



# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK A. BAKER

## PART 2: THE MOVIES AND THE BOOK

By Mark Sage

**I**N PART ONE OF THIS INTERVIEW, WE examined how Mark Baker's ability to understand and interpret history changed as he came into contact with something called "experimental archaeology." He was introduced to this concept while studying for his master's degree. He was required to work at a Mormon farm that interpreted Mormon life at the beginning of the 20th century. Here Mark learned not only to read about history but actually to test the information by trying to recreate the lifestyle. From that point on, historical enlightenment concerning the 18th century would also come in the crucible of real-time, woods experience.

Mark wrote as he learned, and he became a recognized authority on the Colonial woodsman. As such, it is no big surprise that Hollywood producers would seek him out. We pick up Mark's odyssey with his involvement in the movie *The Last of the Mohicans*. Based on James Fenimore Cooper's 19th century classic, the story of Hawkeye, Chingachook and Uncas still entertains and inspires us. How many times have you watched this movie? Mark Baker, coaching Daniel Day Lewis, helped make the character of Hawkeye come alive once more on the movie screen in a more period-correct way.

I asked Mark how he got involved in the first place:

*Michael Mann, the producer, had Daniel Day Lewis and the other principle actors at a survival training camp in Alabama learning wilderness skills. Training consisted of shooting everything from machine guns to .45 caliber autos and learning wilderness skills, like how to skin a deer, start a fire with flint and steel or with a wood bow and drill. But Michael Mann was not satisfied they were teaching Daniel Day Lewis how to be a woodsman with a rifle. So he called his research department in Los Angeles, and they ended up calling MUZZLELOADER magazine and talking to Bill Scurlock. So they ended up calling me . . .*

*They had questions about whether a hunter could really load a muzzleloading gun quickly. They also were curious whether a person could run and reload at the same time. Sure he could, I told them, but it breaks modern safety rules, and I*

*would really need to show them in person.*

*I got another call around noon from Tom Allen, a friend who then worked in the development office at Utah State University. He was editing my thesis, which later became the foundation for Sons of a Trackless Forest. Allen thought that I should make a videotape of myself running, reloading and shooting. So I went to the English department, checked out a video camera for the weekend, and we all went to one of the canyons around Logan, Utah.*

*There we set up the camera, went down about a hundred yards and fired a round, away from the camera, of course. Then we shot some footage of me standing and reloading in one place as fast as I could . . . Two of those times, I shot and reloaded in 17 seconds, once in 32 seconds (my lock klatched).*

*I sent a letter and the tape by overnight delivery to the assistant director, Michael Waxman, and he called me the very next day and said the tape was great, but he couldn't tell what my face looked like. So I got one of my students who was a photography major to take some pictures of me in my 18th century outfit. The next day, I sent the pictures off.*

*The following day the casting director called me up and said that Michael Mann thought that I looked like a real woodsman and would like to offer me a deal. If I would come to North Carolina and train Daniel Day Lewis, they would also make me what is called a "featured extra." Naturally, I was interested and quickly accepted the offer. As it turned out, they didn't need me till July.*

*Also, in the months before filming was scheduled to begin, the casting office wanted 30 woodsmen reenactors to work as a core group of militia. They asked me if I knew others "like me" and would I contact them about submitting photographs. In my naiveté I quickly volunteered. I sent out letters to my friends, they sent photographs, and in Hollywood style, the movie people changed their minds. Instead, they got some long-haired white boys from North Carolina and dressed them up in different types of costumes from movies like *Dangerous Liaisons* and *The Mountain Men*. Believe it or not, I saw Charlton Heston's buckskin pants that he wore in that movie (they still had his name on the inside of the waist). He must be*