

# CUMBERLAND GAP

PATHWAY TO A LAND OF MIST  
AND MYSTERY

Photography by Harold Jerrell

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park  
91 Bartlett Park Road  
Middlesboro, Kentucky 40965  
[www.nps.gov/cuga](http://www.nps.gov/cuga)

Published by Eastern National, copyright 2016

Eastern National promotes the public's understanding and support of America's national parks and other public trust partners by providing quality educational experiences, products, and services. Visit us at [www.eParks.com](http://www.eParks.com).



# CUMBERLAND GAP

PATHWAY TO A LAND OF  
MIST AND MYSTERY



*Photographs by Harold L. Jerrell*





*Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.*

*- John Muir*

## INTRODUCTION

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is a place we go to contemplate, relax, connect with nature, enjoy beautiful scenery, and make memories. It is a place that allows us to listen to the quiet, to think, to pay attention to the details of life, and to find renewal. Visits to special places like the Pinnacle Overlook, Hensley Settlement, and Gap Cave, a hike along the Wilderness Road, or perhaps a trip to the iconic White Rocks, provide incredible opportunities.

The value of this national park unit is brought home in a vivid way by photographer Harold Jerrell. The rugged mountains, historic landmarks, distant vistas, and a representative example of the flora and fauna of the region are reflected in the beautiful photographs.

As you travel through the following pages, I am confident you will enjoy a magnificent piece of our nation's landscape. I encourage you to explore the Cumberland Gap and enjoy the many breathtaking views, hike a trail, pitch a tent at one of its campgrounds, or visit one of its many historic sites. You will be richly blessed!

*- Mark H. Woods*

*Former Superintendent of Cumberland Gap NHP*





A reenactor depicts a pioneer.

## FOREWORD

Whenever I visit Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, I don't just think about the stunning natural beauty of the region or about the breathtaking views from the Pinnacle Overlook. I think about how walking into the Cumberland Gap is like walking into history itself—one of the most fascinating periods of Kentucky history.

As a major gateway to the West, hundreds of thousands of American pioneers traversed the Cumberland Gap in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many of them settled in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and put down roots that still hold fast today, several generations later. Some families can still tell the stories of enduring hardship through the mountains in search of a better life or a tract of land to call one's own.

Preserving this history is important. That's why I have consistently worked in the U.S. Senate to protect the park's Fern Lake and the surrounding watersheds. We've been successful in adding thousands of acres to the park, and efforts to expand this beautiful park will make it available for many future generations.

Another way we preserve history is through books like the one you now hold. Harold Jerrell has captured the essence of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park wonderfully with his photographs. I cannot thank the park enough for creating this book to showcase this beautiful region in Appalachia and Kentucky. It allows us the opportunity to reflect on the profound natural beauty of the park and leisurely explore its wilderness, no matter where we are.

The hundreds of thousands of visitors who come to Cumberland Gap each year prove one thing: this is a gem in America's national park system. Whether you are an expert on the Cumberland Gap or are just discovering it through this book, it's time to pay a visit to this Kentucky national park.

— Senator Mitch McConnell





*Fog shrouds the Cumberland Mountains.*

## **PATHWAY TO THE LAND OF MIST AND MYSTERY**

Look into the mist and discover the mysteries of Cumberland Gap. Although largely forgotten today, roaming bison historically migrated east of the Mississippi River into these Appalachian Mountains to graze and to search for salt licks. Along the way, they created a maze of pathways that have beckoned to animals and people for centuries.

The trails these bison left behind through the Cumberland Gap would be followed by the moccasin-clad warrior, the dreaming pioneer, the battling Civil War soldier, and the most recent of modern-day travelers. Come with us on a journey into the mist enshrouded history of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. With this book in hand you can still unravel the hidden mysteries of the past.





# ATHAWOMINEE, THE GREAT WARRIORS PATH

The moccasin-clad warrior left the first human footprint upon the path through the Cumberland Gap. For eons of time, Native warriors, as well as their bow-yielding hunters used this trail known as the Athawominee or “The Path of the Armed Ones.”



A reenactor portrays a Native American.

*They are of a middle stature, their limbs clean and straight, and scarcely any crocked or deformed person is to be found among them. In many parts of their bodies they prick in gunpowder in very pretty figures. They shave, or pluck the hair off their heads, except a patch about the crown, which is ornamented with beautiful feathers, beads, wampum, and such like baubles. Some of them will have a large feather through the cartilage of the nose; and those who can afford it, wear a collar of wampum, a silver breastplate, and bracelets, on the arms and wrists.*

- John Filson, 1784

One of the first white men to record finding the Cumberland Gap describes it as such:

*On the South side is a plain Indian Road. On the top of the Ridge are Laurel Trees marked with crosses, others blazed and several figures on them.... This Gap may be seen at a considerable distance, and there is no other, that I know of, except one about two miles to the North of it....*

- Dr. Thomas Walker, April 13, 1750



Cumberland Gap



## CLASH OF TWO CULTURES

Through time, the ancient and plain Indian road through the Gap would witness a new and foreign layer of footprints. Pioneers wearing buckle shoes and some, poor and barefoot, began to scorn the moccasin prints of the past. This brought about a great clash of two cultures as both Native Americans and new arrivals from Europe walked the same trail and vied for the land beyond the Cumberland Gap known as Kentucky.



*When we got near to the Gap at a lorril branch where the indean war road comes in the Kentucky road (this Indian Road crosses the Gap at this place from the Cherekeys to the shoney town). And at this branch where the indian road comes in we saw fresh Indian tracks.*

*- Daniel Trabue, spring 1778*

*The south side of Cumberland Gap covered in valley fog.*





*White Rocks, a pioneer landmark.*



## BOONE'S LONELY TRACE TO THE WILDERNESS ROAD

Daniel Boone blazed his lonely trace over the formidable Cumberland Mountains that are part of a mountain range that extends from Alabama to Maine. This wall-like range was a barrier, both physical and political, to westward expansion in the 18th century. However, the determined pioneer saw only the opportunity to achieve the dream of owning his own land and would risk all he held dear to obtain it.

*The Cumberland Gap is a natural gateway through the Cumberland Mountains...for hundreds of miles in either direction, and there is no other.*

*- Dr. Thomas Clark*





*Cumberland Gap as Daniel Boone would have seen it.*



The setting sun illuminates the gateway to the promised land of Kentucky, as it would have been seen by Boone and 300,000 pioneers that were part of this first westward migration. Many migrants on the Wilderness Road depended largely on the abundant game found in what they termed a “howling wilderness” to sustain them along the journey.





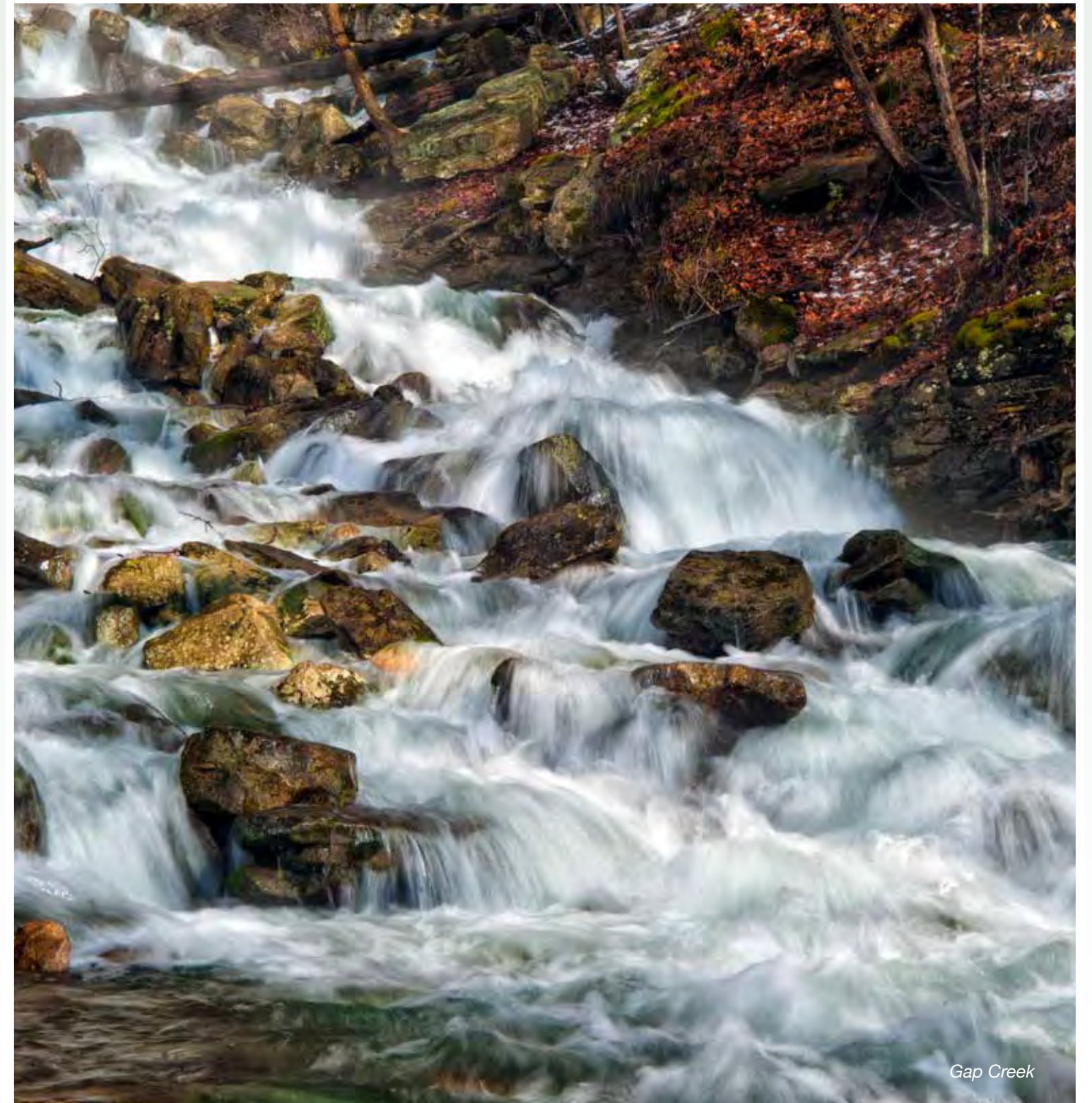
## THE PIONEER JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

*I cannot omit Noticing the many distressed families I passed in the Wilderness nor can any thing be more distressing to a man of feeling than to see women and children in the Month of December Traveling a Wilderness through Ice and Snow passing large rivers and creeks with out shoe or stocking and barely as many rags as covers their Nakedness, with out money or provisions except what the Wilderness affords.*

*- Moses Austin, a merchant whose emigration from Connecticut in 1796 took him through the Gap.*



Reenactors portray a pioneer family crossing Gap Creek.



Gap Creek



Cumberland Gap in winter.



## TRAIL OF DREAMS AND HARDSHIPS

*The effects of the severe winter was now sensibly felt, The earth for so long a time being covered with snow and the water entirely froze, the Cane almost all killed, the Hogs that were in the country suffered greatly being frozen to death in their beds, the deer likewise not being able to get either water or food were found dead in great numbers, tirkies dropt dead off their roosts and even the Buffaloes died starved to death, the vast increase of people, near three thousand that came into this country with the prodigious losses they had in their cattle and horses, on their journey, and the severity of the winter after they got here killing such numbers, all contributed to raise the necessaries of life to a most extravagant price.*

- Col. William Fleming, March 20, 1780

Weather wasn't the only hardship that those who followed Boone's Trace and the Wilderness Road had to contend with. A Cherokee Warrior promised much trouble for those settling beyond the mountains. "You have bought a fair land, but there is a cloud hanging over it. You will find its settlement dark and bloody," earning another name for Kentucky — The Dark and Bloody Ground.

- From *The Wilderness Road* by Robert L. Kincaid

Clouds envelope the Gap.







Powell Valley

## GATEWAY TO CIVIL WAR

Through the years, Kentucky would change from the pioneer promised land to a region positioned between the industrialization of the North and the plantation economy of the South. During the Civil War, both the United States of America and the Confederate States of America coveted the Gap. The North could base its operations of attack into the heart of the South and its railway system from this famous mountain doorway, and the South sought the Gap to close the door against Northern incursion.

*The view from the top-most peak above the Gap is magnificent. Standing as I did at one point, with field glass in hand, one can see far into the winding valleys of three states. The distant mountain ranges veiled in mist: the nearer hills and the valleys immediately below, bathed as they were, in a flood of sunlight; with the sylvan-fringed streams coiling serpent-like round the cleared fields; all made a picture lovely to look at, and which needed but to be seen to have it photographed on the memory at once and forever. The Virginia portion of the valley is the most highly cultivated.*

*- Dr. B. W. Stevenson, 22nd Kentucky Volunteer Infantry*



The mountain was first fortified by Confederate Gen. Felix Zollicoffer, who began building fortifications on the face of Cumberland Mountain. This fort, first known as Fort Pitt by the South, would be changed to Fort Lyon during occupation by the North. Northern occupation would bring more fortifications to the southern side of the mountain, creating a vast array of forts, trenches, and campsites. Artillery would be the hero and figured heavily in the defense of the mountain nicknamed “An American Rock of Gibraltar.”

*And now at eight and a half p.m., our cannon and wagon trains are rumbling down the mountain side into the valley, sending dismay and terror into the hearts of conspirators and traitors.*

*- Dr. B. G. Stevens, Surgeon 22nd Kentucky Volunteer Infantry, June 11th, 1862*



Fort McCook



Sunrise from the Pinnacle.



*We are at the Roughest place in the World Camped on the mountain at the Gap. It is so cold that I can Scarcely write this evening.... We are building forts breastworks &c of every Sort Going to Stick the mountain full of Canons to prevent the Lincolnites from crossing. We have one hundred at work every day, building fortifications. I have my tent up on the side of the mountain plenty of Straw on the floor plenty of Cover to keep me warm at night.... We are all Camped here around the corner of three State Tenn. Kentuck & Virginia.*

*- Dr. U. G. Owen to Laura (Mrs. U. G. Owen), October 8, 1861*



Civil War road and ruins.



Fort Lyon

*The attack began on the Harlan Road on the new works which we have recently built. The infantry were soon repulsed and from that time to sunset, it was an artillery fight. The enemy retreated during the night. It was quite a nice little battle, and was very inspiring to our men. It showed the strength of the Gap that our works are well built. Had it not been for the new works recently constructed on the mountaintop this place would have been easily taken. Our men all behaved well. I believe they would have whipped seven thousand.*

*- Col. James Rains, 1861*



Civil War reenactors

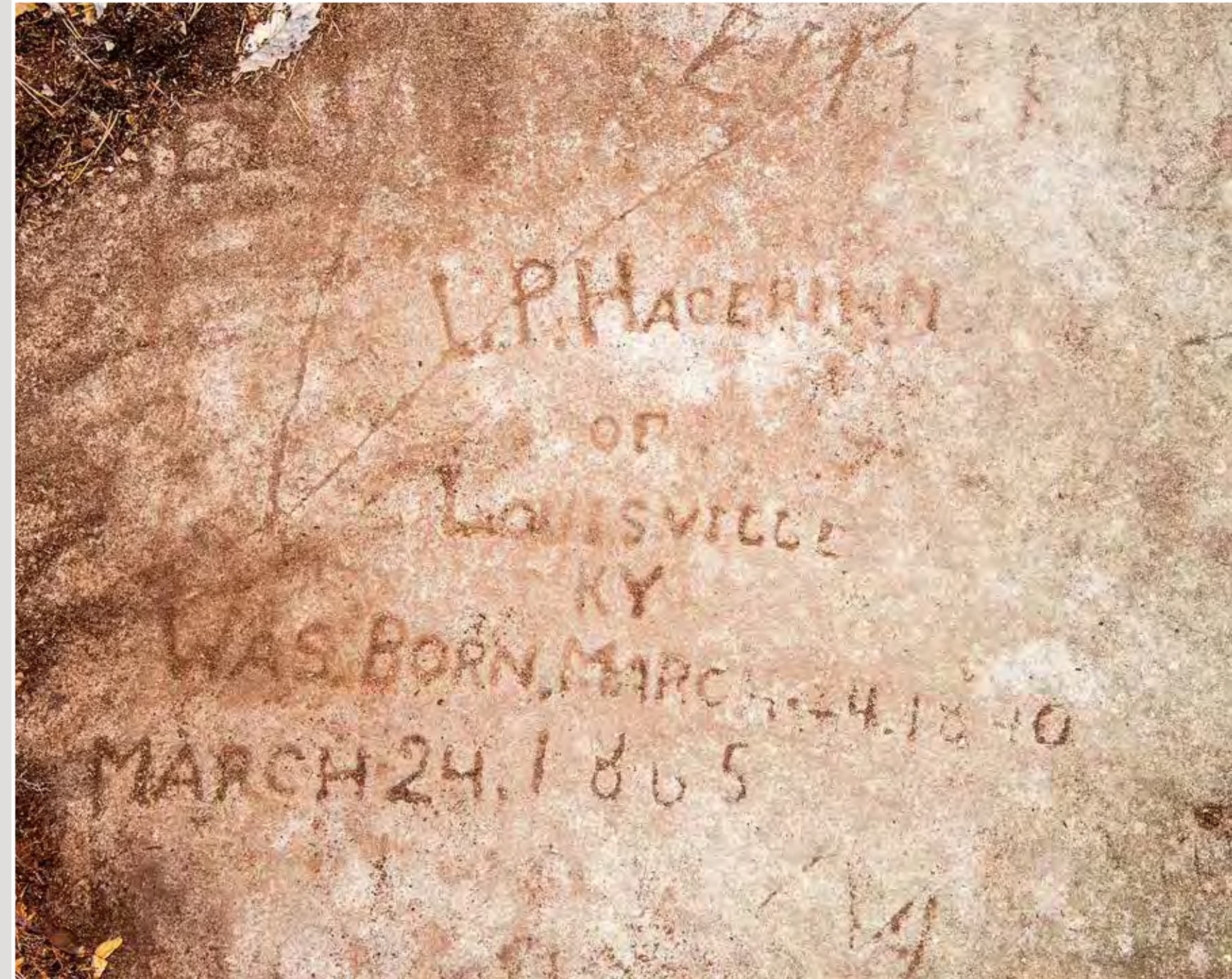


*Early-morning fog flows through Cumberland Gap.*

The Gap would exchange hands several times and would be occupied by the North and South twice each. Many times, early-morning fog covers the deep reaches and recesses of the surrounding valleys and the Gap in the Cumberland Mountain. This phenomenon, which can still be seen today, created much fear in the hearts of soldiers as opposing forces could easily attack the mountain beneath the beautiful and potentially deadly cloud cover.



Confederate officer Lt. William McEntire's name is carved in the lower portion of this rock below. Lieutenant McEntire was captured at Cumberland Gap and was a prisoner of war for 18 months. Upon his release, he returned to his home in Atlanta only to discover that his wife and children had been killed by Sherman's "march to the sea." Such was his bitterness toward the Union before he passed away, he asked his young grandson to return to the Cumberland Gap 100 years to the day after the surrender (September 9, 1863), stand at Fort Pitt and curse the Yankees for five minutes. The solemn promise was made. George McEntire, the grandson, drove alone cross-country from Texas in 1963 to keep the promise made 46 years previously to his dying grandfather.





*Fenced lane at Hensley Settlement.*



## ON THE TRAIL OF AN APPALACHIAN PEOPLE



*A living history demonstration of butter churning at Hensley Settlement.*

Some early pioneers stopped along the trail and settled in the rugged Cumberland Mountains. The Appalachian culture today had its beginnings in this hardy pioneer stock. The Hensley and Gibbons families continued many time-honored pioneer traditions when they established the Hensley Settlement in 1903.



*Aerial view of Hensley Settlement on Brush Mountain.*



*I knowed about the year they moved there. I lived up in this holler here where you start up the mountain at that time. I can remember they brought their things, they come from Martin's Fork. And they brought their things right to my father's house there in front and unloaded it from wagons. They had to use little step stoves, four caps, cooking stoves that they cooked on cast. And they hauled it from there to that mountain with a sled and mules. And the four that I can remember was Al Hensley, Willie Gibbons, Sherman Hensley, and Bert Hensley. Four of em.*

*- Hillary Wilder*

*That's one of the things that they really took pride in, is their bonnets. Especially the ones that they wore on Sunday. And they had special bonnets that they wore on Sunday. The apron you wore for Sunday wasn't the apron that you wore to cook in either. It was a special apron.*  
*- Dorothy Muncey, Willie Gibbons' granddaughter.*

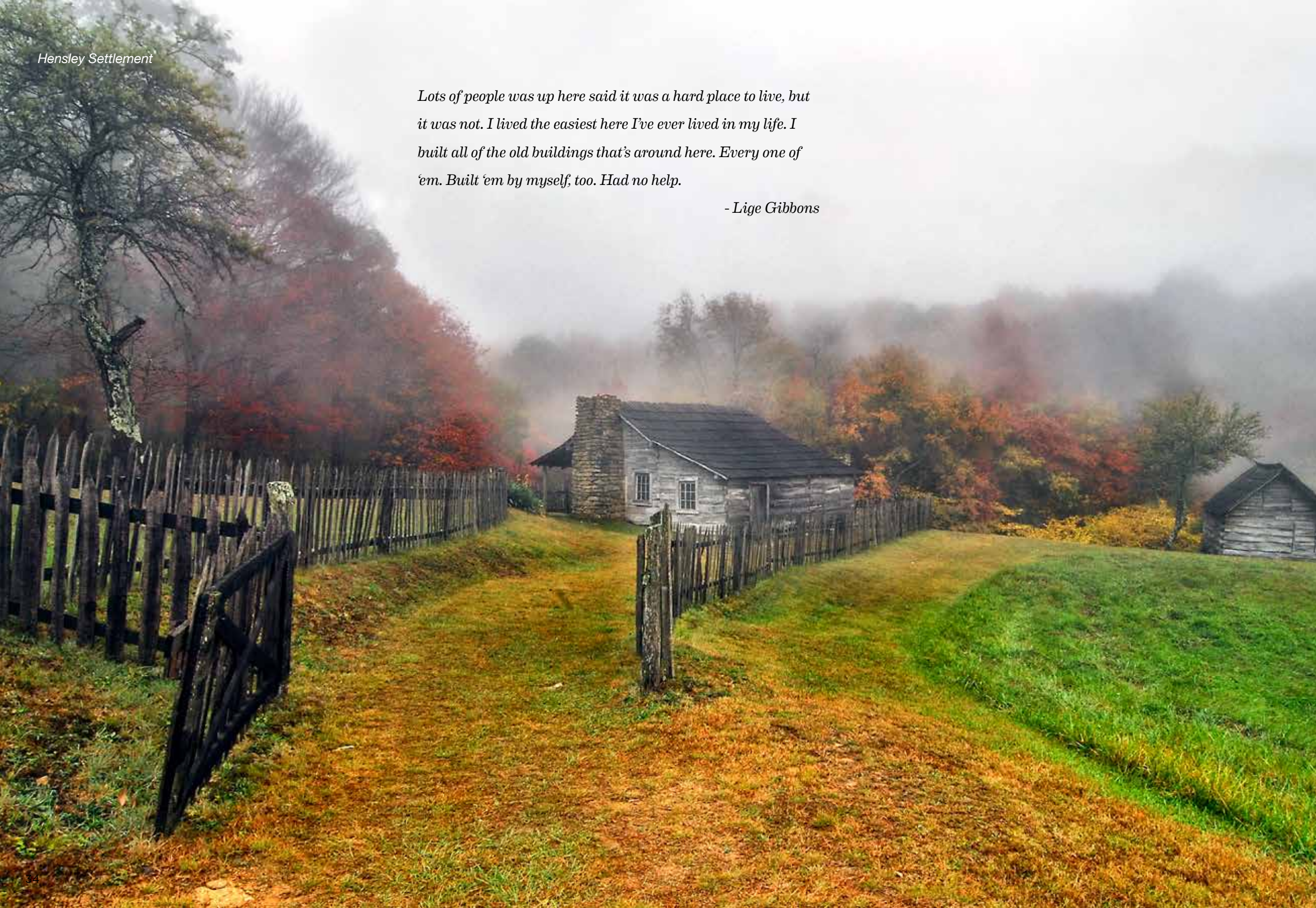


*Reenactors portray life at Hensley Settlement.*



*Lots of people was up here said it was a hard place to live, but  
it was not. I lived the easiest here I've ever lived in my life. I  
built all of the old buildings that's around here. Every one of  
'em. Built 'em by myself, too. Had no help.*

*- Lige Gibbons*



*One window's all it was in the house, so it  
wasn't hard to keep curtains for one window.  
Now that was their plan of building houses—  
one window.*

*- Stella Callahan Hensley*





*Hensley Settlement in early summer.*

*The best time to lay rail fencing was on the old of the moon. They claimed you lay 'em on the new of the moon, they'd go down to the ground. The bottom rail, in a year or two, would be plumb down in the ground.*

*- Jess Gibbons*



*Fall color at Hensley Settlement.*





Families at Hensley Settlement grew hay, grain in the form of corn, vegetables such as turnips and cabbage, and several now mysterious varieties of apples on the mountain. Corn was an important crop and was eaten as roasting ears, dried and ground into meal and animal feed, and also distilled into moonshine.

Brush Mountain School was established in 1907. For 40 years, the settlement children attended eight grades of school in the one room. The school year spanned from July, when the crops were in, to January when the weather on the mountain made walking to school treacherous.

*When I was in school, the old stove set near the center of the building. And we school kids, you know, they'd let us have one lesson...then we'd have to jump out and saw the wood. That's the way we kept the fire going.*

*- Wallace Hensley*



*Brush Mountain School*





*The barn*

Nine of Sherman and Nicey Ann Hensley's 19 children are buried in the Hensley Settlement Cemetery. Many of these died in infancy and early childhood.

*I had two sisters that died with TB. And my mother died with double pneumonia fever, as far as I know. Then I had some smaller infant brothers and sisters that died. I guess, about as good a thing as I can say just from colds, stuff like that.*

*- Herbert Hensley*



*Hensley Settlement cemetery*



*Handmade corn-shuck dolls*





View looking southeast from Pinnacle Overlook. (GPS 36° 36' 6.84" N 83° 38' 6.7194" W)

## YOUR PATHWAY TO ADVENTURE ALONG ROADS LESS TRAVELED

*The mountains are calling and I must go.*

*- John Muir*

Today, visitors to the park have opportunities to see a wide diversity of common and rare plant and animal species—over 1,200 different species. Recent scientific work has documented 968 tree and plant species in the park, including the beautiful spring-blooming redbud tree found along many park roads.



*Redbuds bloom along the road.*





On October 18, 1996, the march of history came to a grinding halt, and the hands of the clock started slowly turning backwards to a time when it all began with the restoration of the original trails through the now “historic” Cumberland Gap. Today, the Cumberland Gap Tunnels accommodate the thousands of travelers in their modern comings and goings and frees the Gap itself to tell of the journey of those who came before us. Experience the road less traveled on your journey into the past as you find these points along your trail of adventure.



*South portal of tunnels at Cumberland Gap. (GPS 36° 38' 4.29" N 83° 25' 3.90" W)*





Left: A section of the Wilderness Road that was followed by 300,000 settlers between 1775 and 1810. (GPS 36° 22' 0.21" N 83° 40' 44.42" W)



Above: Indian Rock, along the Wilderness Road, has witnessed centuries of change. It also served as a hiding place for warriors and highwaymen waiting to ambush unsuspecting travelers.

(GPS 36° 36' 19.44" N 83° 40' 33.60" W)





Shillalah Falls (GPS 36° 39' 26.99" N 83° 35' 0.39 W)

*Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike.*

*- John Muir*

The iron furnace, built in 1819, utilized iron ore, limestone, and charcoal made from timber to make iron. The furnace produced about 43 pigs (bars) daily weighing 150 pounds each. It employed 300 men working 12 hours a day, six days a week. (GPS 36° 36' 5.17" N 83° 40' 5.40" W)





The White Rocks are located in Powell Valley, approximately 10 miles east of Cumberland Gap in Virginia. Natural features like these served as unmistakable trail landmarks for pioneers in their westward migration. Visitors to this region can experience the past by traveling the reestablished Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail ([danielboonetrail.com](http://danielboonetrail.com)) and visiting the Block House at Natural Tunnel State Park and Martin's Station at Wilderness Road State Park.



GPS 36° 40' 3.80" N 83° 22' 0.38" W



*A frosty October morning at Finley Hensley's barn at Hensley Settlement.*





Civil War-era cannon stands guard at the Gap.

Visit Fort McCook and Fort Lyon accessed via the Pinnacle Road or hiking trails (ask for a hiking and backpacking map at the visitor center). Fort McCook (GPS 36° 36’ 31.02” N 83° 40’ 28.59” W)

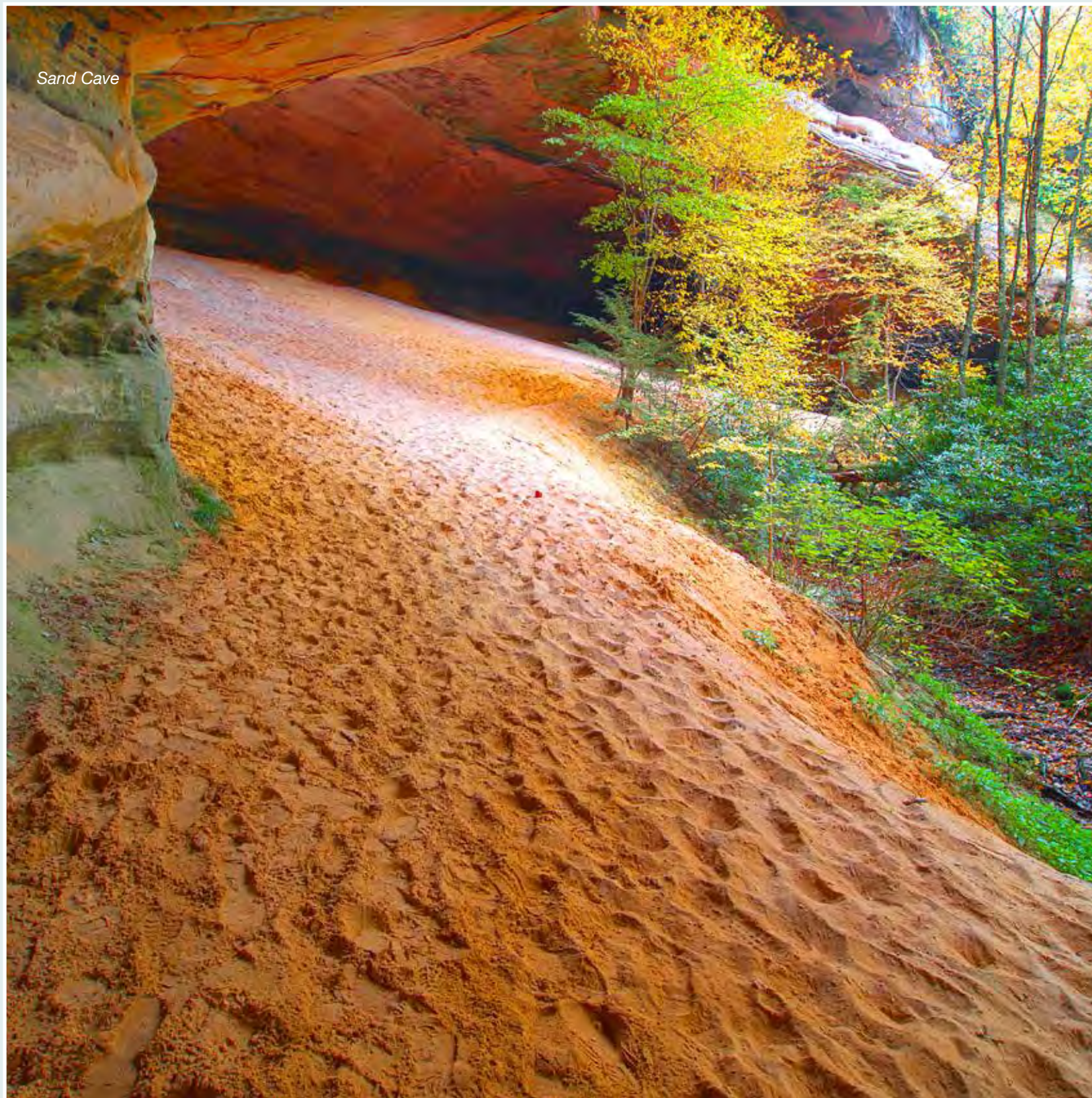


Cleopatra's Pool in Gap Cave.

*We are having great excitement here at this time over a cave which has been recently discovered. The entrance to it is right above our house. Hundreds visit it daily. General Smith and Staff visited it last week. I have been in today. It is indeed grand, and beautiful. The stalactite formations surpass anything of the kind I ever saw. All conceivable shapes of men and animals and vegetables are distinctly to be seen. There are towers and statues, pools of clear water, beautiful arches, and splendid chambers. Some of the rooms are said to surpass those of the Mammoth Cave. It is perhaps the most beautiful cave in the world.*

*- Col. James E. Rains*





*Sand Cave*

Caves within the park are full of creatures specifically adapted to surviving in the dark and damp corridors of the subterranean world, from crickets and spiders that blanket the ceilings of deep, underground rooms, to the bright orange cave salamanders that dwell near cave entrances. These unique organisms are all part of a delicate ecosystem that thrive in the harsh environment. Gap Cave has six different bat species that hibernate along its limestone passages. At Sand Cave, early visitors found an earthly kaleidoscope made of numerous colors of sand.

*Sand Cave* (GPS 36° 40' 8.39" N 83° 27' 25.55" W)



Fern Lake



*I see my path but I don't know where it leads. Not knowing where I am going is what inspires me to travel it.*

*- Rosalia de Castro*

Fourteen thousand acres of the park are managed as wilderness and accessible to the public by almost 85 miles of trails into the world of nature...definitely the road less traveled.



## ART IN NATURE

*Keep your love of nature, for that is the true way to understand art more and more.*

*- Vincent van Gogh*



*Wild geranium*



*Maidenhair fern*



*Mushroom*

*People from a planet without flowers would think we must be mad with joy the whole time to have such things about us.*

*- Iris Murdoch*



*St. Andrew's Cross*





*Pink mountain laurel*



*Bumblebee and coneflower.*



*Yellow fringed orchid*





*Monarch butterfly*



*Barred owl*

*Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life.*

*- Rachel Carson*

*Silence of the heart is necessary so you can hear God everywhere - in the closing of a door, in the person who needs you, in the birds that sing, in the flowers, in the animals.*

*- Mother Teresa*



*Promethea moth*



*Waterfall*



*There is nothing in which the birds differ more  
from man than the way in which they can guild  
and yet leave a landscape as it was before.*  
- Robert Lynd



*Cardinal*



*Blue jay*

*Northern flicker*



*Eastern Bluebird*







*White-tailed deer*



*Black bear*



*Red fox*



*Bull elk*

*Generally speaking a howling wilderness does not howl: It is the imagination of the traveler that does the howling.*

*- Henry David Thoreau*

*Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant.*

*- Henry David Thoreau*





This is not the end of the trail but the beginning. Your journey into the mist of the mountains awaits.  
It's your time to discover this land of mystery known as the Cumberland Gap.

*The question is not what you look at but what you see.*  
- Henry David Thoreau

Thanks to Pam Eddy and the interpretive staff at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

---

Harold L. Jerrell is a retired agriculture extension agent who spent most of his vacation time traveling across the United States with his family visiting national and state parks. His images have been used for numerous magazine and book covers, tourism brochures, and state and federal websites.



*Photo by John Snell*