

## The Longleaf Forest Served as the Wal-Mart For Early Settlers

(bolded words in text indicate key words and concepts)

### Student Information:

Try to imagine what your life would be like without electricity, telephone, internet, paved roads, or even grocery stores. For the **settler** families living amongst the longleaf pine forest, not having the luxuries that you and I take for granted, was a way of life. The longleaf pine forest provided much of the food and supplies needed for their survival.

### Teacher Information:

It was generally the Carolinians of Scotch-Irish decent who settled the longleaf pine barrens where rice or cotton plantations failed to penetrate. A German traveler to the longleaf pine backcountry in 1783 found cattle, swine, and these piney woods people "here denominated crackers." Pioneering cracker families frequently foraged for supplementary food and other goods in the Pinelands, becoming in effect "**hunter-gatherers**". Although life could be, and often was, hard for people living amongst the pine-barrens, the forest provided food, housing and medicine. These backcountry **yeomen** were tough and resourceful.

This picture depicts a cracker family gathering various food staples. The men are "pulling" (fishing) for **gopher tortoises** (also called Hoover Chickens, Cracker Chicken or Florida Bacon) while women are picking blueberries. Gopher tortoise was considered very good eating by many pioneering country folks. Wild blueberries could be eaten fresh out of the hand, with cream and sugar, syrup or honey, or made into cobbles, pies, jam, preserves or jelly.

In fishing for gopher tortoises, a rope made from braided grapevines with a large hook attached was used for hooking and pulling the tortoise from its burrow (or "gopher hole"). Gopher tortoises have powerful front legs for digging. The strength in their legs, however, made it extremely difficult to pull them from their burrow. The picture also shows various tools that could be utilized to help extract the tortoise from its home. Shovels of two kinds; a long handled pointed end type and one shorter handled, square end shovel (behind the **fatwood stump**) can be seen, as well as a **mattock** and a "tater rack". These tools were brought along in case digging out the burrow or chopping roots was necessary-and in case the gopher tortoise needed to be removed more forcefully. Sadly, gopher tortoises reproduce very slowly. In some areas, **overexploitation** occurred and populations of gopher tortoises were whipped out.

Besides wild blueberries and huckleberries, other native plants utilized from the pine woods (and interrelated habitats) included: yellowhaw and mayberry (in left background), **berries** (*Rubus* species.), wild grapes, and prickly pear cactus (front in picture). Both cabbage palm (in left background) and saw palmetto (all through picture) provided "swamp cabbage" (heart bud of either plants) for raw eating out of hand, in salads, or cooked with salt, pork, hamhock, etc.

A hatchet buried in the fatwood (**lighter wood** or lightwood stump) is for cutting this wood to take home for kindling. The entire log, in fact, could be loaded onto the family's mule drawn wagon (in the background). On the wagon are other tools and equipment; such as a long-handled axe for obtaining larger logs of oak, pine, etc. to load up and carry home for longer burning firewood (note: the **axe** is not visible, but it is there). Also, on the wagon are several barrels, crates, **croaker sacks**, etc. for whatever the family might find to put in them; such as gathering Spanish moss (from the scrub oaks) for stuffing pillows, mattresses and furniture upholstery. Saw palmetto and cabbage palm fronds and fibers, oak to be split into thin strips, wild cane and other grasses & sedges might be gathered and used for weaving and plaiting hats, baskets, mats, etc. Also on the wagon might be jars to hold wild honey (if the family is lucky enough to find a hive).

Also not visible on the wagon would likely be a scatter gun of some sort loaded with buckshot or birdshot or a small caliber rifle for smaller game like squirrel or rabbits. The firearm would also afford protection from various sources; animal or human.

In the background can be seen the family's hounds. Not exactly purebred-there are traces of redbone, bluetick, black and tan, etc in them. They're scouting out their territory as dogs will do. The dogs provide the family with companionship, hunting allies, and protection.

The galvanized steel washtubs are used by the family to hold captured gopher tortoises. These type of washtubs were in domestic use at least as early as 1900. The baskets the mother and daughter are using to collect the blueberries are based on baskets from the period of 1890's to 1930's. The larger split-oak basket is a market-style basket, while the small cane basket is actually called a "berry basket".

The clothing styles are based on photos and drawings from about 1890 up into the 1920's. Isolated countrywomen wore sunbonnets and long dresses as late as the 1930's and 1940's in some areas. Men's (and boy's) clothing changed little for decades.

**Key Words and Concepts:** axe, berries, croaker sack, fatwood, gopher tortoise, hunter-gatherer, lighter wood, mattock, overexploitation, settler, yeomen.