

PIONEER FARMSTEAD

A photograph of a rustic pioneer farmstead. The central structure is a log cabin with horizontal log siding. It features two prominent stone chimneys, one on the left and one on the right. A covered porch with a gabled roof of weathered wooden shingles extends from the front of the cabin. The porch has a simple wooden railing and a small wooden table or bench inside. The cabin is situated on a grassy lawn. In the background, there is a dense forest of tall, leafy green trees under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is peaceful and evokes a sense of early American life.

**GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL
PARK**

NORTH CAROLINA - TENNESSEE



The Pioneer Farmstead

INTRODUCTION — Have you ever watched a span of oxen straining to pull a loaded sled, hearing the teamster's "gee" and "haw" or the crack of his whip? Are you old enough to have seen a pioneer craftsman using a frow and maul to rive boards? Maybe you remember your granddad talk of using a broadaxe and "foot" adz to hew logs. Perhaps it was your grandmother telling of making cloth on a hand loom or putting up dried apples for those spicey apple pies that brightened a winter's day. As recently as thirty years past these sights were common in the mountains, but now the frow is rusted and the cloth comes ready-made. A way of life has passed, leaving the mountains poorer for the passing.

Settlers came to these mountains as early as the 1790's. They came in search of land and homes, prepared to deal with the wilderness that awaited them. The good land, such as this Oconaluftee Valley, was taken and settled first; following generations were forced higher into the mountains, making farms on land that was often more rock than soil. Their life was one of "make do or do without," and they quickly adapted to the harsh mountain environment.

Remnants of this way of life are displayed in the Pioneer Museum and Farmstead. The National Park Service moved these farm buildings here from remote locations within the park to exhibit conveniently the settler's way of life. Take your time and wander through the Farmstead. Perhaps you will leave with a better understanding of these people and their lives here amid the Great Smoky Mountains.



MEAT HOUSE —

Shortly after the first frost, usually on a cold crisp morning, the pioneer began laying away his winter's supply of meat. He butchered the fattened animals and put the meat away to cure. Salt curing was the most common method. The farmer arranged the meat in layers on the shelf at the far end of this building, and covered each layer with a thick coating of salt. After curing, they hung the meat from the poles which span the interior. It was thus dry and protected from decay and "varmints." The pioneers used wild animals for food, so bear and venison certainly hung along side domestic meat.

This building exhibits excellent workmanship. The notch and chamfer joints used to make the corners actually lock the logs in place. The logs and puncheon floor are all hand hewn.



Meat House

Chicken House



CHICKEN HOUSE —

Poultry provided a welcomed addition to the mountaineer's often drab diet. He was right fond of a nice, plump hen and often reserved it for his Sunday dinner. Unfortunately, other mountain dwellers — skunks, weasels, bobcats and like "varmints" also cherished the farmer's poultry. The farmer waged a constant battle to protect his feathered flock, and this "varmint-proof" chicken house was one of his weapons in the battle.

This building is made of hand-hewn logs joined at the corners by square-notch joints.



APPLE HOUSE —

The mountain farmer highly valued all fruit, especially apples for their many uses—cider, vinegar, etc. All of them managed to have an orchard or at least a few trees to provide fruit for family needs. Many mountain farms had apple houses to provide storage space until winter use. The upper floor usually held the summer apples, while the ground floor held the winter apples, pumpkins, potatoes, turnips, and other root vegetables. The thick rock walls prevented freezing before use.



Chamfer and Notch Joint



Apple House



CORN CRIB —

From tender roasting ears to flinty grains that were ground into meal, corn was the chief item in the mountaineer's diet. Corn was easy to grow; didn't need much attention or cultivation; and could be stored for long periods without spoiling. Also, as most people know, it can be converted into a rather potent liquid product.

Notice the middle section of the roof which is hinged with wooden pegs. When the level of corn inside was above the door, additional corn was added through the raised roof. Corner construction is again chamfer and notch joints, and the walls are hand-hewn "matched" logs.

The mountaineer split a log in half and took slabs from each half. These slabs, similar in shape and size, were called "matched" logs. They are easy to find. See if you can locate them.



GARDEN — A garden, such as this, was part of every hill farm, and was normally the responsibility of the wife and children. A typical garden contained corn, potatoes, onions, peppers, turnips, pumpkins, beans, cabbage, spice and medicinal herbs, and perhaps cotton and flax. Here again the farmer battled pests and “varmints” that, given free rein, could ruin a garden in a matter of days. One old antagonist was the crow, and one weapon was a home-made, Halloween-type noise maker. There is such a noise maker on the garden fence. Go up and crank the handle — help us battle the crows.



Grinding Sorghum Cane



SORGHUM MILL — “Son, there’s nothing finer to start a morning with than black-strap sorghum molasses mixed with butter on hot biscuits.” There was a place on the kitchen table of nearly every mountain home for a jug of sorghum. It was eaten straight from the jar, used in cooking and as a substitute for sugar.

The mill in front of you, an ox-powered two roller, squeezes the juice from the sorghum cane. The juice is then poured into a pan on the nearby furnace and boiled down to thick, sweet sorghum molasses.



CORN CRIB AND GEAR SHED — Farming in an area as remote as this posed numerous problems. Factory-made tools were practically non-existent and the farmer relied on his own ingenuity to produce farm implements. Protection of his homemade “gear” was a necessity. This shed provided shelter for such items as sleds, plows, grain cradles, and ox yokes. It was a dual purpose building, for the mountain farmer stored corn in the crib. The wooden door hinges and split board shingle roof are standard on most pioneer structures.



BARN — This pioneer barn is one of the largest of its type in the Smokies. The flat river bottom land indicates that the farm was large with many acres under cultivation, so a large barn was needed to store the harvest. Also, livestock was driven both ways across the mountains on the Old Indian Gap Road to markets. This was a stopping place on the trans-mountain stock drives where the animals could be rested and fed after the mountain crossing.



Zeb and Zeke — the Oxen

ANIMALS — The life of the mountaineer without farm animals was very difficult. Animals produced work, food, transportation, companionship and on a few joyful occasions the pleasure of “beating that danged neighbor Luke in a horse swap.” The animals you might see around the Farmstead include oxen, mule, sheep, cattle, pigs, chicken, guineas, cats and perhaps some stray “varmint” looking for an easy meal.



PIG PEN — Have you ever smelled a pig pen on a warm summer day? Be our guest.

The mountain farmer normally let his pigs range in the mountains taking care of themselves by feeding on natural foods like acorns and chestnuts. Occasionally he penned up a few hogs for fattening and butchering. He built a sturdy pen which, hopefully, was bear proof. Often it was not, and the bear got the fattened hog while the farmer had to hunt the ranging hogs for his pork and sausage.

Ironically, old bruin sometimes found himself on the receiving end of the bear-proof pig pen. Should a bear be caught, especially a cub, he was occasionally lodged in the pen and fattened for butchering the same as any common hog. This gave him an entirely different reason to curse its sturdy construction.



BLACKSMITH SHOP

Picture, if you will, the creaking bellows forcing air to the forge fire; the sharp clanging of the smithy's hammer fashioning a horse shoe on his anvil; the searing hiss when the shoe hits the water in the cooling tub; and finally the pleasure of a cooling breeze to the sweating blacksmith when he steps outside to rest a moment. Iron was scarce and was used again and again until it finally wore out. Notice the door hinges on this building and you will see one use for worn out horse shoes. The blacksmith, especially an inventive one, was of great value to the pioneer.



Blacksmith Shop



SPRING HOUSE — Ever gone to the spring house to get a glass of sweet milk? Remember how cool it was and how thick the layer of cream was on top of the milk?

The spring house was the pioneer's refrigerator. Evaporation, the oldest form of refrigeration, together with the cold running water, kept perishables fresh for many days. In this structure the cooling trough was once a holiowed out log; in others the trough was built in the soil and lined with rocks. Seepage from the spring flowed under the puncheon floor which kept the building cool and reasonably dry.



BEE GUM STAND — Honey was the main source of "sweetin' " to the mountaineer. His bees were jealously guarded from all intruders, especially a honey loving bear. Hives were usually made from hollow black gum trees, a tough wood which does not check or split easily. Thus the name "bee gum"; a number of bee gums were called a "stand." Like sorghum, honey was a mainstay in the pioneer's diet, and when mixed with a little dab of whiskey, made a mighty fine cough syrup.

Bee Gum Stand





THE HOUSE — This was one of the finest such dwellings constructed in the Smokies. It was built by John E. Davis, a master craftsman. The “matched” log walls were cut and hewn on the site. Expert workmanship is shown throughout the house. Two of Mr. Davis’ sons helped him build it. Their job was to collect stones for the chimneys, using a sled and oxen. They often had to go far from the house site to find suitable stones, load them on a sled, then spend long hours getting them back. Not too hard a job — no, not until you realize the boys were then eight and four years of age.



WOOD SHED — A supply of firewood was seldom a problem to the pioneer. In fact, trees were often considered a curse rather than a blessing. The settler gathered wood as needed. He used horses or oxen to drag large logs near the house, where he then cut his firewood. Wood sheds were uncommon structures, but the more energetic pioneers often built such sheds to insure a supply of dry wood.

CONCLUSION — In this “make do or do without” environment, the mountain man lived and reared his family. He asked little of the outside world, but turned his talents to coexisting with the mountains. In the beginning, it was man against the environment. The outside world, however, would not let him be. It beckoned his children to leave the mountains and was, in turn, drawn here by the potential wealth of the massive forests. The children went to wars and to city jobs, and the forests went to the screaming, city-owned sawmills. The forests are slowly returning, but the old time way of life is gone forever from these mountains.

Perhaps, as you have walked through the Farmstead today these buildings, tools or demonstrations have given you a better understanding of the mountain people of the Great Smoky Mountains. If so, they have accomplished their purpose.

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