

WHO WERE THE LONG HUNTERS

The term "Long Hunter" is a product of Manifest Destiny historians, and is used today to describe the woodsmen who hunted for extended periods of time in the land once known as the "Middle Ground." Today we refer to the "Middle Ground" as the present states of Kentucky and Tennessee. Not everyone who hunted was a Long Hunter. The true Long Hunter was a professional, and made his living by market hunting. Many of these professional hunters came from the western frontiers of Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Carolinas. Over the years, legends and tales have grown to surround and mystify the history of these remarkable characters. They were an unusual breed, even extraordinary, for they routinely existed in the wilderness for months, even years at a time. They roamed at will, feeding themselves from the endless bounty of the forests. These men were perhaps the most talented, and most enduring of their time. They had to be blacksmiths enough to shoe horses; forge froes, frizzens, gunsprings, to repair guns and traps. They could haft axes and tomahawks, and knap flints to fit the locks of their rifle-guns. Such men were skilled in hunting, trapping, stalking, hiding, reading sign, and building shelters. They were packhorse men, their work demanding that they follow the game trails deep into the endless forests. That they were able to survive in such an unforgiving wilderness for such lengths of time, under such adverse conditions, is truly a testament to their qualities of marksmanship, woodlore, self-reliance and cleverness.

Long Hunters were the first American frontiersmen to push beyond the Blue Ridge. Contrary to the popular Hollywood image, they were not dashing nimrods clad in fringed buckskins and coonskin caps. Nor did they trek west to make free the land for God and country, hearth and home. Most Long Hunters did not have use for Indians, considering them competition, and were prone to shoot them on sight. The Long Hunter was often a plain man, a poor man seeking land, relief from debt, and a way to feed hungry mouths. The stark edge of life and death inured these tough, and stubborn frontier folk to toil, hardship, heat, cold, rain, snow and ice. The Long Hunter broke treaties and laws to trespass and poach on Indian land. He went west to make money in deerskins, tallow and furs. He was perhaps the freest Anglo-American of the colonial era.

The decade of the 1760's is referred to as "the golden age" of the Long Hunt.

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