

# The Wilderness Road Blockhouse



## Self-Guided Tour



## Blockhouse Events:

### Frontier Muster & Trade Faire

Last Saturday and Sunday in April

Saturday: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

### May - October

Open every Saturday and Sunday from

2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

### Frontier Harvest Festival

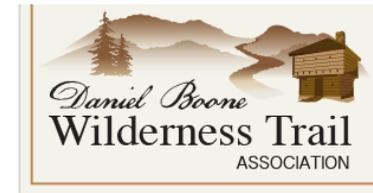
Last Saturday in October

1 p.m. - 5 p.m.

### Old Christmas

First Saturday in January

5 p.m. - 7 p.m.



Natural Tunnel State Park  
1420 Natural Tunnel Parkway  
Duffield, VA 24244  
276-940-2674



## The Anderson Family

Born in 1750, Colonel John Anderson came from a line of Scots-Irish farmers in the Shenandoah Valley. He and his wife, Rebecca, moved to the Holston area in 1773. Anderson decided to build a more fortified home two years later to protect his family after nearly losing his life. Anderson and his wife raised eight children and had 64 grandchildren. Anderson's eventful life not only included his role as the blockhouse proprietor, but also as a regional militia leader and judge. John Anderson lived in his creative masterpiece until his death in the 1800s. Thanks to John Anderson's creation, the blockhouse's unusual structure design and historic significance has brought many visitors to Natural Tunnel State Park and will continue to for years to come.



Continue your journey at the Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail Interpretive Center, a satellite of Natural Tunnel State Park.

371 Technology Trail Lane  
Duffield, VA 24244  
276-431-0104

## #7 The Lower Floor

The lower half of the building shows common appliances you would find in an 18th century home. It includes some hand carved wooden furniture, a few herbs that would be common in a pioneer home, and the most prominent piece on the lower floor, the fireplace. The fireplace would be extremely important due to the fact that it was used to cook food, as well as provide light and warm the house in the winter.



## #8 The Upper Floor

The upper floor of the house showcases a pioneer bed, including woolen blankets. There is also a spinning wheel displayed that 18th century women would use to spin fibers into thread or yarn. The upstairs floor also gives a great view of the gunports that were installed due to the unusual shape of the structure, which was used to defend the blockhouse from any unwanted invaders.



## About the Wilderness Road Blockhouse

The original Anderson blockhouse was built by John Anderson in Carter's Valley in 1775. If you look back across Bishoptown Road and notice the grey barn on the hill, the original site lies about 15 miles in that direction. Whether Anderson knew it or not, his choice of location would play a pivotal role in the future of the Wilderness Road and all who travelled it.

The blockhouse provided a way-station for the pioneers seeking to cross through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. Travelers would camp on Anderson's land and trade their goods with him. In all, an estimated 300,000 individuals traveled the Wilderness Road to Cumberland Gap in hope of a new start in Kentucky.

### #1 Gazing out over Rye Cove

Standing by the blockhouse and gazing out over Rye Cove provides one of the best views in the park. Rye Cove is a rich karst area, meaning that it is full of caves, sinkholes and exposed rock outcroppings. Thousands of settlers passed through the cove on their journey on the Wilderness Road. Rye Cove was also immortalized in the famous Carter family song "The Cyclone of Rye Cove," which told the story of the 1929 tornado that ripped through the cove and destroyed the local schoolhouse.



### #2 Nature's Kitchen

The pioneers obtained much of their food through hunting; gardens were also vital food sources. One of the gardens at the blockhouse is modelled after a Three Sisters Garden, which were popular among Native American tribes. The sister plants were corn, beans and squash. The corn provided a pillar that the beans could grow on and the squash provided shade for the roots of the corn. The other garden is an herbal garden, where herbs could be grown for cooking and medicinal purposes.

### #3 A Genius Design

The overhanging second floor is only one of several notable architectural features. If you gaze up at the overhang from directly below, you will notice gunports that allowed the residents to shoot down on attackers while still being shielded. Additionally, the fireplace was constructed on the inside of the blockhouse so it could not be pulled apart from outside and deter attackers from entering through the chimney.

### #4 The Blockhouse Blacksmith

Blacksmiths were essential to pioneer life, providing valuable tools and items like nails and horseshoes. In this blacksmith's shop, you can examine the bellows that are used to heat the fire and the anvil that is used to shape the hot metal.



### #5 Pioneer Baking

Most families did not have ovens yet, so they had to improvise. Due to this, many people had a great deal of knowledge on various cooking methods, which included an intricate spicing system. A common method of cooking included cooking food in cloth bags, which would first be sterilized by boiling and then would be floured or buttered to produce pudding. Food preservation was also very important in the survival of pioneers.



### #6 The Role of Flax

For settlers on the frontier, new clothing was a rarity. To make new clothes, they would grow flax and then laboriously process it until they could spin the fiber into linen. The flax had to be retted, scutched and combed to obtain the silky fibers from the plant's stem. Settlers would sometimes mix the linen thread with wool to make linsey-woolsey, which tended to make warmer clothing.

