

CHEAT SHEET FOR ORGANIZING A LIVING HISTORY EVENT

By Trails Inc. [precursor to Appalachian Living History]

Considerations for the previous era:

What - is the actual historical event you wish to highlight? Was it large scale or small?

When - did this event occur? Year and season?

Where - did the event occur? Was it on the facility or nearby?

Who - was involved in the event and which of them will be portrayed?

Considerations for the current era:

What - is the relationship of your facility/park/forest/historical site to the actual event? What is the proposed scale of the re-enacted event? How many presenters and how many public participants?

When - is the best time to carry out the re-enactment to avoid conflict with similar events? Match the proposed event season with the historical event season.

Where - on the facility is best suited to interpreting the event? Inventory your facility. Are there old structures suitable for a setting? Are there natural features that will enhance the interpretation? Remember to consider the scale of the re-enactment and the most appropriate number of participants.

Who - are the resource persons who can assist you? Recruit local historical resource persons and groups as much as possible. These include living historians, other historical facility staff members, authors, history professors/teachers, history hobbyists, descendants of local historical characters, re-enactors, and dramatists. Utilize other resource persons who are not-so-local to help fill in the gaps.

CHEAT SHEET FOR ORGANIZING A LIVING HISTORY EVENT
EXAMPLE 1 (A specific event during a history celebration.)
CARTER CAVES STATE RESORT PARK: PIONEER LIFE WEEK

Considerations for the previous era:

What - is the actual historical event you wish to highlight? Was it large scale or small?

Making “nitre” a product used in making gunpowder at Swindoll’s Cave, a.k.a. Salt Peter Cave, at Carter Caves. Historically, nitre (sodium nitrate) was mined at the cave circa 1809 – 1812. The nitre was then transformed to salt peter (potassium nitrate). From there it was taken to the new State of Ohio to be made into black powder, some of which was used to help fight the war of 1812.

When - did this event occur? Year and season? 1809 –1812: year around.

Where - did the event occur? Was it on the facility or nearby? On the park at Salt Peter Cave.

Who - was involved in the event and which of them will be portrayed? The Plummer family and volunteers who performed the mining in lieu of required militia service. Primarily the miners will be portrayed.

Considerations for the current era:

What - is the relationship of your facility/park/forest/historical site to the actual historical event?

What is the proposed scale of the re-enacted event? How many presenters and how many public participants?

1. During most of the year it is a show and tell experience using the paid cave guides. Groups of 12 or more.
2. During Pioneer Life Week, which takes place the last week of July each year, it is a lantern tour with approx. 8 re-enactors showing how the nitre was mined and presenting the historical context in which the mining took place. There are several volunteers available to help present the cave tour in costume. They are highly motivated to give the public an entertaining and educational experience. There will be approximately 30 – 40 publics per performance and approx. 3-4 performances.

When - is the best time to carry out the re-enactment to avoid conflict with similar events?

Match the proposed event season with the historical event season. Timing is already set and is part of the scheduled Park events for year around. The special presentations need to be scheduled 3-4 times during the Pioneer Life Week.

Where - on the facility is best suited to interpreting the re-enactment? At the cave where the actual mining took place. Additionally, subsidiary presentations can take place at the nearby Welcome Center.

Who - are the resource persons who can assist you? Park staff will be there for the year around programs. During the Pioneer Life Week, there are several volunteers available to help present the cave tour in costume. The Little family are key recruiters. They are highly motivated to give the public an entertaining and educational experience. The local historical society, the state historical society, and Morehead State University sources will be used to enhance and provide historical accuracy. Unfortunately, local records were lost in the 1937 flood.

CHEAT SHEET FOR ORGANIZING A LIVING HISTORY EVENT
EXAMPLE 2 (A general information type of event.)
PROPOSAL FOR 1700s HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION AT CRANBERRY MTN.
NATURE CENTER IN MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST

Considerations for the previous era:

What - is the actual historical event you wish to highlight? Was it large scale or small?

18th century cultural exchange between peoples of the Allegheny Highlands in West Virginia. Cultural exchanges were usually small scale, sometimes between single pioneer families and small groups of Amerindians.

When - did this event occur? Year and season? Summer 1760s and 1770s.

Where - did the event occur? Was it on the facility or nearby? Greenbrier Valley region, near the facility.

Who - was involved in the event and which of them will be portrayed in the re-enacted event?

Scotch-Irish farmers/settlers/traders (male & female), English naturalist, and Delaware hunters/gatherers/traders (male & female). No particular historical persons, only generalized characters will be portrayed.

Considerations for the current era:

What - is the relationship of your facility/park/forest/historical site to the actual historical event?

What is the proposed scale of the re-enacted event? How many presenters and how many public participants? Cranberry Mtn. Nature Center in Monongahela N. F. is located immediately west of Euro American plantations made in the 1750s-70s. Broad, well-drained savannahs created through frequent burning by Amerindian hunters in the Greenbrier Valley, attracted the settlers. Trade between the cultural groups as well as war, highlighted this period of history. The Cranberry River region was a haven for bear hunting & ginseng digging forays during this period and later. Small number of presenters (4-6), large numbers of total public participants (200-600), but scattered throughout the day.

When - is the best time to carry out the re-enactment to avoid conflict with similar events? Early summer when crops have been planted and there is time to hunt and gather for sustenance. Early naturalists traveled the larger region in the summer of the 1770s & 80s, because of the blooming plants new to European Science.

Where - on the facility is best suited to interpreting the re-enactment? Nature interpretive trail and woods edge along lawn of the nature center are good places to set up interpretive stations. An Indian camp will be in the woods along the trail, a pioneer cooking demonstration will be on the lawn, as will a sketching naturalist and Delaware hunter/trader. In case of rain, a tent will be set up in front of the nature center on the large lawn that looks over the Cranberry Valley. A dramatic vignette will be presented to provide an example of cultural exchange. A Scotch-Irish settler family will negotiate with a Delaware family for services in finding and purchasing a child taken captive during Pontiac's War.

Who - are the resource persons who can assist? Doug Wood was recommended by a colleague as a resource person. He can help plan and recruit. He lives less than 3 hours away and is very familiar with the history of the Greenbrier Valley. A couple of amateur historians live in the nearby town of Richwood, although their interest is primarily 19th century. The National Forest archeologist can be consulted.