

Where the Buffalo Roam

A once-ancient staple of the American Indian diet is catching on right here in Pennsylvania. BY BARBARA ANN ROSENBERG

"OH, GIVE ME A HOME WHERE THE BUFFALO roam...." Those wistful words were written about 100 years ago. But where was that home? In the Dakotas? Colorado? Kansas?

How about Pennsylvania?

Ridiculous! Whoever heard of buffalo roaming Pennsylvania?

Well, maybe not then, but they surely do now. Several herds of them, in fact.

When did those woolly, shaggy, 1,000-pound-and-up prehistoric-looking creatures transfer their venue from the Great Plains to our backyard? And why?

It seems the buffalo stampede to the East can be traced to two Pennsylvania residents in 1984: Larry Kutney, a soft-spoken former federal drug enforcement officer; and Captain Ron Kipps, a rosy-cheeked former "cowboy" from West Virginia (Kipps achieved his rank of captain in the merchant marine in 1977).

Kutney says he bought his first pair of buffalo strictly for the adventure and "to help preserve our American heritage." As is pretty inevitable, the buffalo were fruitful and multiplied — and his herd began to grow.

By 1987, Kutney decided to sell off some of the buffalo meat that he and his two young children couldn't consume. So he placed an ad in a local publication for 10-pound buffalo "samplers" (steaks, roasts and chopped meat) for \$75 — and they sold like the proverbial hotcakes.

Thus was the Indian Ridge Buffalo Trading Company born on just 10 acres in Plumstead, outside of Doylestown in Bucks County. What had started out as a hobby ("A pret-



Former DEA officer Larry Kutney raises buffalo for fun and profit.

ty expensive hobby," says Kutney, noting that it can cost \$1,000 to \$3,000 to buy, and anywhere from \$200 to \$600 annually to feed a single buffalo) became a full-fledged business, because people *loved* the meat. "It's extremely low in fat and even lower in cholesterol than fish," he says. "And it's not at all gamey in flavor." It's actually finer-grained than beef, and many people find it sweeter, with no fatty aftertaste.

But not all of Kutney's animals are sold for their meat. "We keep some of them as pets and for resale to other breeders," he says. "Those animals are used to a lot of human contact and are very tame. We hand-feed them every day — they're so gentle they'll eat apples from my children's hands. We don't slaughter those buffalo. We just couldn't."

The buffalo that Kutney raises as meat animals graze at another loca-

tion — on 75 acres in Susquehanna County in the northeast corner of Pennsylvania. Individuals buy the meat, as do restaurants, in spite of the fact that as protein prices go, buffalo meat is expensive (\$19.95 a pound for tenderloin and \$3 to \$4 for ground meat). "But," Kutney notes, "there's little or no shrinkage." And he foresees the meat prices coming down as buffalo production goes up. "Way up," he predicts. To keep up with the anticipated demand, he's buying additional acreage in Virginia, where he hopes to range a much larger herd.

It was also in 1984 that the captain and his wife, Dr. Margaret Stinavage Kipps — a veterinarian he met and began dating after she made a "barn" call on one of his animals — began raising bison at the Elk Trails Ranch in West Clifford, north of Scranton in the beautiful

Endless Mountains. They chose this endeavor for primarily one reason: "Economics," says Ron Kipps, "pure and simple economics. In 1986, beef on the hoof dropped to 64 cents a pound while buffalo was bringing \$1.70. It seems we made the right choice."

Ron Kipps greets visitors to his ranch in full regalia: slanty-heeled boots, skintight jeans and a cowboy hat — an outfit somehow more indicative of a Texas ranch hand than one with a range in northern Pennsylvania. His drawl gives further evidence to the fact that he isn't a native of the Keystone State. Actually, when he lived on his family's cattle ranch in West Virginia, he roped and rode and picked up many of his cowpoke mannerisms along the way, mannerisms that have remained with him to this day, in spite of his stint on the sea.

Buffalo meat is finer-grained than beef, and many people think it's sweeter. Best of all, it's low in fat and cholesterol.

But although Ron Kipps is vastly different from Larry Kutney in manner, they both conduct their businesses in much the same way.

The Kippses' herd of 111 show animals and breeding stock are like personal pets. The buffalo live in a fenced lot adjacent to the Kippses' neat little home on top of a high hill with a commanding view of the entire surrounding area. Margaret works close by — her veterinary office is in a small outbuilding next to the storage and sales areas reserved for the frozen buffalo meat sold on the premises.

The Kippses' display animals — named Annie and Paul (for close friends of theirs) — created a sensation in August when they were shown at the Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg, and then again at Susquehanna County's Harford Fair.

The animals the Kippses sell for

GET YOUR BURGERS HERE

WHILE SOPHISTICATED RESTAURANTS MAY SERVE UP COMPLEX BUFFALO dishes, there are simple, delicious ways to prepare the meat. Captain Ron Kipps describes his wife's Buffalo Speedies (skewered chunks of meat) as "outrageous — outrageously good!" Here are a couple lip-smacking recipes.

Buffalo Speedies

5-6 pounds buffalo steak or roast, cut in 2" cubes

¼ cup each: red wine; salad or olive oil; Worcestershire sauce; soy sauce; lemon juice or cider vinegar

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon onion powder

¼ teaspoon salt

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 teaspoon oregano

1 teaspoon dried basil leaves (or 1 tablespoon fresh, chopped)

¼ teaspoon dried parsley (or ½ tablespoon fresh, chopped)

Sprinkle of bottled Italian seasoning

Mix seasonings and meat thoroughly. Store in refrigerator in glass or pottery container for three days, turning meat in marinade twice daily.

When ready to serve, thread meat on skewers (about ½ pound

per person for very hungry people, otherwise about ¼ pound). Broil or grill until medium rare.

Serves 10 to 12 people.

Buffalo Burgers

2 pounds ground buffalo

2 eggs, lightly beaten

3 slices bread, soaked in ¼ cup milk

¼ large onion, finely chopped

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon pepper (or to taste)

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

Mix all of the ingredients together thoroughly and cook under broiler or on grill. Buffalo will not brown like beef because it is so lean. If brown crust is desired, brush with a little olive oil before cooking.

Serves 4 to 6 people. — B.A.R.

meat do not grow up in West Clifford, but are raised to the Kippses' specifications in North Dakota. "Buffalo are very smart animals," says Ron Kipps. "Very smart — unlike humans, they actually know just what to eat to keep themselves healthy."

He says his original concern for "economics, pure and simple" has paid off: "We sold our first piece of buffalo meat in December 1988. In 1989, Elk Trails Ranch sold 30,000 pounds; 60,000 in 1990." Captain Ron says he's hoping to move 100,000 pounds this year.

With more and more buffalo meat being sold to the public, it was inevitable that restaurants would start serving it, too. In fact, it is a regularly featured menu item at Vickers in Lionville, where Arturo Burigatto, the owner, is an avid hunter (when he's not tending to his sophisticated restaurant, that is).

"I shot a Cape buffalo on one of my hunting trips to Africa," he says, "and thought it was delicious."

Burigatto couldn't lay his hands on any Cape buffalo in the United States, though, so he did "the next best thing" and tried the native bison. "I thought that was delicious, too, so I decided to put it on the menu as an experiment."

Burigatto's patrons evidently liked it as well, because ever since he first introduced it, tenderloin of buffalo has become one of Vickers' leading items. It's prepared with wild mushrooms and a complex, delicious sauce befitting its status as a delicacy.

If you'd like to try your hand at preparing your own buffalo delicacy, you can order buffalo meat from Larry Kutney's Indian Ridge Buffalo Trading Co., 3801 Stump Rd., Doylestown, Pa. 18901, (215) 249-9229; or from Captain Ron Kipps' Elk Trails Ranch, RD 1, Uniondale, Pa. 18470, (717) 222-9815. ■

Barbara Ann Rosenberg, a local freelance writer, last wrote about the goat ladies of Chester County.