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rein·deer  (rān dîr')

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n. pl. reindeer or rein·deers

A large deer (*Rangifer tarandus*) of the Arctic tundra and northern boreal forests, having large hooves and long branched antlers, and widely domesticated in Eurasia. Subspecies native to North America and Greenland are usually called caribou.

[Middle English *reindere* : Old Norse *hreinn*, reindeer; see **ker**-¹ in the Appendix of Indo-European roots + Middle English *der*, animal; see [DEER](#).]

Word History: The word *reindeer* has nothing to do with reins. The element *-deer* in *reindeer* is indeed our word *deer*, but the element *rein-* has a different origin. *Rein*, “leather strap for guiding animals,” comes from Old French *resne*, while the *rein-* in *reindeer* is of Scandinavian origin. Wild reindeer once roamed Great Britain in prehistoric times, but they had become extinct long before the Anglo-Saxons invaded the island, or even before the Celts settled it in ancient times. (The small herd of wild reindeer that currently lives in Scotland descends from animals imported from Scandinavia.) To most people in medieval England and Scotland, the reindeer was a foreign creature living in distant Scandinavia, and it is therefore not surprising that the English name of this animal contains an element borrowed from a Scandinavian source. The *rein-* in Middle English *reindere* (Modern English *reindeer*) comes from the Old Norse word for the reindeer, *hreinn*.

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

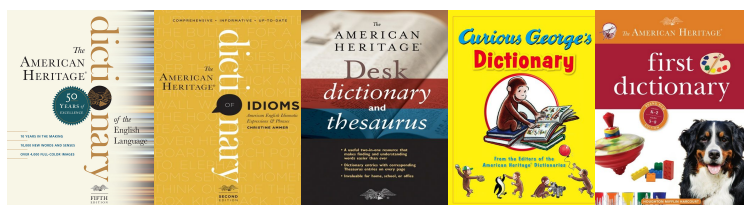
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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