

Jim and Running Bear

The Deer Hunt

By Dwayne Sharpe

Jim was up early. He was packing for a trip to Big Mountain with his friend Running Bear. He made sure his Bow and arrows were packed. This was going to be a hunting trip for deer and he was going to use only his bow and arrows that he had made by himself. The saddle bags were packed and the pack horse carried a few supplies as it was to be used to carry back the deer meat that he and Running Bear were to hunt.

Jim headed north toward the Indian reservation where Running Bear lived. It was only a few miles away. Along the way, he thought of the arrows in his quiver. Running Bear had taught him how to make the arrows. Selecting the wood was important as the arrow needed to be strong. Birch was the only wood Running Bear said would work well. It was indeed a hard wood and took quite awhile to make a single arrow.



The sun was just rising when he arrived and Running Bear was waiting for him. Together, they rode northwest toward Big Mountain.

Running Bear looked over at Jim's horse and said, "I see you have your bow and arrows."

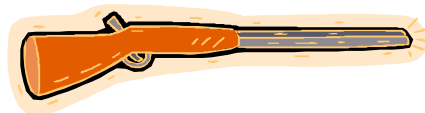
Jim replied, "Yes, and I even have some extra feathers if these come off."

Running Bear said, "I hope you're not using any chicken feathers. You know they are not strong enough."



"No, I found some crow feathers in the forest. There must have been some fight as there were feathers all around. I also have some pine pitch to glue them down" said Jim.

Running Bear had taught Jim all about arrow making and had insisted that he make his own arrows for this trip. This was going to be a hunt just like the "old" days, before the rifle was brought out west.



“I think we will arrive a little before sunset. We can make camp and turn in early so we can get an early morning start”, said Jim.

They found an open area near some large trees and began to make camp. The horses were unloaded and hobbled so they could move around and find grass to eat. Running Bear made a fire while Jim went to fetch water from a stream that was flowing down from the mountain. The meal consisted mostly of jerky and warmed beans along with some coffee to wash it down.



In the morning, some sourdough bread and more coffee was consumed before they headed out on the hunt.

“I think we should try for two bucks, Running Bear”, said Jim. “I can take half of one and you can take the rest for your village.”

“OK. We don’t want to kill any more than we can eat”, said Running Bear. “It is not the way of my people.”

“I agree. Food should never be wasted”, said Jim.



Running Bear pulled two large feathers from his pack. The ends had been dipped in red paint. He handed one to Jim and told him to stick it in his hat brim. Running Bear slid the other feather into his head band.

Jim asked, “What is this for?”

Running Bear responded, “If you see a red feather, don’t shoot. It’s me.”

With that, Jim and Running Bear then gathered up their bow and arrows and proceeded to walk towards the forest.

At the forest edge, Running Bear said, “I will continue north for awhile and then circle around toward the west. You go west and then circle towards the north. We should meet up by noon.”



Jim headed west rather quickly to cover ground. After a few minutes he slowed his pace and began walking toe to heel as he felt his way. It was important to be very quiet while

hunting as the animals that live there will run and hide if they hear any noises. The sun moved up slowly as he continued the search for deer.

Running Bear had headed north where there were fewer trees. He walked quickly until the trees were growing closer together. There he slowed his pace and began walking toe to heel in his moccasins. He heard different birds singing their morning songs and spotted an owl perching on a high branch. He continued his slow walk and found signs of rabbit and deer. The signs were old and he continued the hunt.



Jim came across a small clearing in the forest and waited at its edge behind a bush. He knew that deer ate grass and would find this clearing appealing. He scanned the grassy area and the surrounding trees, but nothing moved. He waited.

Running Bear found the forest very thick and moving became difficult without snapping a twig or a branch. It seemed like an hour of this before he came across a game trail. It was a narrow little path that stretched through the forest. It was easier to travel and there was little on the path that would make noise when he walked.



Jim first spotted the furry brown rabbit on the other side of the clearing. It had hopped into view and then remained where it was. It had something in its mouth and was chewing rapidly, probably a root of some kind. It wasn't long before a couple of birds flew in and landed on a tree limb over Jim. They were making a racket compared to the songs he had heard earlier that morning. Jim scanned the surrounding area again and this time he spotted a couple of squirrels running up a pine tree. Suddenly, the rabbit took off and at the same time a doe entered the clearing. Jim's hopes were raised considerably.

Running Bear was quietly walking the small trail when he heard something up ahead. He ducked down and moved to one side hiding behind a bush. He listened carefully as he sneaked a look all around him. Nothing moved and nothing made a sound. After waiting only a short time, he began to move, ever so slowly. He may have gotten about 10 steps when he froze. No more than 5 paces away was a full grown mother skunk, with three little baby skunks following behind. Running Bear half-stood like a statue as he waited for the skunk to leave the area.



The doe had come for the grass. The morning dew had left it damp and tasty. Jim hoped that a buck would be nearby. Slowly he pulled one of his hand-made arrows from the quiver and fitted it into the bowstring. He again waited very patiently.

The mother skunk and its babies walked out of sight much to the relief of Running Bear. He then proceeded down the game trail to make more room between the skunk and himself. Up ahead, he saw some bushes move. He was uncertain if this was caused by the wind or by an animal. As he drew closer, he could see that there was something in the bushes. He pulled an arrow out and fitted it to the bowstring.

In the clearing, another doe entered. Jim's heart was racing with excitement waiting for a buck. Right behind the second doe, a 12 point buck stopped at the edge of the clearing. Jim could not believe his luck. He pulled back the arrow carefully and took aim. The buck must have seen the movement and turned quickly. At that precise moment, Jim let the arrow fly. Its flight was true and buck lay dead. The other animals ran from the area, startled by the buck's fall.



Running Bear carefully inched forward as quietly as he could. When he was about 10 paces away, he slowly stood up to get a better view. What he saw startled him. It was a bear sleeping in a berry bush. This is one animal that you do not want to mess with armed with simply a bow and arrow. He bent down low hoping that the bear would not notice him. He crept ever so slowly back and then around the area that the bear was in. He then quickened his pace until he knew the bear could not hear him. He then slowed again and then began a search for signs again.



Jim inspected the fallen deer. He knew that Running Bear's people would use all the parts, including the antlers. He then began the process of cleaning the deer. It was approaching noon and figured that Running Bear would catch up to him shortly.

Running Bear did not see anything to help him in his hunt. He saw several squirrels, two rabbits, and many birds. He was now at the northern most point of his hunt and was turning west. It took him by surprise what he saw next. Two doe were racing through the forest like they had been startled. He waited patiently and was rewarded with another pair close behind. He fitted his arrow into the bowstring and waited. This time a small eight point buck raced alone across the forest floor. He took careful aim and arrow found its

mark. The fallen deer would help feed and cloth his people. He thought of the moccasins that he was wearing made of deerskin. He then began the chore of cleaning the deer.



Jim hung the deer from a limb and then went to look for Running Bear. The sun was near its height for the day and the forest was well lit. It wasn't long before Jim came upon Running Bear.

He spotted the deer that Running Bear had shot and said, "Looks like you got your buck!"

"Yes, and it was a tricky shot. The buck was running extremely fast like it had been startled," said Running Bear. "I was lucky the arrow found its mark. How about you?"

"I found a buck in the clearing with two doe," replied Jim. The arrow with the crow feathers flew straight. I'll help you with that deer."

The two bound up the legs of the deer, and found a long limb to fit between them and carried the deer back to where Jim had hung his. They let that deer down and tied it up with the other deer. Together, they hiked out of the forest and back to the camp. That evening, they each told stories of how they came to find the deer. Running Bear talked about the skunk and the bear. Jim talked about how his arrow flew so straight.

Early the next morning, the pack horse was loaded with the two deer and Jim and Running Bear headed back home. The return trip took most of the day, but that evening, Jim celebrated with Running Bear in his village with a small feast.



As Jim was about to leave the village, he told Running Bear "I'd like to go hunting with you and this bow and arrow again. I enjoyed the hunt and I know your people needed the meat."

"My village depends on the braves for the food," replied Running Bear. "Without food, my people would go hungry. I enjoyed your company and we will do it again. Soon."

Jim returned to his ranch house where he salted the meat and hung it in the smoke house. He would enjoy venison for several weeks.