

# DISCOVERING OUR LAKE

## Running with Bison (and Antelope)



Image courtesy of Gregg Norrande

Tired of running on a treadmill all winter? Legs sore from pounding the pavement? Try Antelope Island for a rejuvenating trail running escape.

Several times a year, my trail running buddies and I head out to the island for a change of pace. We do so in winter when we're tired of running the Shoreline Trail because other trails are knee deep in snow, or in spring when trails in the foothills are a soggy mess. Or just when we feel like enjoying the beauty and serenity of the island and the surrounding lake.

Although we've run on Antelope Island dozens of times, each seems to be a unique adventure. One morning last spring it was so calm that Farmington Bay was like a polished mirror, with snowcapped mountains reflected perfectly on the water. Other times, we have to bow our heads as blowing snow whips into our faces. We've run the island when it's hot enough for shorts and a t-shirt (and a lot of sunscreen), or bundled in tights, multiple layers and wind-proof mittens.

Sometimes the sky is blue, the air is clear, and visibility across the lake is perfect. Other times we run through a shrouded mist, with vague impressions of the island's craggy peaks as our only "view". Either way is equally inspiring.

And yes, we have run with the bison and the antelope (and even an occasional coyote). One needs to be cautious with bison, of course. They may seem calm as they lumber across the trail, and usually pay scant attention to people, but they can be quick to startle. Getting gored by an angry bull would surely put a damper on your training schedule! Several times, though, while we jogged by at a safe distance, they've looked up and broken into their unique canter. Any runner would be amazed at how quickly 1500 pounds of bison can accelerate.

But for sheer grace and blinding speed, almost nothing compares to the island's herds of pronghorn antelope. It's one of those joys that occur only rarely, and if you're looking down at the rocky trail in an effort to avoid an embarrassing fall, you may well miss it. Just as you





Image courtesy of Gregg Norrande

crest a ridge, a blur of speed flashes across your path. They are gone almost before your foggy brain registers the sight, but the image of the line of fleet, lean antelope remains implanted in your memory.

Mostly we run Antelope Island for the solitude. But sometimes, you feel like having a party. Every year, on a Saturday in late March, hundreds of trail runners converge for the Antelope Island Buffalo Run, organized by local rocket engineer and trail running regular Jim Skaggs and his amazing volunteers. Participants range from casual joggers and walkers to trail running elite, but all test themselves against 25K, 50K, or 50-mile courses. Next year, some will tackle the first 100-mile version of the race. If running with bison for between 15 - 100 miles isn't enough fun, the party continues at the finish line, where organizers serve a mean buffalo stew, to which all racers contribute by bringing a can of ... whatever.

Some might bristle at hundreds of feet trampling the island in one day, but Park officials have been delighted by the event's low impact. If there is one way to get the

otherwise affable Jim Skaggs mad, it is to leave just one little gel packet tab on the trail. Some runners even return to the start with extra trash left over by other park users. For more information about the race and its strict "no impact" policy, go to <http://www.buffalorun.org/>.

I asked Jim why he takes so much time out of his busy schedule to put on this event. He said: "I love being a volunteer on the island's trail patrol. Running out here is such a unique experience, unlike anywhere else, that I just had to share it with my trail and ultrarunning friends. The state has a real treasure here that I hope is protected for generations to come." 🐾

For a trail map: [www.stateparks.utah.gov/img/maps/aispprintable.jpg](http://www.stateparks.utah.gov/img/maps/aispprintable.jpg).

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