

Tomahawk Beckwourth

My Life and Adventures

Adapted by Michael Cox

Illustrated by Barbara Lofthouse



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Introduction

When Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492, people were already living there. These people, now known as Native Americans, had been there for at *least* 15,000 years. Christopher Columbus called them Indians because he mistakenly thought America was an island in the East Indies.

Soon after Columbus's landing, Europeans rushed to America to claim great chunks of it for themselves. The country was vast and home to many Native American tribes. It was teeming with wildlife, including grizzly bears, deer, mountain lions, and a hundred million buffalo.

By 1800, after the United States gained independence from Great Britain, the country's East Coast was settled. Europeans were displacing the Native Americans and began importing Africans to work as slaves.

The area that was known as the "Wild West" was explored by many of its new inhabitants. One of them was James (Jim)

Beckwourth, the son of a white landowner and an African-American slave. Born around 1800, he lived an incredible life, trapping, blazing trails, living among Native Americans, and leading wagon trains.

Tragically, by 1890 most Native Americans had been killed or driven from their homes. Of the millions of buffalo, only 541 remained.

Jim Beckwourth was a great frontiersman, who explored the landscape and lived among its people as the country changed forever.



*A painting of the
American wilderness*

CHAPTER

1

The Howling Wilderness

I think it must have been around the time I had the fight with Mad Bill Payne that some young fellow asked me to tell him the scariest thing that had ever happened to me. I couldn't. Why? Because I've had so many terrifying and hair-raising things happen to me, I've lost count!

Truth is, ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, I've spent my whole life dodging death and danger. Yet it occurs to me now, that a bullet, arrow, or wild critter is going to get me sooner or later. So, in these pages, I'm going to write down some of my adventures and scrapes. I won't include all of them, though, because that would mean a book a hundred times bigger than this one!