

ROSS, ELIZABETH

BOS. AND ARROWS

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Bows and arrows of long ago constituted the principal weapons of the Cherokees, and were their dependence in war and on the hunt. Today there are some fine old bows preserved among the Cherokee people, and there are living many members of the Nation who are highly skilled in the use of the ancient weapons.

In the making of bows the Cherokees have long been partial to the wood of the bois d' arc, and of the black locust. A perfect bow must be made from unblemished wood, free from knots or other defects, and much care is observed in their making, as well as in the making of arrows.

Although the use of firearms was general among the Cherokees in their original country east of the Mississippi River many years before the removal west in 1838, there were, nevertheless, many bows in possession of the people, and hunters often carried their bows and arrows when in quest of small game.

On the long journey to the Indian Territory nearly one hundred years ago, the Cherokees were without

firearms, the United States soldiers having disarmed them during the period preceding the removal. In consequence the only method by which wild game might be procured was with bows and arrows. Where wild game was encountered along the route the bowmen were successful in killing deer, turkeys and small animals in considerable quantity on some occasions. During a number of years after the establishment of the nation in the Indian Territory, the bows and arrows were often used, and even at this period (1937) small game has been slain by use of the bows and arrows.

All along through the years since the coming of the Cherokee to the present state, there have been held at intervals contests in which the marksmen use the bows and arrows. Cornstalk shooting matches often brought together considerable numbers of contestants. Cornstalks, in the matches, are arranged in bundles, placed from one hundred to one hundred and fifty yards distant from the participants in the matches, and the person piercing the largest number of stalks with one

arrow during the course of the contest is declared the winner. In such contests, arrows with sharp points, usually a long steel point, are used instead of the short or blunt points.

In the early days of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory wild game was greatly abundant. Wild deer were numerous, as also were wild turkeys, and great flocks of prairie chickens were to be found in the fall and winter seasons, while there were also quails and ducks, and squirrels both red and gray existed in great numbers and many of the hunters procured all the game necessary for their use with bows and arrows.

There are now living many Cherokees who are adept in fashioning bows and arrows, though the occasion for doing so does not often occur.

So skilled in marksmanship were some of the bow and arrow men that they could shoot a wild fowl on the wing and pierce the head of a squirrel when the small animal had reached the topmost branches of the highest tree.

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