

## FIRST FAMILY ON THE TRACE

The animals paid them no attention, barely raising their heads from their grazing to glance at the new corners as they moved across the wide valley. Marsatook, with his Shamen's staff halted the troop. Turning to his brother Colattodon, with a puzzled look on his face, "Why do they not flee from us? They seem not afraid, as if only our spirits were here. Do they not see our spears and war clubs? Do they not know us? What say you of this? Has the great Father, the Sun, delivered us into a land where the animals have no fear?"

Colottodon gazed out over the grasslands leading to the great river, "We may be the first people that they have seen. We have found no firepits or camps; only the tracks of the animals dot the Trace. Let us gather river logs to build our lodge. The panthers pay us no mind now, but they are night hunters; we must have shelter before nightfall and this is not a land of caves. The Trace crosses the Mother River where the stones make a bridge and many trees have washed ashore. It is here that Father has led us. It is here we will build a strong lodge. Mayhap you will have a vision tonight and learn the answers to your questions."

Marsatook grunted his assent to the need for a strong pole lodge. His mind wandered back to the last vision he had attempted. A cold shudder rattled his frame as he recalled the deep fear that had engulfed him during his spirit quest. He had eaten the wild mushrooms as before, but that time he had eaten too many and his dream had become confused, whirling wildly out of his control. His focus was gone. He spun wildly, trying in vain to balance his spirit. His body fell and fell, seemingly lost in a world of fast moving objects, dancing in and out. Confused and helpless, he plummeted to the earth and did not awaken for two days. When he finally began to stir, he found that he could not move his legs. He hurt all over his body. Forcing his eyelids to open, they fluttered and he gasped trying to speak. His mouth dry and parched. He could hear voices around him and felt hands lift his head and blessed water being applied to his open lips. He moaned for more and the helping hands assisted him. Swallowing what he could, he sighed, and felt grateful as more water was applied to his face and head cooling him as he tried again to open his eyes. He caught blurred and cloudy glimpses of the roof of the pole lodge and the voice of Nedradee, hovering over him as she put a warm broth clay bowl to his lips, which he gulped down with dribble running out of the corners of his mouth. The welcome broth of bird and rabbit stew with willow bark slid down his throat, calming him as he groped for more. Drinking what he could, he collapsed back into the soft buffalo and wolf skins of his bed. His head and body were no longer spinning and though he still couldn't fully open his eyes, he felt his spirit float away from his body as he began to see images of animals playing in the sun. He became one of them and began to see through their eyes. He was now a tall noble Wapiti and he raised his huge antlered head and cocked it sideways trying to discern a new sight. He pulled in air to scent the two legged strangers coming into view. Snorting and shaking his head he was revolted by the stink emanating from this group as they continued on to the river. He saw himself with his tall staff leading his people, but his senses were now that of the Wapiti and he felt the tingling sensations ripple through his Wapiti body. He knew these people but the Wapiti did not. It was then that he found the answer that he had sought. These two legged animals were the first of their kind, and though the smell of them was revolting to his Wapiti senses, he felt no fear of them, only curiosity.