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Cherokee Talking Leaves

119 Rowe Lane

New Tazewell, Tennessee 37825

14 "Bind the Bush" In Ceremony

The last Saturday of November, 2011, fourteen persons assembled in a tight circle in the Information Building of the National Ceremonial Grounds of the Southeastern Cherokee Council, located near Ochlocknee ("Yellow Waters" in the Muscogee language), Georgia.



In the center a small flame flickered. The smoke of smoldering sage leaves filled the area. It was the time of the Bounding Bush Ceremony.

The ceremonial leader welcomed all and explained how "smudging" and "going to water" were outward rituals that portray an inward process of purification as people prepare themselves for ceremony.

The leader and his young apprentice, gave each participant a small bough taken from the White Pine tree. According to Thomas E. Mails, in his book *THE CHEROKEE PEOPLE*, at the ancient Bounding Bush ceremony, some of the people carried this kind of branch in their hands while others carried 18" diameter hoops with twigs forming a cross in the center and white feathers hanging from the 4 corners. These were carried in processions and dances.

The hoops signified the circle of life, the medicine wheel, and the circular nature of the universe. The cross represented the 4 sacred cardinal directions, the feathers peace and purity. The White Pine was respected for its endurance through the winter by holding on to its needles.

Our ancestors knew when the Cold Moons were about to come upon them (Snow Moon, Cold Moon, Boney Moon). In olden times, survival during the cold moons was a challenge. Preparations had to be made first. The Summer Houses needed to be secured against the winter winds. The fire wood was

gathered near the circular Winter Hot Houses. Meat, fish, and plant food had been gathered and stored. The most frail elders among them were taken into the hot houses and kept fed and warm as they imparted their wisdom to the young in the form of stories and legends.

During this ceremony, each person participated by tying their White Pine bough onto others until all 14 limbs were united. The result was a small but sturdy "bounded bush", representing the people "bound together with the cords of love and support to take them through the cold moons until the spring "awakening" of Earth Mother.

Tobacco was given to each and prayers made and tobacco deposited into a repository for later offering to the sacred fire. Tobacco is associated with prayers and prayerfulness.

The ceremonial Talking Stick was passed around the circle and all who wished had the opportunity to speak.

Finally, the prayer pipe of the tribe was awakened and all had the opportunity to touch it and smoke it or offer it to the Creator in prayer.

A story was told of "Ice Man", and how he helped the Real People in putting out a fire and creating a beautiful lake.

The ceremonial leader gave the benediction, asking The Great One to bless each one present and to guard over each one through the harsh cold moons. The Tribal Grounds were "put to rest" for another season to be revitalized and be renewed during the winter moons.

Thus the Bounding Bush Ceremony was conducted. It was the closing of a door to the warm moons and the ceremonial season. It was the opening of the door to a quieter time, when people come together to learn the wisdom of the elders and story tellers and to be "bound together" in harmony until the First New Moon of Spring which would come the following Vernal Equinox, when Earth Mother would re-awake along with all the animals, plants, and people. # # #