

A DAY BY THE BUFFALO

PIONEER HISTORY/OZARK CULTURE - Beaver Jim Villines

Participants will learn the pioneering ways of the Ozark region's earliest settlers and how they are revealed in the clues they left behind.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Before the days of railways and highways, rivers were used to explore the *frontier*. Native Americans were the first to know the vast American continent -- much later, European explorers followed the Indians down the trails and waterways of the frontier. When the earliest settlers arrived, they established communities along large rivers like the Mississippi, Ohio, and Arkansas. Eventually, they made their way up smaller streams like the White River and the Buffalo Fork of the White River, which was later shortened to Buffalo River.

Settlers first arrived in the Buffalo River valley in the 1830s to discover little more than narrow pathways made by those who preceded them. They built log houses up the hollows and at the base of cliffs, and farmed the fertile bottomlands alongside the river and creeks. After the bottomland was claimed, settlers began building cabins atop the benches overlooking the river valley. James A. Villines, or "Beaver Jim" was one such "bench settler." His simple homesite resembled many being built during this time.

With more settlers arriving, neighbors became closer as the crow flies but remained distant as the wagon rolls. Travel was difficult over the winding roads and rivers were often too high to cross during the high waters of springtime. Springfield, Missouri, where most trading was done, was a three-day trip -- Russellville took up to two weeks to reach. Poor transportation meant few travelers came through the hills. In some ways, the settlers of the *Ozarks* were isolated from things occurring in other parts of the United States. Because of this isolation, traditions, skills, and ideas developed that were different from other areas. The Ozark people became a distinct *culture*, or group of people with a *unique* lifestyle passed down through the generations.

Today, the *National Park Service*, *protects* and *preserves* many of the homesites and farms to ensure that the faces, names, and traditions of these early settlers are not forgotten. Cabins like the one built by James A. Villines provide clues to a former way of life, and evidence of the persistence of pioneers who paved the way for others.



CLASSROOM: PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1. Obstacles Here, There and Yonder

STATE STANDARDS

Social Studies - Strand: Geography

Standard 1. Physical and Spatial

Students shall develop an understanding of the physical and spatial characteristics and applications of geography.

Social Studies - Strand: Geography

Standard 3. Interaction of People and the Environment

Students shall develop an understanding of the interactions between people and their environment.

OBJECTIVES

Students will :

1. locate the **Ozark** region on a United States map.
2. locate large rivers relative to the Ozark region.
3. explain how and what obstacles slowed the growth of the Ozarks compared to growth along larger rivers.

MATERIALS

- map of the United States

ACTIVITY

1. Have students look at a map of the Midwest area and locate the largest cities. Ask students:
 - a. Why did these cities develop where they did?
 - b. Locate the large rivers of the area and where they intersect.
 - c. What were the obstacles to travel, on and off the rivers, and throughout the Ozarks?
2. Have students distinguish the geographic boundaries of the Ozark region relative to the Arkansas River Valley, the Great Plains states, the Ouachita Mountains, and the Mississippi Delta. Ask students:

In what ways would living in the Ozarks be different than living on the Mississippi Delta?



NATIONAL RIVER: ON-SITE ACTIVITIES

Activity 2. Exploring Beaver Jim's Homestead

STATE STANDARDS

Social Studies - Strand: Culture and Diversity

Standard 2. Interaction of People and the Environment

Students shall develop an understanding of how cultures around the world develop and change.

Social Studies - Strand: Geography

Standard 3. Interaction of People and the Environment

Students shall develop an understanding of the interactions between people and their environment.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. describe the settlement patterns of the United States in the 1800s.
2. identify five features of Beaver Jim's homesite that cannot be found in home of today and explain why the changes came about.
3. Identify three modifications to the house and ground that were made during Beaver Jim's lifetime.
4. Explain why the Ozark region remained culturally isolated for so long and identify three things that brought about change.
5. Describe the purpose of *national parks* in *preserving* historic sites and explain why these areas are important.

MATERIALS (Ranger will provide)

- paper
- pencils

ACTIVITY

Be prepared to spend approximately one hour with a park ranger exploring the cabin, barn, outbuildings and surrounding land of a pioneer.

CLASSROOM: POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Activity 3. Your Family History is Important, Too!

STATE STANDARD

Social Studies - Strand: Culture and Diversity

Standard 2. Interaction of People and the Environment

Students shall develop an understanding of how cultures around the world develop and change.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- compare their family history with Buffalo River pioneer history.

MATERIALS

- paper
- pencil
- someone to interview

ACTIVITY

1. Ask students to conduct an interview with family members, preferably Mom and Dad or Grandma and Grandpa.
 2. Suggested questions during interview would be:
 - a. Did you *migrate* here?
 - b. Where were you born?
 - c. Who was the first family member to *migrate* to Arkansas?
 - d. Where did he/she come from?
 - e. How did they arrive?
 - f. Did other family members follow?
 - g. Did they live off the land or work someplace else?
 - h. How was life different when you were a student compared to student life today?
 - i. What do I have that *pioneers* in our family did not have?
 3. Suggested thoughts for students to add to their interview report:
 - a. Will my children and grandchildren be interested in learning about my family history?
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- b. Why is it important to remember how our family once lived?
 - c. Is it important to *protect* and *preserve* the house that our family lives in now?
Does it tell a story?
 - d. Am I part of today's history?
4. Encourage students to return to school with their interview and read aloud their family history to the other students.

KEY WORDS

frontier, Ozark, culture, National Park Service, protects, preserved, pioneers, unique, migrate

RESOURCES

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