



Smoky Mountains, the Wild Side

Daniel Hance Page

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CHAPTER 1

Smoky Mountains 1670

In 1670 the Iroquois Confederacy was establishing an empire covering the Eastern Woodlands and as part of this fur trade necessitated expansion a force was sent against the Shawnee who had temporarily settled beside the Cherokee in the area that would in later years become the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. One member of this group from the Confederacy was a young Mohawk man called Red Deer.

After the Shawnee were defeated in battle, Red Deer entered the forest. Some said he liked to hunt alone. Those few who knew him were aware he did not travel in the woods to be alone but to be in company of the spirit world.

In a lofty place where there was a view over a vast area with seemingly endless trees joined by a river or lake, Red Deer sat beside a small fire. While resting physically, by spirit he traveled. In spirit he could walk beside a great bear while this forest giant stood on a high point, claw a mark on a stump then stretch out one paw to rake the wind while looking everywhere without fear.

Red Deer could also accompany an eagle soaring while held aloft by air currents rising upward from sides of mountains. Sometimes at great heights frost gathered on wings as this majestic bird surveyed terrain below also without fear. All these spirits, Red Deer knew were companions because they, as him, were connected with the Creator. *I'm an individualized part of the Creator, mused Red Deer. Thereby I can find company in the presence of other spirits of the Creator. In the forest I find such presence and here I can rest. Often there is silence or messages without words. At other times visions come and words clarify the future.*

The forest blazed with light. *I'm going to find here more than a battle against the Shawnee, concluded Red Deer.*

Opening a leather pouch, he withdrew a handful of crushed, parched corn mixed with maple sugar. He savored this mixture of food after to the small flames he added a few extra pieces of dry smokeless wood.

Of average height and strength, he had craggy features. Fire in his eyes outmatched all other physical characteristics. He had that eagle look of a person who missed nothing and thereby accepted only the truth.

I did not bring the musket because everything we do now must be accomplished quietly, he noted while checking his bow and quiver of arrows. We can get from the traders not only guns and knives but also iron arrow points. I continue to enjoy chipping my own points from flint. With a scrap of leather over a rounded stone, I like placing a piece of flint on the leather then by pressing down and twisting the point of a deer antler I'm intrigued by the way portions of flint can be chipped away from the arrow point hidden for so long inside the stone. Using wet strands of sinew, I secure in place the point at one end of a shaft and split turkey or hawk feathers at the other. I paint additional red rings around each shaft. Although we have to hunt because we require food, I select only what is not just used but absolutely needed because creatures of the forest and I share part of a connection with the Creator.

After extinguishing the flames, Red Deer left his camp and stepped into the forest. *Everywhere in the woods I am at home, he observed. There are no strangers here except maybe the always-angry hogs the Europeans brought. I have made arrowheads and knives from the tusks.*

I always want to be aware of the four directions along with where landmarks are located. Our main camp is northward. The place I just left was to the northwest.

Red Deer walked throughout the day until shadows of evening gathered, lengthened then darkened. Night cloaked the forest until the moon first appeared as a red glow shining among trees. This light grew larger while appearing to climb the sky, bringing a silver sheen to brighten the forest.

After sleeping, Red Deer greeted the next day by coaxing a reluctant flame from coals. Above the fire a trout was roasted on a skewer. Coffee from an English trader also perked.

A fine meal to start a great new day, thought Red Deer, after savoring the meat and starting to sip the strong, black drink. I must not wait any longer. We need food. Helping to add necessary food is my contribution to the others.

At a different location with a rock wall at his back and slight breeze refreshing his face, he watched a well-used deer trail. Etched clearly in first light, three deer approached his position. Caught by curiosity, they stepped

toward the person yet this mysterious form did not move. First one deer led the way then the other.

With the animals at close range, Red Deer pulled back the arrow in his bow. This movement warned the animals of danger. They turned to retreat. In moving sideways a buck attracted an arrow. On its way to the target, a branch caused a slight misdirection and the buck, although hit, did not show any sign of falling.

I must give the animal time to rest then the arrow will finish its work, thought Red Deer, before he started preparing a camp. In a pot heated over a small flame, he prepared rice tea seasoned with a bit of sassafras root. Along with this drink, he savored some of his supply of charred, crushed corn mixed with maple sugar.

From his camp, he watched the day pass to eventually finish with a flash of colors from the setting sun. Shadows gathered to become the night.

After enjoying another meal of corn, he sat and rested, while sipping the tea held in his favorite wooden cup. *The whippoorwills are calling,* he noted. *They express one of my favorite songs that speak from the forest. I also prefer the loon's cry in addition to an ovenbird's cheerful notes. As much as any of the others, I enjoy hearing robins when they sing in the spring to mark their territories. Spring peepers provide music to be enjoyed with the celebration of a new growing season sending out new plants along with young birds or animals.*

Now I enjoy the whippoorwill. At my home along the Mohawk River, the whippoorwill has a longer, more complete call. The singer here has a dialect—a shorter call, more like whip-will rather than whippoorwill.

I consider deer, as all parts of the forest, to be friends although I collect some for food. Deer in this area are numerous and food is required. Our basic supplies are powdered, charred corn mixed with maple sugar but meat too is important. I also like tea made from the tips of hemlock boughs. I get coffee now from English traders, although charred corn has always provided a good drink.

The Shawnee have been defeated. Our group will soon be starting the return journey. I'll bring them this food with the new day, tomorrow.

First light in the morning brightened the path for Red Deer as he followed the route taken by the wounded animal. Drops of blood from the injury marked the trail.

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