

Sutton, E.

January 27, 1940

Mr. E. S. Sutton
Benkelman
Nebraska

Dear Mr. Sutton:

I was glad to get your interesting letter about the buffalo and their migrations. You will find some confirmation of your theory in Haley's BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES GOODNIGHT, published by the Houghton Mifflin Company. There seems no doubt but that the railways and earlier the Oregon Trail served as barriers to the north and south movement of the herds. Also my information shows that buffalo if possible took cover from blizzards in rough country. Of course there was a good deal such country upon the Plains. Buffalo Gap in the Black Hills is so named, the Indians say, because it was the gateway through which the herds passed into the hills in the winter. However, a good many buffalo must have remained away from the mountains and not all of them went south. At the rate at which they travelled while grazing, how far would they go in a season anyway? In my WARPATH you will find accounts of Buffalo in Dakota and Montana in very bitter winter weather. One thing must be true, that they sought good feeding grounds wherever they went. I believe Catlin says that the Indians in Dakota burned off the prairies in order to stimulate the new grass and so bring the buffalo early to their country in the spring. My book, THE OLD SANTA FE TRAIL, published last summer (Houghton Mifflin), has something on this.

I have a feeling that in early days before the white man arrived on the Plains, the buffalo ranged the whole country, afterward breaking up into more regional herds. Of course, there is one theory that there were two or three species of buffalo, the woods buffalo, the plains buffalo, and the mountain buffalo. Have you consulted the literature of the American Bison Society? They used to publish annual bulletins. Of course Hornaday was one of their principal officials.

I tried to find out all I could as to the habits of buffalo from old Sioux Indians, but could not find that they had any theory as to migration. They simply looked for the herds until they found them and then held a hunt. They believed that the buffalo came out of certain caves every spring, for example the Wind Cave in the Black