

Book 1 of the Wilderness Time Travel Series

Across the Wilderness
Pamela Ackerson

She wished she were somewhere else, anywhere but here.

Stunned and confused, Karen found herself standing in front of the most breathtaking, beautiful waterfall she had ever seen. A glorious rainbow reflected off the mist. She never realized she had such an explicit and vivid imagination. Her dream had taken her to a paradise away from the threat of the menacing Indian called Standing Deer. She was alone.

Where was he? How did she get here? The change in location was typical of a dream, reassuring her. This wasn't Florida, not with those hills and that waterfall. In every direction, Karen could see dark, almost black hills and lush full, majestic trees. Twenty-five feet from the waterfall, she saw a cave opening. She would have to explore it.

She wandered over to the edge, fascinated by the flickering sparks from the hot sun as it beat down on the water. The pond of shimmering clear water beckoned her. Knowing she was going to enjoy the cool fresh water against her skin, she was going to succumb to its call.

Since this was a dream, she rationalized, no one would know. There wasn't a moment's hesitation. Stripping off her clothes, she jumped into the refreshing cool water. She could never have skinny-dipped when she was awake, but in this dream, it felt natural. Karen knew she was much too inhibited to do anything like this in real life.

An exhibitionist she will never be, even though she may not remember her dreams; it felt delightfully wicked. At home, she was afraid to swim in any of the ponds or lakes. She was terrified of alligators and water moccasins.

Nobody but you knows what happens in dreams unless you chose to tell someone. There was no one to judge you or chastise you. If only she could relax like this at home, Karen felt all the stress of the past few years float out of her. Now that she had her surgical license, she can finally find a position in a hospital, and have her own office in the future. Karen would be able to help those who couldn't afford an expensive doctor. She was going to make a difference.

Looking at her body, she scrutinized it as she was floating around the cool water. She looked good now and there was a sense of personal satisfaction. A year ago, she had taken a long look at herself and decided that things were going to change. She wasn't going to be a frumpy person ever again, and wasn't going to allow men to control her anymore either. She had quit smoking, lost thirty pounds, started working out on a daily basis, and liked looking at the muscular cuts in her arms and legs. Proof of the hard work she had put into her body, improved considerably by the bike riding she had started on a regular basis.

Karen hated running, bouncing around all over the place, and listening to the catcalls and obnoxious remarks from men driving by in their cars. A person could cover more territory on a bike. For someone who, a year ago, had little self-esteem as a woman, she had come a long way. Always the brain, she contemplated, never a desirable woman.

"Well, I changed that. Didn't I?" Karen said aloud. Well, almost, she pondered and smiled, knowing she still had a long way to go to build up her confidence and self-esteem. She was fine when it came to her career and everyday life but when it came to relationships, forget it. Total disasters, she just let them walk all over her.

She changed that when she broke off with David. That was her first step, getting rid of David, the one destroying her self-esteem. She could look back objectively now and see a trend. She would become involved with men she thought were strong like her father, but found they had felt intimidated by her intelligence and would hurt her emotionally just to prove their manhood.

Karen caught some movement out of the corner of her eye. She groaned, knowing the peace she had been feeling was over. Starting back to where she had dropped her clothes, she warily watched the figure come out of the trees. There was blood all over the man's chest. She swam quickly to the shore. As she was running to

her clothes, the man collapsed onto the ground. His horse stood close by, guarding him. There was a considerable amount of blood on the horse, as well.

Karen pulled on her shorts, grabbed her T-shirt, and sprinted to the injured man. When she reached him, she skidded to a halt. He pulled a knife on her with a viciousness and speed that she couldn't perceive from someone who was as injured as he appeared. Shocked, she realized the man behind the knife was another Indian.

"Put that away," Karen gasped for breath. "I'm here to help you."

What is it with Indians all of a sudden? She had never had dreams about them before. Maybe, this dream was trying to tell her something.

Karen scanned the area quickly and spotted the mouth of the cave. Hoping he would understand her, she explained the necessity of needing to move him to a better place. Helping him onto his feet, together they made it to the interior of the cave. Once there, he collapsed again. Before he passed out, he grabbed her arm and mumbled in a foreign tongue.

"*Tashunca.*" My horse.

She had no idea what the Indian had said. The only thing on her mind was to attend to the injured man. She hurried outside to the sparkling cool pond of water that she had just so thoroughly enjoyed, and again, taken off her shirt. This time, she planned to use it to clean the Indian's wounds. She plunged it in the water. As she was running back to the cave, Karen wished she had him in a proper facility with electricity with medical supplies. She closed her eyes and wished for anything modern and everything she could possibly need to attend to his injuries and care for him.

As she entered the cave, Karen saw that what she had wished for was right before her eyes. Stunned, she dropped the shirt on the floor of the cave. It was a huge room, completely modern, with the Indian lying on a bed beneath crisp white sheets. Delight brightened her features. Dreams were definitely wonderful, even if they were unpredictable. Too bad real life couldn't be this way.

Picking up the shirt and draped it on the back of a chair to dry.

With meticulous precision, she cleaned and bandaged the Indian's wounds. Two were very deep, long lacerations. She had sewn them quickly and skillfully.

After she completed her task and made him comfortable, Karen wrapped a towel around herself and went outside to check on the man's horse. Tying the horse to a nearby tree so it would be in the cool shade, she evaluated the horse's wounds. They were minor and she nursed them easily. Most of the blood belonged to the Indian. She believed the horse would be safe and comfortable in the shade of the trees.

She returned to the cave and saw that her Indian had awakened. He was pale from the loss of blood and she knew he was in much pain, although he attempted not to show it.

"I'm a doctor." She explained, hoping he understood her. Smiling, with her best bedside manner, she assured him to ease his fears. "I can help you. You are seriously injured and must rest."

She was gentle as she lifted his head to help him drink some water. He whispered in his language and when he realized she didn't understand him, he spoke in broken English. Moving his hands to point to himself, his voice cracked so badly that she could barely understand him. "Jumping Bull."

Tapping her chest, "Karen."

Nodding, he closed his eyes. He was weak from the loss of blood and would be sleeping soon. The medication she gave him would help him relax and get the needed rest.

Karen sat down in the chair next to the bed. Jumping Bull wouldn't be moving for a while. It will be a long wait unless, of course, her dream decided to take her somewhere else. She loosened the towel so it rested across her chest; a rest is what she needed. Dreams can be exhausting. At least, this one was. There were too many questions. Why was she dreaming of Indians? There had to be a meaning to what was happening.

Maybe she had been idle too long. Disregarding that thought, after all the schooling she'd been through, she needed the break. Her mind was trying to tell her something.

Karen woke up with a chill. As she rolled over, with her eyes still closed, she thought about the odd dream she had just had. As she lay there waiting for the grogginess to go away, she realized her hair was wet.

Wet? She bolted up and looked down at herself. She didn't have her shirt on! Dazed from her sleep, she felt the towel slip off onto the bed next to her. She stared at it, shaken and speechless. Karen leaned over the

sides of the bed in search of her shirt. Not there! Reaching down, she pulled up the dust ruffle and looked under the bed. It was nowhere in sight. Jumping out of bed, she threw on another top, grabbed a dry towel, and wrapped it around her hair. What if maybe, just maybe, she had taken a shower in her sleep? She had never walked in her sleep before, but one never knows.

Heart thumping, Karen looked in the bathroom for her shirt and then continued to search the rest of the house. She couldn't find the T-shirt anywhere.

It was as if it never existed.

Thank you for taking the time to read the excerpt from Across the Wilderness.



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