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## Cattle in the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** Miller discusses three types of native American "cattle" that could plausibly fit the role of the cattle mentioned in the Book of Mormon text.

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## Cattle in the Book of Mormon

Archaeologists as well as paleontologists have been finding more and more associations of animals, extinct as well as extant, with man at a number of sites in America. (e.g., Harrington, 1933; Irwin-Williams, 1967; Schmidt, 1988; Pichardo, 2000a, 2000b; Arroyo-Cabrales and Alvarez, 2003).

The first of the animals to be discussed are the cattle, oxen, and cows. These are listed in the Jaredite record (Ether 9:18). The cow and ox are also reported in the Nephite record (1Nephi 18:25). Whether there are any distinctions to be made between those animals in the two records is unclear. However, I assume that two different types of closely related animals are meant. Is there any evidence for domestic cattle being associated with either the Jaredite or the Nephite peoples? There may be some!

The presence of cattle as identified by bones of a domestic type *Bos taurus* (Figure 1a & 1b) has been reported by Hatt from three caves (Lara, Has, and Loltún) in the Yucatan Peninsula (1953, p. 27, 29). What makes this especially interesting is that these bones were found in association with an extinct horse. Perhaps of greater interest is that human artifacts have also been recovered from these caves that may relate to the same age. According to paleontologists Joaquin Arroyo-Cabrales and Oscar J. Polaco, the presence of this horse seems to indicate that it survived into historic time (2003, p. 283). Another cave (Gruta de Loltún) on the Yucatan Peninsula also contains the domestic cattle species, *Bos taurus* (Arroyo-Cabrales and Alvarez, 2003, p. 263).



**Figure 1a.** This Egyptian tomb painting is of Sennutem (overseer of the Royal Egyptian tombs) plowing with domestic cattle of the species *Bos taurus*. It was discovered near Thebes, Egypt, and has been dated at c.1200 B.C. The time of this Egyptian tomb painting corresponds to the same time that the Jaredites were living in the New World. The first Jaredites conceivably brought this cattle species with them. *Bos taurus* bones and teeth have been found in caves of the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico and elsewhere along with prehistoric artifacts. (Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons, Yorck project – Public Domain)



**Figure 1b.** The Egyptian tomb painting shown here is from near Thebes, Egypt. It, too, depicts domesticated cattle of the species *Bos taurus*. The dating of this painting has been placed at c.1422-1411 B.C. A number of ancient petroglyphs and rock carvings indicate that Egyptians domesticated cattle by at least 4500 B.C. according to some archaeologists. These dates also correspond to the same time that the Jaredites were living in the New World. (Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons, Yorck project – Public Domain)

## Cattle

Other caves in the region yet need exploring for vertebrate mammals in association with man. While some research has been done, it is still in initial stages. Undoubtedly more information will come forth showing that animals some viewed as extinct actually continued into historic times. As far as native American “cattle,” there are at least three types which could represent the ones referred to in the Book of Mormon

One of these is the native American bison (buffalo), which is known throughout North and Central America from the latter part of the Pleistocene to fairly recent time. Its once exceptionally large geographic range, though, has been greatly reduced because of expanding civilization, beginning with European settlers. Different species of bison are known to have coexisted with man before becoming extinct. Two of these are illustrated in Figure 2. Sorenson reported that early Spaniards regarded bison as “cows” (1992, p. 12). From personal observations in different regions, I have seen that the bison (or buffalo) can be semi-domesticated. Possibly this was one of the animals referred to as “cow” in the Book of Mormon. It might also be regarded as an “ox.” Another candidate for a cattle-type animal perhaps known to Book of Mormon people is the extinct shrub-ox.

While supposedly extinct at the close of the Pleistocene, it might have well survived into historic times. I have examined a skull of this ox-like animal from southern Mexico (Carranza-Castañeda and Miller, 1987, P. 339-340). One final ox-type mammal in North America is the extinct woodland muskox (Figure 3). It, too, could easily have lived into historic times. Both the shrub-ox and woodland muskox are considered to be animals that lived

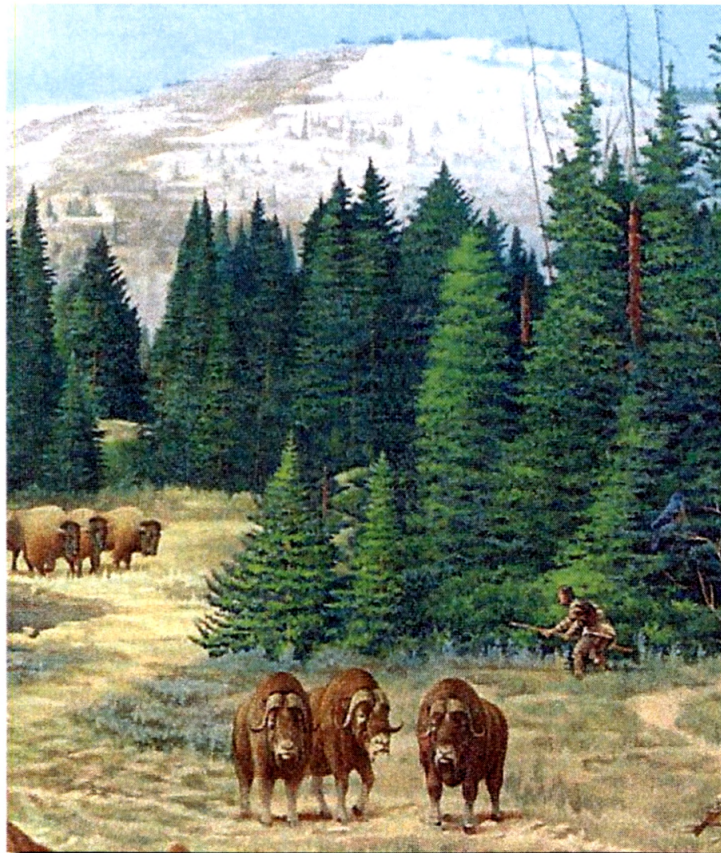
primarily in wooded areas. Those that live in this type of an environment do not commonly get preserved as fossils. Both kinds of native ox, are considered relatively rare.



**Figure 2. Represented here are two species of extinct bison known until the latest Pleistocene, and quite possibly later. Both species are larger than our present bison. The giant bison, *Bison latifrons*, is on the left, and the smaller bison, *Bison antiquus*, is on the right. *Bison*, especially the smaller living species, *B. bison*, could well be included among some of the cattle mentioned in the Book of Mormon. (Figure by courtesy of the George C. Page Museum in southern California. John Dawson, artist. From Harris and Jefferson, 1985, “Treasures of the Tar Pits.”)**

From the above information it can be seen that the cattle mentioned in the Book of Mormon, both in the Jaredite and Nephite records, could be accounted for by the native oxen that were

present in Mesoamerica as well as in North America. It does not take a great stretch of the imagination to believe that both the shrub-ox and woodland muskox were capable of being at least semi-domesticated. Man has in fact semi-domesticated the living northern muskox.



**Figure 3. Restoration of extinct woodland muskoxen, *Bootherium bombifrons*, with a native hunter looking for bison. Muskoxen, recent and extinct forms, are also a type of cattle, and the extinct form here could have been encountered by the Jaredites. Living muskoxen, however, are now confined to Arctic regions, and commonly used for food and clothing by Alaskan Inuit people. (From Miller, 2002, “Quaternary Vertebrates of the Northeastern Bonneville Basin and Vicinity, Utah.” Original painting in the Prehistoric Museum, Price, Utah. Joe Venus, artist)**