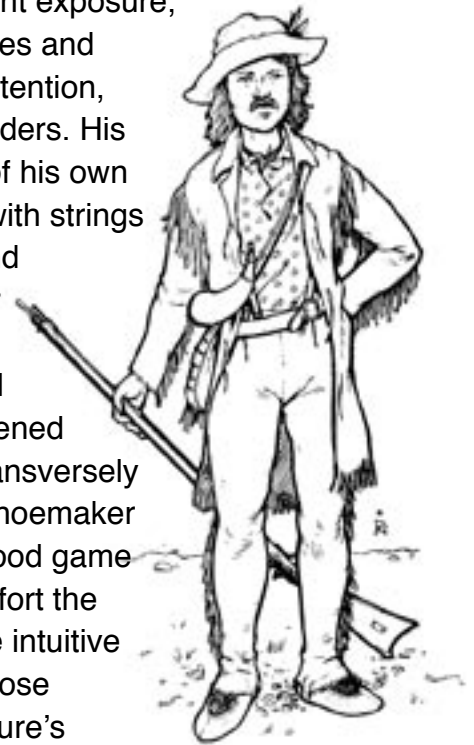


## Mountain Man Clothing

The Fur Trapper era was only a short period in American history, but it remains a favorite. Every weekend somewhere in the United States there is a Rendezvous taking place where re-enactors can live out this period in history. We are excited about offering the Varsity Scouts the opportunity to learn about this period in history, and we want to do all that we can to encourage them to take part in the fun. Included here are a few basic ideas and descriptions of period clothing to help them dress as mountain men.

“His dress and appearance are equally singular. His skin, from constant exposure, assumes a hue almost as dark as that of the Aborigine, and his features and physical structure attain a rough and hardy cast. His hair, through inattention, becomes long, coarse and bushy, and loosely dangles upon his shoulders. His head is surmounted by a low crowned wool-hat, or a rude substitute of his own manufacture. His clothes are of buckskin, gaily fringed at the seams with strings of the same material, cut and made in a fashion peculiar to himself and associates. The deer and buffalo furnish him the required covering for his feet, which he fabricates at the impulse of want. His waist is encircled with a belt of leather, holding encased his butcher- knife and pistols- while from his neck is suspended a bullet pouch securely fastened to the belt in front, and beneath the right arm hangs a powder horn transversely from his shoulder...The mountaineer is his own manufacturer, tailor, shoemaker and butcher; and fully accoutred and supplied with ammunition in a good game country, he can always feed and clothe himself, and enjoy all the comfort the situation affords. No wonder, then, his proud spirit, expanding with the intuitive knowledge of noble independence, becomes devotedly attached to those regions and habits that permit him to stalk forth, a sovereign amid nature’s loveliest works.” “Rocky Mountain Life” Rufus Sage, Pages 38 and 39.



### Trousers and Pants

Mountain men usually started out with at least one pair of cloth trousers. These were usually made of canvas, heavy cotton, or corduroy. These trousers would have a button fly or a front button bib. Some also had a two or three inch slit in the back that was laced up to keep the pants snug. A great place to get cheap pants for rendezvous is a paint store. Painter’s pants come in natural canvas (not bleached white canvas), and can easily be made to look “authentic”. Any wide wale corduroy pants in tan, brown, grey, or even black will also work. Long shirts can cover zippers and pockets that are not period correct. Blue jeans are not correct at all, but denim pants in tan, brown, grey, or black will do.

When their cloth pants wore out the mountain men would make leather pants out of buckskin, or buffalo skin. These pants would have fringe down the outer seam of each leg, and a simple button fly. Buckskin pants are difficult to make yourself. The hide has to be pre-stretched, and is very tedious to sew. There are people who will do the work for you, but this is expensive.

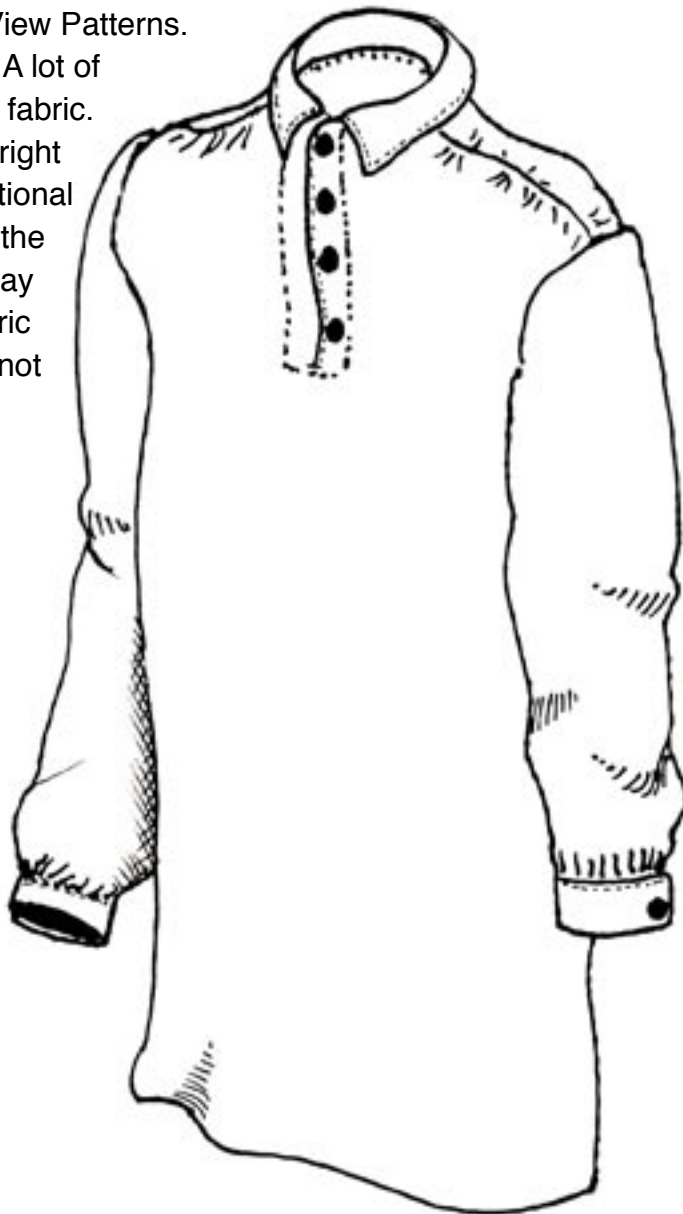
# Mountain Man Clothing

## Shirts

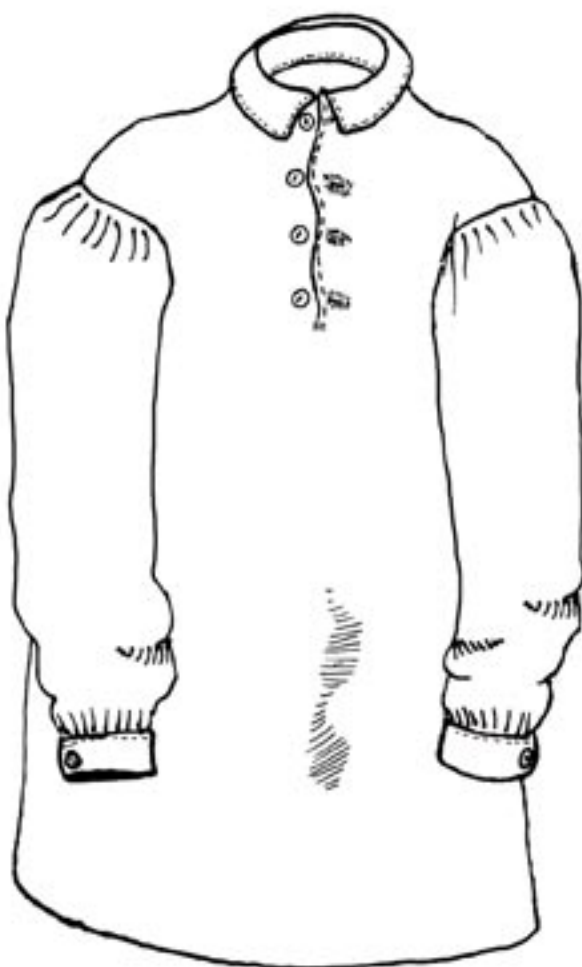
The most common type of shirt worn by the mountain men was a simple work shirt. This shirt was usually made of cotton, muslin, wool, or linen. These shirts are easy to sew and very comfortable to wear. They typically were mid-thigh length, and were large and blowsy. Patterns are available for these shirts from Eagle View Patterns.

Material must be selected carefully to be accurate. A lot of today's cotton material has the color printed on the fabric. This is obvious and easy spot, one side will have bright colors and the other will appear much lighter. Traditional cotton fabric was woven, which means the color is the same on both sides. This fabric is still available today and is usually referred to as homespun. Muslin fabric is widely available and very inexpensive, but does not come in many colors. Linen can be expensive, and

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Yoked Work Shirt



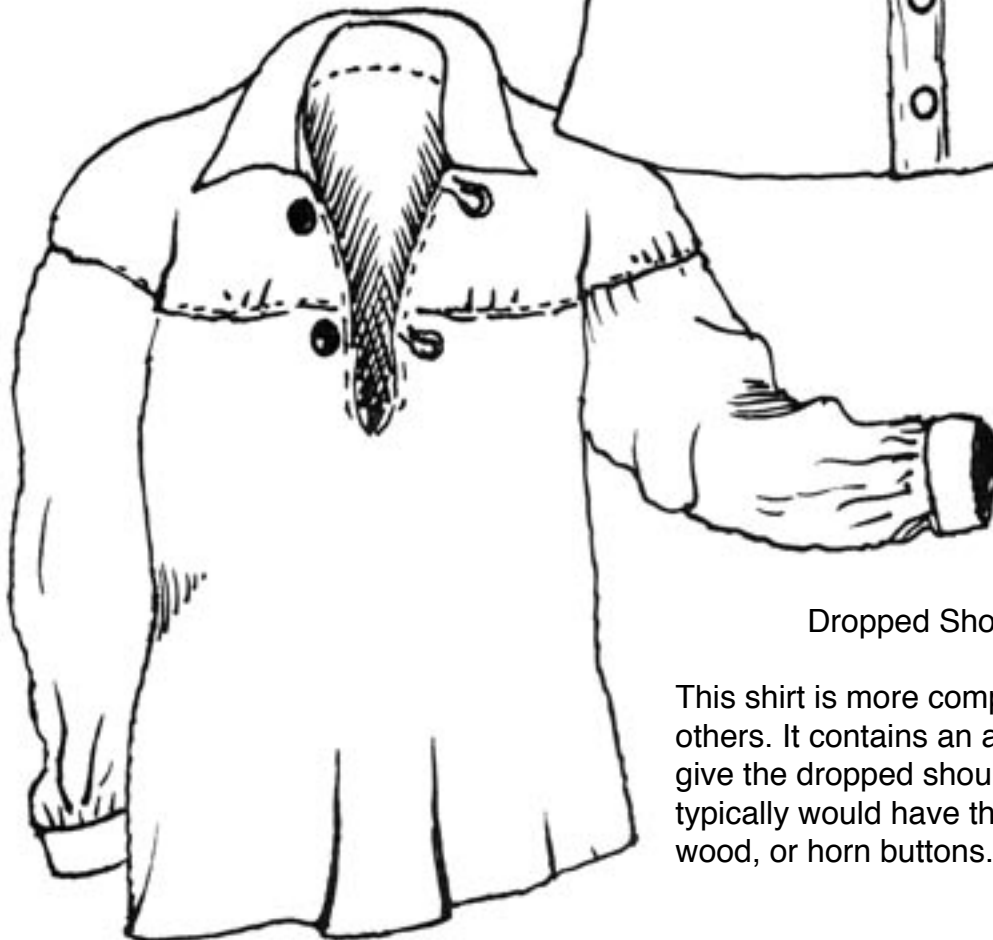
Simple Work Shirt

This shirt had a one-piece body, and no tapering or fitting of any kind.

This shirt had a two-piece body. Both shirts were made with button cuffs, short collars, and a three to five button neck opening. Some had only a single button opening. Buttons were usually made of metal, wood, or antler.

### Waistcoat or Vest

These vests were quite popular. They are made from heavy wool flannels, cottons, and light to heavy woven wool. The vest usually had six to eight buttons, and some had slash style pockets. Patterns are available for this vest from Eagle View Patterns.

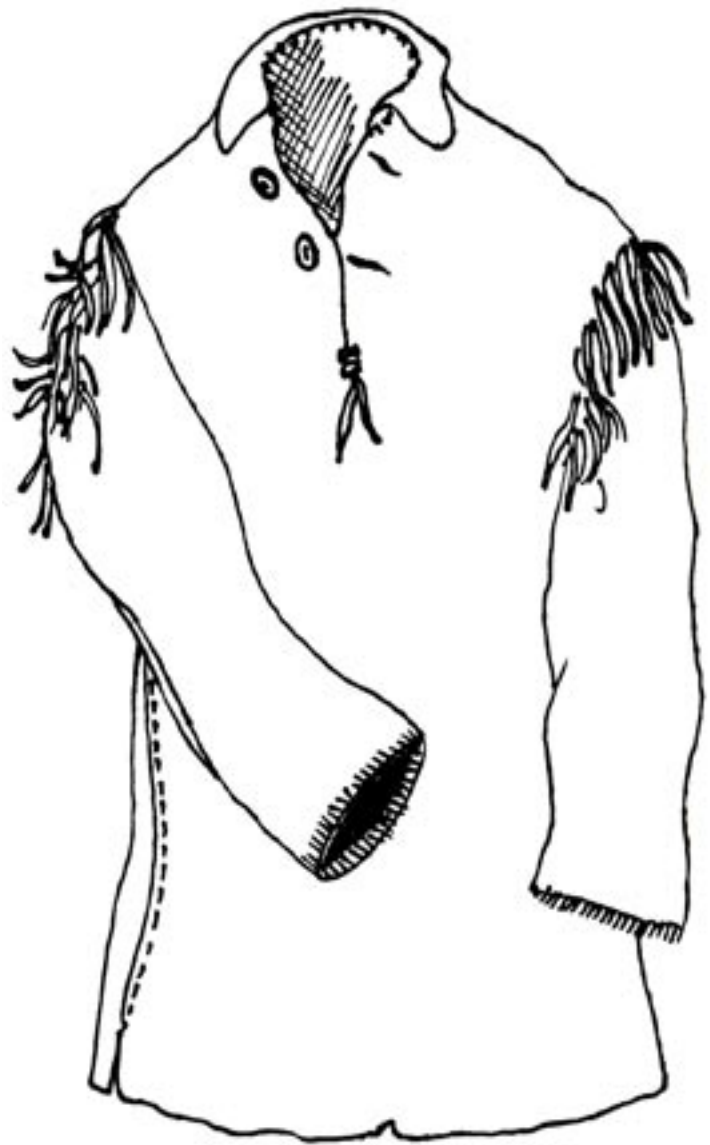


### Dropped Shoulder shirt

This shirt is more complicated than the others. It contains an additional piece to give the dropped shoulder look. This shirt typically would have three or four metal, wood, or horn buttons.

## Buckskin Shirt

These shirts were typically made to copy the style of white men cotton shirts not Indian buckskin shirts. Some mountain man did decorate their shirts with strips of beadwork, and most shirts had some fringing on the sleeves or shoulders.



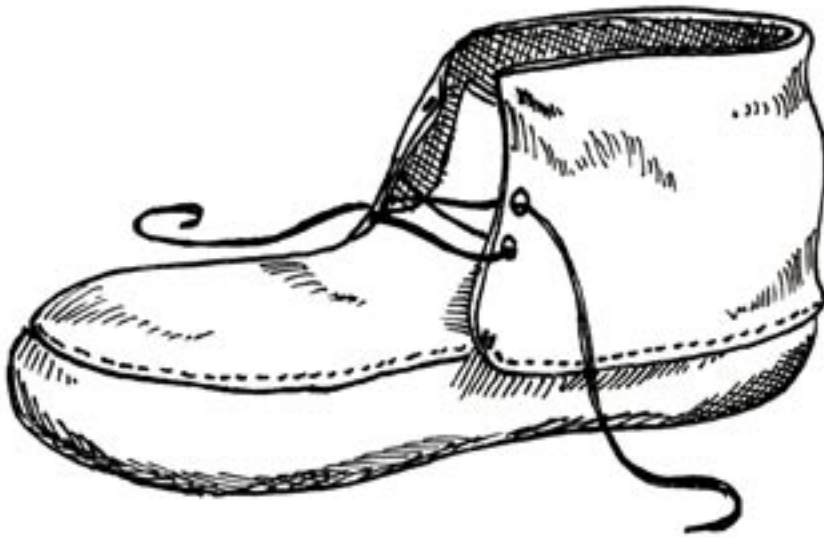
## Wool Blanket shirt

This shirt is quite easy to sew. There are only three main pieces, the body and the sleeves. It was typically worn over a cotton or linen work shirt much like a pull over jacket. It is easier to make than a capote and requires less blanket material.

## Footwear

Among the common footwear of the Mountain Man were Moccasins. Many of the mountain men who came west with boots soon learned how difficult they were to maintain, or replace. Moccasins were much more practical and easy to make and repair.

There are many different styles of moccasins and many different books and methods of construction. Some are made of one piece of leather. Some were made with a “pucker vamp”. There were hard sole types and some that went up to the knee. Indians decorated their moccasins with beadwork, porcupine quills and paint. It was common for mountain men to use pieces of trade cloth for the moccasin uppers.



Basic Moccasin

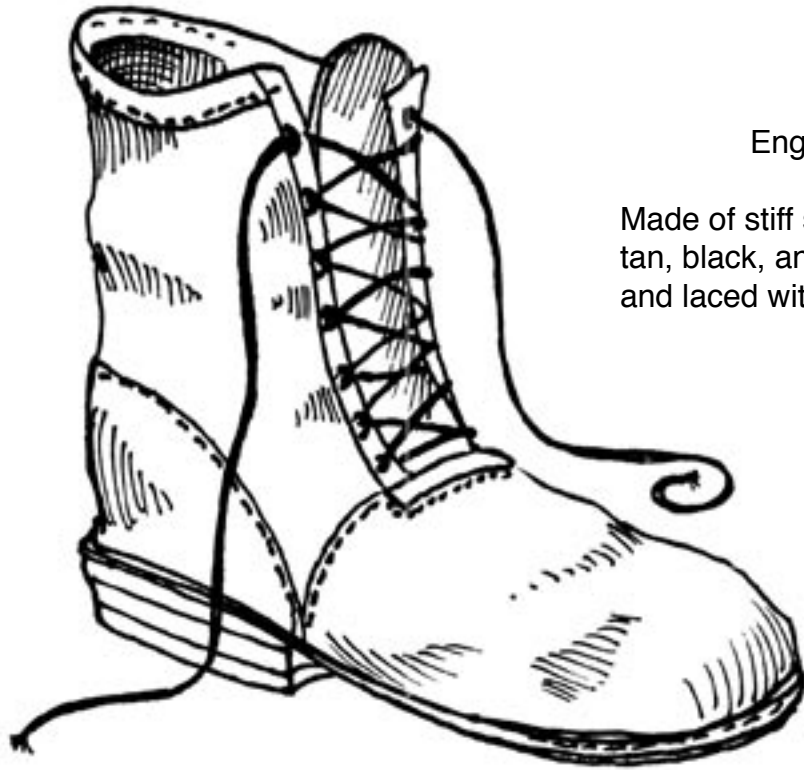
Most moccasins were constructed of two or three pieces. The sole that was often a harder piece of leather, the upper which could be leather or trade cloth, and an additional piece around the ankle that held the moccasin on. A leather lace was also often used to secure the moccasin.



The Pucker Vamp

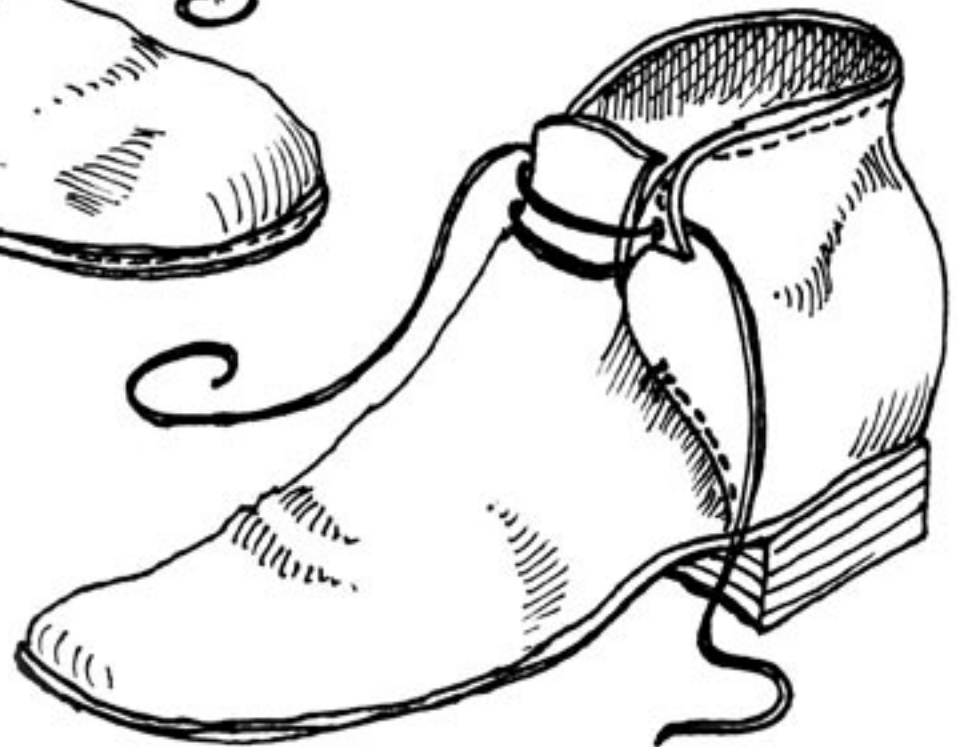
The bottoms of these moccasins were created from one piece of leather and then gathered around the top of the foot. Often the top would be made of red trade cloth. Some had extra leather to wrap around the ankle, and even extended to the knee.

Moccasins are more common at today's rendezvous than during the mountain man era. Shoes, boots and other clothing were available at the original rendezvous and trading posts. When their boots wore out, and they were not in a position to buy new ones, mountain men did construct and wear moccasins. It is also true that some mountain men might have been partial to moccasins, but boots were still very common.



English High Top Lace Boot

Made of stiff shoe leather in brown, yellow tan, black, and brown red. It was constructed and laced with heavy cotton cord.



Ankle High Work Shoeboot

Made with a soft brown leather body, and a stiff leather sole and heel. Sewn with heavy cotton "sail" cord, and laced with a piece of deer's hide.

## Hats

Mountain men wore a variety of hats. Felt hats were among the most popular. These came in a variety of shapes and sizes, and were available at most the trading posts. Some of the other common hats include the clerks cap, the voyager or liberty cap, the wool hood, and the Canadian hat.



Large Brim, High Crown  
Felt Hat



Low Crown, Narrow Brim  
Felt Hat



Short Soft Brim, Round Crown  
Felt Hat

Another common style of felt hat was a Large Brim hat with a round crown. Felt hats were usually brown or grey. Black was a more rare color. These hats were often decorated with different style hatbands. Hatbands were made out of everything from wool trade cloth, leather, strips of beadwork, or hair pipe. Feathers were also added on occasion. These hats took on a unique look as they became more weathered.





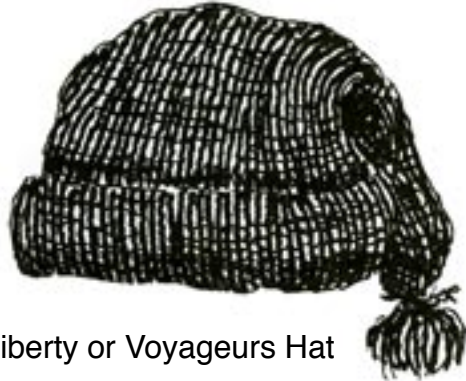
Canadian Cap

This is a fur trimmed cap with four peices of thick wool forming the crown.



Clerks Cap, or Wheel Cap

Made of wool, canvas, or corduroy, with a bill of fabric or hard leather. Sometimes made from scrap materials such as flower sacks.



Liberty or Voyageurs Hat

A simple wool knit hat that flops over to one side.



Fur Hat

Fur hats were not all that common. They would never have been made of beaver or any fur that was highly valued. Otter, skunk, and badger fur were most likely used. These hats usually were a simple round top construction, with a feather or two for decoration. A hard leather bill was often added. Fur hats with tails, paws, or animal faces were less common.



Wool Hood or Blanket Hood

Made from a peice of wool blanket, that when stitched together forms "ears"



## Pouches and Bags

Traditionally the Mountain Man did not have pockets in their pants, thus the need to have some way to carry and hold items that would normally be carried in the pants pockets. A possible bag is used to carry anything and everything that you need to have immediately available to you.

Possible bags vary greatly in size but are usually around 10 inches square.

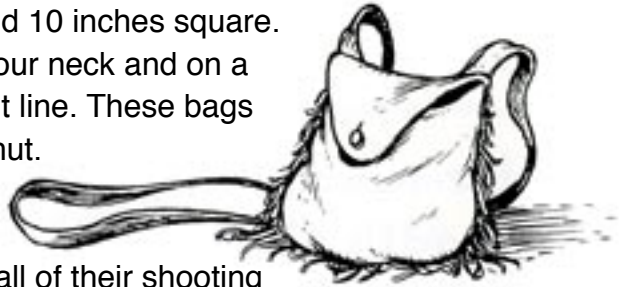
They usually have a long strap that can be put around your neck and on a shoulder to carry them so the bag hangs close to the belt line. These bags would have a flap and some method of securing them shut.

They would be made of leather or heavy canvas, and sometimes had pieces of trade cloth added. These bags

also used as shooting bags. Mountain men would need all of their shooting

supplies close at hand at all times. Often a powder horn would also be carried with the bag. The

strap of the bag also provided a good place to keep things right at hand. Sometime a small sheath for a patch knife was added to the strap of the bag.

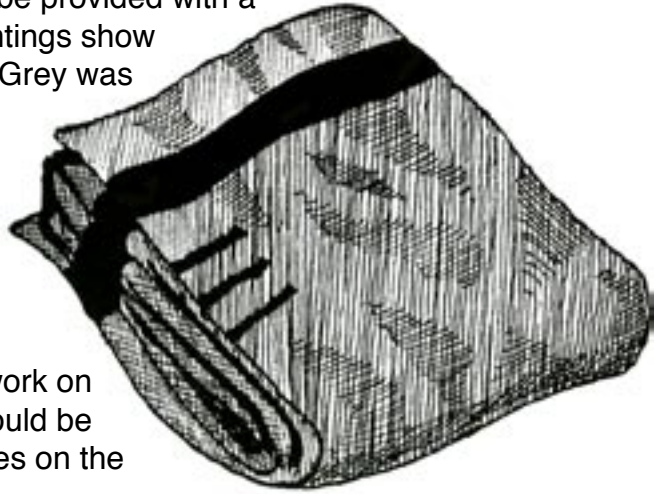


## Capotes

Capotes were the usual coat worn by mountain men. The knee-length hooded capote was usually made from a blanket, and was closed with a sash and occasionally buttons. Mountain men might sew capotes for themselves when winter began or be provided with a capote from the company's trade goods. Many paintings show mountain men wearing light blue or white capotes. Grey was also a common color.

Some fashionable mountain men wore a greatcoat instead of a capote. Greatcoats are distinguished from capotes by their fashionable lapels and more tailored fit.

Capotes did not usually have any fringing or beadwork on them. If the blanket had stripes or "points" these would be placed at the bottom of the capote, with some stripes on the sleeves.



Capotes are easy to make, and require a minimum amount of stitching. These were garments that were actually made by the mountain men, not professional tailors. The simpler the capote is the more likely it is to be correct to the period.

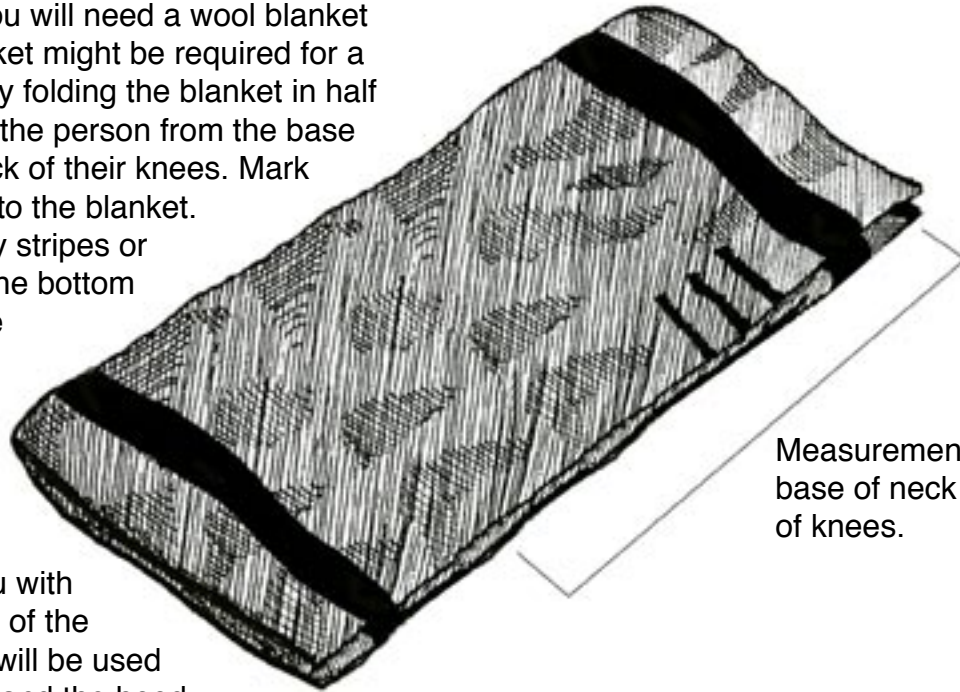
Capotes are usually made from a wool blanket. Today we usually see them made from a Hudson Bay Blanket, or a Whitney Blanket. These blankets are expensive to buy new. You can sometimes find other brands of point blankets for less, or find older used blankets at estate sales or online auctions. Another great place to find wool blankets is thrift stores or military surplus stores. The older grey Army blankets even have a black stripe, and look quite authentic.

To save time and help with the long term integrity of the your capote sewing it on a machine is advisable. Additional hand stitching can be added on the outside of the coat to preserve the hand made look. This "Blanket Stitching" is obvious on many historical drawings, but is not always present. This is an element that is really a personal choice.





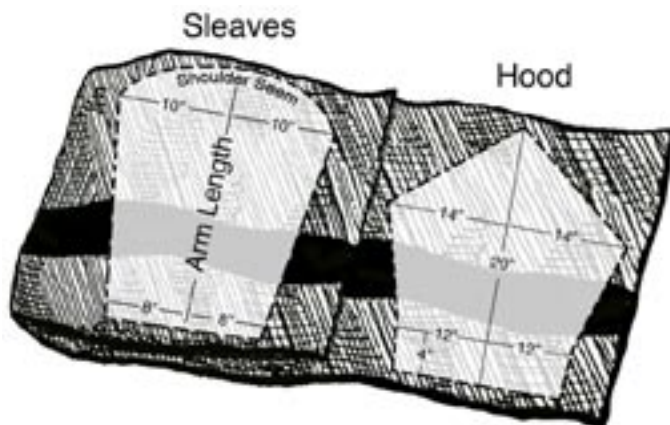
To create a capote you will need a wool blanket 72x90". A larger blanket might be required for a larger person. Start by folding the blanket in half lengthwise. Measure the person from the base of the neck to the back of their knees. Mark this measurement onto the blanket. Keep in mind that any stripes or points should go on the bottom of the capote. Cut the blanket straight across.



Measurement from base of neck to back of knees.

This should leave you with around 1/3 the length of the blanket. This portion will be used to make the sleeves, and the hood or collar.

Wrap the large portion around the body. There should be a 12-14" overlap in front. If the blanket is too big trim the width on the opposite side of the points. Measure the width of the shoulders and mark from the center of the blanket to cut sleeve openings and neck line.



Take the remaining piece of the blanket and fold one side over just enough to accommodate the sleeve pattern. Take special care to keep the stripes lined up. The sleeves can be square cut or slightly tapered with a rounded shoulder for a better fit. Sleeves should be cut to the length of the arm with a folded width of approximately 10" at the shoulder and 8" at the wrist. Once the sleeves have been cut the last portion of the blanket can be used to make a hood or collar.



These are very simplified instructions, and even though a capote is a simple garment, you may not get it right the first time. It is a good idea to first make a capote out of muslin, or other inexpensive fabric. This will allow you the freedom to make changes without ruining your blanket, and give you a pattern to cut from. Eagle View Patterns also offers a pattern for a capote.