



# Daniel Boone

The Hunter and his “love of the chase”

In 1811, 77-year-old Daniel Boone, along with Michael Stoner, James Bridges, Will Hays, Flanders Callaway, and Callaway's slave Moses, returned to Missouri from a “long hunt” that some say took them to Yellowstone. The trip took six months, and their boats were chock-full of skins when they returned to St. Louis, where they could get the best prices for their furs.

The return was witnessed by Stephen Hempstead. In a letter written decades later to Lyman C. Draper, Hempstead wrote, “The canoe was covered with bear skins, and she landed first the stern, and the steersman got out and then the bowman rowed her around and they landed. Mr. Callaway and the Negro rowed in front and Colonel Boone steered.” Some accounts had Derry Coburn, Boone's son's slave and hunting companion, with him. He may have been the person rowing in the Hempstead account. Hunters later claimed that they met Daniel Boone at the “great salt lake.”

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**FAR LEFT:** Illustration of *Daniel Boone Blazing a Trail* circa 1931— a book illustration by J.L. Kraemer from *Boy's Book of Adventure* by V.R. Lowe. Boone is often depicted in a coonskin cap, however, he actually wore a wide-brimmed felt hat. **BACKGROUND:** Dawn breaking over the foggy Appalachian Hills in the Daniel Boone National Forest, Kentucky.

# Coon- skin Caps



The caps were originally a traditional Native American article of clothing, but when European pioneers began settling the Tennessee and Kentucky areas, they made it their own, evolving its use and wearing them as hunting caps.

The coonskin cap eventually became a part of the iconic image associated with American frontiersmen such as Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. However, Boone did not actually wear coonskin caps and he reported to have disliked them altogether. Like many other long-hunters of his day, Boone wore a wide-brimmed felt or beaver hat, much like the Quaker style hats worn by men in Pennsylvania where he was born and spent his early years.

To those who did not know Daniel Boone, it would seem impossible to think a man of 77 years could make such an arduous excursion—especially when taking into consideration the average lifespan at that time was close to three decades less than Boone's age. But this was Daniel Boone, arguably the greatest hunter and explorer of the Americas. He had opened the road to the West—not the West as we know it today, but the West of his day—Kentucky (1779). Later, in 1799, the year George Washington died, he would head a party of settlers including his wife and extended family to Femme Osage, Missouri. This was Spanish territory granted to Boone to encourage settlement. In title it may have been Spanish, but in reality it was controlled by the powerful Osage Indian tribes that were not so eager to have white settlers take their pelts and ravage their salt licks. Thus began a replay of the struggles Boone experienced in Kentucky—Indians and land speculation gone awry.

Daniel Boone was born in Pennsylvania on October 22, 1734. Later the calendar would be adjusted making his birthday November 2, but Boone favored October 22 as the date. He would reminisce in his later years that “my love for the wilderness and hunter's life began with being a herdsman and thus, being so much in the woods.” Boone would

spend the “grass season” with his mother caring for a dairy herd on 25 acres his father had purchased five miles from the family log cabin. It is said he often “neglected his herding

duties” in favor of exploring the wilderness. At the age of 10 he supplied he and his mother with small game he killed with a self-made sharp-wooded shaft he called his “herdsman's club.” When he was 12 or 13, his father gave him his first rifle; by the age of 15 he had the reputation as the best shot and hunter in the area. His reason for neglecting the cows in favor of hunting he gave as “love for the chase.” Boone in later years would say that when he was working his father's fields in the summer, he would pray for rain, and at the first shower even if it lasted just an hour, he would grab his rifle and head for the woods. Some reports said Daniel Boone was so cocky about his marksmanship that he would resort to one-handed trick shots at local contests. Then he would walk among the contestants “pat them on the shoulders, and tell them they couldn't shoot up to Boone.” Later in life he would find humility after displaying his smugness when defeating an older Saucy Jack, a Catawba Indian with a legendary reputation both in his hunting and bragging. After getting inebriated, Jack set out to kill the young upstart, but Boone was saved by his father, causing Saucy Jack to flee the area. Later Boone confirmed the “lesson learned” helped when he was a captive of the Indians: “I was careful not to exceed many of them in shooting, for no people are more envious than they in this sport.”

Boone's formal education was limited, but not out of step with the time. In fact, he could read and write, although his spelling was called “atrocious” by some. He taught himself mathematics in later years with the help of his son-in-law Will Hays during surveying expeditions in Kentucky. His favorite book was *Gulliver's Travels* and many who were with him on his long hunts would tell of him not only reading it, but often delighting his companions around the campfire by reading the stories aloud. He was appointed by the governor of Virginia as a lieutenant colonel, the head of the county militia. He was later elected to be a delegate in the Virginia Assembly in 1791 where he served on committees on religion, propositions, and licenses. When he was in Missouri, the Spanish government bestowed on him the title of “Syndic”—equivalent to head administrator and judge. His son Nathan said of his father that he “governed

more by equity than by law.”

Boone was a unique product of his times. His roots were firmly implanted in his Quaker upbringing. Pennsylvania Quakers did not believe in war. At that time, they had no organized militia or army, and they negotiated with the Indians fairly for title to their lands. The Quakers promised and gave the natives equal treatment under the “Said Laws as any other Inhabitants.” This resulted in many of the Indians actually relocating to Pennsylvania and fostering an Indian trade that accounted for one-third of the Commonwealth's foreign exchange. The Boone homestead was open to Indian hunters and diplomats who were welcome to food and drink. Grandfather Boone had, in 1728, rescued two Indian girls held captive by white settlers who “harbored lustful and murderous intensions.” Despite the fact that he lost two sons, a brother and countless friends and relatives in the struggle to control the West, Boone never became an Indian-hater, common with other men who surrounded him. In his later years he would become angry when he was referred to as a great Indian fighter. Late in his life, when asked about “The Mountain Muse” a 250-page epic poem written by Daniel Bryan and published in 1813 that depicted Boone's life and described him as a great Indian fighter, Boone remarked, “I never killed but three.” He later said it was too bad he didn't sue for slander. “Such productions ought to be left until the person is put into the ground.”

At 15, Boone guided at least 17 members of his family to North Carolina's Yadkin River Valley. It is here where he began his career as a professional hunter. (In later years, he supplemented his income by mining salt.) Game was abundant which supplied food and clothes for their families, but also was a means of income from the sale of hides and furs to the settlements back East. Here, venison was considered inferior, and bear meat was the staple food, supplemented with raccoon or opossum. Bear skins were often left in the woods because they were too heavy to carry, but they harvested the bear grease for cooking and to rub on skin to ward off pesky flies and mosquitoes. Harvesting deerskins and trapping was the major income-producer for Daniel Boone the hunter—often accomplished while trespassing into territory that belonged to the Indians. As Boone's son Nathan recalled,

“In those days, deer skins were probably worth about forty cents a pound or a dollar each, while beaver skins were then worth about two dollars-and-a-half apiece and otter skins from three dollars to five dollars apiece. So from 200 to 250 beaver skins was about the full amount of a successful

winter's trapping. Also about 400 to 500 deer skins would be considered a fair season's hunt.

"My father would sometimes hunt all day for deer. He would not just watch the salt licks. He would start early in the morning, when the leaves were moistened with the dew and thus caused no noise when walking, and deer generally were feeding. They are always on their feet feeding or walking about during the rising of the moon, to which hunters pay great respect. Deer are easier seen when on their feet and moving about than when laying (sic) down, and though there were particular hours of the day when they fed, the hunters would keep hunting all day. My father practiced fire-hunting on the Yadkin River, a common practice at the time ... in the summers. At that time the deer would come down to the river to avoid the flies. There is also tender moss in the shoaly parts of the river which the deer sought after, and they would go there also to drink. As the banks of the rivers were often skirted with thick cane, it was more convenient to fire-hunt with canoes, though sometimes the hunters would wade in shallow streams and carry their fire."

During Boone's time, the amount of deer harvested in a year was astounding. For example, Fort Pitt received 282,629

deerskins in one year. Indians competed with newcomers harvesting and trading for European merchandise and guns and would often confiscate settlers' piles of skins, take the trespassers' weapons and warn them not to return or they would face dire consequences. (This happened several times to Boone.) The loss could be a year's worth (or more) of hard labor.

With time, the competition for the lucrative trade grew more fierce and violent. Boone's eldest son James fell victim when 15 Delaware, two Cherokee, and two Shawnee Indians came upon their camp. The Indians were returning from a parley discussing their mutual concerns about the encroachment of American settlers. The event was recorded by a slave who hid undetected in the bushes after the Indian attack: Around the campfire the night before, the young Boone hunting party heard the howling of wolves. It was the two younger brothers' first adventure into the wilderness, and they became frightened. Crabtree [the 16-year-old longhunter who had joined the expedition along the way], calmed them, jokingly telling them that in Kentucky they would also hear buffalo bellowing from the treetops. In the early morning the Indians fired on the sleeping party. The young Mendinall brothers were killed instantly but James

# Daniel Boone

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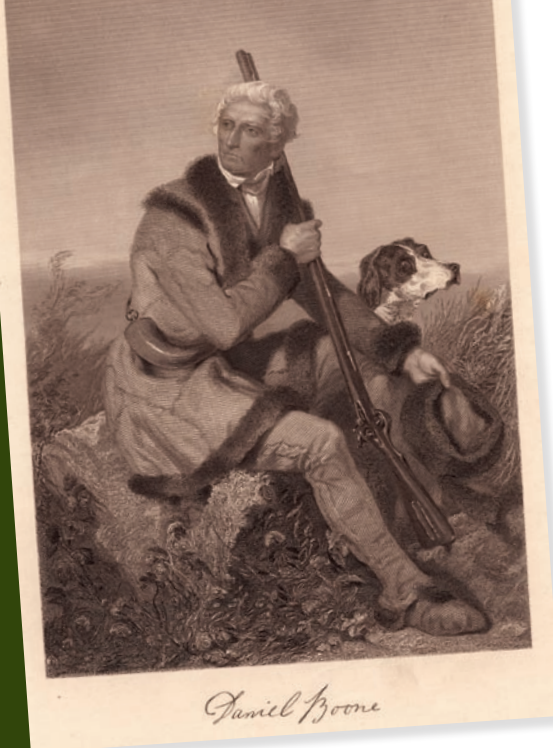
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# Barking Squirrels

From *Daniel Boone: Last Frontier...*

Following is anecdote from John James Audubon with details of an adventure he had with Boone about 1810, when Boone demonstrated a hunting technique called “barking off squirrels”.

We walked out together, and following the rocky margins of the Kentucky River [he wrote] until we reached a piece of flat land thickly covered with black walnuts, oaks and hickories. As the general mast was a good one that year, squirrels were seen gambolling on every tree around us. My companion, a stout, hale, and athletic man, dressed in a homespun hunting-shirt, bare-legged and moccasined, carried a long and heavy rifle, which, as he was loading it, he said had proved efficient in all his former undertakings, and which he hoped would not fail on this occasion, as he felt proud to show me his skill. The gun was wiped, the powder measured, the ball patched with a six-hundred-thread linen, and the charge sent home with a hickory rod. We moved not a step from the place, for the squirrels were so numerous that it was unnecessary to go after them. Boon pointed to one of these animals which had observed us, and was crouched on a branch about fifty paces distant, and bade me mark well the spot where the ball should hit. He raised his piece gradually until the *bead* (that being the name given by Kentuckians to the *sight*) of the barrel was brought to line with the spot which he intended to hit. The whip-like report resounded through the woods and along the hills in repeated echoes. Judge of my surprise, when I perceived the ball had hit the piece of bark immediately beneath the squirrel, and shivered it into splinters, the concussion produced by which had killed the animal and sent it whirling through the air, as if it had been blown up by the explosion of a powder magazine. Boon kept up his firing, and before many hours had elapsed, we had procured as many squirrels as we wished; for you must know, that to load a rifle requires on a moment, and that if it wiped once after each shot, it will do duty for hours...



Portrait of Daniel Boone created in 1861 from a painting by Alonzo Chappel. Note the hat he is holding.

west, this time to Missouri. Although mountain men were already living where Boone ventured in Missouri, he became known for leading men and their families into this raw and rugged wilderness. He was a man others were willing to follow. Their confidence in him was so strong that they were willing to risk all for the quest. His adventures were legendary (and often exaggerated when the truth was hard to believe). Later in life he would receive visitors who came to Missouri just to see and talk to the famous Boone. Until his death at age 85, he still made two hunts a year.

Officers at Fort Osage, near the site of present-day Kansas City, were astonished to see the famous explorer at age 82. They reported that he wore “the dress of the roughest, poorest hunter.” One reported, “We have been honored by a visit from Col. Boone, the first settler in Kentucky; . . . He goes a hunting twice a year to the remotest wilderness he can reach and hires a man to go with him, whom he binds in written articles to take care of him, and to bring him home dead or alive.” Boone spent two weeks with the soldiers. “I intend by next autumn to take two or three whites and a party of Osage Indians, and visit the salt mountains, lakes and ponds, and see the natural curiosities of the country along the Rocky Mountains. The salt mountain is but 5 (sic) or 600 miles west of this place.” Boone never made the trip. He died peacefully with his remaining family around him on September 16, 1820, at the age of 85.

Daniel Boone’s life was one that exemplifies the courageous men and women whose sacrifices built the foundation of character and psyche of what would become the United States as we know it today. His fame grew exponentially after his death. Daniel C. Beard founded Sons of Daniel Boone, which later merged with the Boy Scouts of America. In the late 19th century Theodore Roosevelt organized the Boone and Crockett Club. This group of 100 regular and professional members set the stage for the American model of preserving our forests and their wildlife inhabitants. But when Roosevelt said that one of the purposes of the club was to encourage “energy, resolution, manliness, self-reliance, and a capacity for self help” he could only have been thinking of one man. Well, maybe Davy Crockett too, but that’s another story. ■

Boone and Henry Russell had taken bullets in their hips and were immobilized. When the Indians rushed the camp, they pillaged the supplies and two of them, along with a Cherokee named Big Jim—who, in the past, had shared a campfire with Daniel and his doomed son—began to slice the helpless boys with their knives as they frantically attempted to protect themselves. Despite young James’ pleas to Big Jim, they proceeded to tear out the nails of the hands and feet of the boys. Finally the Indians tomahawked the lads then shot numerous arrows into their lifeless bodies to serve as a “calling card to warn the [next] trespasser of the consequences if caught.”

Later in the spring, a mournful Daniel Boone set out to visit the grave of his murdered child. A party of hunters came upon Daniel, describing him “dressed in deerskin colored black, his hair plaited and clubbed up” (parted in the middle and in a pony tail). Boone found the common grave of his son identifying him by his golden hair, then reburied him, covering him well to protect him from marauding wolves. Later in life, Boone would recall the experience with his family, saying in a soft, choked voice that “he felt worse than ever in his life.” A storm erupted after the burial, but Boone remained by the grave enduring the rain while he wept. He later set up a camp but was unable to sleep. He thought he heard horses so he quietly saddled his horse in the middle of the night and road away.

Boone settled Kentucky but his attempt at land speculation was a disaster. He continued to hunt, but as debts mounted and game became depleted, he again looked