

Who was Buffalo Bill ?

Discovering an American folk hero

The name "Buffalo Bill" is one of the most famous names in the history of the West. Once Bill was known as a great fighter and a great hunter. Today people prefer to remember other sides of his character. Later in his life he was a great *showman* and one of the first people to see that it was necessary to protect America's natural environment .



Buffalo Bill Cody was born on a farm in Scott county, Indiana, on 26th February 1846.

In those days, life in the American West was a constant **struggle** for **survival**, and native Americans and white **pioneers** would fight to the death to protect their homes and their people.

Clearly, young Bill was a **tough** boy, who knew what he was doing. Before he was thirteen, he was an expert horse-rider and very good with a gun; and in those days, when the West was wild, that meant he had excellent qualifications for a job.

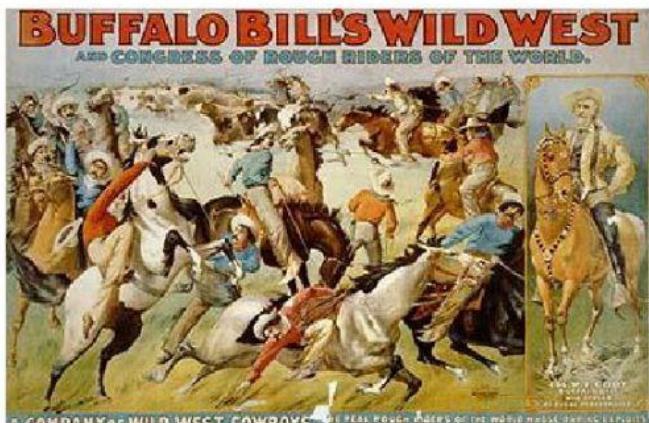
Before the age of twenty, Bill left home and took a job with the Pony Express company, and very soon he became reputed as one of their best riders.

It was the time when the West was being opened up. After the Pony Express, Bill got a job **supplying** buffalo meat to the men building the Kansas Pacific rail- road. In the space of 17 months, he **claims to have** killed 4,280 buffaloes. This is where he got his name, "Buffalo Bill".

In the 1870s, he worked as a scout for the army, during the "Indian campaigns", and took part in General Custer's war against the Sioux. Once, he killed Chief Yellow Hand in a **duel**. This was just one of the **exploits** that were written about in popular story books. In those days, anyone who killed Indians was seen as a hero. It is very different today.

Today, we look at the Indian wars in a different light. Though many American Indians still call themselves "Indians", the expression "native Americans" is considered to be more correct. Huge areas of land have been given back to the Indian nations, and Americans accept that White pioneers stole it from them in the past.

In fact, Buffalo Bill was one of the first men in America to realise that white Americans and Indians could, and should, work together. Bill made his peace with the Indians, and when he established his famous "Wild West Show", he **recruited** many famous Indians to work with him. They included Red Cloud, Red Shirt, and even Sitting Bull. His grandson says, "At its height, there were over 650 people who travelled with the show, including 250 American Indians. With these Indians, with all the cowboys, they **re-enacted** the robbery of the Deadwood stage coach and the Pony Express **mail** relay system".



With the money he earned from his show, Bill **purchased** some land in Wyoming; but by then the West was already changing dramatically. Bill, the once-great buffalo-hunter looked nostalgically at the few rare buffaloes that were still around, and realised that they had to be protected. At the same time, he began trying to conserve aspects of the old Western life that were rapidly disappearing into the twentieth century. One of the things he did was to help establish America's first National Forest **reserve** in Wyoming.

When he died, aged 70, Buffalo Bill knew that the old West was almost dead too, except as history and stories. Yet he knew, too, that one of the most famous names associated with its legends, was his own.

WORDS :



showman: man who runs a show - **struggle:** fight, battle - **survival:** existence - **pioneer:** person colonizing new territory - **tough:** strong, resistant - **ancestor:** grandfather and earlier generations - **expanse:** open space - **willing to:** ready to, prepared to - **supply:** bring, provide - **claims to have:** says he - **duel:** organised fight between two people - **exploit:** action - **area:** zone - **recruit:** employ - **height:** most important moment - **re-enact:** imitate, play - **mail:** post - **purchase:** buy - **reserve:** protected zone.-

Student worksheet

Who was Buffalo Bill ?

Exercise:

Here is an imaginary interview with Bill Cody, aged 65; What questions were asked, in order to elicit these answers..

Reporter: How

Bill: I was under 20

Reporter: What

Bill: I got a job providing buffalo meat for the men building the railroad.

Reporter: How

Bill: Seventeen months

Reporter: Later on

Bill: Well, I realised that really we would do better to living and working together, rather than killing each other.

Reporter: What

Bill: I used it to buy myself some land in Wyoming.

Reporter: Do..

Bill: Oh no! I realise now that we ought to be protecting nature, not destroying it!