

## The Fire Keeper's Apprentice, part 3

By Rick Runningbear

The Fire Keeper's apprentice had gathered the 7 kinds of sacred wood for the Sacred Fire. He had also gathered from the meadow lands various kinds of natural tinder, such as the fluff from various plants including thistle down. He even had found the remains of a field mouse's nest that had dry grass and various kinds of fluff woven into it. "This mouse's nest will make excellent dry tinder to start the Sacred Fire", he thought.

As the apprentice approached his master's lodge he noticed him sitting outside the door and it looked like he was striking two kinds of hard substances together. "Come here and see what I am doing" the Fire Keeper called out to his apprentice. As the apprentice drew near he observed in the teacher's left hand a small stone and in the right hand a curved piece of metal. "What are you doing, sir?" asked the apprentice.

"I am striking this piece of flint with a piece of steel that I obtained from one of the settlers. It is a quicker way to make a fire than the old one where we twirled a stick of wood against wood until it was hot enough to make the dried goldenrod spark up. See the sparks that fly out as I strike the flint and steel together?"

The apprentice watched as a few sparks were cast towards a pile of tinder on the ground in front of the Fire Keeper. Then he saw some of the tinder glow red and a wisp of smoke began to rise from it. Quickly the Fire Keeper picked up a small feather fan and gently began to fan the smoldering tinder. In a few moments a flame erupted and quickly the Fire Keeper added some dry twigs and Pine needles to the tinder and the fire grew bigger.



The Fire Keeper extinguished the small flame and handed the flint and steel to his apprentice. "Practice casting sparks with these until you can cast sparks easily into dry tinder. I want you to make lots of little fires today. Tomorrow is our big celebration. Meet me at the Sacred Circle one hour before sunrise and we will make the Sacred Fire together."

With that the Fire Keeper stood up and entered his lodge and closed the flap behind him. The apprentice kneeled down and began to strike the steel and flint together. At first there were no sparks. But after a little practice a spark or two flew out. And after an hour or so, the apprentice found out that he could cast forth a good trail of sparks and succeeded in making several small flames in the practice tinder.

That night, after the apprentice had returned to his lodge, he lay down on a mat on the floor and soon drifted off to sleep. In his dreams he saw a eagle flying in the air. But as it flew closer it was evident that it was no ordinary eagle. It was larger and lightening flashed from its eyes and from its talons. It was the Thunderbird. Lightening flashed to the ground in front of the apprentice and a fire emerged. The apprentice then saw what seemed to be the spirits of the ancestors dancing around the fire.



The apprentice awoke before daybreak and made his way to the ceremonial circle where the people came for ceremony and dancing. In the center of the circle was a low mound. It was the fire mound and was about 2 feet high and 4 feet in diameter. It was made of clay mingled with sand and looked like the shape of a small volcano with the flattened top indented slightly. Beside it kneeled the Fire Keeper who had arrived

earlier. The 7 sacred kinds of wood had been received the day before from the representatives of each clan. In a leather pouch was tobacco and in another was corn meal. These were placed upon the top of the fire mound in a ceremonial way. Then the 7 kinds of sacred wood were stood up inclining towards the center at the top to form a teepee like shape. Each type of wood was placed in the direction closest to where the clan which it represented would be seated. Natural dry tinder was placed inside the wood sticks.

The apprentice waited for his master to begin casting the sparks into the tinder but to his surprise, the Fire Keeper handed the flint and steel to the apprentice and with a nod, let it be known that it was the apprentice who was to make this particular ceremonial fire. The steel struck the flint, once, twice, three times and the sparks landed upon the dry tinder in the center of the fire mound. A small flame began to flicker and with a few sweeps of the ceremonial fan, the fire began to grow in strength and soon was burning strongly.

It began to get light in the eastern horizon. Soon the sun could be seen rising over into the blue sky. Soon the people began to arrive. The river was down below, near the ceremonial circle. The women went to their place downstream and the men went to their place upstream. They all did the ancient ritual of going to water by immersing themselves 7 times to purify their bodies and their hearts from any negativity.

The smoke of burning Cedar was in the air as it did its part in cleansing the people before ceremony. The Uku (the Peace Chief) dressed in his white regalia, invited the people to enter inside the Sacred Circle and take their places. He also took his place as did the war chief and his attendants dressed in their red regalia.

Everybody was happy and respectful to each other. As the ceremony went on there was religious and social dancing around the sacred fire. The Fire Keeper's apprentice was among the happiest of all. He had made his first sacred fire and would soon be a fire keeper in his own right. # # #