

### JOHN HENRY TALL TALE

When John Henry was a little boy, he picked up a hammer and a little piece of steel. He swung the hammer down hard upon the steel. Even though he was already very strong and naturally skilled with the hammer, he told his father, "This hammer's gonna be the death of me."

John Henry grew to be a mighty man who loved hard work. This made him just right for the job of steel driver on the railroad. From six in the morning until five at night, John Henry brought his hammer whooshing down upon a steel spike. Blow by blow, he broke through the rock and stone standing in the railroad's way. Folks said that John Henry's hammer slicing through the air and slamming against the spike sounded like the wind and thunder.

The new railroad was moving along quickly until the steel drivers came to Big Bend Mountain standing right smack in their path. The mountain was a mile and a quarter thick, but John Henry wasn't going to let the mountain stop him. He was the best steel-driving man in the land! He picked up his hammer and beat away at the mountain. He drilled twenty-seven feet.

Then one day, a salesman came with a steam-powered machine, boasting that it could out drill any man. The challenge fired up the men and a race was set. They put the best steel driver —John Henry— against the machine. John Henry pulled out two twenty-pound hammers. With one in each hand, he hammered all day beside that machine.

At end of the day, John Henry laid his hammers down, took two steps, and fell to the ground from pure exhaustion. When he opened his eyes, he asked, "Did I beat that old steam drill?"

"The machine drilled twenty-one feet," they told him. "But you, John Henry, drilled twenty-seven feet." John Henry smiled real big, then closed his eyes and died.

Today, folks say that if you stand at the edge of darkness beside Big Bend Tunnel, you can still hear the sound of two hammers drilling their way to victory. The mighty spirit of John Henry lives on.

