

A Delaware Snake Legend

Told by Julius Fouts

Twelve men were out hunting in a party one time. Early one morning before sunup, one of them heard a turkey gobbling and followed the sound toward a small lake, about which some large cottonwoods were growing. By and by, the others killed a deer and waited for him, but he never came back to the camp.

Next morning they sent another man out to find him. But he heard the turkey gobbling and went that way, never to return.

Now, by this time the rest of the party felt sure that their comrades had been killed by something nearby -- the Delawares had a medicine, or power, by which they could tell when their friends were dead, so these people knew that the two had perished.

Now, the brave man who was head of the party thought the turkey gobbling which they heard now and then had something to do with it. So he led the party down to the lake the next morning.

They got there just in time to hear the last gobble of the turkey, which seemed to be up in a great cottonwood. They looked up and saw the head of an enormous snake, up among the branches, the body of which hung down the lakeward side of the tree into the water.

As they watched, it slipped down the side of the tree and into the lake where it disappeared amidst a great boiling and bubbling of the water. Evidently this was the thing that had killed their friends.

That night they sang all night. And towards morning a great fish raised itself in the water and come toward them.

"No, you are not the one we want," they cried, and sent it back.

So they sang for a number of nights and raised many strange beings, one of which was a large turtle with trees growing on its back. When the trees raised above the water, they took some of the branches and told it, "Go back, you are not the one we want."

Finally they raised the great snake, and killed it. Then they burned its body and hunted among the ashes for bits of bone to use as medicine.

As each one took a piece, he made a wish as to what he was going to use it for.