

Build a Shelter!

Mountain men stayed in a large variety of shelters while trapping beavers in the spring and fall. Wedge tents, wall tents, and other canvas tents are all mentioned in journals. However, most men would simply sleep under the stars on top of bison skins, hang a canvas tarp from a tree, or construct a lean-to. They would build much stronger shelters (like tipis, lodges, and forts) during the long winters.

Results: If the mountain man chose “shelter building” as a skill, they make a much better shelter than the other men.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Build a Shelter!

"A single buffalo robe folded double and spread upon the ground, with a rock, or knoll, or some like substitute for a pillow, furnishes the sole base-work upon which the sleeper reclines, and enveloped in an additional blanket or robe, contentedly enjoys his rest."

Rufus B Sage, 1846

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Relax!

Mountain men enjoyed what little down time they had with a variety of fun activities. Dice games, card games, and board games (like chess and checkers) were all common. Music was played from instruments like the jaw harp. Reading and storytelling were both very popular, too. These pastimes became much more important during the long, cold winters.

Results: The mountain men can choose which pastimes they want to participate in.

Show: Playing Cards, Jaw Harp, Wooden Dice, & Water Canteen

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Relax!

"We all had snug lodges made of dressed Buffaloe skins in the center of which we built a fire and generally comprised about six men to the lodge. The long winter evenings were passed away by collecting in some of the most spacious lodges and entering into debates, arguments or spinning long yarns until midnight in perfect good humor and I . . . cheerfully confess that I have derived no little benefit from the frequent arguments and debates held in what we termed The Rocky Mountain College"

Warren Ferris, 1830

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Lice Infestation!

Head lice were a common affliction for all people in the 1800's due to poor hygiene and infrequent bathing. In the Eastern USA, people would wash their hair with kerosene oil to kill the lice. Mountain men could not do that, instead they used a special lice comb (made from horn). The wider side of the comb would remove the head lice and the narrower side of the comb would remove the eggs.

Results: The mountain men suffer a terrible lice outbreak.

Show: Horn Comb

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Lice Infestation!

"Do you want to know how we got rid of lice (on our clothes) in the mountains? We just took off our clothes and laid them on an ant-hill, and you ought to see how the ants would carry off the lice! "

Joe Meek, 1833

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Go Bison Hunting!

Mountain men often hunted bison for food. They would ride on their horses towards the great herds, guns in hand. They carried their power horns and kept lead balls in their mouth. When their gun had been fired, they would pour gunpowder into their hand, and then into the barrel of their gun. Then, they'd take a ball from their mouth and drop it in the gun.

Results: If the mountain men chose "hunting," as a skill, they hunt and shoot a cow bison.

Show: Lead Balls & Powder Horn

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Go Bison Hunting!

"The hunter chases buffaloes at full gallop, discharges his gun, and reloads. . . . To accomplish this he holds the weapon close within the bend of his left arm and, taking the powder horn in his right hand, draws out with his teeth the stopper, . . . shakes the requisite amount of powder into his left palm, and again closes the powder horn. Then he grasps the gun with his right hand (and) . . . pours the powder down the barrel. . . . Now he takes a bullet from his mouth and with his left hand puts it into the barrel."

Rudolph Kurz, 1851

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Hunger!

Having enough to eat was never guaranteed for the mountain men. All the men had to endure periods with little or no food. During starving times, they would eat anything and everything. This included dogs, horses, mules, badgers, bobcats, insects, bark, roots, wolves, owls, moccasins, saddles, and even beaver skins.

Results: Draw a token, this mountain man has a 50% chance to die from hunger. If the mountain man is “extra tough” or chose “hunting,” “fishing,” or “plant identifying” as a skill, they survive.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Hunger!

"The sufferings of the men now became terrible, both from hunger and thirst. . . . Everything was eaten that could be eaten, and many things at which the well-fed man would sicken with disgust. I have held my hands in an ant-hill until they were covered with the ants, then greedily licked them off. I have taken the soles off my moccasins, crisped them in the fire, and eaten them. . . . We used to take a kettle of hot water, catch crickets and throw them in, and when they stopped kicking, eat them."

Joe Meek, 1832

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Horse Accident!

Some mountain men died due to accidents with their horses. Mountain men spent a lot of time riding and hunting on their horses. But are large, unpredictable animals. They would occasionally injure or kill their riders and owners.

Results: Draw a token, this mountain man is thrown from his horse and has a 50% chance to die. If they chose “horse riding” as a skill, they survive.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Horse Accident!

"In the evening, a fatal accident happened to a Canadian belonging to Mr. McKay's party. He was running his horse, . . . when thrown with great force to the ground. The Canadian was taken up completely senseless, and brought to Mr. McKay's lodge. . . . He had received an injury of the head which had evidently caused concussion of the brain. . . . The poor man died early next morning. He was about forty years of age, healthy, active, and shrewd, and was an interpreter among the Indians."

William Kirk Townsend, 1834

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Gun Accident!

Accidents of all kinds were a danger to the mountain men. One kind of danger was gun accidents. Some mountain men were accidentally shot, but others were caught in gun explosions. Gun barrels had a tendency to explode due to a variety of causes, even more so during the cold winter months. These explosions shot metal shards (much like a grenade) towards the mountain men.

Results: Draw a token, this man is burned (not killed) by a gun barrel explosion. If they chose “gun shooting” as a skill, they are fine.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Gun Accident!

"McCarey . . . was reloading the gun, which he had just discharged, when the powder in his horn was ignited by a burning wad remaining in the barrel; the horn was burst to fragments, the poor man dashed from his horse, and his face, neck, and hands, burnt in a shocking manner. . . . He travelled on with us, though in considerable suffering. His eyes were entirely closed, the lids very much swollen, and his long, flowing hair, patriarchal beard and eye brows, had all vanished in smoke."

John Kirk Townsend 1834

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Grizzly Attack!

Mountain men trapped beavers in the same mountains and plains where many large, wild animals lived. These men had to watch out for several potentially dangerous species of wildlife... including bears, wolves, moose, mountain lions, bison, and more. Otherwise, a careless (or unlucky) man may end up killed by a wild beast.

Results: Draw a token, this mountain man is attacked by a grizzly and dies. If they chose “gun shooting” as a skill, or if they are “extra tough,” they have a 50% chance to live.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Grizzly Attack!

"while passing through a Brushy bottom a large Grissely came down the vally ... Capt. Smith ran to the open ground and as he immersed from the thicket he and the bear met face to face[.] Grissly did not hesitate a moment but sprung on the capt taking him by the head first pitching sprawling on the earth[.] he gave him a grab by the middle ... breaking several of his ribs and cutting his head badly ... the bear had taken nearly all his head in his . . . mouth (and) one of (Capt's) ears was torn from his head"

James Clyman, 1824

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Build a Fire!

While Lucifers (matches) were available at rendezvous, they were unstable, unreliable, and unsafe. Most mountain men lit fires using flint and steel, a burning glass on sunny days, or by rubbing sticks together. These methods were quick and reliable, but the men had to practice using these items.

Results: If the mountain men have “fire building” as a skill, they have no problem making cooking fires. Otherwise, they have a difficult year cooking.

Show: Flintstone, Steel Striker, & Tinderbox

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Build a Fire!

“Instead of a brilliant flame, the match smouldered and spurted acid about to the detriment of clothes and a peaceful disposition.”

Unknown Match User, ca. 1805

“If possible, avoid inhaling gas that escapes from the combustion of the black composition. Persons whose lungs are delicate should by no means use the lucifers.”

Warning on Boxes of Lucifers, 1830

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Falling Accident!

Mountain Men had to cross mountains, valleys, streams, prairies, and all sorts of other environments. A constant danger was slipping and falling to their death.

Results: Draw a token, this mountain man falls from a rocky outcropping and dies. If the mountain man chose “mountain climbing” as a skill, or if they are “extra strong,” they survive.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Falling Accident!

“Mr. Manuel’s ... Boy Charles went out the Boat to get some grass or grasshoppers for a Prairie Dog which he had caught some days ago, ... the Boy went upon the Hills unperceived, they are very high[.] he fell down a precipice overhanging rock, precipice into the River(.) when the Men ... went to find the Boy, alas he was gone”

John C. Luttig, 1812

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Drowning!

Mountain men trapped beavers in lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. They trapped in the late fall and early spring, when the water was cold and icy! This means that drowning was a constant danger. Jacques La Ramee (who the city, river, and county of Laramie is named after) is said to have drowned in the Laramie river.

Results: Draw a token, this mountain man drowns and dies. If the mountain man chose “swimming” as a skill, they survive. If they are “extra strong”, they have a 50% chance to survive.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Drowning!

“Sunday, 10th [1833] Mr. Brown left us in the afternoon on his return to the Bloomfield farm . . . however the unfortunate gentleman never reached alive, the ice was so weak that he broke through and was drowned not more than 20 paces from the shore of the island, he had men with him but they were too far from him to render him any assistance.”

Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journals, 1830-1833

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Trade for Dogs!

Native American Tribes had many domesticated dogs that were first brought into North America during the Ice Age. These dogs carried tipi poles and supplies before Native Americans had horses, helped guard their camp, and were also eaten. Mountain men could trade for dogs, to either eat during starving times, or keep as guards and pets.

Results: If the mountain man chose “trading” AND either “sign language” or “Native languages” as skills... or if they are “extra friendly”... they can trade with the tribes for a dog.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Trade for Dogs!

“As there are few Indians about I made sketches of their dogs, of which there is an endless number here. Most of them look like wolves. Moreover, they do not bark but howl most dolefully. If one dog begins a chorus 100 strong immediately joins him . . . Indians make use of their dogs as beasts of burden and as guards, never for hunting, because their baying and howling would betray the huntsman to lurking foes.”

Rudolph Friederich Kurz, 1851

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Cook a Bison!

Mountain men ate mostly meat. Bison was the largest part of their diet, and was cooked many ways. The men also made boudins, by filling bison intestines with herbs and onions and then frying them. Pemmican, a bar like mixture of dried meat and fruit, was also vital. Other (rarer) foods included bacon, salted pork, smoked ham, dried fish, wild game, biscuits, flapjacks, fry bread, corn bread, hard tack, beans, hominy, rice, and peas.

Results: If the mountain man chose “cooking” as a skill, they fry up tasty bison ribs.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Cook a Bison!

“At our mess-fire there was a whole side of ribs roasted. When browned thoroughly we handled the long bones, and as the generous fat dripped on our clothes, we heeded it not, our minds wrapped up with the one absorbing thought of satisfying our relentless appetites; . . . our eyes closed with ineffable bliss. The meal ended, the pipe lent its aid to complete our happiness; and at night we retired to the comfortable blankets, wanting nothing, caring for nothing.”

Lewis Garrard, 1846

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Conflict with Tribes!

Many mountain men enjoyed a mostly peaceful and lucrative relationship with the tribes of the Rockies. The men traded with the tribes, often married Native American women, and some even spent winters in the villages. But, there were also deadly conflicts between mountain men and some of the tribes, such as the Blackfoot.

Results: Draw a token, this man dies during a fight. If they are “extra strong,” “extra fast,” or chose “knife fighting” as a skill, they survive.

Show: Tomahawk & Knife

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Conflict with Tribes!

“In Indian warfare, we do not marshall our forces; nor approach the scene of conflict in any regular order. Each person . . . proceeded down the ravine at full gallop. Mr. S. and I, without being aware of the . . . nature of the approaching contest, felt convinced we were . . . entering on a perilous engagement, in which one, or both of us might fall. We therefore briefly directed each other as to the disposition of our property, or in other words, made our wills, appointing each other sole executor.”

Robert Campbell, 1832

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Cold Weather!

Mountain men trapped beavers during the late fall and early spring. It could be brutally cold during both of these seasons. To stay warm at night, the men would build fires, make beds out of tree limbs, wear their clothes, cover themselves with bison blankets, and share beds with other mountain men. Even doing all of this, it was not enough sometimes.

Results: The mountain men have a terribly cold month. If they chose “shelter building,” “fire building,” or “sewing,” they are more comfortable, but not completely comfortable.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Cold Weather!

“Having spread our skins and blankets upon our foundation of (balsam tree) boughs, with a bag of rice . . . or our folded coats for a pillow, we . . . lie down, all in one bed, with all our clothes on except our coats; and even them, and caps and mittens too, sometimes. . . . When the weather is very cold, we are obliged to get up two or three times during the night, and renew our fire. . . . It is impossible to carry bedding enough to make us comfortable in extreme cold weather—we . . . suffer much during the night.”

Frederick Ayer, 1843

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Make New Clothes!

The clothing that the mountain men brought into the Rockies would not last long in this harsh environment. The men had to make new clothes out of animal skins. They crafted deerskin pants and shirts, decorated with fringe, to replace cloth clothes. They wore bison skins as coats and replaced old boots with moccasins. Some men even chose to make breechclothes and leggings instead of pants.

Results: The mountain men make new leather clothes.

Show: Moccasins

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Make New Clothes!

“Buckskin clothes . . . are certainly more serviceable for life in the bush and on the prairie and serve better protection against sun and mosquitos when one is on horseback.”

Rudolph Friederich Kurz, 1848

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Make a Copote!

Mountain men would frequently wear a special kind of coat, called a copote (kuh-poat). This coat was hand made from thick, wool trade blankets. It resembled a bath robe of today; it had a hood, sleeves, and went down to the man's thighs. It had no buttons, and would have been closed by a belt.

Results: If the mountain man chose "sewing" as a skill, they can make a copote.

Show: Trade Cloth

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Make a Copote!

"The blankets . . . are beginning to (be) use(d) as material for coats . . . They give to these garments the shape of a paletot with hood but without buttons. They are held in place only by means of the belt. The garment is cut in such a way that the colored stripes are used for ornamentation. The straight edge with the stripes forms the lower part of the coat; . . . even the strokes denoting the quality (1, 2, 3, point blanket) are left in view.

Rudolph Friederich Kurz,
1846-1852

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Buried Alive!

Mountain men would bury and hide their beaver pelts in holes underground until it was time for the rendezvous. This was called a cache. These holes may have only been 20 inches wide at the surface, but would open up to be very large and deep underneath! Sometimes, while digging these caches, the holes would collapse and kill the mountain men.

Results: Draw a token, this mountain man is buried alive and dies. If the mountain man is "extra fast" or chose "shelter building" as a skill, they have a 50% chance to survive.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Buried Alive!

"A man in the employ of Smith, Sublette and Jackson, was . . . constructing one of those subterranean vaults for the reception of furs. The cache was nearly completed, when a large quantity of earth fell in upon the poor fellow, and completely buried him alive. His companions believed him to have been instantly killed, knew him to be well buried, and the cache destroyed, and therefore left him."

William Ferris, 1830

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Make Bullets!

Mountain men would buy bars of lead at the rendezvous, and melt them down into lead balls to use as bullets. To do this, they would melt the lead in a frying pan and pour it into a bullet mold. Sometimes, the men would have to make balls without the molds, too.

Results: The mountain men struggle to make bullets without a bullet mold. If the men are “extra smart” or chose “bullet making” as a skill, they use a bullet mold.

Show: Bullet Mold, Lead Bar, & Lead Balls

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Make Bullets!

"I had to flatten 1-pound bars of lead into thin plates, cut the latter into narrow bars, from which I then struck off little cubes, threw them into our frying pan together with ashes and sand, rubbed and rubbed them over and over with a flat stone until those small angular pieces had become round. "

Rudolf Freiderich Kurz,
1846-1852

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Trade with the Tribes!

Mountain men were trapping and trespassing on tribal lands. So, they carried trade items to give to Native Americans to help maintain peaceful interactions. They also used these items to trade for horses, dogs, food, skins, clothing, and other necessities.

Results: If the mountain men have the “trading” skill AND either “native languages” or “sign language” skills... they get an extra 25 beaver skins.

Show: Possibles Bag, Silver Trade Pieces, Steel Points, Beads, Hawk Bells, & Mirror

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Trade with the Tribes!

"I commenced and made them a speech, . . . we came here to build a fort and trade with them - the sole object we had in view was benefitting them (I had almost said ourselves): yes, that we came here, our sole object to better their condition - that we had a large quantity of merchandise in our boat, and hoped we would find them disposed to trade with us, and reciprocate our good feelings. I then presented them with 300 charges ammunition, 60 plugs tobacco, a dozen knives, and other kick-shaws."

Robert Campbell, 1833

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Smoke Tobacco!

Today's world knows tobacco to be a dangerous substance. But this was unknown during the 1800s. It was heavily used by both mountain men and Native Americans of the time. Mountain men would smoke (or chew) tobacco to relax. Tobacco also helped create trust and friendships between the mountain men and tribes.

Results: The mountain men smoke tobacco in their pipes throughout the year.

Show: Clay Pipes, Tobacco Canteen, & Twist Tobacco

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Smoke Tobacco!

"The Chief and his retinue, came . . . to smoke a pipe with us, and enquire our business. We seated ourselves in a ring on the grass, with our guests, and a pipe was immediately produced, and presented to a little hardy old veteran, the Chief. He placed it in his mouth, when his attendant applied to it a coal, and the Chief taking two or three whiffs, passed it to the person on his right, who in turn took a few puffs, and returned it to the Chief; . . . and it continued then regularly round, until it was extinguished."

Warren Ferris, 1830

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Smallpox!

Europeans (like mountain men) brought smallpox and other deadly diseases to Native people who had no natural immunity to them. As white explorers, trappers, and immigrants moved across South and North America, disease and death followed. It is estimated that 55 million Native American people died due to the invasion of the Europeans. Mountain men also suffered from the disease, but smallpox completely wiped out entire nations of Native People.

Results: Draw two tokens, these men die from smallpox.

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM

Smallpox!

"There was such a stench in the fort that it could be smelt at the distance of 300 yards. It was awful. . . . Some went crazy, and others were half eaten up by maggots before they died. . . . Many died, and those who recovered were so much disfigured that one could scarcely recognize them. . . . Fort William was . . . used as hospitals for Indians. . . . It became the duty of John Brazo to take out the dead and dump them into the bushes. . . . The tribe was reduced more than one-half by next spring."

Charles Larpenteur, 1837

WYOMING STATE MUSEUM