

Big Medicine
May 3, 1933 - August 25, 1959
National Bison Range

Who would have thought that after bison were hunted close to extinction in the 1880's and as rare as the birth of an albino bison is (perhaps one in five million), we would ever see a white bison?

Yet it happened on May 3, 1933 at the National Bison Range in Moiese, Montana! A white calf was born to brown parents. Nicknamed by Refuge staff as "Whitey", this bison soon gained national media attention. In recognition of his symbolic importance to Native Americans, he soon became known as "Big Medicine."

Big Medicine was a white bison, but not a full albino. He had light blue eyes (rather than pink) and tan (not white) hoofs. He had a top knot of dark brown hair. In his prime, he weighed more than 1,900 pounds, rose 6 feet at the hump, and measured almost 12 feet from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail. He became a herd bull, and sired numerous offspring. In 1937, Big Medicine sired a full albino bull calf, born deaf and blind. At the age of 6 months, this calf was sent to the National Zoological Gardens at Washington, DC, where he lived for 12 years.

A bison's natural life span is about 15-20 years with their teeth becoming greatly worn with use. For this reason, Big Medicine spent much of his maturity in the Bison Range's smaller display pasture. Here he received special care and feed. He was often seen standing on a clay knob over looking his cows.

Big Medicine died on August 25, 1959 at the age of 26, quite old for a bison bull. At this time, he weighed only 1,193 pounds. His hide was in poor condition due to his advanced age.



Big Medicine was mounted by renown sculptor/taxidermist Bob Schiver. The mount can be seen at the Montana Historical Society, 225 North Roberts, Helena, Montana.