

Pierre de Liette, "Memoir concerning the Illinois Country, ca. 1693," in *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*, vol. XXIII: *The French Foundations*, ed. Theodore Calvin Pease and Raymond C. Werner (Springfield, 1934), 307–18.

Liette describes a bison hunt.

This was my reason, in 1688, for begging Monsieur de Tonti to allow me to accompany a village of Illinois who were going off on a buffalo hunt for five weeks. This request he readily granted, being pleased to have me learn this language, for which task he saw I had some talent, that he might safely absent himself when his affairs demanded it, and leave me in his place. He recommended me to the chief of this village, and with my servant I was placed in a cabin of savage men, if one may say that there be any among barbarians.

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We went into camp two leagues away. As I saw only old men, women, and girls, and five or six young men, I asked them, partly with the few words that I knew and partly by signs, how it happened that there were so few young men. They gave me to understand that they were out on a hunting expedition. The women had thrown down their packs and had run, each with an axe, into the woods to cut poles and to peel bark for their summer hunting cabin. As for the kind they use during their winter sojourn, they always carry these along; they are similar to those which they have in summer, as I shall tell in the proper place. They set them up on the edge of a prairie so as to be in a cool place, for in the month of June and in order to be in the open, it is to be remarked that all the southern nations establish themselves in the most open spots so as to see what is going on, and so as not to be taken by surprise, and in case an attack is made upon them, so as to be able to pursue.

The few young men who were with us while the women and girls were making the cabins went an arpent into the woods to cut

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Translation

three poles of which they made a large tripod from which they hung a big kettle, which they filled with water and then seated themselves around the fire which they had made underneath. My man and I settled down near them. A short time after, two men arrived each with a buck on his back. Two of our cooks went to meet them. The hunters, on seeing them approach, threw down their load and advanced proudly toward them, highly elated at being the first to bring meat to the camp. Our servitors soon had the bucks cut up and put into the kettle. When they were cooked the old men were called and came to eat. We were the first served and got the best there was. I noticed that this happened every day, and that some young men always came by turns with

the old men. They are called guards, and prevent anyone from separating from the band and going off alone, because this frightens away the game. A man and woman once tried to escape from the band while the guards were busy gathering strawberries; one of the guards saw them and ran after them, took away the man's load, cut the collar

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and the bear skins which they used as a mattress, smashed the kettles which the woman was carrying, and came near killing a child, which she had upon her load, by pulling it from her head; and all this happened without the man or woman saying a single word.

The next day we saw in a prairie a great herd of buffalos. A halt was called and two old men harangued the young men for half an hour, urging them to show their skill in shooting down all the buffalos that we saw, and to manage so as to make all those that they could not kill move toward us. After removing us to the nearest spot, they started out in two bands, running always at a trot. When they were about a quarter of a league from the animals, they all ran at full speed, and when within gunshot they fired several volleys and shot off an extraordinary number of arrows. A great number of buffalos remained on the ground, and they pursued the rest in such manner that they were driven toward us. Our old men butchered these. As for me, I did not

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shoot. Their appearance filled me with terror, and I withdrew from our troop when I saw them approach; which set all the savages laughing, at which I was not a little mortified. It is certain that those animals are frightful looking and usually terrify people who have never seen them. The cows are as big as the big oxen here. They have a hump about eight inches high which extends from their shoulders to the middle of their backs. They have their whole heads covered with fine hair so that their eyes can hardly be seen. They have short hair in summer, but from the month of September until June they are covered with a very fine wool.

To return to the hunt in which our savages engaged, they killed 120 buffalos from which they brought back a hundred tongues. The people from my cabin smoked these and distributed them among themselves to carry to me.

We remained a week in this place in order to dry all this meat. They make for this purpose a kind of cradle ten feet long, three feet wide, and four feet high, which they call gris, upon

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which they spread out their meat after preparing it. Under this they kindle a little fire. They are at it for a day, ordinarily, when they wish to dry a flat side. There are two of these in a buffalo. They take it from the shoulder clear to the thigh and from the hump to the middle of the belly, after which they spread it out as thin as they can, making it usually four feet square. They fold it

up while still hot, like a portfolio, so as to make it easier to carry. The most robust men and women carry as many as eight, for a whole day. This is not possible in autumn nor in winter, however, as the cows are then very fat; they then can carry four at most.

The drying of this meat by the women and girls does not prevent the young men from going to the chase every day each for himself, for it is only when they all go together that they have guards. If anyone has no luck (which rarely happens in buffalo hunting), his relatives contribute from their share. These little hunts are ordinarily for bucks, bears, and young turkeys, on which

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they feast, not failing to invite the strangers whom they have among them (a very frequent thing), such as Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, and others; so that there were days when I was invited as many as ten times. We did not dare to refuse, having learned that they were grieved if anyone who was among them did not come. Some days later they again surrounded a large herd of buffalos. I went to the chase in the hope of finding some one of these isolated so as to surprise and kill him, and thus redeem in some sort the poor opinion they had formed of me because of the apprehension I had shown at the sight of the first buffalos. About an eighth of a league from the spot where we were camping I heard a loud breathing in the brushwood. I listened very intently, and, having assured myself that I was not mistaken, I advanced as softly as I could and saw a calf stretched on the ground, its mother having been killed. It was completely exhausted. I did not wait long to discharge my gun. Several women who were in the vicinity, engaged in peeling off bark, came up on hearing the report. One of them, leaving the others, went off to

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the village to announce that I had killed a calf. Two old men came up, who gave me to understand that the animal was not worth the shot, as the calves are never fat; but as this was the first animal that I had killed, they felt it must be given the proper honors. They skinned it, leaving nothing but the entrails and the skin, and as soon as all our hunters had returned, one of the old men went off to harangue the village, announcing that I had killed a calf and that they must partake of it, in order to thank the Master of Life because he had allowed me to begin to kill game. The meat was divided among 120 men, who did not allow the least scrap of it to go to waste. We did not taste it, as it is not customary for the savages to eat when they give a feast. The same day I had the old men assemble in our cabin and gave them all the powder and bullets that we had, telling them that we were not able to kill game while pursuing it on the run; so I begged them to divide this with the young men, as it was not fair that they should feed us for nothing; and to those of our

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own cabin I said that, according to the good treatment they accorded us, I should find a way to reward them. We perceived that they had understood me by the extraordinary care they took of us when we were on the march. If we showed signs of being thirsty, the most agile of them ran to fetch water for us from places that we should never have discovered.

As regards thirst, having gone to the chase, I found two men in a prairie who were skinning a buffalo. They told me to come with them as they wanted to have me eat a broiled slice of their meat. I told them I stood more in need of drink than of food. They gave me to understand that no water was to be found except at a great distance, but that there was some in the buffalo which they had killed not half an hour before, if I would have a little patience. I thought I had not rightly understood them, and the savages perceiving this, said nothing in reply to everything that I wished to say to them except, "Wait," my thirst not being so great but that I could do so. But I was apprehensive about the two leagues and more that remained to be traversed before arriving

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at the woods where streams are to be found. They hurried as much as they could in skinning their buffalo, and I helped them lay it on its back. After opening its belly, they opened the paunch and separated with their hands the excrements from the water which had not yet had time to be absorbed. Using my hands, I drank as much as I wished. It had a bad taste, but in spite of that, I had the pleasure of slaking my thirst.

When I came for my broiled meat on which they had promised to feast me, I could not understand where they would get means for cooking it. They took a fillet from within the body, this being the most tender part in all sorts of animals, and cut it into strips like sausages. One of them went off three or four arpents into a hollow, which in spring is nothing but a sort of marsh, and brought back a bundle of round reeds as thick as one's fingers. They drew from their quivers two bits of wood which serve them for striking a flame, and in less than half a Miserere, they had a fire. They kindled a part of their reeds, over which they put their meat, which they turned from time to time with their bows. In

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spite of all the care they took to scrape it with their knives, some ash remained, which rendered it as black as itself. Nevertheless, I ate abundantly of it and found it very good. It was very tender and I had a good appetite. One of the pieces of wood which they use to make a fire is of white cedar, which is the most combustible, a foot long more or less, according as they choose to make it, and as thick as two fingers. On one side, on the very edge, they make little holes, in which they make a notch. They put this bit of wood on some rotten wood or on some grass, dry and very fine, after taking care to crush it thoroughly in their hands. The other piece of wood is as thick as the little finger; it is a bit of a wood that has a black berry, which we call morette. When this wood is green it is very soft, and it is proportionately hard when it is dry. They shape the end to the size of the holes in the other piece of wood, into one of which they insert it, and by turning

it in their hands without ceasing, they produce a sort of powder from which, after a very short time, one sees smoke issue, which shortly is converted

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into flame. This coming through the notch of which I have just spoken, falls on the rotten wood or dry grass, which is ignited.

We went as much as twenty leagues from the fort on this hunt, and I may say with truth that no finer landscape can be found. There are avenues extending farther than the eye can reach, which seem made expressly by nature to provoke our admiration, and offering, though about as wide as the Cours de la Reine, not a single bit of brushwood. This may be due to the endless number of buffalos that pass there. The reason why these places are so much frequented by these animals is because there is a kind of marsh here and there in the middle of these alleys which serves them for watering places.

More than 1,200 buffalos were killed during our hunt, without counting the bears, does, stags, bucks, young turkeys, and lynxes