



Buffalo Hunt, White Wolves Attacking a Buffalo Bull, plate 10 from the "North American Indian Portfolio"

Date

1845

Primary Maker

George Catlin

Medium

Color lithograph on paper

Description

By this plate it will be seen that buffaloes have other enemies than Man to contend with, and that hunting is an occupation not exclusively the province of the Indian, in those wild regions. There are several varieties of the Wolf species on the American prairies, the most numerous and formidable of which is the White Wolf, found in great numbers in a high latitude and near the Rocky Mountains. These animals are equal in size, in many instances, to the largest Newfoundland dog; and, from the whiteness of their hair, appear, at a distance on the green prairies, much like a flock of sheep, and often are seen to the number of fifty or a hundred in a pack; and in this way following the numerous herds of buffaloes from one end of the year to the other, gorging their stomachs with the carcasses of those animals that fall by the hands of the hunters, or from sickness and old age. Whilst the buffaloes are grouped together, the wolves seldom attack them, as the former instantly gather for combined resistance, which they effectually make. But when the herds are travelling, it often happens that an aged or wounded one lingers at a distance behind, and when fairly out of sight of the herd, is set upon by swarms of these voracious hunters, which are sure at last to torture him to death, and use him up at a meal. During my travels in these regions, I have several times come across such gangs of these animals, surrounding and torturing an old or a wounded bull, where it would seem from appearances that they had been for several days in attendance, and at intervals desperately engaged in the effort to take his life. On an occasion when one of my hunting companions and myself were returning to our encampment, with our horses laden with meat, we discovered at a distance, a huge bull encircled by a gang of white wolves; we rode up as near as we could without driving them away, and halting within pistol-shot, had a good view, where I sat for a few moments upon my horse and made the sketch for this plate, in my note-book; after which we advanced, and the sneaking gang withdrew to a distance of fifty or sixty rods, when we found, to our very great surprise, that the animal had made desperate resistance until his eyes were entirely eaten out of his head; the gristle of his nose was mostly gone; his tongue was half demolished, and the skin and flesh of his legs torn almost literally into strings. In this "tattered and torn" condition the poor old veteran had stood, bracing up in the midst of his devourers, who had ceased hostilities for a few minutes, in a sort of parley, recovering strength and preparing to resume the attack in a few moments. In this group some were reclining, to gain breath, whilst others were sneaking about and licking their chops in anxiety for a renewal of the attack; and others, less lucky, had been crushed to death by the feet or the horns of the bull. I rode nearer to the pitiable object, as he stood bleeding and trembling before me, and said to him. "Now is your chance, old fellow, and you had better be off." Though blind and nearly destroyed, he seemed to recognize a friend in me; when he straightened up, and trembling with excitement, dashed off at full speed in a straight line over the prairie. We turned our horses, resuming our march, and having advanced a mile or more, looked back, and on our left we saw the ill-fated animal again surrounded by his tormentors, to whose insatiable voracity he unquestionably soon fell a victim.

Dimensions

Composition: 13 7/16 x 18 3/8 in. (34.1 x 46.7 cm) Sheet: 15 9/16 x 22 1/8 in. (39.5 x 56.2 cm)