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Family Friendly Hike in Genesee Park Bison Sanctuary

HIKING

RAISING KÜHL KIDS

By **Kühl Editor** on June 2, 2020

About five miles west of Golden, mountain-bound drivers leaving Denver on Interstate 70 often see bison grazing in adjacent pastures. This symbol of the American West captures the attention of both young and old. Far too

many times during my journeys to and from Colorado's High Country, I considered a detour but didn't follow through. Until I met family members for an intergenerational hike, I didn't realize that [Genesee Park](#) is part of the Denver Mountain Park system.

History of Genesee Park

More than a century ago, the city purchased the acreage and started developing the foothills location outside Denver's city limits by creating a game preserve, campground, and the rustic Chief Hosa Lodge, a National Historic Site. These efforts preserved the natural landscape, while simultaneously establishing a wildlife habitat for bison, elk, and mountain sheep. The original herds of bison were transported from Yellowstone National Park in 1914. When the campground opened in 1918, it was "America's first motor camping area."

Multiple Hiking Options

Our hiking plans were flexible since our intention was to show our one-year-old granddaughter and three-year-old grandson the grazing bison. The map of the 2,400-acre park showed three possible locations: the North Bison Pasture, the Middle Bison Pasture, or the South Bison Pasture. A few days before we planned our get together, our youngest son and his fiancé had taken the I-70 bike path starting at exit 254 and stopped to see the bison in the North Bison Pasture.

We followed their suggestion and got off the highway at exit 254. We quickly realized that the bison were not grazing on the north side. Had the animals been in the North Bison Pasture, we could have chosen a few hikes of varying levels of difficulty.

Instead, we drove across the bridge to the south side of the highway to the Bison Meadow Overlook. From this vantage point, we had an incredible panoramic view of the mountains showcasing the distant peaks of the Continental Divide, as well as bison grazing in a distant meadow. A sign reminded us of the Ute and Arapahoe Native Americans who used to live in the region and the settlers who later came in search of gold. While there were several accessible trails nearby, we opted to drive a bit further to Exit 253 so our journey to the bison would be more child friendly.



Incredible views from Bison Meadow Overlook, Genesee Park, Denver, Colorado

We parked near the Chief Hosa Lodge constructed in 1918 of native stone and logs. Genesee Lane had a gate which prevented vehicle traffic but was open for pedestrians. The Chief Hosa Loop hiking trail and adjacent service roads were accessible. Parking was limited at this popular place.

Chief Hosa Loop

The Chief Hosa Loop is a fantastic choice for small children. The mature forest, filled with spruce trees, lodgepoles, and ponderosa pines, offers partial protection from the sun, and the rolling terrain creates a sense of adventure. Pine cones, rocks, and a smattering of wildflowers are positive distractions. The slight increase in elevation is easily handled by short legs.



Hiking the Chief Hosa Loop, Genesee Park, Denver, Colorado

Signage showed a cut off to the Patrick House Trail. This short path terminates at the Patrick House, a mid-19th century toll station for stagecoaches at the beginning of the gold rush. The house is currently used as a private residence. From there, we walked along a multi-use trail adjacent to the cordoned off area for the bison. A

reinforced, oversized chain-link fence separated us from a rolling, green pasture with both mature and baby bison. Bison are the largest mammals native to North America and are capable of running 35 miles per hour and jumping a six-foot fence. Signs instructed visitors to keep at least three feet from the fence.



Bison grazing at Genesee Park, Denver, Colorado

Baby bison didn't stray far from their mothers, and an occasional bison wandered to a feeding bucket. We captured a few fully-grown animals wallowing on the ground. Puffs of dirt flew into the air as these enormous mammals rolled back and forth.

Our two grandchildren watched attentively as the animals hung out in their natural habitat. If we didn't have young children with us, we may have continued to walk on the Genesee Mountain Trail which runs between the Middle Bison Pasture and the South Bison Pasture and meanders uphill to the area where we first observed the bison from a distance.

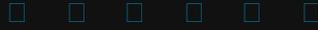


Watching the bison at Genesee Park, Denver, Colorado

Conveniently located at multiple highway exits, Genesee Park is a great place to take a hike or view wildlife on the way to Colorado's Rocky Mountains. While initially designed by the City of Denver, families taking road trips can also benefit by using the park as a spot to take a break from driving. Adventure seekers can enjoy a

handful of foothill paths while also looking for roaming animals.

When Sandy Bornstein isn't trekking in Colorado or writing, she's [traveling with her husband Ira](#). After living as an international teacher in Bangalore, India, Sandy published an award-winning book, [May This Be the Best Year of Your Life](#), as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Among other things, Sandy writes about family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences.



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