

SOUTHERN I-75 CORRIDOR KENTUCKY FACT SHEET

Heritage Tourism

The Southern I-75 Corridor roots of Kentucky's heritage run deep—dating back over 300 years when the English first sent scouts over the Appalachian Mountains in the 1670s to survey the new frontier. The Cumberland Gap, named by English explorer Thomas Walker in 1750, opened the way for pioneers such as Daniel Boone to explore the inner lands of Kentucky. From the late 1700s to the early 1800s, over 300,000 settlers followed the Wilderness Road from the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky, many passing by the present-day town of London in Laurel County.

Today, the way is open for travelers wanting to explore the rich history of the region. The Southern I-75 Corridor of Kentucky is a destination to view and appreciate the accomplishments of early settlers, marvel in the time-tempered skills of Appalachian craftsmen or even enjoy an old-fashioned country song. Southeast Kentucky has a timeline that spans from famous colonials to a certain famous colonel. The cultures and traditions that weave the fabric of the region's past are as varied as the cloth on a colorful quilt, and that's the beauty of its heritage.

Some of the earliest echoes from the past along the Southern I-75 Corridor can be found at the Mountain Life Museum located in the Levi Jackson Wilderness Road State Park in Laurel County. Here, the reproduction of a pioneer settlement blends authentic 19th century structures with replica buildings to demonstrate the Scots-Irish pioneer culture in early Kentucky. The park is an appropriate setting because two old frontier roads, the Wilderness Road and Boone's Trace (which led to Fort Boonesborough), pass through its borders, and visitors can still see remnants of both historically important trails.

More of the past comes alive at Levi Jackson Wilderness Road State Park in the form of McHarque's Mill, a working reproduction of a mill that dates back to the mid-1800s. With power provided by the waters of the Little Laurel River, the mill grinds out bags of flour the old-fashioned way. In addition, on the grounds around the mill is the largest collection of millstones in the country.

In Rockcastle County, the pioneer past is bittersweet, as in the BitterSweet Cabin Museum located at Renfro Valley Entertainment Center. "BitterSweet" not only refers to a plant native to the area but also to the "bitter" hardships endured by early settlers coupled with the "sweet" memories of simpler times. At the Museum, artifacts dating back to the 1700s are housed in authentic log cabins to create a village frozen in time. In addition, skilled craftsmen such as wood wrights, blacksmiths and broom makers help bring the past back to life with on-site demonstrations.

Within walking distance of the BitterSweet Cabin Museum, days gone by are back with the sounds of old-time mountain music—a style of country music that is never bitter and certainly always sweet. Renfro Valley Entertainment Center has a mountain music tradition dating back to 1939 with the first national radio broadcast of the "Renfro Valley Barn Dance." The Center showcases traditional mountain country music and attracts nationally known acts. It is also home to the Kentucky Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

More regional creativity can be found at Berea College, where arts and crafts are an important part in the curriculum. Founded by abolitionists in 1855, this liberal arts institution played a prominent role in the late 1800s in revitalizing the importance of Appalachian arts and crafts. The total revitalization movement takes in a broader scope, of course, but for a proper appreciation of Kentucky mountain craft heritage as well as regional contemporary arts, Berea College is a good place to start.

As peaceful as this part of the Kentucky Highlands is, it couldn't escape conflict in the Civil War. On October 21, 1861, the first battle between regular troops on Kentucky soil was fought in Laurel County. The

Battle of Camp Wildcat, as it was known, is still remembered each year on Wildcat Mountain (now part of the Daniel Boone National Forest) in mid-October with reenactments.

There were many Kentucky colonels in the Civil War, but none were as famous as a local colonel from a more modern era who is honored in the southern Laurel County town of Corbin. This is the location of the Harland Sanders Café and Museum, which is the site of Colonel Sander's first restaurant and the birthplace of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Another tribute to the Colonel's achievements, The World Chicken Festival is held each year in September in downtown London, the seat of Laurel County.

More memories from the past can be found at the Cumberland Museum in Williamsburg. This delightfully eclectic assortment of collections managed by Cumberland College includes stamps, coins, Christmas dolls, arrowheads, nutcrackers and hundreds of taxidermy specimens. In addition, a museum within this museum, the Carl Williams Cross Museum, houses one of the largest collections of crosses and crucifixes in the world, with over 7000 items on hand.

Visitors will find, in this special part of Kentucky, the past is still part of the present. Kentuckians in this region not only remember what once was, but they revere it. Whether reenacted, put on display in a museum, handmade in the smooth lines of a piece of pottery or floated on the fading notes of a song, Kentucky's heritage is alive and well along the Southern I-75 Corridor.

DESTINATIONS:

- Cumberland Museum, Williamsburg: This museum is housed in the Cumberland Inn, which is run by Cumberland College. 859/539-3100; www.cumberlandinn.com
- Carl Williams Cross Museum, Williamsburg: This large collection of crosses and crucifixes is part of the Cumberland Museum. 859/539-3100; www.cumberlandinn.com
- Berea College, Berea: This liberal arts institution that was founded in 1855 is one of the centers of Kentucky's revitalized Appalachian arts and crafts movement. 859/985-3018; www.berea.edu
- Renfro Valley Entertainment Center, Renfro Valley: "Kentucky's Country Music Capital" featuring weekly shows, festivals and special events. 1-800-765-7464, www.renfrovalley.com
- Kentucky Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Renfro Valley: A state-of-the-art facility dedicated to the legends of Kentucky country music. 1-877-356-3263; www.kentuckymusicmuseum.com
- Mountain Life Museum, Levi Jackson Wilderness Road State Park: This museum features pioneer relics and American Native artifacts. 606/878-8000; www.levijacksonstatepark.com
- McHargue's Mill, Levi Jackson Wilderness Road State Park: A working mill powered by the waters of the Little Laurel River. 606/878-8000; www.levijacksonstatepark.com
- Camp Wildcat, London: Located on Wildcat Mountain, it is the site of one of the first Civil War battles in Kentucky. 606/964-4163
- BitterSweet Cabin Museum, Mt. Vernon: An authentic log cabin village located at the Renfro Valley Entertainment Center that captures the historical charm of Appalachia and features artifacts dating back to the 1700s. 1-800-252-6685; www.rockcastlelourism.com
- Laurel County Historical Society Library, London: A regional and genealogical center for research featuring family histories, marriage and death records, and census records. 606/864-0607; www.laurelcountyhistoricalsociety.org
- Colonel Harland Sanders Café and Museum, Corbin: The original 1940 restaurant, complete with artifacts and memorabilia, of Colonel Sanders, the man who started the national chain of Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants. 606/528-2163; www.kfc.com

FESTIVALS:

- Camp Wildcat Enactment, London, mid-October: Civil War enactment and encampment on Wildcat Mountain, featuring participants in period dress displaying and firing period artillery pieces. 606/964-4163
- Native American Indian Festival, London, mid-October: A celebration of the culture and heritage of area Indian tribes. 1-800-348-0095; www.laurelkytourism.com
- Discovery Festival, Renfro Valley, early June: A fun event to honor and learn about the lifestyles of colonial ancestors, featuring working artisans and craftsmen as well as living history presenters. 1-800-252-6685; rockcastle tourism.com
- Appalachian Harvest Festival, Renfro Valley, early October: Celebrating the harvest the old-fashioned way with a mule-drawn press, steam engine show, covered wagons, blacksmithing, antique farm machinery and mountain music. 1-800-765-7464; www.renfrovalley.com
- Old Fashioned Trading Days, Williamsburg, early September: Turn back the hands of time on the city's Courthouse Square. 606/549-2285
- The World Chicken Festival, London, last full weekend in September: This egg-cellent event is a major Southeast attraction, with over 200,000 people attending each year. 1-800-348-0095; www.chickenfestival.com.