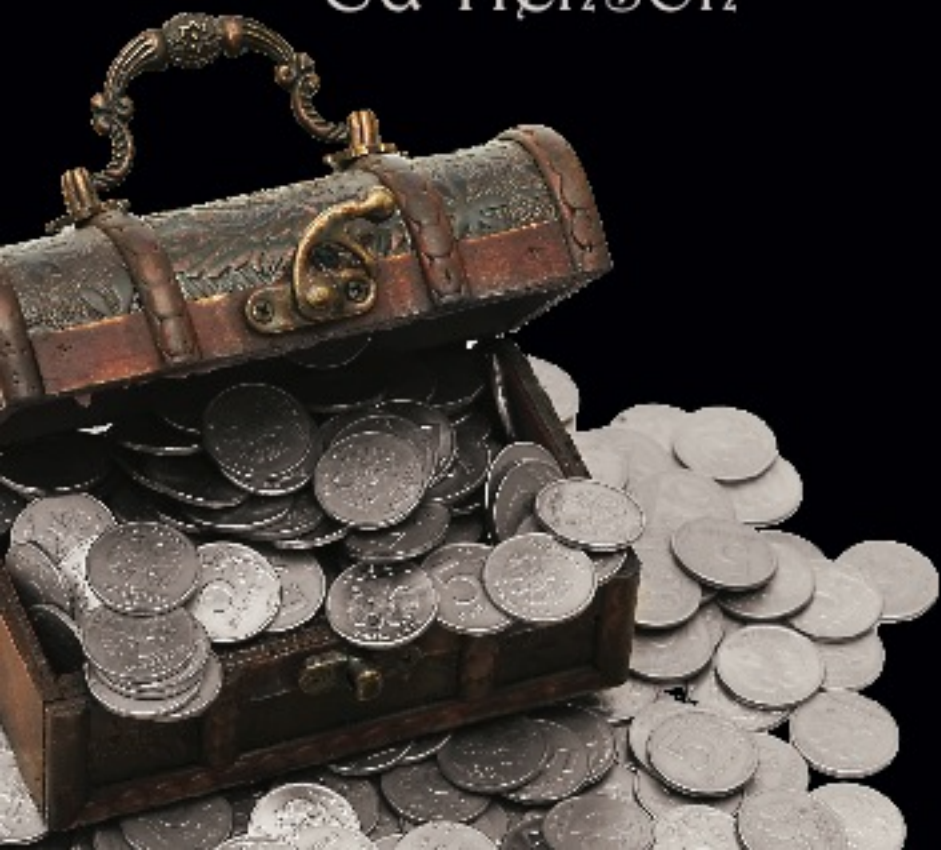
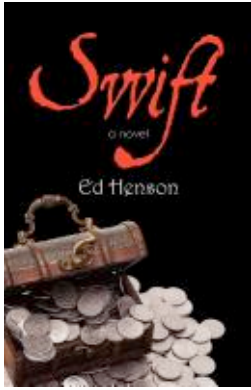


# Swift

a novel

Ed Henson





*Three hikers make a discovery of a lifetime, a treasure sought after for generations, but not without the high price of tragedy and murder. Swift is based on Kentucky's oldest legend of John Swift's Lost Silver Mines.*

# SWIFT

**Order the complete book from the publisher**

**[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

**<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/5744.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**

**Your free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!**

*Swift*

Copyright © 2011 Ed Henson

ISBN 978-1-61434-519-0

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published in the United States by Booklocker.com, Inc., Bangor, Maine.

This novel is a work of fiction and the product of the author's imagination. All historical characters and organizations are used fictionally. Any other character resemblance to real persons living or deceased is entirely coincidental.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.  
2011

First Edition

## **One: The First Clue**

The summer the air was hot and stagnant. And without a breeze, the humidity was so high every breath was like drinking. This had been one of the hottest summers on record. Why Will Morrow picked this day to hike up the rocky slope of the mountain remained a mystery to his companion, Jennifer. Yet, trudging up the steep mountain trail offered a new adventure. The climb, nearly too much even for Will, prompted him to wonder about Jennifer. He reached the bottom of the massive cliff and perched himself atop a large boulder to rest and wait until she, perhaps a hundred yards behind him, made her way up the difficult climb.

“We’re at the base of the cliff, so the tough part is just ahead,” Will teased as she huffed the last few paces towards his resting place. Jennifer offered no comment, precisely because she was using every available sticky breath to take in oxygen to sustain her arduous climb. Will studied Jennifer from his seat as she walked the winding path to meet him. Her auburn hair flowed regally against the luscious green forest covering the mountain slope, and her deep blue eyes provided such striking contrast that had always captivated Will. He thought her to be among the more beautiful women he'd ever seen at the bar where he worked. Jennifer never considered herself pretty. She never really meditated on her physical appearance much at all. Jennifer's pride was her independence, which made her all the more attractive to Will. She stood toe-to-toe with Will, or anyone else, when

discussing nearly any subject. A voracious reader, she loved to learn about anything scholarly, being more prone to peruse the non-fiction aisles of the library over the New York Time's Bestsellers selection.

"My God, Will, we're going to have a heat stroke," Jennifer complained as she arrived at Will's resting spot, a little red in the face and dripping with sweat. She dropped to the ground, amid the dried leaves and pine needles, on the opposite side of the trail from the boulder.

"Here, have some water and cool down a bit," Will said as he handed Jennifer a bottle of water from his pack.

Jennifer more than welcomed the rest from her difficult climb of Pilot Knob. Though famous in the region, no one recalled for sure how the mountain had gotten its name. It was the last great peak on the western edge of the Cumberland Plateau, which covered the eastern third of Kentucky, and the grand geologic feature marked the end of the rugged terrain of Eastern Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia. Here the highlands suddenly ended and gave way to the much more benign bluegrass region of Kentucky. The view from Pilot Knob was spectacular, and held the unique distinction of being the point at which Daniel Boone, noted pioneer, had first observed the impressive "levels" of Kentucky's landscape.

The smells of the deep, rich woodlands had now given way to the fresh scent of the small Virginia pines growing in abundance on the cliff tops. Will had learned many of the indigenous tree species and identified them along the way. He always enjoyed trying to name them during his many trips into the woods. This trail was well defined and obviously used by the many hikers who made their way each

*Swift*

year to the top of the famous knob. Although a little winded, he still maintained enough stamina to make such climbs, and quite often would go on weekend explorations around the region. As a boy, he loved to hunt for Indian relics and pretend he had found the most priceless of treasures. As he grew in years, he continued his hunting forays, minus the imagined treasure, and one of his greatest pastimes was to walk freshly plowed fields each spring searching for arrowheads. He used to find lots of broken flint pieces, pottery shards and on the lucky occasion, bone tools. Nowadays, the law had changed to protect artifacts from being removed from their original environment and Will, having fostered a certain respect for the history such artifacts provided, abided by those laws.

Will Morrow, 26 years old, stood tall and strikingly clean cut with dark brown hair and eyes to match. Trim and fit, he looked the part of the dashing adventurer, and his love for the outdoors left him with a perpetual tan. Having never developed much of an interest for golf and other “modern-men” activities, he preferred to spend his free time fishing and exploring off-beat trails around the region (no doubt a result of his relic hunting days.) Time for these simple joys had lost ground to the demanding responsibilities of life, making this particular trip more fervent.

Will worked as a bartender at the Brick Yard, a popular bar and night spot in downtown Frankfort and the hours had turned him into a bigger night owl than he would have liked. Being a bartender hadn't been part of his original plan. He had started college ripe with sincerity and on track to study Geology, but had dropped out his second year when both parents became ill. His older sister had married a rancher and

moved out to Wyoming and was unwilling to shift her new life back home to care for their sick parents. They agreed Will would be the caregiver since he still lived at home. Over the course of several years, his parents' health continued to decline until each died within the same year. He had intended to return to school someday and get his degree but his interest had waned over time. Will attributed his temporary educational disinterest to the stress of these events and had every intention of finishing his education. With both parents gone, the family farm and a substantial inheritance belonged to him and his sister; and since she had no desire to return to Kentucky, the farm passed to Will. Working outdoors and maintaining the farm suited his disposition, and he found solace taking care of his parent's horses, dogs and assorted chickens. After taking control over the farm he had assumed a variety of jobs, all of which postponed his schooling. But tending the bar at the Brick Yard seemed liked a good fit. Bartending meant odd hours and long nights, but it was more than balanced by the tips which provided a means for Will to pursue his daytime hobbies. Most days, he was content just to mind the farm, and make a little time for his girlfriend. Jennifer Morgan, his latest love interest, recruited him as her guide this hot Saturday in August.

Will had been to Pilot Knob before and agreed to take Jennifer to the top of the landmark so that she could take scenic photographs of the Bluegrass to the west. She frequently sold her pictures to local interest magazines and newspapers. Jennifer, a beautiful 24 year old, had completed college and graduated from the University of Kentucky with a major in journalism. Although a good writer, she positively loved photography. It had become her passion, and she never



went anywhere without her camera. She excelled at her crafts, and consistently won top honors at the Kentucky State Fair for her lush landscapes as well as the Hearst Award for journalistic excellence. She specialized in landscapes and scenic vacation spots and she had always wanted to go to the top of Pilot Knob and take photos of the area in hopes of selling them to a nature or tourist magazine.

"Are we ever going to reach the top?" Jennifer whined as she reached the small rock overhang at the base of the main cliff towering above them. This particular cliff was massive, made of trillions of grains of sand and quartz pebbles cemented together by iron ore and other minerals in a concrete concoction of nature. Will moved off the well-defined trail to find a rock bench.

"We're nearly there. Just got to get to the top of this cliff."

"How much farther?"

"Tell you what, let's walk along this ledge for a ways and see if we can find us a gentler climb to the top if you're tired," Will suggested. He figured the statement would fire her up and she would refuse, allowing them to take the straight-on-up direct route and get to the top quicker. She surprised him this time.

"Okay by me, let's do it."

For the next few minutes the two hikers eased along the ledge following the base of the cliff looming above them. It was not pleasant going, climbing over boulders and negotiating thickets of Mountain Laurel clinging to the rocks and meager soil. The laurel bushes with their small spoon shaped leaves filled in every nook and cranny of the hillside; and in the summer there was always the danger of

rattlesnakes around these dry cliff areas. Will navigated the underbrush and disappeared around a corner.

“Look at this!” Will yelled out.

“Look at what? What is it?”

“A tiny hole in the cliff.”

“Well, so it is!” Jennifer exclaimed after she came around the point of the rocky mountain ledge.

“A tiny natural arch! I guess wind and water keep carving away at this soft sandstone rock and these strange formations happen,” Will conjectured.

“I am going to take some pictures,” Jennifer said, already hunching down to find the best angle in relation to the afternoon sunlight beating down on the them and the cliff.

“I’ve been here on this knob more than once but never aware of this formation up here,” Will admitted. “Well, I’ve never actually been around this way before on this side of the mountain. Just goes to prove there is always something to be found.”

While Jennifer took several photographs of the unique rock structure Will continued exploring further and discovered a rather prominent overhanging ledge past the arch formation. The massive cliff above them jutted out to form a roof like structure often referred to as a rock shelter.

“Nice rock shelter,” Jennifer said as she arrived.

“Sure is,” Will said, secretly impressed she knew the correct terminology. “I’ve never bothered to come around this way before and check this area out.”

The rock shelter was in two levels and contained obvious signs of campfires being built here on more than one occasion. Numerous boulders lay strewn about on the floor. Some large, some small and each presumably dislodged from

*Swift*

the main rock formation many years ago. Will imagined violent earthquakes shaking so hard the boulders simply fell away from the cliff. The floor of the rock shelter was sandy with bits of charcoal scattered about. In one or two places, heavier concentrations of charcoal indicated places large fires were burned. On the softest part of a rock wall, near the edge of the shelter, the carved names of previous visitors to the site glared out like a garish visitor's registry.

"Hey, smile a little and face at me," Jennifer surprised Will and snapped a shot. "Got to at least record this accomplishment."

"What say we eat lunch? It's nearly 2:00 o'clock and I'm hungry," Will grumbled.

"This is as a good spot as any, right here under this cool ledge," Jennifer said. The two settled down to rest in the breeze beneath the overhang, using a large boulder as an improvised table to lay out their assortment of high energy trail food. Nothing fancy, just granola bars, raisins and some water comprised the meal rations. "This would be a nice place to bring a real picnic," Jennifer suggested.

"Depends on how much food you plan on packing up this mountain!" Will joked.

Satisfied they began to explore around the rock overhang kicking around the sand and dirt hoping to find a hidden treasure but knowing years of use by local teens, hikers and tourists guaranteed they'd find nothing.

"Take my picture." Jennifer handed the camera to Will and showed him what button to push and scrambled up next to the cliff to pose. "Okay, I'm ready," she said as she backed up against the rock wall. "Go ahead. Look through the viewfinder and make sure I am in the right lower quarter of

the picture. Hold your breath, and push that button I showed you, okay?"

"Okay, let's see here. Okay, I see you good, good. Here goes," Will said, dramatically demonstrating he was holding his breath.

"Uhhhm... I think you closed your eyes and I'm not sure I framed it right. Let me try again, just in case."

"Oh, so you're an expert now are you, Mr. Morrow?"

Ignoring Jennifer's sarcasm Will very intently held the camera still and peered at Jennifer through the view finder.

"What the hell?"

"What?" Jennifer yelled. "Something wrong with the camera?"

"Behind you, on the rock wall, I see something." Will gently dropped the camera to his side holding it with one hand and stared intently at the rock cliff behind Jennifer. Jennifer had already turned, following Will's gaze to the rock cliff behind her.

"What is that, some kind of marking?" Jennifer asked.

"It sure does look like something's carved on the rock," Will exclaimed, getting excited. The way the light hit the back of the rock shelter, it highlighted the lichen covering the carved markings, making them visible. The peculiar angle at which Will had positioned himself relative to the rock caused a slight shadow to appear over the surface of the back of the rock shelter.

"That is the damndest thing. I'm sure something is carved in the rock." Will passed the camera to Jennifer and moved immediately to the rock wall for a closer examination of the strange markings. The lines, symbols and other crude carvings resembled nothing like he'd ever seen, though they

*Swift*

inexplicably reminded him of turkey track shapes. Will rubbed his hands over the strange markings, tracing them, gently feeling the stone surface trying to make sense of the unusual discovery.

"I'm going to set my tripod up and take a detailed picture," Jennifer yelled over her shoulder. She headed back to the lunch rock to unpack her equipment. The simple grooved markings appeared to be gouged in the rock. The longest and deepest, two straight lines, started at a slight angle from about six feet high on the wall sloping down to the left, almost to the ground. About midway and to the right side of the lines another line intersected the them near the top. This line ran almost vertically to the ground creating an off-kilter triangle. To the left of this intersecting line one of the markings reminded Will of a turkey, or other bird-like track. The other markings, which resembled x's, circles and more anonymous bird tracks, fell inside the triangle portion of the drawing,"

"You know, this sort of looks like a map," Jennifer mused.

"Could be...although I've never heard of any such thing around here. You know what it might be? Maybe it's an Indian carving of some sort. Heck, this might even have been a burial or camp site," Will continued. He had become familiar with some of the petroglyphs left long ago by the prehistoric people who hunted and lived in this region. These markings appeared completely unfamiliar, though. After a while of scratching around in the dry sand, no signs of Indian habitation appeared and they moved on to even higher ground for better angles for Jennifer's photos.

Jennifer took some magnificent photographs from the top of Pilot Knob. Being especially excited about taking a shot

southward of the escarpment where it meets the Bluegrass Region, she hoped this might be another picture that would end up published. On the way home that evening Will and Jennifer pondered the day and the strange carvings they discovered on the rock.

"This might be something worth checking into," commented Jennifer.

"Oh, I don't know. Probably some prank...kids goofing off. Local kids play up around those rocks, I'd bet," Will thought out loud.

"Are you kidding? Kids these days don't get fifty feet away from a computer or a video game. I'd bet this is something real. Real or not, I'll bet it's old."

"Still, I don't know what the thing means. Really, it doesn't make much sense. I've never heard of Indian rock carvings on this scale." Will thought about his buddy, Ray Deever, a self taught expert in the rock carvings, folklore and history of the region.

"I know someone who might have a thought about this or have some information. His name's Ray Deever. He might be able to tell us something about this. I'll give him a call tonight," Will added.

"I'll have the pictures ready for you tomorrow. I'll print them out tonight and drop them off at Brick Yard tomorrow afternoon, okay?" Jennifer offered.

"Great!"

As soon as Jennifer gathered up her equipment and packed away they started their trek back down the mountain. The walking proved to be much less strenuous except for extra pressure on their legs going down. They followed the clearly defined trail placed to allow visitors to see the

*Swift*

wonderful site and leave the least amount of impact on the environment. Getting off the defined route, like they did, was continuously discouraged by the numerous signs posted along the way. The carvings might not ever been discovered if they had stayed on the trail. Perhaps the discovery overshadows their infraction of the rules.

In one fourth the time it took to reach the summit, they returned to the parked truck alone in the now deserted lot. The drive home relaxed them both as the evening approached. He drove straight to Jennifer's apartment hoping he could talk Jennifer into going out later for dinner. She agreed and they choose a place to go after they both cleaned up from the day of hiking. They didn't often get to eat out because he worked most evenings. This made the day together even more special. Will headed home, fed the dogs and jumped into the shower. In short order he was ready for an evening with his girl.

As soon as the waiter took their order, Will flipped out his phone and called up his friend Ray and told him what he and Jennifer discovered. Ray couldn't recollect ever seeing rock carvings around the big mountain, but seemed interested. He didn't want to sound too excited, but to Ray Deevers, such a discovery was akin to parking a beer truck in the driveway of an alcoholic.

"I'll have some pictures tomorrow Ray. Can you stop by the Yard and give me your thoughts? I can tell you these carvings are strange and someone took some time to make them. They are water worn now and must be pretty old,"

"Sure, I'll run by after work on the way home. As good an excuse as any to have a beer I suspect."

The next afternoon, Jennifer dropped by with the pictures as promised and Ray showed up around 6:00 p.m. Will showed Ray the photographs Jennifer took of the strange rock carvings. She also had drawn a crude replica of the carvings on thick parchment paper based on her photos which emphasized the curious markings.

"These photos show exactly the way it looks Ray, right there carved into the base of Pilot Knob," Will explained.

"I've been to Pilot Knob a lot of times but never saw any rock carvings. You sure they're old carvings?" Ray questioned.

"I'm pretty sure they are old. They sure appear to me that way."

"Well, being close to the Indian Old Fields, maybe these are real Indian markings," Ray noted.

"What are Indian Old Fields?"

"Oh, just the last great Shawnee Indian town in Kentucky. It was called Eskippakithiki. That was the Shawnee name but since most of us can't ever pronounce it right, I guess people just started callin' it 'Indian Old Fields' People used to find arrowheads and ax heads out in those fields years ago."

"Never knew that," Will had to admit. Ray knew a lot of local history and interesting yet obscure facts.

"Sure enough, Indian Old Fields is a famous place, I reckon."

Ray Deevers was Will's best friend. They attended the same high school, played on the same ball team, and made countless hiking trips together. Though he had the classic Irish ginger complexion and shocking red hair, Ray had no real Irish heritage. His freckles were overpowering compared to his pale skin tone and he never got the girls quite like Will



*Swift*

did. While Will had at least attempted a run at college, Ray never did, but he did complete a couple of years at a trade school to learn about mechanics and had quite a knack for repairing cars. He loved to fix just about anything with his hands, and was quite handy around cars, lawnmowers and pretty much anything with an engine. Even though Ray and Will took different paths after high school, they managed to pick up where they left off as best friends after Will finished his brief stint in college. Early on Ray had worked as an hourly mechanic at one of the local dealerships but because of his skills, he eventually went to work at a very well-known auto shop in town. Customers knew and trusted him with their cars and he never ceased to entertain them with random trivia.

“Tell you what, why don’t the two of us go back up to Pilot Knob and look around. I’d like to take a look at these carvings myself. Maybe I’d get a better fix on ‘em,” Ray offered.

“Sounds good, what are you doing next Saturday?” Will asked, hoping that would be a good day off for Ray.

“Far as I know, nothing. Saturday would be fine.”

“I’ll bring Jennifer, too, since she took the photos and knows about this. That’ll be okay with you won’t it?” Will added.

“Who else knows?”

“Just you, me and Jennifer...why?”

“Just a thought, but what if this has something to do with some kind of devil worshipers or something?”

## Two: John Finley

In the summer of 1752, John Finley arrived by a crude river raft at the Great Falls of the Ohio. John Finley, along with seven other men, made the trip from the spot on the river destined to be named Fort Pitt, searching for greater fortunes. An oddity formed by up thrust Devonian shelving, the Falls provided an obstacle to boats and river-crafts but, during dry times, this spot was easily crossed. 1752 happened to be one of those rare dry years. The raft landed on the north shore of the river with a thud. The old raft captain had chosen this location because of the smooth beach, though to deny the role of chance would be disingenuous. Camps sprang up on both sides of the river and people crossed back and forth at the falls. Had the raft landed on the opposite side, John Finley would not have needed to wade the river. Since most of the men's destination seemed to be the north prairie country, the north side was the obvious landing site, and even before the raft hit the sandy shore men began jumping off, grateful to be on land once again.

"I believe I owe you this amount. That's what we agreed on," John Finley told the raft boss as he stepped from the ramshackle water craft.

"I thank you very much."

"Here's my pay too, and thanks for takin' me on," added George Mundy stepping off right after Finley.

"You boys be careful around them falls, you can get hurt, swept away real quick," the tough old raft boss warned both men. A captain of sorts, inasmuch as he owned the raft, he

*Swift*

collected from every man on board. On vessels like these no one was entirely in charge. But it was the quickest, most economical way to get into the wilderness and best hunting grounds.

"Looks like the water is down a lot. Good, it'll be easier. I sure wish he'd landed on the south side of the river though. We wouldn't have to get wet," remarked George.

"You've crossed here before, haven't you George?"

"Not crossed, but I have landed here on the south side."

They set out in a brisk, westerly walk. Late afternoon came upon them and both men wanted to get across the river before dark. The river was susceptible to drastic, momentary changes. Even though it had been an unusually dry year all across the country, rains in the east just a couple of days ago could turn the river into a monster. George Mundy knew they should get across as soon as possible. The raft had safely landed several hundred yards above the falls. Those wishing to go farther down the river would have to wait at the raft landing site, soon to be made into a long term river camp, and await the inevitable rise of the river.

George Mundy was experienced in this particular wilderness; familiar with the natives, and spoke their language quite well. He claimed to be going hunting but John wasn't sure exactly what George was hunting, as he was traveling light and with only a little gun powder. Anyone knew it took a lot of powder to do a lot of hunting. The two men had become good friends in the few days they spent together on the raft. Even though John Finley was quite an industrious fellow, this area of the wilderness was totally unfamiliar to him.

"You decided where you're going to end up?" George inquired.

"Don't know. I hear the hunting is pretty good about anywhere south."

"You know John, you should come along with me to do your huntin'. That's where I'm headed."

"Works for me George. Makes no real difference to me, and heck, I might learn a thing or two from an old timer like you."

John Finley, pure Irish and a roustabout, dabbled in whatever enterprise suited his fancy on any given day. John had planned to make his way into the wilds, do some hunting and fur gathering to make money. Furs had become popular in Europe and the demand seemed never ending. With this new profitable enterprise more men tried their fortunes on hunting the furs in the wilderness and making huge profits back east. John, now by mere accidental good fortune, had a personal guide of sorts and one who he would soon learn knew the natives very well.

John Finley had with him a pack full of trinkets including small metal tools such as punches, awls, knives, glass beads, yarn and some other small utilitarian items. These amounted to about all he might carry along with his long rifle, powder and mini balls, the bullets made of lead. The clothes he had on his back and his trusty long rifle were everything he owned. He brought along the few trade items in hopes they would get him out of a jam with any hostile Indians. He was quite certain they would be on the same hunting grounds.

"Let's cross here, John."

"Lead the way, George. If you go I'll be right behind you, I guess."

*Swift*

The Great Falls had proven to be the demise of many river travelers. A giant ledge about thirty feet high dissected the river, and formed a practical ford between the two shores of the Ohio River under dry conditions. Here the Devonian limestone was exposed, presenting the interested observer a glimpse at strange fossilized creatures, many resembling sea shells. These fossils exposed in great numbers scattered throughout the limestone bedrock and certainly left many of the explorers puzzled as to their origins. The ledge would occasionally have a broken or missing section, resulting, no doubt, from the endless onslaught of the rushing, scouring current of the river. But during certain times, with care, people and animals could negotiate across the ledge in the shallow water, gaining access from the prairies of the northwest to the savannas and wilderness of the south. The two men stopped intermittently to marvel at the many exposed fossils embedded in the water worn rock.

"Ain't that something," John remarked. He would stop every few feet to look over the many petrified sea creatures.

"Yep," George answered, desensitized from having seen these fossils on previous visits. John thought they looked to be some type of stone animals, sea shells perhaps frozen in the stone for reasons he never begun to comprehend. They reminded him of shells from the oceans back east.

Near the center of the river the men had to wade through water deepened to about four feet. The water became deep enough the two travelers had to hold their rifles and powder high over their heads as they negotiated the swifter river currents. The Great Falls crossing was a busy place on some days with people crossing the river in both directions. The Shawnee and Mingo knew the place well and used the

crossing to move in and out of the Kentakee wilderness. Other tribes also were aware of it, but the Shawnee in recent years used the crossing most. There were always encampments on both sides of the river. Most of the camps were Shawnee, trappers, and traders. Once across the stream the two men neared a small camp of five Shawnee. One of the Shawnee directly approached George Mundy and greeted him. They named one another in their greetings.

The Shawnee dressed in skins and loin cloths, bare-chested except for beads and ornaments around their necks. They carried small deer skin bags and each Shawnee had a bow and quiver with carefully fashioned arrows. John studied the Shawnee warriors. The discussion between Mundy and his counterpart ended suddenly.

"Hard headed bastards," Mundy swore under his breath as he walked up to John.

"What, are you makin' a trade with those Shawnee?" John asked.

"Nah, I'm trying to purchase my way to travel with this group. Kind of hitching a guided and safe passage if you know what I mean. They're headed for Eskippakithiki ('S-kip-pa-kee-ta-kee') located east of here. It's only about a day and a half from here and that is exactly where I want to go."

"What is, Esskipi-ah-thi-ki, I mean, what is that?" John asked.

"Ah, a town, a village, whatever you want to call it. Eskippakithiki is located on the Warriors Path. It's one of their biggest settlements in the whole area. Biggest one I know, anyway. There must be five hundred Shawnee living there. I've been there a couple of times. It's a big village,"

*Swift*

replied George, having no real incentive to offer much more information.

“And you want to go to this place?”

“Well, don’t you think a bunch of Indians would have plenty of furs to trade and already located some of the best hunting grounds in the territory? If they ain’t going to kill me then I sure aim to find out their best hunting places.”

John nodded understanding, but remained skeptical the two men were discussing just a tag-along trip to a village. The discussion seemed to be somewhat plaintive on Mundy’s part; at least it appeared that way to John. Nevertheless, John Finley found himself alone in a strange country with, as far as he could tell, only one casual acquaintance. Now that the Shawnee were in the mix, John did not feel completely comfortable with the initial invitation on the other side of the river. The dynamics had changed.

“Say George, I wonder if I might come along too. Would you consider that?” John inquired.

“Well, I already invited you once today, but seein’ how I have now hooked up with these Shawnee you’ll need to work out your own deal with them. That probably won’t be too hard; some of those glass trinkets you’re carrying there would cinch that deal, I expect. They’re crazy about that kind of stuff.”

The fiery sun settled on the horizon and another day in the wilderness along the great river was coming to an end. A deal was made with little fanfare. John approached the warrior, held out some beads while gesturing to himself and pointed east. The message was understood and with a nod the warrior approved the deal. Everyone hastily settled down and prepared to have their evening meal. The Shawnee ate

jerky they had carried in their packs and did not build a fire that night. There was little talk among the Shawnee warriors as they sat near each other, consuming the jerky and some berries they had collected somewhere earlier in the day. George built a nice fire on the river bank on the edge of a thicket. The abundance of dry drift wood scattered about the rocky bank offered a good supply of fire wood. Since George and John had traveled the river they had not had the opportunity to hunt fresh meat for their meal and they, like the Shawnee, had to rely on dried jerky and the few dried other items they'd brought with them. John still had some hardtack biscuit bread he shared with George. Tomorrow morning the party would leave for Eskippakithiki.

The next morning as the light swelled upon the horizon, the party set out. The early morning air already thick with humidity, typical of this time of the year, promised to bring a hot and sweltering day for the travelers. The group of seven people was comprised of five Shawnee warriors, George Mundy, and following behind, John Finley. The travelers moved along briskly on a flat terrain with few streams. For the most part they followed a bison trace or trail heading off in a southeast direction. Once or twice they came to places where the trail would fork into different directions, but the party tended to head in an easterly direction, which John concluded by keeping track with the position of the sun.

By early afternoon the traveling party reached the headwaters of a stream. At the rest stop George started up a conversation with the same Shawnee man from the day before. By now John knew this was the leader of the small band of travelers. He watched without being noticed, pretending to cool off at the creek bank. George pulled



*Swift*

something out of his pack and handed the item to the Shawnee, who examined it carefully. John wondered what George showed the Indian that interested him so much. After a few minutes of silence the Shawnee agreed to a bargain and slid the item into a deer skin bag. The deal was made, whatever it was. The Shawnee leader veered off and drank water from the stream, then gave a signal to the other Shawnee, who collected their things. Mundy did the same. Sensing the departure, John hurried, refilling his leather water pouch, and filed behind the now moving group.

The traveling party followed the stream towards its mouth. Since the area was in the midst of a drought, most of the time the party could travel in the middle of the stream bed on the flat and smooth bed rock. In a matter of two hours the group reached the mouth of the stream. Here the clear, shallow stream flowed into a larger stream, large enough to be a river. The lead Shawnee picked up a river bank trail and followed it along the edge of the river while the others followed behind him. John Finley remained in the last position about a hundred feet behind Mundy. In short order the Shawnee led the men to a ford in the river. Rocky shoals scattered and stretched two thirds of the way across the river. At the crossing John noticed a wide, worn patch coming off the hill down to the shoals on both sides of the river. Bison and other animals crossed the river here back and forth to grazing and breeding grounds. John considered hunting would be good in this area and noted landmarks he might come back to in hopes of good hunting.

"How about them mud banks there?" George pointed out to John.

"This must be a main crossing point for animals."

*Ed Henson*

“Buffalo. They cross here by the hundreds on some days. Cold weather up north will bring them south huntin’ for good grazin’ pastures.”

“I’d guess they’ve been crossin’ here for years.”

“No doubt about that. These Shawnee figure the bison are up north or they’d be all over the place here huntin’ them.” George concluded the brief conversation and the party quickly made their way across the shallow shoals of the river and continued east. The evening arrived when the party made the night’s camp. The camp was along a small stream appearing to boil up from the earth. The great spring provided a favorite stop for the night by the Shawnee who traveled from the Great Falls crossing. The fresh limestone water and the small depression afforded both water and protection from the winds seemingly forever blowing across the vast savannah. The abundant, lush grass in the region with giant burr oaks standing alone scattered about the open plain appealed to John. During fall months the grasslands would be dotted with buffalo in various herds grazing. Most of these herds would have made their way to the general location the same way this group of men made their way.

The Shawnee had a fire started before John had even arrived. Keeping to themselves from the two white fellow travelers they exhibited no hospitality, no discussion, basically no contact. George and John started their own campfire and situated themselves into the positions they would rest for the night. John stepped to the water and filled his water flask. Another night of jerky lay ahead of them. George scouted around a bit before dark and found on the bank a small stand of sassafras saplings. After a few minutes digging around the roots of one of the small trees, George

*Swift*

retrieved some of the roots and brought them back to the campfire.

“What do you have there George?”

“Sassafras, I’m going to make us something to drink.” George took his knife and shaved the bark off the roots he’d previously washed in the creek. George then took his tin cup, scooped up some water and brought it back to the fire John was tending. George put the root back in the cup and set the cup in the fresh coals of the fire. There was no time, really, for setting up a good cooking fire since the men would all be asleep in a little while and up in the early hours headed east.

“Now, let those get good and hot then we’ll have some tea shortly,” said George, quite proud of the idea.

Eventually the cup of water boiled and the water turned amber. After the drink cooled for a short time, George took a sip. He shared his tea with John and they passed the cup back and forth until it was empty, at which time George shaved some more bark from the remaining roots and started the brewing process all over again.

The Shawnee had already settled down and most were asleep. John and George discussed the day’s trip and conjectured on what tomorrow would be like. George tried to explain to John what Eskippakithiki was like but could not prepare John Finley for what he was about to see tomorrow.

### **Three: Arrival at Eskippakithiki**

The site of the Shawnee town shocked John Finley as they crossed over a low hill and the entire levels of the town came into full view. They had already greeted others along the path coming out from the town and observed other small parties of five and six hunters moving out in various directions. As they made their way into the village, some took notice but seemed apathetic to the arrival of the group containing two white men. The people of the village assumed the warriors would not have brought trouble to their town.

Eskippakithiki was positioned on a level plain near the foothills tapering outward from the mountains further to the east. The village was a scattering of long bark houses, the kind of permanent house typical of most southeastern tribes. Several poles were set in a general rectangular-shape, stockade style with smaller, flexible rafter poles arched across the top of the structure as roof supports, and mud, moss, leaves, dry grass and bark were mixed in random fashion to cover the entire structure. Despite the unusual materials, the long bark houses provided watertight protection, a necessity in the, often, rainy climate. Numerous cooking fires dotted the camp and sent straight columns of smoke into the blue cloudless sky. Flat fields of green grasses and crops cultivated by the Shawnee hugged the village and made the two strangers feel more welcome. At least one notable stream meandered nearby supplying a continuous fresh source of water. A well-worn path led from the village, westward to the

*Swift*

long hill, then downward to the meandering creek. Women and children traveled along the path carrying skins and pots of water to their various homes in the town. Hunting was likely to be good in every direction, with bison located north, south, and west of the town while deer and elk were plentiful east in the mountains. A good source of flint outcropped nearby in the mountainous area. Flint, a precious resource, provided the raw material for practically every tool needed for day-to-day life. This group of Shawnee had begun to acquire metal objects including axes and knives. Rifles had recently become accessible from the French.

John Finley and George Mundy were ignored by their traveling companions as each hunter separated off to their own house and waiting families. The hunters brought back numerous trade items but they never divulged their origins to either John or George. The two strangers moved right through the village and, though were stared at by the inhabitants, they exhibited no hostility. John Finley moved to the eastern edge of the town. He found a big Burr oak tree in the hot savanna plain well outside of the town at the edge of the woods and adjacent to a well used path. John assumed the path to be an old bison trail but later would learn it to be the Warrior's Path. John discarded his heavy pack and set about making a hasty temporary camp. He gathered firewood, built a cooking pit from stones and made ready for his first night's stay in a big town. George Mundy rested under the shade of the big oak tree, watching John hurry about setting up camp. Some of the Shawnee kids came around just to see the white-skinned new comers.

"Aren't you going to lay a camp?" John asked.

"I will in a little while. Do you know what Eskippakithiki means?" George said, changing the subject.

"I don't speak Shawnee, so it's pretty likely I don't know what it means," John replied with a touch of sarcasm.

"Means 'a place called Blue Licks.' 'Eskipp' means 'Blue Licks,' 'ak' means 'place' and the 'ithiki' is the word in their language meaning 'called', I guess. Anyway, this is known as the lower Blue Licks. North up the Warriors Path is the upper Blue Licks. They gather and boil salt at the upper Blue Lick, I am told. Never been there myself, though," George explained.

"A place called Blue Licks," John chuckled.

"Yes sir. Funny thing to me too. Back east they call this country out here Kentakee. I think some hunters confused the last part of this town's name and came up with Kentakee. You take the 'Ki-thi-ki from the last part of Eskippa and it would be pretty easy for some of them devils to make Kee-taa-kee sound like Ken-ta-kee. It always seemed like it to me anyway."

"Well, if nothin' else, it sure is something to ponder."

George sensed John's interest begin to wane so he bid him farewell for the evening and moved toward the north side of the village, well out of sight of John. As the day wore on, Finley unpacked his belongings and placed some of the trinkets, beads, and so forth out on a small piece of cloth to take inventory, and also to determine if he had lost anything along the trek. A couple of Shawnee men came by and, upon noticing his trinkets, stopped and began looking through them. With no regard to John, the men went through each and every item. The Shawnee spent a good deal of time handling and mulling over each item. Some even engaged in small discussions over some of the beads. When satisfied with

*Swift*

what they saw, they would put them back and move on to the next item. One Shawnee picked up a handful of beads and walked over to Finley. He held out the beads in front of Finley and asked to trade a beaver pelt for the glass beads. Finley, not understanding a word of Shawnee, felt certain the man wanted them so he nodded in agreement with no idea what he'd get in return. The man took the beads and left. A few minutes later the man returned with a beautiful tanned beaver hide and placed it where he had taken the handful of glass beads. Before the day ended, Finley had traded nearly every bead, bauble, and trinket that he had brought along.

As John Finley lay by his campfire that evening, poking the coals with a stick, he thought about his plan to go hunting. In this village, he could get all the pelts and hides he could possibly take out of this country by simply bringing a few trade items and setting up a trading shop. This day, he reckoned, he had traded for six beaver hides, five deer hides, and one elk hide as well as some other bone tools, pretty stones and a necklace of bear teeth. All these items for just the few trinkets he had brought along for the sole purpose of trading himself out of a jam. He thought of bringing in a lot more merchandise and of all the different kinds of animal hides he could obtain, which afforded him a sound and comfortable sleep that night, an unexpected benefit of his trading.

The next morning Finley moved around the town to get his bearings. Warriors and hunters began leaving the village heading in a southeasterly direction and it looked as though they followed a pretty well defined path. Some long rifle hunters used the trail from time to time, but the Shawnee, Mingo, and Cherokee were the primary users of the trail.

Some Shawnee still used the bow and worked the fine flint into arrow points. Other warriors had Long Rifles acquired by trade or capture. What a strange combination of old Stone Age tools and modern rifles, he mused. The same path came into the village and then led itself north into the woods. In fact, paths led out in every direction from the town. Finley walked over to Mundy's campsite and found his friend getting his gear packed up, ready to head out.

John Finley worked his way back through the village in the direction of his campsite, stopping on one occasion to observe an older warrior chipping, or knapping, a piece of flint into a sharp, well-balanced, triangle shaped arrowhead. After a few moments he noticed several recently made stone tools, mostly arrowheads, lying beside the craftsman.

John could see that the fields just outside the village had beans and squash growing in one area and to the south of the site stood a rather large field of corn growing in small patches. Women kept the dirt around the young corn plants chopped and free from weeds in the same manner folks back in Pennsylvania did, though the corn appeared to be shorter. By this time John had arrived back at his camp site to find George Mundy sitting by the campfire.

"Good morning' George," John yelled.

"Mornin' to you too," George simply replied.

"You heading out today?"

"Yes, I have a ways to go today."

"Hunting the mountain game or the bison?" John inquired, trying to get information about directions and destination without asking outright.

"Neither," George curtly replied.



*Swift*

“Ah, I see.” Of course, this brought John’s curiosity up a notch. After all, if Mundy was not hunting game, then what was he doing out here in the wilds of unmapped territory among potential hostile peoples on any given day.

“Well, be safe on your journey, wherever it takes you, and perhaps we will meet again.”

“I expect to be back in a few days.”

“Oh, I see.”

Mundy hurriedly got his pack situated and headed out of town on the northern trail. John decided to spend the day going south on the trail from the village. He figured if Mundy went north he would do well to go south, keeping out of each other’s way. John followed the well-defined trail south out of the Shawnee town. The trail followed the edge of the rougher mountainous terrain to the east but stayed on the flat plain. Late in the afternoon he headed back up the trail. He knew he wouldn’t get lost today. Once he heard some men coming up the trail, so he slipped off the trail behind a large boulder. Three Shawnee hunters on a return trip with all the deer meat they could carry. They passed him by, never aware he had hidden behind the rock. He did not want to take any chances his first day out. The men may not have been aware of his arrival in town and thus had a different reaction to his presence, he reasoned. He had only seen one deer and he didn’t get a shot off. But he had, after all, spent more of his day exploring the countryside.

John Finley had made up his mind he would hunt for a few more days until he could get all the deer hides he could carry and then he would head north up the trail Mundy used. Finley spent the next two weeks east of the great knob hunting until he had enough. He made his way back to the

*Ed Henson*

town and then headed north on the trail. After a few days he found himself along the shores of the great river and he followed the river upstream. Eventually he'd make it back to civilization, he was certain.

John Finley returned in mid summer, but instead of going by way of the river, he traveled by land, following a path along the south shore. John had brought two horses from home and two other men he had hired to help him carry his much greater load of trade goods. He brought with him a generous supply of trade beads, axe heads, colored felt and flax cloth, rope and various pots and pans. Traveling was slow because he and his companions had to travel upstream on a couple of major rivers to find a good crossing place. John recognized many landmarks from his earlier raft trip and picked up the trail, confident it would take him directly south to the great Shawnee Town. Along the route south, he encountered several small parties of Shawnee headed north. They casually greeted him and were congenial. Finley by now enjoyed the benefit of being well known to the people of Eskippakithiki. His pending arrival would mean many more wonderful items, many of which these people had never seen before. Finley intended to open the first mercantile business in the Kentakee wilderness. Throughout the late summer into a rainy September of 1752, John Finley worked to get his business up and running. He built his hut from trees he had cut and set in the rich fertile soil. Just like the Shawnee houses, he covered the roof rafters with moss, tree bark and just about anything else he found. Even though the summer months were hot and muggy, business flourished. Toward

*Swift*

the end of September, as his supplies ran low, he packed up his furs, enlisted the help of five Shawnee men, and headed north back up the trail. Finley returned at the end of October of 1752, with still more supplies. He now had arrangements made for additional supplies to come down the river trail next spring and he would trade his furs to buyers on the North shore. Finley and the people of the Shawnee town prospered.

On a cold November day, two Shawnee men came to Finley's store and wanted to trade for some cloth and yarn. They did not have any furs with them but one of the men offered Finley something unusual, and the instant he saw it, he knew his life would change forever. What was offered in trade was a silver arrow point. The projectile had been hand beaten into shape from raw silver or similar substance. Since Finley arrived in the summer of 1752, he had adapted the Shawnee language to a level he could carry on a practical conversation on most topics with the native people of the town.

"Where'd you get this?" Finley asked directly. If they did not want to share that information, they would not hesitate to say so, or simply not respond. He assumed the shiny object to be a trade item from the north, perhaps on past the great river. Nevertheless, Finley figured if he opened up a trade connection for silver, he would be east coast wealthy in no time.

"Did you trade with the Iroquois, Wyandotte for this?" Finley quickly followed.

"No," replied one of the men.

"Did you find it?"

"Trade," came the reply, with no further explanation.

"Bring me more and I will have even finer cloth, beads and tools like you've never seen before," Finley began laying his plan to get this trade store to a new level.

John was surprised by another visitor into his store on this same day, George Mundy. George had another man with him on this unexpected visit.

"Howdy John Finley," Mundy announced.

"Well, if ain't George Mundy." Finley replied.

"Yep, in person. You know I love huntin' out here in this country."

"Oh, I know that all right."

"John, this here is John Swift, a friend of mine," announced George.

"Hello Mr. Swift," replied John Finley, outstretching his hand for a shake.

John Swift was a tall man with a roughly carved and weathered face. His dark black hair and cold, penetrating stare made people feel uncomfortable at times. He dressed the same as any other frontiersman. But there was something different about this "Swift."

"Are you huntin' here in the wilderness too?"

"Ah, Mr. Swift and I go way back, we have been through many a scrape together. He and I have been planning on doing some exploring together down in this wild country and, well, old Captain John here, finally showed up today!" George explained.

"Did you say Captain John?"

"Well, yes I am, uh...well I have commanded my own ship, mainly working out of the Carolina's and Virginia and did some merchant trading down around Cuba and the Islands," Swift replied.

*Swift*

"I used to be a mate on Captain John's ship," added George.

"Surprises never quit coming today, do they? Well, I'll be. I don't recall you ever saying anything about being a sailor, George," John Finley replied, taken aback by this new information.

"So, how or why would you two sea dogs be so far inland? And now turned hunters?"

"No, we... ah... I'm in a bit of trouble back east and this is a safe place for me right now," John Swift stated as matter of fact with the intent of ending this aspect of the conversation.

"Oh, well, no one around here but the Shawnee and me," John replied. He sensed this topic getting just a little too sensitive and learned more than he needed to know. John mulled over and over in his head what a seaman would be being doing out here in the wilderness. The three men sat around talking until dark, when John said to George.

"I want to show you something George."

In his hand he displayed for the two men the silver arrowhead. A long time had passed since John had seen or spoken to another white man. He used this conversation piece to keep interest and conversation going.

"Where'd you get that?" George asked.

"Traded for it right here. Some Shawnee brought it in and traded it," John explained.

"You don't say. Do you have any more?"

"This is the best thing so far; I have a couple of other small things but nothing like this."

"Wouldn't want to trade would you?" George inquired.

"You can have it George; maybe the thing will bring luck to you as you wander around in the wilderness." John knew

he had few friends in this wild country that could come to his aid if needed, and this silver arrowhead was a small price to pay, an investment, to maintain a friendship. Besides, John knew he was in a position to trade for more and even better silver items.

"Why, I couldn't take it without something in return," George replied. He didn't want to be obligated.

"Please, George honor me and accept this gift. I don't expect anything in return."

"Well, if you insist, okay, then." George passed the small treasure over to Swift for him to take a look at the unusual silver arrowhead. Swift expressed little interest and quickly passed the object back to George.

"We had better get some rest if we are heading out early," Swift said to George.

Both men left John's store and wandered on over to their campsite. The Shawnee town had already settled down for the evening, each family around their own hearth.

The next morning George Mundy and John Swift head off to the north. Also, a number of Shawnee stirred about. The water brigade had already started for the day and small hunting parties of two and three warriors headed out in various directions. John thought he would spend some of this day working on his planned store expansion. The store, though already a suitable bark house, was built in the same fashion as the Shawnee houses and needed another room for his expanding fur collections.