Adobe Walls wasn’t our first stop on a three-day marathon to crisscross the Texas Panhandle in search of Indian battlefields. But for me it was the most memorable because of what we almost missed.

Not until my son and I were ready to leave did we see something far away across the pasture. Walking through even taller grass, we finally found one more granite marker with the inscription “Billy Tyler, Ike Shadler, ‘Shorty’ Shadler — Killed by Indians on June 27, 1874.”

“I remember the Shadler brothers,” I said to my son. “This must be where it happened. Those were the guys that slept in the bed of their wagon on the night of the attack. They didn’t hear the Indians approach but woke up just in time to see Quanah’s spear leave his hand.”

Years later Quanah told that story to the head of the Indian reservation at Fort Sill. Quanah killed one of the Shadler brothers while another warrior took out the other brother and a guard dog. As for Billy Tyler, he picked an unfortunate time to check on the horses.

Were hundreds of Indians so quiet that three buffalo hunters and a guard dog had no warning of an attack? Of course they were. That’s part of what made them so terrifying.

A few weeks before our trip, I had been in the audience when the National Ranching Heritage Center opened its exhibit of Indian artifacts once owned by Quanah Parker. I sat six feet away from Quanah’s great-grandson when he put his hand over his heart and said with tears in his eyes, “I may live in Albuquerque, but my heart is here.”

That’s what he said—“here.” Where exactly is “here”? Did he mean Lubbock, the Comancheria, the Llano Estacado, the Southern Plains? Eventually I realized that Bruce Parker meant all of the above.

How did I grow up in Lubbock and never realize it is the geographical center of what had been a vast Comanche empire called the Comancheria? How did I not know that I lived on the largest flat area in the Western Hemisphere with a sea of grass so formidable and trackless that Spanish explorers declared it uninhabitable? Yet here we are.

Longhorns had been a sports symbol to me, the Llano Estacado was a winery, South Plains was the name of a fair, Mackenzie was a park with a swimming pool, and Quanah Parker and Colonel Goodnight were lead characters in an outdoor play. Was I really that shallow or just that young?

My understanding of where I grew up was like a page in a coloring book where you have to connect the dots before you can see the image. My dots were disconnected.

By Sue Hancock Jones
WHERE THE BISON ROAM

After being away for 30 years, it was a surprise to come home and discover a bison herd within a short distance from Lubbock. And who knew that bison aren’t buffalo? No true buffalo lives in North America, but there is a Texas State Bison Herd roaming the grounds of Caprock Canyons State Park, which is why you have to watch where you step when you visit the park. Bison “patties” are everywhere.

Before the 1870s, some 50 million bison roamed the Great Plains. Within a decade, the bison were almost extinct. Why did the U.S. Army not only allow but also encourage such a mass slaughter? The answer took me back to those “buffalo” hunters in that adobe saloon. Alarmed by the Indian attack on Adobe Walls, Gen. William T. Sherman and Gen. Philip H. Sheridan devised the Indian Campaign of 1874. The military resolved once and for all to remove all Native Americans from the Texas Panhandle. Displacement required a new strategy of burning Indian camps, killing their horses, and starving their families into submission. Killing the bison meant starving the Indians.

Plains Indians had been hunting bison for centuries and used virtually every part of the animal for food, clothing, shelter, tools and even fuel. Just as Gen. Sherman and the Union Army had used a Civil War “scorched earth” policy to burn their way through the South, the U.S. Army encouraged the bison slaughter as a way to drive native people onto reservations in Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

Bison bones littered the plains, and newly arrived settlers loaded them on railcars bound for fertilizer factories. Even if there had not been an Adobe Walls in the middle of nowhere, Sherman and Sheridan would have found another reason to scorch the Comanche earth.

A handful of individuals toward the end of the great slaughter became concerned with the fate of the bison and began the difficult task of saving them. Mary Ann (Molly) Goodnight urged her husband Charles to capture some orphan calves from the southern herd in 1878. The hunters did not kill the small calves because their hides were not valuable, but they killed the mothers. Molly felt sorry for the starving calves and raised them on the JA Ranch to form the nucleus of the Goodnight herd. This herd, as well as four other herds started by other concerned individuals, provided the foundation stock for virtually all bison in North America today. The JA Ranch donated the herd to Texas Parks and Wildlife and moved the bison to Caprock Canyons State Park in 1997.
When Charles Goodnight founded his Goodnight Ranch in 1887 between Clarendon and Amarillo, his two-story, 2,900-square-foot home was likely the first house in the Panhandle designed by an architect. The ranch house is now the centerpiece of the Charles Goodnight Historical Center and a tribute to the impact of the legendary cattleman and his wife Mary Ann (Molly), the first white woman to live in the Panhandle.

Many of Goodnight’s contemporaries believed he had no superiors as a cattleman.

**FATHER OF THE TEXAS PANHANDLE**

Saving bison from extinction in North America is only one of a long list of Colonel Goodnight’s contributions as Father of the Texas Panhandle. In October 1876 when he drove his herd on the long trail drive from Colorado to Palo Duro Canyon—the “Grand Canyon of Texas”—he was literally the first rancher in the Panhandle. No farmers, no counties, no semblance of organized community life existed on the Southern Plains.

A Mexican who knew the Panhandle as a result of expeditions to capture mustangs intrigued Goodnight with tales of a very large canyon with all that a rancher needed—abundant grass, good water, and depth sufficient to provide protection from winter blasts. With Irishman John Adair as his financial partner, Goodnight became co-founder of the 1.3 million-acre JA Ranch. In time others would discover the canyon and Palo Duro Canyon would become a state park attracting hundreds of thousands of tourists.

Today the canyon and the ranch are like inseparable twins.

Within four years of Goodnight’s descent into the canyon, nearly 20 other large ranches of 100,000 acres or more appeared in the Panhandle. To put the expansion in perspective, the Panhandle—which is slightly larger than the state of West Virginia—had only 1,607 residents in 1880, but Goodnight was the first of thousands of ranchers and farmers that would become a state park attracting hundreds of thousands of tourists. Today the canyon and the ranch are like inseparable twins.

**People didn’t call Goodnight “Colonel” because he was part of any military force, which he wasn’t. They called him “Colonel” because of his status as a man of action and a get-things-done person. He had an optimistic attitude, almost to a fault, and a dawn-to-dusk work ethic. Goodnight wore heavy work boots, not cowboy boots, and never carried a sidearm after he quit long cattle drives. He had only two terms of a formal education in a rural Illinois school and was never able to read and write with ease, but Goodnight knew cattle and was an accomplished scout. He could approximate the direction and distance to the nearest water source and distinguish between a real turkey call and what could be the effort of an Indian to fake one.**

Goodnight missed service in the Confederate Army because he was on crutches from a leg injury when the initial recruitment occurred. When he got well, he was permitted the alternative of scouting for the Texas Rangers as Indian attacks intensified on the Texas frontier. When the war was over and the number of unbranded, out-of-control Longhorn steers exceeded the number of people in the state, Goodnight partnered with Oliver Loving andblazed the Goodnight-Loving Trail into the pages of the nation’s cattle drive history.

Eleven years after founding the JA Ranch in Palo Duro Canyon, Goodnight ended his ranching relationship with the Adairs and founded his own Goodnight Ranch less than one mile north of the canyon in Armstrong County.

The Fort Worth and Denver Railway built a railroad through the area in 1888 and located a station near the center of Goodnight’s ranch. The railway named the station Goodnight, and a small community grew around it. Today Goodnight is still a dot on the map between the towns of Claude and Clarendon. The 2,900-square-foot, two-story home of Charles and Molly has been restored as an historical center open to the public.

Charles Goodnight co-founded the 1.3 million-acre JA Ranch in 1876 when he drove a herd of cattle deep into Palo Duro Canyon to become the first rancher in the Panhandle. Today Palo Duro State Park and the historic JA Ranch continue to co-exist in the canyon.
Crisscrossing the Texas Panhandle meant driving nearly 1,000 miles without leaving the northern counties of Texas except for a quick trip to western Oklahoma, home of the Washita Battlefield. Some call it the Washita Massacre.

Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer’s charging troopers had come splashing across the frigid Washita River into the sleeping Cheyenne camp of Chief Black Kettle. The attack came unexpectedly at the first morning light when the village was most vulnerable in the winter of 1868. The night before the attack, Black Kettle had just returned to the village after a 100-mile trip to Fort Cobb to petition unsuccessfully for peace and protection. Most of Custer’s victims were women, children, the elderly and 675 horses.

As we drove the long road back to our hotel in Amarillo, it was hard not to resent the fact that Custer’s victory at Washita had catapulted him into the public’s imagination as the nation’s preeminent Indian fighter. Black Kettle had been a peaceful chief who devoted his life to leading his people to safety. The settlement of the American West and even the entire nation is replete with such stories. Someone always gets displaced.

Driving between Pampa and Amarillo, we watched an extremely long train push through the evening with an almost endless load of FedEx boxcars. Soon afterward, another train passed...then another and another. We counted eight trains in two hours as we drove west on Highway 60. The discovery plummeted any thoughts I had that trains were part of a bygone era and perhaps no longer as significant—or in the old days.

Rail had been one of three major factors that brought settlement to the Western frontier—rail, wind and wire. The forerunners of these Panhandle trains brought a deluge of settlers to the area in the 1880s and gave Texans long-awaited access to distant markets. In the same decade, drilled wells made it possible for windmills to pump water to the surface.

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