



KICKAPOO TRACE MUZZLELOADERS

In the early 1800s, hunters and trappers on the American frontier would gather their trade goods and travel to a rendezvous. Members love the experience to share with everyone the mountain man era of life. Traders dress in the fashion of the Mountain Men, what club members refer to as period attire. Visitors could purchase or trade black powder firearms, primitive camping equipment, period attire and a wide range of other items. It was a gathering of black powder enthusiasts getting together and setting up events and booths.

The Kickapoo Trace Muzzleloaders(KTM) club was started in the 1970's by a group of people who wanted to capture the spirit of the American mountain man from 200 years before. The driving force of the mountain men was their need for independence, and their willingness to suffer tremendous hardships to achieve it. They would spend months or years away from what they called home, with only provisions they could carry or gather as needed, trapping for furs that were sellable at rendezvous. Home to them was a reasonably "permanent" structure with walls, a roof and a bed, and served as a place of relative safety, and gave them sometime to recover from the long hunting trips. Most often their only contact with other whitemen was at the annual rendezvous sponsored by the large trading companies for the purpose of buying the furs. At the rendezvous, the mountain men would sell their furs and buy supplies for the next trapping season. Rendezvous' were known to be lively, joyous places, where all were allowed - free trappers, Indians, native trapper wives and children, travelers and later on, even tourists who would venture from even as far as Europe to observe the festivities. James Beckwourth describes: "Mirth, songs, dancing, shouting, trading, running, jumping, singing, racing, target-shooting, yarns, frolic, with all sorts of extravagances that white men or Indians could invent."



Most often the mountain men left the rendezvous with only their new supplies since they lost most of their money gambling, drinking, or splurging on other pleasures.

Representing the North West Company, Donald Mackenzie, a Scottish-Canadian explorer and fur trader, held one of the first rendezvous in the Boise River Valley in 1819. This first rendezvous of white traders and trappers in the Rocky



Mountains was continued starting in July 1825, when a site was occupied just north of McKinnon, Wyoming, along the Henrys Fork River. The days of the rendezvous lasted only another brief 15 years, until the last rendezvous at Daniel, Wyoming in 1840. But, perhaps no other time in American history captures the imagination as much as that of the Mountain Man Era.

Rendezvous are still celebrated as gatherings of like-minded individuals or clubs in many walks of life. The fur trading rendezvous are celebrated by traditional black-powder rifle clubs all over the US and Canada. These gatherings range from small gatherings sponsored by local clubs to large gatherings like the Pacific Primitive Rendezvous and others. These gatherings include much of the same activities of the originals, centering on the shooting of muzzle-loaded rifles, trade guns and shotguns, the throwing of knives and tomahawks and primitive archery, as well as cooking, dancing, singing, the telling of tall tales and of past rendezvous. Personas taken on by participants include trappers, traders, housewives, Native Americans, frontiersmen, free-trappers and many others.



The people who started the Kickapoo Trace Muzzleloaders saw the Mountain Men as American heroes. Their primary goal was to gather with like-minded individuals, shoot black powder fire arms whenever possible, and replicate the skills of mountain men, such as shooting, tomahawk throwing, knife throwing, and fire starting with flint and steel. The club members make a lot of their clothing, possibles bags, shooting bags, powder horns, and even their guns. The activities of the Kickapoo Trace Muzzleloaders today continue the tradition of carrying on and sharing the skills of the mountain men with anyone interested. In addition to those skills, we also demonstrate dutch oven cooking, blacksmithing, and trapping. Although all the mountain men had some skill level with blacksmithing, the weight of the equipment prevented them from practicing their skills while on the long hunt. If they were fortunate enough to have a pack horse on their long hunts, they may have carried equipment for the dutch oven cooking, and better sleeping arrangements than the usual bedroll. The pack horse would also have made it easier to transport the furs to the rendezvous for sale.

If you walk into any modern day re-enactment of the rendezvous, such as one of the KTM sponsored events, with