

## **The Settlement of the Longleaf Pine Frontier in the Early 1800's**

(bolded words in text indicate key words and concepts)

### **Student Information:**

Although it may be hard to envision, at one time the longleaf pine forest was the wild frontier. Mysterious and (sometimes) dangerous animals and plants could be found everywhere in the forest. Paved roads and air-conditioned cars and houses did not exist. Mule-drawn wagons slowly carried people through endless longleaf pine forests. Homes were built from the lumber of longleaf pine trees cut with axes and saws. Most families could only afford a single mule to farm the land. Life was tough for these people.

### **Teacher Information:**

The procurement of food, shelter, and medicine on the longleaf pine frontier was filled with uncertainty and peril. Self-sufficiency was essential, and the survival of these people were inextricably linked to the fruits of the longleaf pine ecosystem. The axles of every pioneer wagon that moved through these woods were lubricated with the **tar** extracted from the **lightwood** of longleaf pine. The essential tasks of life in the piney woods could easily result in serious or even fatal injury. Access to trained medical practitioners was often a day's ride or more from one's **settlement**. Pioneers learned to gather the herbs, animal parts and minerals needed to concoct various **herbal medicines** from the woods around their house.

Longleaf pine forests were found across a variety of different soil types (from very fertile **clayey soils** to not so productive sandy soils). Before the introduction of modern fertilizers and irrigation systems, only the more fertile soils such as those found in east Texas, Southeast Alabama, and the lowcountry of South Carolina proved to be valuable **agricultural** areas for cotton, corn, etc. In these areas, cleared land was deemed more valuable than forested land. Trees were cut with hand axes and sawed in lumber for cabins, smoke houses, barns, etc. Trees not used in construction of the homestead were either piled and burned or sold to nearby lumber companies. Stumps were removed by hitching up a mule and coaxing the mule to pull them out of the ground (later, dynamite seemed to do the trick).

Unlike today's enormous agricultural fields maintained with diesel powered tractors, pioneer farmers were physically limited by how much land could be farmed. As a rule of thumb, one man and one mule could work only **50 acres**.

Since the landscape was **open-range**, cattle were generally free to roam where they pleased. Fences were used to keep livestock out of areas (like crops). Smaller longleaf pine trees were quartered and made into **rail** fences. Typically a few acres of **subsistence** crops were planted around the house (like collard greens and purple-hulled peas). Plum or persimmon trees may be planted around the house for fresh fruit. Chickens were raised mainly for eggs but also for meat in the rare event of a visit from a neighbor. In the common event that something could not be grown, the nearby pineywoods provided a wealth of foodstuffs. Numerous edible berries, plants and animals flourished in the pine uplands.

**Key Words and Concepts:** acre, agriculture, clayey soil, herbal medicine, lightwood, open-range, rail, settlement, subsistence, tar.