

Kentucky's Elk Country

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The melodic sound of mountain music fills the air. Gentlemen nod politely as a newcomer unpacks his banjo and joins the jam session. Nearby, several women tap their toes to the music while crafting cornhusk dolls. Another group nimbly stitches a colorful patchwork quilt.

Visitors to Elk Country Corridor can experience the distinctive cultural heritage that stretches back to the time when Daniel Boone and the first pioneers crossed mountains.

The region's early settlers carefully packed precious possessions and necessary provisions before leaving their homes in Virginia, North Carolina or Tennessee. The arduous trek into the mountainous region of Southeastern Kentucky would stretch their resources to the limit. Although every square inch of storage space was needed, the pioneers made room in their wagons for mandolins, guitars, dulcimers and other stringed instruments.

Music was an important part of their European heritage. Much like their ancestors who carried instruments across the ocean, the Kentucky pioneers enjoyed the comfort of hearing a familiar song being strummed while on the long journey to unfamiliar territory.

The musicians who migrated to Southeast Kentucky are credited with giving birth to bluegrass and country music. Some of our nation's most talented musicians are descended from the early settlers of Elk Country Corridor. A portion of Country Music Highway (US Route 23) runs through the area and pays tribute to local legends Hylo Brown, Jeanne Ritchie and the Sexton Family.

Music remains an important part of life in the region and receives national attention. A recent issue of *National Geographic Magazine* featured the unique music scene that has evolved in Whitesburg where seasoned musicians teach students to play traditional instruments in an after school program called "Passing the Pick and Bow." Many of the students aspire to play in bluegrass or country bands. Others hope to incorporate the instruments in newer genres of music. Visitors to the area can enjoy offerings as diverse as traditional bluegrass and Christian punk rock. The article recognizes the contribution of Appalshop to the region's musical scene. Along with a vast collection of recorded Appalachian music, Appalshop also houses a recording studio and radio station. Live concerts are staged at its facility in Whitesburg and other venues throughout the Appalachian region.

Along with musical instruments, pioneers often transported spinning wheels and looms to the new region. The items were a vital necessity in the isolated region where households

had to be self-sustaining. Along with clothing, the spinning wheels and looms were needed to create other items including quilts and rugs. The pioneers often made their own furniture, musical instruments, candles, pottery, baskets, dolls, wooden toys and other items. Generations later, area men and women continue the tradition of creating genuine mountain craft items. Their handiwork enjoys a worldwide reputation for quality, originality and beauty.

Products made by Elk Country Corridor's skilled craftspeople are displayed and sold in a variety of outlets throughout the region. Visitors will find an amazing range of quality Appalachian crafts offered including woven rugs, baskets, quilts, candles, dulcimers, pottery and furniture.

Mountain craft heritage is also celebrated at a variety of festivals and events throughout the region. Visitors are invited to watch as skilled hands create a vibrant quilt, fine piece of furniture, braided rug, colorful birdhouse, wooden toy or other traditional craft items.

Cultural heritage offerings in the Elk Country Corridor include, but are not limited to:

Appalshop Center (606-633-0108), located in downtown Whitesburg, is a creative media center focusing on the history, culture and social issues of the Appalachian region. Operations include June Appal Recordings, Roadside Theater, Headwaters Television, WMMT-FM Radio, Appalshop Films, and an art gallery. Since its beginning in 1969, Appalshop has gained a reputation for making powerful documentaries about folk-culture figures and social activism in Appalachia. Visitors can watch many of the videos, enjoy live music by local musicians and tour the facility. Appalshop sponsors concerts and other live performances at its location in Whitesburg and at venues throughout Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

The Greater Hazard Area Arts Council and Performing Arts Series (606-436-5721) offers regional and national performances in music, drama and dance. Performances are held in the Forum at the Hal Rogers Center on Hwy 15, south of Hazard and in the First Federal Center at Hazard Community & Technical College. The series runs during the fall and spring semesters.

Seco Company Store & Winery (606-855-7968) is located on Hwy. 805 at Seco. The restored commissary serves as a gathering place for people to share the musical and artistic heritage of the Southeastern Kentucky coal town. Displays include dulcimers, carvings, quilts, and other regional crafts. The property also houses 12 bed & breakfast units and the Highlands Winery.

Country Music Highway National Scenic Byway (877-868-7735) begins in Whitesburg. A section of Highway 23 was renamed to honor the many entertainers who grew up in the area including Hylo Brown, Billy Ray Cyrus, Crystal Gayle, Tom T. Hall,

the Judds, Patty Loveless, Loretta Lynn, Jeanne Ritcher, the Sexton Family, Ricky Skaggs and Dwight Yokum.

Kentucky School of Craft (606-785-1055) in downtown Hindman is a professional school affiliated with Hazard Community College. The facility offers training in a variety of high quality media including clay, wood, jewelry/metals, blacksmithing and fiber. Tours of the facility can be arranged.

Kentucky Appalachian Artisan Center (606-785-9855), located in downtown Hindman, is a regional marketing and support system for local artists. The Center is dedicated to building an artisan-based economic sector in Southeastern Kentucky that will include musicians, storytellers, writers, craft makers and others who carry on the cultural traditions of the Appalachian region. The center is open to the public and offers a retail section, art exhibits and craft demonstrations.

Red Bird Mission Crafts (606-598-2709), located on Rte. 66 in Beverly, provides economic opportunity for artisans in the area. Offerings include dulcimers, hickory bark furniture, baskets, birdhouses, handmade beeswax candles, hand-woven rugs, coal product figurines, dolls, wooden toys, Christmas ornaments, pottery, corn-shuck flowers and more.

Morris Fork Crafts (606-666-5445) is located in rural Breathitt Co. off Hwy 28. Visitors will be impressed by the wide variety of traditional Appalachian items. Everything is handmade by the 80 members of this local craft co-op. Items available include quilts, wood crafts, baskets and a variety of other fine crafts.

Marie Stewart Crafts (606-785-5475) preserves the rich traditions of area craftsmanship. The co-op features only juried items to ensure the highest quality. Craft demonstrations are provided seasonally.

The Cozy Corner (606-633-9637) is located in downtown Whitesburg. Housed in an historic building, circa 1911, the store offers handmade local quilts, books on Appalachia, regional folk art, and local crafts.

Valley of the Wind (606-633-8652) showcases the paintings of Sharman, Jeff and Evan Chapman-Crane. Subject matter including mountain people, places and endangered animals are presented in styles ranging from classic to contemporary. The studio is housed in a 1920-era farmhouse located between Pine and Black Mountains on Highway 806 near Eolia.

Pine Mountain/Letcher County Craft Co-op (606-633-0185), located on Highway 119 near Whitesburg, features the works of 40 local craftspeople. Offerings include

handmade birdhouses, cane-bottom chairs, soft sculpture dolls and hand-painted gourds.
Craft demonstrations are presented.