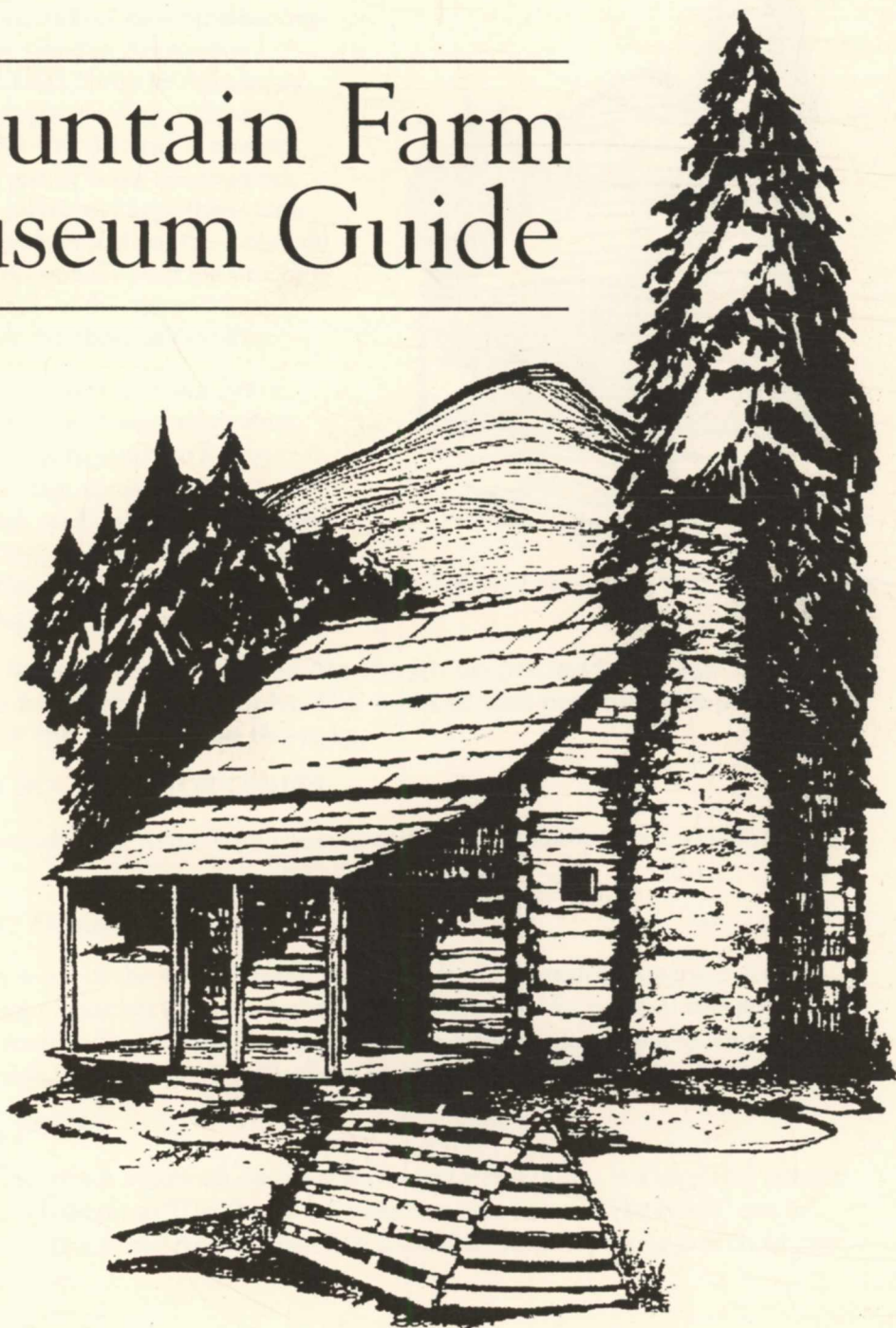

Mountain Farm Museum Guide



MOUNTAIN FARMS

At Humpback Rocks, the National Park Service has assembled a collection of farm buildings representative of those found in Appalachia between 1850 and 1900. Farms in Appalachia varied from place to place and they changed over the years. Some were located in remote coves; others were part of larger communities. By 1850, both log cabins and large frame farmhouses could be found throughout the mountain South. Many farmers initially built log structures similar to those found on this site and later enlarged them, adding a clapboard exterior.



Life in Appalachia also varied. A number of farmers traded their crops in regional markets, using their cash income to purchase factory-made furniture and other conveniences at country stores and through mail-order catalogs. Poorer farmers relied on their own resourcefulness and proven folkways. The farm buildings and rural life depicted here at Humpback Rocks represent the more colorful aspects of regional life.

The features of interest along the trail are shown on the map on page 5. They are described in the following paragraphs. The number that precedes the paragraph corresponds with the numbers on the map.

1 HUMPBACK ROCKS VISITOR CENTER

Stop here for an introduction to the farm museum and to view exhibits about agricultural life in Appalachia.

2 WHITE ASH - *Fraxinus americana*

The tough, springy wood of the white ash has long been highly regarded. American Indians used the long, straight branches for arrows; today the wood is used for baseball bats and handles of garden tools and agricultural implements. The mountaineer preferred white ash for long-handled tools, while he preferred hickory for short-handled tools.

3 HUMPBACK ROCKS

On the skyline of Humpback Mountain, looming above and ahead of you, is a large rock outcrop known to the local folk simply as "The Rocks." A steep one-mile hike to "The Rocks" can be accessed via a short section of the Appalachian Trail located at the next parking area about one-quarter mile south of here.

"The Rocks" was quite likely a landmark for wagoners on the Howardsville Turnpike, a wagon road in use from some time after 1850 to the 1880s. This road ran from Howardsville on the James River to points in the Great Valley, and remnants of the old track can still be seen on the other side of the Parkway. The up-mountain freight was mostly bolts of cloth, salt, guns, and ammunition, which were towed up the James in barges to Howardsville. There, it was loaded into wagons bound for the mountain and valley communities. The return cargo was usually grains, hides, cured meats, and whiskey.

4 FLOWERING DOGWOOD - *Cornus florida*

Many farmers valued dogwood for both its wood and its medicinal qualities. Because it wears to a glossy smoothness, the wood was used, as it is by the textile industry today, for shuttles in weaving.

5 RAIL FENCE

Fences were usually made of rails split from chestnut logs. The wood from this handsome and useful tree was very durable. Chestnut was plentiful until the 1920s, when the disastrous Chestnut Blight killed the trees.

Wire fencing gradually replaced split rail fences, but we are fortunate to still have good examples, which were gathered from far and near to recreate this traditional mountain scene. There are many different styles of old-time rail fences. This one is called a "snake-style" split rail fence. You will see other kinds along the Parkway.



"Snake-style" Split Rail Fence

6 BLACK WALNUT - *Juglans nigra*

Settlers and early residents used black walnut for cradles and cabinet work. It was once so common that it was even used for railroad ties. Today it is a prized cabinet wood and is used extensively for gunstocks. It is now so rare that lumber dealers try to buy choice black walnuts grown as shade and nut trees.

Although difficult to remove from their hard shells and enclosing husks, the nuts are tasty. The husks were also an important dyestuff, producing shades from brown to almost black.

7 GARDENS AND ORCHARDS

Farmsteads usually had small garden plots and fruit trees. Common garden crops were corn, potatoes, beans, onions, squash, pumpkins, and cabbages. A few apple trees were generally planted, but they often produced second-rate apples as a result of lack of pruning and proper cultivation.

Fresh garden products were often supplemented in the spring with "sallets" or wild greens. Wild fruits such as strawberries, huckleberries, and grapes were gathered when in season. The diet of most families was adequate in summer, but suffered in winter because of limited storage for perishable foods.

8 THE CABIN

The log cabin, which was the typical early home of the Southern Highlanders, is thought to have been patterned after those common in the forests of Sweden and Germany. Immigrants to this country quickly adopted it as a practical dwelling on the American frontier. The architecture of pioneer homes was ever-changing, depending on the remoteness of the area, the proximity to sawmills, and the skill of the builder.

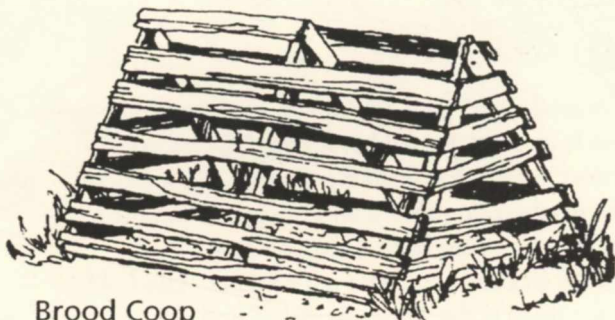
This cabin was moved from the old Ramsey Farm about 45 miles south of here and is thought to have been built in the 1890s. Some new material was used in reconstructing the building, but many of the original timbers may be seen. The only nails used in the reconstruction are the square nails in the shingles; all other major joints in the framing were fastened with locust pegs. These pegs may be seen in the oak framing around the doors. Boards fastened in this manner were extremely tight, as it was the practice to use a green board which shrank tightly around the dry locust peg.

The most prominent feature of the low-ceilinged room is the large, stone fireplace used for both heating and cooking. You will note there is only one small window, located strategically where the farmer could keep a sharp watch for both two- and four-legged marauders around the outbuildings. The walls were usually bare except for pegs on which clothing and household articles were hung. A ladder leads through the "scuttlehole" to the loft, which was used for storage and sometimes for sleeping.

The loom was homemade, as were the cradle, the table, and the box mousetrap just beyond the foot of the cannonball rope bed. A muzzle-loading shotgun would have hung on the wall above the fireplace. Light was furnished by kerosene lamps and beeswax candles.

9 BROOD COOP

The small wooden cage is a brood coop in which a mother hen and chicks were kept. The coop



Brood Coop

kept the hen confined, yet allowed the chicks to forage for food outside and to return to the safety of the coop when danger threatened. The coop is made of split oak slats on a frame with pegged joints.

10 WEASEL-PROOF CHICKEN HOUSE

The construction of a chicken house presented special problems, as it had to be "varmint" proofed to guard against weasels, skunks, and other prowlers. Gaps between logs were filled by chinking with pieces of wood held in place by locust wedges. Rocks were filled in snugly between the log and the ground. During the day the doors were open, but in the evening, after the chickens had gone to roost, the doors were closed and fastened with pegs.



Chicken House

A metal-bladed froe is hammered (with a maul) along the length of a log to rive (or split off) sections like the oak boards of the chicken house door. The ingenious wooden hinge is fashioned from a strong but flexible stick called a withe bent around a shaft or axle called a pintle.

11 BEE GUMS

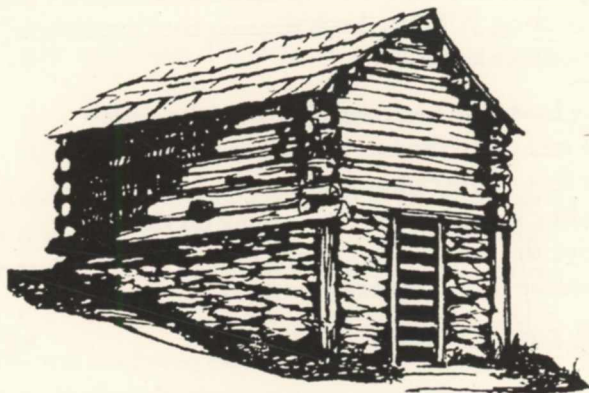
Hollow sections of trunk from the black gum tree, called "bee gums," were used to keep colonies of bees. The family pantry seldom included sugar, so sorghum molasses and honey were the principal sweetening agents.

12 BLACK OAK - *Quercus velutina*

Black oak bark, rich in tannin, is the source of a yellow dye that was an item of commerce in the old days. The yellow to orange coloring of the inner bark can usually be seen if you scratch a twig with your fingernail, and it helps in identifying this common oak. The low quality wood is also used for rough construction and barrel making.

13 ROOT CELLAR

Vegetables as well as fruits were stored in rooms such as this. Smoked and cured meats might have been hung from the ceiling. Root cellars were often dug into a hillside as this one is to make the room both cool and dark, which aided in preserving the stored food. The ladder type door is the "summer door" and was used in warm weather to provide ventilation.



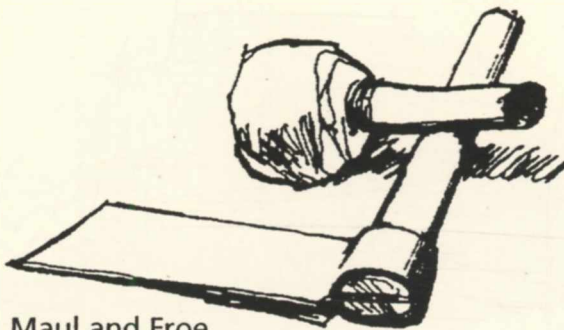
Root Cellar and Gear Loft



14 GEAR LOFT

The mountain folk sometimes refer to various items of equipment, supplies, and odds and ends as “gear” or “plunder.” Such things were usually stored in a room like this one; hence the name “gear loft” or “plunder shed.”

Here may be seen such common farm items as the hand cradle for cutting grain, and carpenter tools like the wooden plane, broad-axe, auger, and froe for splitting stakes. A flail for threshing grain was also a common item of “plunder” around the mountain farm.



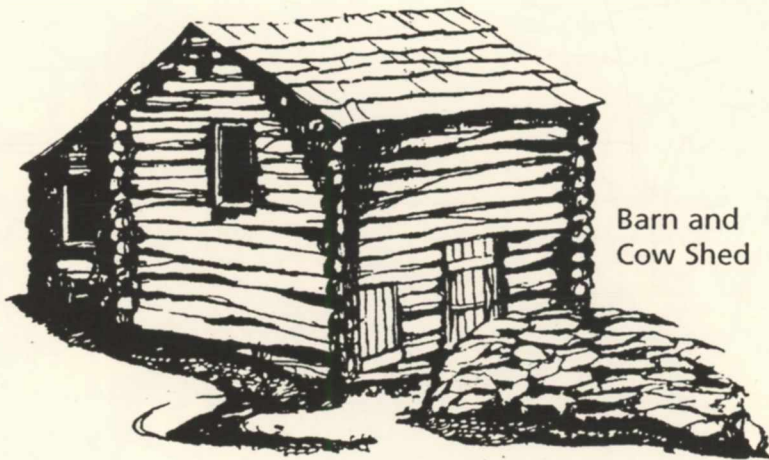
Maul and Froe

The floor is made of chestnut puncheons—smoothed split-log slabs. Just such hewn and shaped logs as these were widely used for flooring through the late 1800s, and not uncommon into the early 1900s. Look at the upper door hinge. It consists of a hickory withe that holds the pintle. The ends of the withe, split and tightly wedged in place, extend all the way through the log. The hickory stick was soaked in boiling water so that it could be bent easily.

15 THE BARN

This barn was built in 1881 and moved to this site from the old Clark farm 31 miles south of here.

The first door opens into the corn crib, where ears of corn were stored for stock feed. The next room might have been used for a stable or as a storeroom for items of farm equipment. The pole ceiling forms the floor of a loft for storing hay, and the logs below the loft are chinked to keep out the weather. When filled, the loft itself gave protection from cold above.



Barn and
Cow Shed

Common farm equipment stored in the barn included the wooden “A” harrow that was dragged across the field to break up clods of dirt or spread soil over the freshly sown seed, a wheel-less cart known as a “slide,” and plows that were uniquely shaped to specific tasks. All these items were homemade—oftentimes even the iron parts.



Pig Pen

16 BEAR-PROOF PIG PEN

Nearly every farmer had razorback hogs. Most of the year these animals roamed the forest, thriving on acorns and chestnuts. The hogs were seldom seen from early spring until fall, but they could be identified easily by markings on their ears. In the fall, a few weeks before killing time, several of these choicest porkers were rounded up and placed in pig pens, where they were fed on corn to "harden the fat."

The pigs were placed inside the pens by removing the rails from the top. Once in there to fatten, they were not removed until ready to be butchered. Pork was a mainstay in the diet of the mountain people.

17 COWSHED

The family cow was probably kept in this small shed on the end of the barn. Stone fences, such as the one around the barn, were fairly common where rock was plentiful. Miles of stone fences were built in the mountains during the early 1800s in an effort to control the wanderings of foraging hogs.

18 PIGNUT HICKORY - *Carya glabra*

Few trees were more valued by the pioneers than the hickories. The wood was used in cabin construction and furniture making. It burns with a hot flame, and untold thousands of trees were consumed in the fireplaces of mountain homes.

In the autumn, when frost caused the nut pods to open and the nuts to drop to the ground, nearly all mountain families gathered hickory nuts for winter use. A delicacy in the family diet, hickory nuts were used to flavor pastries, cakes, and candies.

19 BEETLIN' BLOCK

The "beetlin' block" or "battlin' block," as it is called in some sections, was the forerunner of the old-fashioned washboard. Soiled clothes were boiled with homemade soap in large iron kettles and then hammered on the block with a "beetle" or "battlin'" stick.

The ash hopper across the trail behind you was filled with ashes. Water was then allowed to trickle through it. The alkaline solution (lye), which seeped out into the trough at the bottom, was added to old fat and boiled in the iron kettle to make soap.



Beetlin' Block

20 SPRING HOUSE

This little house, built over a cool mountain spring, was the walk-in refrigerator of the pioneer. Cold spring water continually flowed through the cooling trough where crocks of milk, butter, eggs, and other perishables were kept. In some spring houses, the cooking trough was a hollowed log or trough along one wall.

END OF THE TRAIL

You may return along the same trail or you may continue along the fence and across the Parkway to the Humpback Rocks trail.

YOUR SAFETY. Do not allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. Efforts have been made to provide for your safety, but there are still hazards that require your alertness and vigilance. Please exercise common sense and caution.

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