Proposal for BISON emoji

Submitted by: Alex Schmidt Date: April 29th, 2019



Credit: Julia Heffernan

CLDR short name: Bison

CLDR short keywords: bison // American bison // European bison // American buffalo

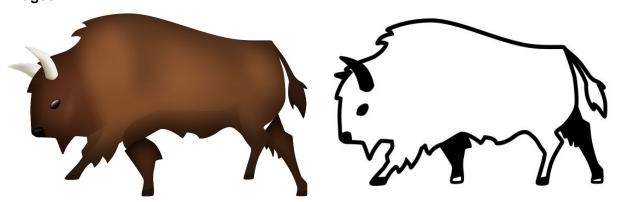
Proposed sort category: animal-mammal

Proposed location in category: between ox and water buffalo

Reference Emoji: elephant

Abstract: This proposal requests the inclusion of a new animal emoji: BISON. The bison is a key cultural touchstone of centuries of North American life. Bison serve as a symbol of Native America, a burgeoning livestock category, a gaming trope, and the original animal conservation success story, to name a few of their cultural roles. This combination of distinctive profile, universal familiarity, and symbolic meaning makes the bison a strong candidate for the emoji keyboard.

Images



Credit: Julia Heffernan. Free to use in conjunction with this proposal.

Introduction

There are two living species of bison -- American bison and European bison -- along with six extinct species. American bison (often called "buffalo") are the largest mammal in the Western Hemisphere and embody the pre- and post-colonial American West. Bison once numbered in the tens of millions in North America, providing food, resources, and a sacred religious symbol to many Plains Indian societies. Bison are also the United States national mammal, the official mammal of three U.S. states and a Canadian province, a key figure on coins, currencies, and flags, and the namesake of cultural figures like showman "Buffalo Bill" Cody, of the Buffalo Bills professional football team, and of the historical "buffalo soldiers. celebrated by the classic Bob Marley song. Also game franchises from *Oregon Trail* to *Red Dead Redemption* feature bison as classic western fauna and key player objectives, a trend likely to continue.

Americans hunted bison to near extinction in the 1800s. Their recovery became the first modern conservation success story.

11 U.S. bison now live as wild animals and are separately ranched by a million-dollar bison livestock industry.

12 Europeans also hunted bison to near extinction, despite millenia of a major bison presence on the continent, depicted in visual art dating back to cave painting.

13 Europe's bison numbers recovered, thanks to similar conservation efforts to America. They now roam several European countries and serve as the national animal of Poland and of Belarus.

Despite their historical importance, cultural significance, unique appearance, and growing culinary popularity, neither bison nor their attributes are expressable in the current emoji keyboard.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bison

²https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2013/11/26/marking-the-100-year-anniversary-of-historic-transfer-of-bison-from-the-bronx-zoo-to-wind-cave-national-park/

³ https://defenders.org/bison/basic-facts and https://www.fws.gov/bisonrange/timeline.htm

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American bison#As a symbol

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffalo Bill

⁶ http://mentalfloss.com/article/25650/whats-nickname-origins-all-32-nfl-team-names

⁷ https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/manylenses/buffalosoldiers

⁸ https://genius.com/Bob-marley-and-the-wailers-buffalo-soldier-lyrics

⁹ https://www.thrillist.com/eat/nation/what-you-hunt-in-oregon-trail

¹⁰ https://reddead.fandom.com/wiki/Bison

¹¹https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2013/11/26/marking-the-100-year-anniversary-of-historic-transfer-of-bison-from-the-bronx-zoo-to-wind-cave-national-park/

¹² https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/dining/bison.html

¹³https://www.nature.com/news/mysterious-origin-of-european-bison-revealed-using-dna-and-cave-art-1.2 0822

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European bison

Selection Factors -- Inclusion

Compatibility

The proposed bison emoji is new to all major platforms.

Expected usage level

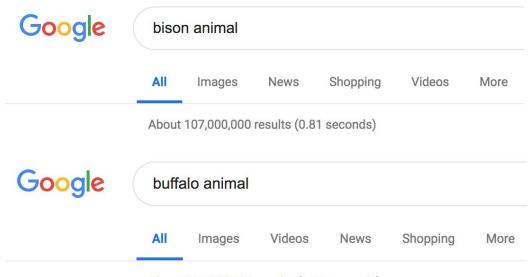
Frequency

A key note for bison search popularity metrics: tracking the popularity of bison online via the "bison" search term faces complication from the American popularity of "buffalo" as casual species nomenclature. This makes "Bison"-driven metrics the tip of the iceberg for the species' significance. To adjust for this, stats here incorporate both names. These stats also specify "buffalo animal" to filter out the other common meanings of the word "buffalo" (e.g. the water buffalo species on other continents distinct from bison, the popular buffalo wing food item, New York State's second largest city of Buffalo NY).

Additionally, this situation highlights a major reason for bison inclusion in the emoji keyboard. The reason: a bison emoji is a clearer representation of the species than the most common word for it. Americans rely on the colloquial "buffalo", despite that term being a better fit for African water buffaloes (a separate species half a world away). There may never be a day when "bison" is the most common parlance for the American bison. Either way, a bison emoji would help people in all countries express the concept of bison with greater accuracy.

Google Search

The combined Google results for bison total about 332 million results, not far off the 480 million results for elephants (in particular given how much easier it is to index elephants by the single word for them).

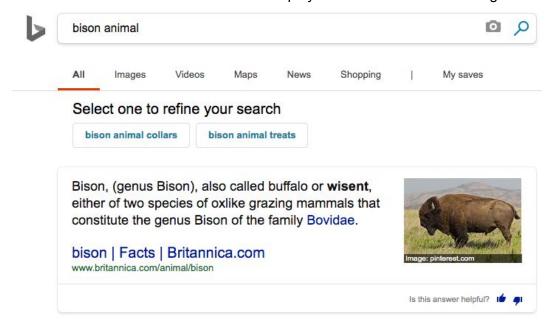


About 225,000,000 results (1.26 seconds)



Bing Search

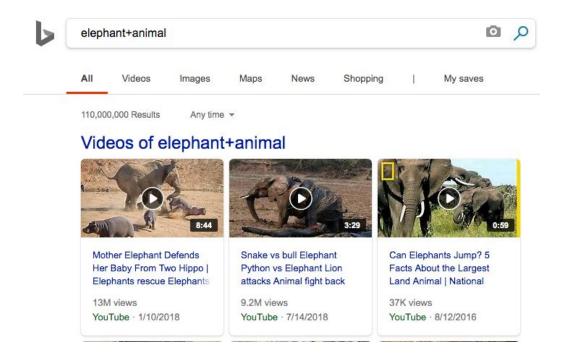
For some reason "bison animal" did not display a number of results on Bing:



However "bison+animal" brings up over 26 million listings:

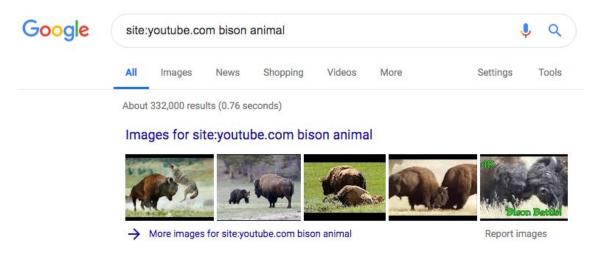


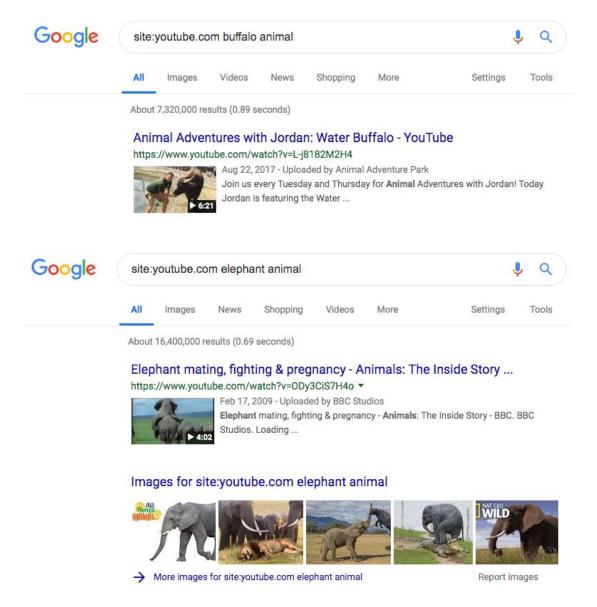
Considering the much more enormous Google search interest for bison, these results appear to be skewed. Similar Bing underreporting happens in the case of "elephant+animal":



YouTube Search

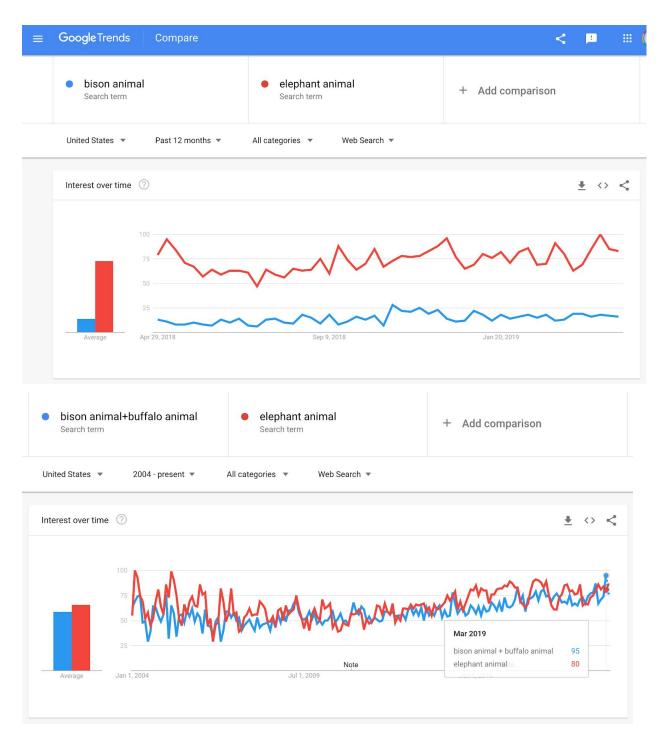
The "bison animal" search term cracks 332,000 results on YouTube. "Buffalo animal" racks up over 7 million more results. Admittedly "elephant animal" delivers double the number of results here -- nevertheless, the bison draws enormous interest.



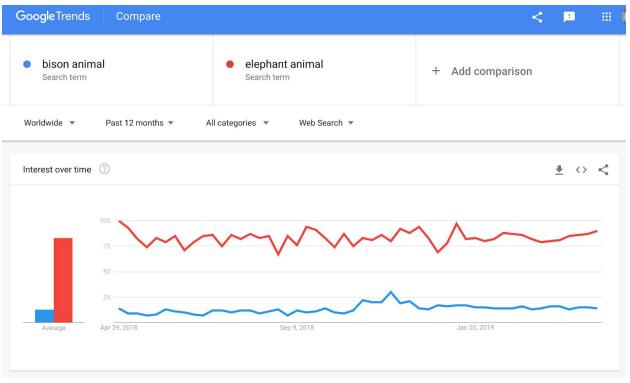


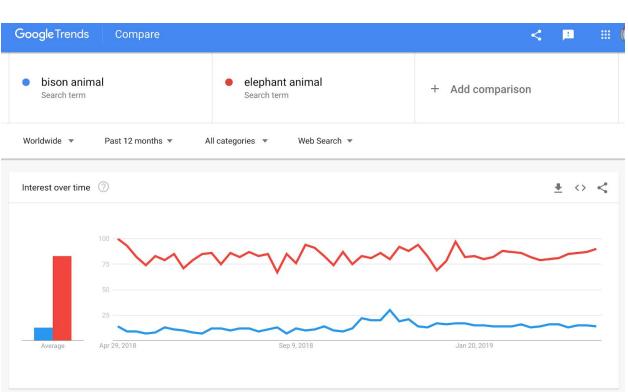
Google Trends: Web Search

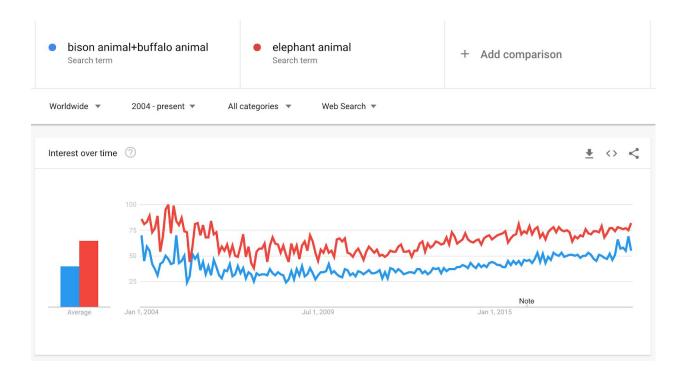
Searched as fully as possible, bison enjoy comparable popularity to elephants in the United States. Bison also show no lasting dropoff. This indicates lasting public interest in the animal.

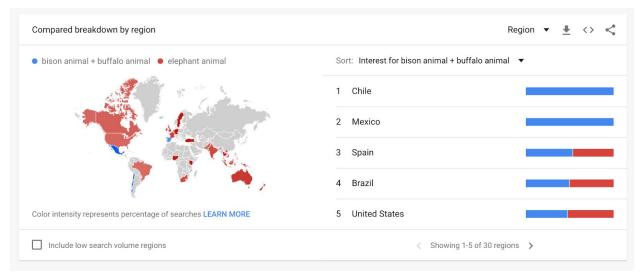


Looking globally, bison trend slightly below elephants overall. They also nearly match in popularity everywhere from Spain to Brazil to Pakistan, with bison outpacing elephant popularity in Mexico, Chile, and Argentina.





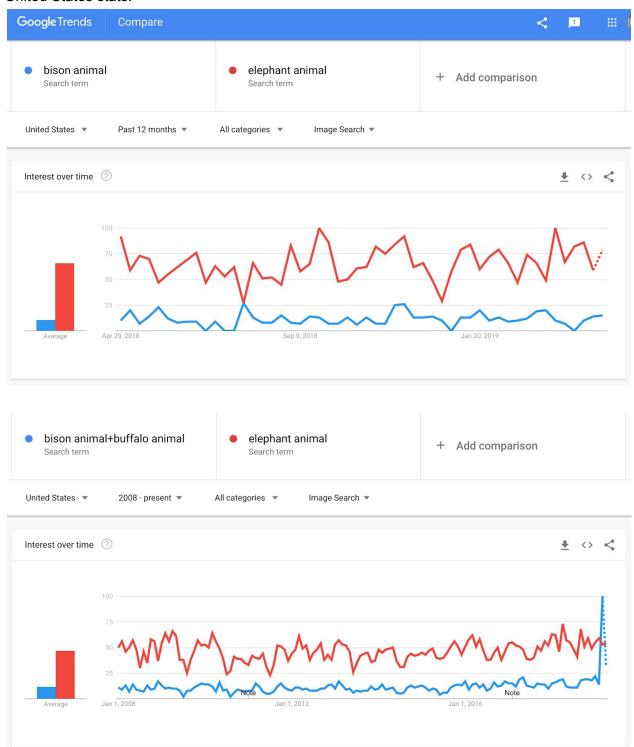




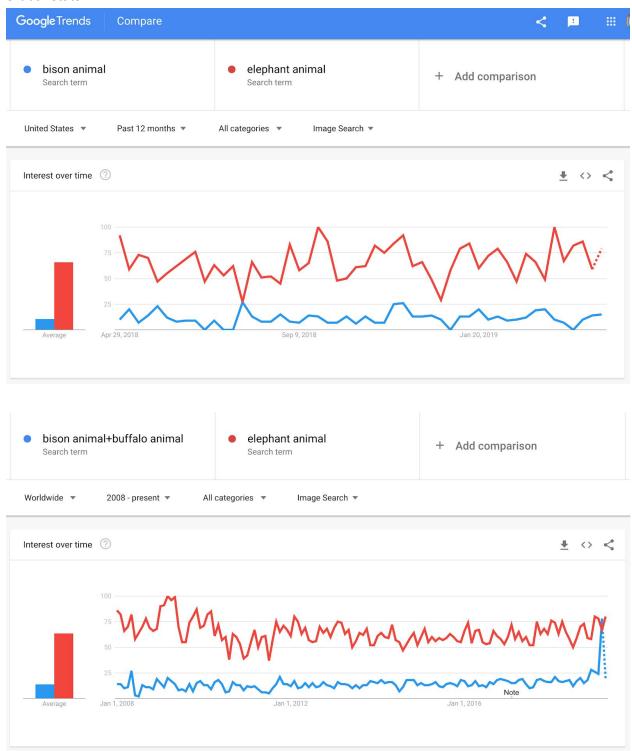
Google Trends: Image Search

Image search trends tilt further toward elephants in this case. However bison hold a steady interest, and enjoy a massive recent spike that could indicate greater interest in the near future.

United States stats:

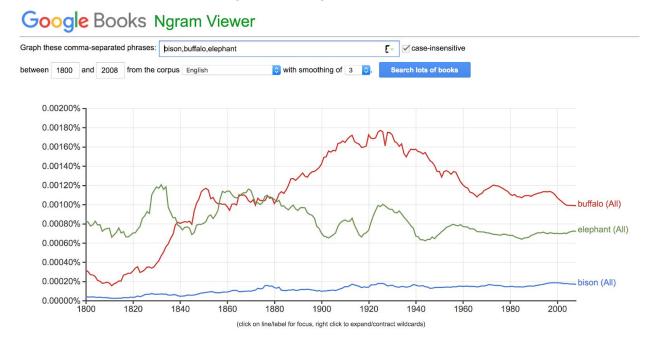


Global stats:



NGram Viewer

Searching simply by species name (as books won't often describe either animal as "[name] animal"), elephants fall between the popularity of bison and buffalo. Numbers here also represent an increasing interest in both "bison" and "buffalo", perhaps owing to increased contact between bison and the English speaking world over these centuries.



Other metrics

Bison/"buffalo" are a majestic present day animal and cultural landmark with a storied past. People go out of their way to see, hunt, and/or eat bison, and find encounters with them to be remarkable. Bison are also the subject of frequent environmental debates in the United States, such as a potential Montana law under consideration this week. For all those reasons, bison are an extremely popular hashtag on Instagram, with the hashtags #bison and #bisons sitting at a combined 653,167 tags as of this writing. Even relatively niche tags for bison-related situations such as #bisonburger (28,971 posts)¹⁷, #bisonhunting (10,343 posts)¹⁸ and #bisontattoo (2,272 posts)¹⁹ enjoy significant activity.

¹⁵ https://www.mtpr.org/post/lawmakers-consider-future-bison-montana?fbclid=IwAR3WnunffmsKHtPhMv DdQxpKW3aor3pTDQOtGK GsaSobd75j6NlafSedLo

¹⁶ https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bison/ and https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bisons/

¹⁷ https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bisonburger/

¹⁸ https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bisonhunting/

¹⁹ https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bisontattoo/

Multiple Uses

Metaphorically, bison and "buffalo" are considered a hard-charging animal, a herd-oriented animal, and featured in idiomatic phrases like "use every part of the buffalo."²⁰ The expression of all these concepts could benefit from a bison emoji.

Bison/"buffalo" live across North America and Europe, sighted frequently by residents and visitors. Bison are also a culinary option for Americans across all 50 states, thanks to major national restaurant chains like Ted's Montana Grill (44 locations in 17 U.S. states)²¹ and Bareburger (38 locations in the U.S.)²². The sighting and eating of bison are two common yet exciting situations calling for a bison emoji.

Beyond their state and national roles as representative animals (see previous sections), bison are a sports mascot for major universities like the University of Colorado at Boulder, Howard University, North Dakota State University, Bucknell University, and the University of Manitoba.²³ As mascot of Howard University, bison also hold a significant role representing historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). In other logos, Bison are the symbol of the Buffalo Bisons professional baseball team²⁴ and the indirect symbol of Buffalo NY's Bills football team and Sabres hockey team.²⁵

Bison are the logo animal of choice for environmental conservation groups across North America. Even groups like the Chicago Zoological Society²⁶ choose the bison as their symbol, despite operating outside the Great Plains and handling an enormous range of animals day to day. This choice often springs from the bison's singular role as an animal conservation success story.²⁷ There are also bison-specific conservation efforts occuring in the present-day United States, in Canada, and in numerous European countries. U.S. and Canada bison conservation often combines with efforts to reintroduce prairie ecosystems. Also, Native American-led bison conservation efforts hold a powerful cultural meaning that's unique within all global animal conservation. Tribal efforts include the Osage Nation bison preserve in Lawton, Oklahoma²⁸, the Oglala Lakota tribe's reintroduction of bison to Pine Ridge Reservation land in South Dakota²⁹, the Dehcho First Nations Assembly's effort to protect bison on Horn Plateau in the Northwest Territories³⁰, and the Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty signed in 2014, an agreement between 11 tribes in Montana and Alberta to restore bison to past habitats, and the first intertribal agreement

https://www.voanews.com/a/nonprofit-works-to-reintroduce-buffalo-to-the-oglala-lakota-diet/4251633.html https://phys.org/news/2018-11-indigenous-areas.html

²⁰ https://www.mouseplanet.com/6966/Bump the Rat or Use Every Part of the Rat

²¹ https://www.tedturner.com/teds-montana-grill/

²² https://www.foodnewsfeed.com/content/bareburger-adds-beyond-burger-all-locations-nationwide

²³ https://www.ranker.com/list/bison-mascot-school-list/reference

²⁴ https://www.milb.com/buffalo

²⁵ http://www.sportslogos.net/logos/list_by_team/4/Buffalo_Sabres/

²⁶ https://www.czs.org/landing

²⁷ https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/a-symbol-of-hope-us-designates-bison-as-the-national-mammal

²⁸ http://osagenews.org/en/article/2017/10/17/osage-nation-receives-its-first-shipment-bison/

²⁹

of its kind in 150 years.³¹ Asked why he built a supply chain to bring bison meat back into the Oglala Lakota nation's diet, Charles "Bamm" Brewer told VOA News he had a vision during the tribe's annual bison roundup. It came to him as he rode into a cloud of dirt and snow and steam kicked up by the majestic animals. Per VOA: "That's when [Brewer] believes he stepped into the past, living the experience of his ancestors. 'And they gifted me a message: "Bring the buffalo back to the people."" All animal conservation matters. Bison are the rare animal whose conservation symbolizes the renewal of entire cultures. Bison also play an active, tangible, edible role in that process.

Bison are the quintessential symbol of the American West. They symbolize the historical process that created the present day United States. They also symbolize many Native American peoples displaced by that process. No other emoji in the entire keyboard matches the bison in this potential role and in this constant opportunity for its use.

Image Distinctiveness

Due to the unique look of the BISON it is easily distinguishable from other animals. Its size distinguishes it from most land creatures. Its large rounded front half, distinctive hump, and short legs differentiate it from cows, water buffaloes, and other bovines. It is also a unique symbol of the American West and its history -- few other emoji suggest this place or period in any specific way, and none capture it in precisely the same fashion.

Additionally, vendors have options in terms of their art for the bison's pose (e.g. standing, running, charging) if they feel that helps vary its image re: other large hoofed mammals.

<u>Completeness</u>

As stated above, the bison is an animal of enormous past and present significance across multiple continents. It is also a singular symbol of the American West, of animal conservation, and of Native American & First Nations cultures. In emoji form, it could allow the keyboard to express these tangible and conceptual ideas like never before.

Frequently requested

Lacking an official bison emoji, sports teams and organizations often create their own.³³ Others frequently request the animal as an emoji, often referencing common reasons like its

 $\frac{https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/bringing-back-the-bison-tribes-and-first-nations-sign-hist}{oric-treaty-eStUli69w0iERVPo8wcDqg/}$

https://www.voanews.com/a/nonprofit-works-to-reintroduce-buffalo-to-the-oglala-lakota-diet/4251633.html https://twitter.com/umanitoba/status/647125223842689024 and https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/sports/ncaa-march-madness-emoji/?tid=sm_tw_

³¹

importance as a national symbol of the United States.³⁴ Its lack is glaring enough that users turn to "bison emoji" as a placeholder.³⁵



³⁴ https://twitter.com/CurtisCSnyder/status/806593149619404801 and https://twitter.com/ModFarm/status/779066574665687040 and https://twitter.com/Icarus_Cash/status/812346499027836928

³⁵ https://twitter.com/SarahhMJones/status/483633528186634242

Selection Factors -- Exclusion

Overly specific

The bison emoji is not overly specific, as it is a distinct species of animal.

There is no comparable emoji on the current keyboard. Also the current animal-mammal category includes two emoji to represent the sheep species ("ram" and "ewe"), two emoji to represent camel species ("camel" and "two-hump camel"), separate emoji for cows and their faces, and separate emoji for pigs *and* their faces *and* their noses. This suggests the category has a robust capacity for expansion when a hoofed mammal reaches even a moderate level of global significance, and can accommodate a single emoji representing both living species of bison plus all six extinct species.

Open-ended

We are filling in the set of animals, and this animal helps bolster American & European megafauna, which are currently underrepresented relative to their African and farmyard peers. Also, emoji relating to Native American culture are essentially non-existent in the current keyboard. The bison begins to address this critical gap.

Already representable

There is no way to represent the bison or its cultural & historical characteristics in the current emoji set. The existing large horned ungulates in the keyboard are chiefly livestock (cow & ox), are separate species native to other continents (water buffalo), or strongly differ from the bison's appearance (deer, also aforementioned cow & ox & water buffalo).

Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

The bison is an ancient species that cannot be trademarked. Various sports teams, organizations, and private companies (e.g. Patagonia³⁶ brand clothing) use specific bison artwork representationally, but no reasonable person could consider these the predominant depiction of the entire real-life bison species.

Transient

Bison remain the focus of major conservation efforts, but this doesn't hurt the interest in bison in general. Separately, the bison's role as a dietary staple dates back centuries, exists across cultures and eras, and is unlikely to abate. Bison feature on flags, coins, logos, and more, and have done so for over a century. Their earliest artistic representations date all the way back to European cave paintings. Even in the case of a tragic bison extinction, the species would likely represent that context, similar to the current depiction of dinosaurs (which currently enjoy multiple representative emoji in the keyboard).

³⁶ https://www.patagonia.com/product/fitz-roy-bison-trucker-hat/38049.html

Faulty Comparison

The unique look and proportions of the bison makes it difficult to mistake for other animals represented by Unicode.

Exact Image

The bison can be depicted flexibly by any developer.

Author Bio

Alex Schmidt (aschmidt47@gmail.com & alexschmidty.com) is a writer, podcaster, comedian, and 4-Time 'Jeopardy!' Champion living in Pasadena CA and Durham NC. As a child and later as an adult, his family frequented the managed bison prairie at FermiLab (Batavia IL). This prairie is the world's first-ever bison habitat ringed by an underground particle accelerator.³⁷

³⁷ https://www.fnal.gov/ecology/wildlife/site/bison_field.shtml