

***Woods Runner* by Gary Paulsen**

Subjects: Kidnapping—Fiction; Frontier and pioneer life—Pennsylvania—Fiction; Soldiers—Fiction; Indians of North America—Pennsylvania—Fiction; Pennsylvania—History—Revolution, 1775–1783—Fiction

Awards: Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People

Book Lists: America, North America



The forest was unimaginably vast, impenetrable, mysterious and dark. His father had told him that a man could walk west for a month, walk as fast as he could, and never see the sun, so high and dense was the canopy of leaves. And yet Samuel loved the forest. He knew the sounds and smells and images like he knew his own mind, his own yard. He was not sure exactly when he became a child of the forest. One day it seemed he was eleven and playing in the dirt and the next he was thirteen, carrying a .40-caliber Pennsylvania flintlock rifle, wearing smoked-buckskin clothing and moccasins, and moving through the woods like a knife through water.

Samuel lived with his parents in a valley, nestled in the hills of far western Pennsylvania. Although Samuel's parents lived in the wilderness, they were not a part of it. They had been raised in towns and had been educated in schools where they'd been taught to read and write and play musical instruments. They moved west when Samuel was a baby, to escape the chaos of towns, to devote themselves to a quiet life of hard physical work and contemplation. They loved the woods, but they did not understand them. Not like Samuel.

And that's why Samuel knew, on that day when he was hunting bear five ridges away from home, that something was . . . off. The woods felt strange, as if something had changed. He was halfway up the fifth ridge when he saw the smoke. Thick clouds of smoke were rising to the east, a goodly distance away. He frowned, looking at the smoke, willing it to not be what was coming into his mind like a dark snake, a slithering horror. Some kind of attack. Had there been an attack on the settlement, on his home? No. He shook his head.

He started running down the side of the ridge and didn't stop until he smelled it. Not just the smoke from the fires. But the thick, heavy smell. Blood. Death. The cabin was gone. Burned to the ground. In the distance he could see that the other cabins, scattered through the clearing, had been burned as well. He forced himself to search the ashes, looking for the slightest indication of . . . bodies. He found nothing. He started circling the cabin, forcing himself to take time to be calm, carefully studying the ground, looking closely at the soft dirt away from the grass. The attack had been fast. They had come up along the creek. His parent's were probably outside and must have been overrun with no time to react. Samuel backtracked and found his parents prints in the soft soil. They had not been killed, or at least not been killed here. They had been taken away. They had not been killed. He clung to that thought.

Samuel had no idea what to do except to follow his parents tracks—he had to follow and rescue them. How he could do that, free his parents . . . he'd have to wait and see. First, he had to bury the others, his neighbors, his friends. Those killed so savagely they did not look like they had been people. Then he'd wait for the morning. Then he'd find his parents.

The year is 1776 and England is at war with its American Colonies. British soldiers, redcoats, and Iroquois Indians had attacked Samuel's settlement. Samuel is a child of the forest, quiet and quick. But is that enough? Can he save his parents, save himself from war? (*Hold up book*) Read *Woods Runner* by Gary Paulsen.