

Deerfoot Lodge
Use of American Indian Imagery, Symbols, and Pageantry
July 2013

The mission of Deerfoot Lodge is to “build Godly young men in a Christ-centered community through wilderness camping.” Time spent in God’s creation where young men develop respect, appreciation, and inspiration from the natural world is an integral part of Deerfoot’s camping experience. Deerfoot campers and staff come to appreciate that the very character of God is revealed through the created order, and understand that His world is to be cherished and protected. Further, Deerfoot values character traits such as bravery, honor, courage, and integrity as key characteristics of a Godly man. These values and beliefs are celebrated in many of Deerfoot’s programs, rituals, and celebrations.

Throughout its history, Deerfoot Lodge has borrowed names, traditions, and symbols from the American Indian people in order to add depth to its program. From the oldest section of camp (campers ages 14 to 17) titled Indian Island where campers live in authentic tipis to Deerfoot’s highest award, the Lone Eagle, Deerfoot borrows names and symbols from a group of peoples that share Deerfoot’s respect for nature, honor in entering manhood, and value on courage and personal dignity. Deerfoot’s use of American Indian imagery, symbols, and pageantry is a time honored tradition for the camp that borrows from the strength of our native people.

Symbols such as feathers hold an array of meaning in the American Indian community, but are almost always marks of honor and symbols of accomplishment. The feather symbolizes trust, honor, strength, wisdom, power, freedom and many more things where to be given one of these is to be handpicked out of the rest of the men in the tribe. During Deerfoot’s Lone Eagle ceremony, a Lone Eagle candidate is given a single feather as a symbol of entry into a small fellowship of Christian men who are accomplished in the skill areas of camp and stand out as men whose lives are wholly centered on Jesus Christ. Upon receipt of his feather, the new Lone Eagle must describe his chosen Lone Eagle name, telling how this name represents the journey he has been called to by God. The use of the American Indian symbols and pageantry is intended to add imagery to this solemn ceremony that marks its importance in the life of the young man.

While Deerfoot Lodge has a uniquely Christ-centered approach to spirituality, it respects the American Indian’s understanding of the importance of creation and a relationship with the Creator God. Deerfoot understands that the history of the Christian Church includes periods of disrespect and persecution of native people, which has caused great harm to American Indian people and to the mission of Jesus Christ. As such, its use of American Indian imagery is a small attempt to honor a people that loved the land and held a deep and developing spirituality. Deerfoot uses this symbolism while holding fast to the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is to love God wholeheartedly and to share God’s love and grace with all people.