

A DAY BY THE BUFFALO

PIONEER HISTORY/OZARK CULTURE-Collier Homestead Tour

Change came slow to the Ozark mountains, and settlers depended upon their own resourcefulness long after “conveniences” were common in other regions of the United States.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

In the 1800s, Arkansas was part of the *frontier* of the United States. Most areas east of the Mississippi River were settled, but much of the land west of the river was still uncharted territory. Maps of the west contained little detail, and only the most adventuresome souls attempted to cross into these unsettled lands. The United States government encouraged people to move further west to help expand the boundaries of the growing nation. In 1862, the *Homestead Act* was established to assist people in their *migration*, or westward movement.

Under the Homestead Act, people could gain ownership of government lands in exchange for improvements to it. The act helped both the United States government and its citizens: it encouraged settlement of the West, and also gave people the chance to become landowners. Wealth was not necessary to take advantage of the new act, only a willingness to work hard, the ability to withstand hardships, and the resourcefulness to make it on your own. People who possessed such traits settled frontier areas like the Buffalo River Valley.

The earliest settlers to the river valley arrived in the 1830s and homesteaded the bottomlands along the river where the soil was best for growing crops. Eventually, the most fertile land was claimed and settlers began homesteading land atop the rises or “benches” that overlooked the valley. By the 1930s, the only patches of unclaimed land that remained lay atop the highest ridges where the land was least fertile, but the views were most spectacular. Sod Collier and his family lay claim to one of these tracts in the 1930s, becoming one of the last families to homestead land in the Buffalo River Valley.

Today, the National Park Service tells the story of the settlement of the Buffalo River Valley, *preserving* the traditions, names, and places of those who tamed this portion of the frontier.



CLASSROOM: PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

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 : History

Standard 6. History

Students shall analyze significant ideas, events, and people in world, national, state, and local history and how they affect change over time.

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 the Collier Homestead

STATE STANDARDS

Social Studies - Strand : Geography

Standard 2. Culture and Diversity

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

Social Studies - Strand : History

Standard 6. History

Students shall analyze significant ideas, events, and people in world, national, state, and local history and how they affect change over time.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. describe the settlement patterns of the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries.
2. identify three things still in practice in the Ozark region that had changed in other parts of the United States by the 1930s and 40s. Explain why these advances were slow to reach this region.
3. describe family life in the 1930s Ozark region.
4. compare and contrast skills needed to survive in earlier times with those needed today.
5. describe the purpose of *national parks* in *preserving* historic sites and explain why these areas are important.

MATERIALS

- day pack
- drinking water

ACTIVITY

Be prepared to spend approximately one hour with a park ranger touring the Collier Homestead.

CLASSROOM: POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Activity 3. Your Family History is Important Too!!

STATE STANDARD

Social Studies - Strand : Geography

Standard 2. Culture and Diversity

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, migration/migrate, Homestead Act, preserving, protecting, pioneer, Ozarks, national parks

RESOURCES

Hardaway, B. Touchstone. 1991. *These Hills, My Home*.

Smith, Kenneth. 1967. *The Buffalo River Country*. Little Rock, AR.: Ozark Society.