Thoughts from a pilgrim, really just a child.

How to become a weekend Mountain Man in three extremely difficult stages.

1. READ: Books of the time and personal narratives by men who were there.
   The Book of Buckskinning, reference books on period arms. The Primitive Technology magazine fills in the Native perspective.
   Stuart K. Wier has compiled a reader’s guide. He has done the research and put them all in one place. Visit www.westernexplorers.us
   Maps will reveal place names of the men in the books or died somewhere that was named for them. They are all over the West.

2. VISIT: Follow the route of Lewis and Clark. I have been from Great Falls on the Missouri to Three Forks, up the Jefferson River and the Beaverhead River, to Clark Canyon Reservoir. The camps have been found and the distance between them is amazingly short.
   All 16 Rendezvous sites. Forts Bridger, Robidoux, Uncompahgre, Vasquez, Lupton and Laramie. There are many beaver and buffalo forts around the circle of parks: North, Middle, South and Buffalo.
   Bent’s Old and New Forts in southern Colorado. Taos and Santa Fe for the rest of Charles Bent’s story. Lucian Maxwell and Kit Carson were there as well.
   You can still see ruts of the Santa Fe Trail.
   When you visit these sites, dress period if you can, and wander off alone. Feel the ground. Imagine the past. What did they see? Put yourself in the 1800’s.

3. PARTICIPATE: Attend rendezvous to learn. The smaller ones are not as intimidating. Check on the Crazy Crow and Talking Bear web sites for upcoming events. Your camp and clothes do not need to be complete before you start. Build as you go. See something that you like? Ask. Everyone will tell you their life story, and maybe even what you asked about.
   The “things” are not as telling as your attitude. Do not think you need a Hawken rifle - most trappers did not have one, even as late as 1850. Learn to throw a hawk. Then a knife. Become a fair shot. Add a pistol. Long bows were common. A trapper needed to defend himself with anything he could get. Cook over an open fire. Dutch ovens were way too heavy to pack. Make your gear, clothes and camp, if you can. Make something to trade.
   These are my thoughts, none of them my own. I built a flintlock for high school woodshop class. Went to my first ronde in 1998. I learn something at every one. No one will ever know all the mountain man lore. I’m 70 now, one of the younger OF’s.

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Comments? Questions? Send a post to: w.w.owen356@gmail.com