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# Early Dogs of North America

by David Mech

- 1 When Europeans first came to North America they were quite surprised to find that dogs had arrived before them. Native Americans had already tamed the dog to act as a friend and helper. Many early explorers wrote with great wonder about the ways dogs were put to use. Of course they were pets, hunting companions, and watchdogs. But they were also used for carrying loads and sometimes even for food!
- 2 Where did these animals come from? At first people thought the Native Americans had tamed coyotes, just as Europeans had

once tamed wolves. But then scientists looked at the dogs' skulls. They looked like the skulls of European and Asian dogs and wolves, not like the skulls of coyotes. So the scientists decided these dogs must have come from Europe and Asia.

- 3 How did the dogs get to North America? They certainly didn't swim any oceans! No, they arrived thousands of years ago by crossing a bridge. It was a natural bridge not made by humans—an ice and land bridge stretching from Asia to Alaska. It existed when the North American climate was much colder. The dogs

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had come along with early humans who followed herds of wild animals. The strong and faithful dogs must have been welcome friends on that long, cold journey.

- 4 Once these wandering people settled, they bred only those dogs that had the kind of body and characteristics they wanted. In this way they developed different breeds of dogs. Some kinds had long, woolly hair, like sheep. Cloth and even wigs were made from the hair. Other dogs were raised for meat. When the Spaniards came to Mexico, they found these dogs so delicious that they ate all they could find!
- 5 The Spaniards were also surprised to see that dogs were used for carrying loads. It had never occurred to them to use dogs in this way. The dogs pulled a kind of sled called a travois (tra-VOY), which was made of two poles in a V shape. Deer or bison hide was stretched between the poles to form a seat. The narrow part of the V was harnessed to the back of a large dog. The wide part dragged on the ground.
- 6 It may not sound as fancy as a cart, but the travois was simple to make and worked well. It could slide easily over uneven ground and go many places a wheeled cart would not have been able to go. It did very little damage to plants.
- 7 Even when Native Americans began using horses, they still liked to use dogs on crusted snow. The horses would break through the snow at every step. But dogs with their travois skimmed over the top without sinking in. Tribes on the move often used both horses and dogs. Their few horses pulled large travois. Children and household goods were packed on dog travois and bumped along behind!
- 8 Big dogs pulled loads of firewood for the people living on islands off Canada. These dogs were well trained and brave. Often they were given warrior names and went into battle with their masters. If a dog was killed, it was given a special burial. In many places burial mounds have been found where well-loved dogs were buried.
- 9 In one such mound near a Pueblo village a dog was found buried with its master. Because of the dry desert air, the dog's body, though several hundred years old, was almost perfectly preserved. It was a dog of medium size with long, golden-brown hair. It had a narrow nose, tall ears, and a bushy tail.
- 10 The Aztecs of Mexico bred a dog we now call the Mexican Hairless. This is one of the oldest dog breeds on earth. These dogs are related to the hairless dogs of China. They have almost no hair, except on the tips of their tails and sometimes on top of their heads.
- 11 Most dogs love to hunt animals, and the early dogs were no exception. The Plains dogs were useful for hunting deer as well as for pulling travois. Recently dog bones were found in a cave that had been used as a hunting camp—10,000 years ago!
- 12 The biggest, most dangerous animals that Native Americans and their dogs hunted were bison. These big animals always travelled in large herds for protection. The hunter would try to find a lone bison and get as close as possible without alarming it. At the last moment the dogs rushed the bison and surrounded it. They kept barking and rushing at it to keep its attention.
- 13 Meanwhile the hunter would try to spear the bison just behind the shoulder without being trampled by the animal. This was very difficult, but the dogs were really helpful in keeping the bison's attention away from the hunter.
- 14 As more and more Europeans arrived to settle in the new land, they brought their own kinds of dogs with them. Many of the native dogs bred with the other dogs and started mixed breeds. Soon nearly all the early breeds of dogs were gone.
- 15 Today we have good clues to what the original dogs were like from the written words of explorers and others. We have found the remains of dogs buried in ancient camps and villages such as the one found in the Pueblo village. And we also have pictures and sculptures that Native Americans made of their pets. With all these clues we have been able to piece together the story of the trusty companions of the very first North Americans.

## How Well Did You Read?

Write the letter of the best answer.

- 1 What caused scientists to decide that the North American dogs came from Europe and Asia?
  - a The dogs' skulls
  - b The dogs' feet
  - c Written records
- 2 How did the dogs get to North America?
  - a They swam across the ocean.
  - b They travelled across with men in a ship.
  - c They crossed a land and ice bridge.
- 3 In what ways were the dogs used differently from the dogs in Europe?
  - a Some of the dogs were used for food.
  - b Some of the dogs were used to pull loads.
  - c Both a and b
- 4 What advantage did a travois have over a wheeled cart?
  - a It could pull a heavier load.
  - b It could slide more easily over rough or uneven ground.
  - c Both a and b
- 5 What advantage did dogs have over horses for pulling loads?
  - a The dogs would not sink in snow.
  - b The dogs were more easily trained.
  - c The dogs could pull a load faster.
- 6 If a dog and its master were both killed in a battle in the old days,
  - a the dog's body would be burned because it had not protected its master
  - b both would get a special burial
  - c the family of the man would save the dog's skin as a relic
- 7 If in a mound near a Pueblo village a dog was found buried with its master, you could assume that
  - a both died about the same time
  - b the dog was much loved
  - c Both a and b

- 8 Of what use were dogs in hunting bison?
  - a They helped track down a bison herd.
  - b They kept the bison's attention away from the hunter.
  - c The dogs rushed in and killed the bison.
- 9 Why did early breeds of dogs disappear?
  - a They were all killed or eaten for food.
  - b They couldn't survive warm climates.
  - c They were bred with other types.

## Learn about Words

### Vocabulary

**A** You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 taken from the wild; made obedient (1)
- 2 loyal; worthy of trust (3)
- 3 roaming; always moving here and there with no particular place to go (4)
- 4 special qualities or features (4)
- 5 attached with leather straps (5)
- 6 moved lightly (7)
- 7 maintained; kept from decaying (9)
- 8 figures carved out of wood, clay, or stone (15)

**B** A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning a, b, or c. Write a, b, or c.

- 9 **raised** (4)
  - a lifted up
  - b increased in degree and price
  - c grown for a particular purpose
- 10 **shoulder** (13)
  - a place where an animal's neck joins its body
  - b portion of a garment
  - c outer edge of a roadway

## Word Study

- C** father + **ly** = fatherly (like a father)  
enjoy + **able** = enjoyable (that can be enjoyed)  
act + **ive** = active (that tends to act)

Many adjectives end in *ly*, *able*, and *ive*. Often *ly* means "like," *able* means "that can be," and *ive* means "that tends to." Read the definition below and then choose *ly*, *able*, or *ive* to complete the word in **heavy type**. Write the completed word. (Sometimes you may need to drop the last letter of a word before adding the ending.)

- 11 like a sister: **sister**\_\_\_\_\_
- 12 that tends to protect: **protect**\_\_\_\_\_
- 13 that can be adored: **adore**\_\_\_\_\_
- 14 that can be imagined: **imagine**\_\_\_\_\_
- 15 like a brother: **brother**\_\_\_\_\_
- 16 that tends to effect: **effect**\_\_\_\_\_
- 17 that tends to create: **create**\_\_\_\_\_
- 18 that can be respected: **respect**\_\_\_\_\_

**D** There is an incomplete word in each passage below. Choose the suffix *ly*, the suffix *able*, or the suffix *ive* to complete the word in a way that makes sense. Write *ly*, *able*, or *ive*.

- 19 He acts like a priest. He has a very priest\_\_\_\_\_ manner.
- 20 We must correct those mistakes. Let's take correct\_\_\_\_\_ action now.
- 21 If you drop that glass it will break. It's a break\_\_\_\_\_ glass.
- 22 She acts like a queen. She has a queen\_\_\_\_\_ manner.
- 23 That dress attracts me. It's a very attract\_\_\_\_\_ dress.
- 24 We can't afford to buy that car. It's not an afford\_\_\_\_\_ expense.
- 25 I really enjoy Mable's company. She is a companion\_\_\_\_\_ person.
- 26 My sister doesn't tell anyone what she's doing. She's very secret\_\_\_\_\_ about her plans.

**E** Books sometimes have *indexes* at the back to help you find information. An index is an alphabetical list of all the subjects in a book, with page numbers for each one. Here is an index entry for the subject of soccer:

**Soccer:** history of, 98-100; Pelé, 121-25; rules of the game, 106-15; in the world, 101-05 (with pictures); World Cup championship, 116-20 (with pictures)

This index entry divides the subject of soccer into several parts. It tells you what page each part begins and ends on and which parts have pictures. Use this index entry to answer the questions below. Write *Yes* or *No*.

- 27 Can you find pictures of Pelé on page 122?
- 28 Can you read about the soccer World Cup championship in the book?
- 29 Can you read about the rules of the game on page 110?
- 30 Can you read about the history of soccer on page 98?
- 31 Can you read about soccer in the world on page 114?
- 32 Can you find pictures of soccer players from other countries in the book?
- 33 Can you read about Pelé on page 123?