

Daniel Boone, Cumberland Gap, Wilderness Trail

Daniel Boone was born in Pennsylvania in 1734. As a boy he hunted animals, first with a spear and later with a gun. He became a crack shot and is said to have shot his first bear at age 12. Boone took part in the French and Indian War in 1755.

For many of his adult years, Boone was a “long hunter.” He would hunt alone in the woods, hundreds of miles from white civilization, for months at a time. One of his hunting trips lasted 18 months.

In 1769, Boone and some others passed through the Cumberland Gap in the Appalachian Mountains into Kentucky. They found a land filled with buffalo, deer, and wild turkeys, as well as meadows perfect for farming. Boone was separated from his party and spent the winter of 1769–70 in a cave.

In 1775, Boone began working for the Transylvania Company, which wanted to establish a colony called Transylvania in the frontier areas of Virginia and North Carolina. The scheme collapsed, but not before Boone had blazed the Wilderness Road in 1775. This wagon road, which was often nothing more than a wide place in the forest, ran from Virginia through the Cumberland Gap and into the Ohio River Valley.

The Appalachian Mountains had long been a natural barrier to westbound travel, but the Wilderness Road allowed settlers to travel through the mountains more easily. Settlers moved along it into what would become the states of Kentucky and Tennessee. The road was a main route west in the southeastern states until the National Road was completed in 1837. The Wilderness Road, which eventually became part of U.S. Highway 25, is still around today.

After blazing the Wilderness Road, Daniel Boone continued to hunt and explore. During the Revolutionary War he was taken prisoner by the Shawnee. He so impressed his captors with his great skills as a hunter and woodsman that he was accepted as a member of a Native American family. Eventually, however, Boone returned to his original family.

After several more years in sparsely settled Kentucky, Boone went west to Missouri in a dugout canoe. When someone asked him why he was leaving Kentucky, Boone allegedly replied: “Too crowded.” He lived in Missouri for the rest of his life, dying in 1820 at the age of 85.

Boone published his memoirs, *The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone*, in 1784. In them he describes his explorations and his many encounters with Native Americans. After his death, Boone was romanticized and marketed as an American hero, a man who lived close to nature, fought Native Americans, and helped “win the West.” His genuine adventures have been supplemented and embellished with numerous additional stories. (47)