



Vol. 3 No. 2, May 23 2024

Event Reports

Avoncroft Museum's International Living History Festival 20th – 21st April 2024

Your Editor visited this event for the third time with his son. Both of us went in period Victorian attire which attracted some attention and many photographs and enabled us to feel part of the event even though we were not there with any of our groups. As always, there was a good mix of periods represented from medieval through to World War 2. Living History camps, arena demonstrations and a few traders, all set among the museum's historic buildings, made for a great day out.

Of most interest to westerners would be the groups representing the Seven Years War, the American War of Independence and the War Between the States. Overall, the nineteenth century was very well represented with only the old west period being omitted (which it would be nice to rectify in future). We had a fun day and would urge everyone in range to visit this excellent event next year.

[R.B., Ed.]



Wagons Roll

3rd – 5th May 2024

This season's opener for Spirit of the Old West (SoToW) was again a well-attended event with caravans and campers and a few of us in period tents. The mornings were generally a little quiet but a "blanket sale" on the Sunday helped. Fun and games and fast draw competitions started around lunchtime and the atmosphere grew from there, helped by lots of chatting with friends and new acquaintances.

The evenings consisted of entertainment in the bar. Cowboy bingo, raffles and a whisky roll all took place along with prize-giving for the fabled shooters and games winners. All this plus a number of Country & Western performers on the three nights who attracted a lot of line dancing (not my thing but I am told they were all very good).

Most campers dressed up for the evenings, suiting the room which was decked out with lots of period flags. As well as us "authentic campers", there were others who dressed period plus some inspired by Hollywood and others in modern C&W attire.

The only annoyance was the loose cut grass that, being wet, was tracked everywhere, especially into the tents. The weather was better than in 2023 but morning dew meant that your editor's tent still had to be hung up to dry when he got home – just one of the normal 'hazards' of camping.

Special mention must be given to Sanita's Country Kitchen – the best catering van I think I have ever known – friendly people and excellent food!

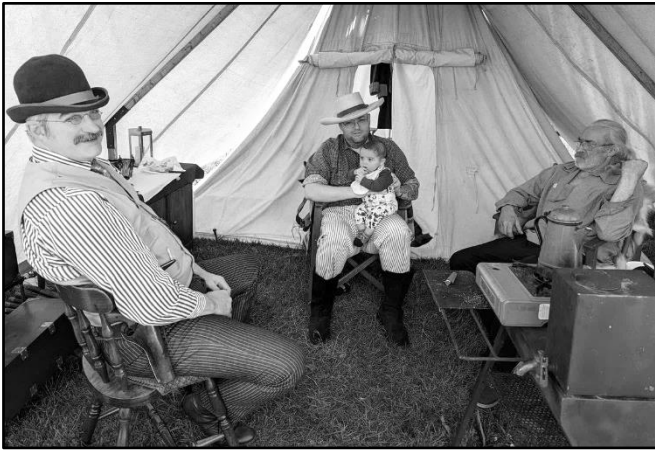
This was the last Wagons Roll at Penkrige. The event is moving next year to Stoke Prior near Bromsgrove which should make it even better.

[R.B., Ed.]

Camp Severn, Shrewsbury

4th – 6th May 2024

Camp Severn is a children's event run every year in Shrewsbury and is fun for all the family. Paul Weaver normally runs this for Spirit of the Old West but, due to ill health, I was seconded from my duties at Wagons Roll. Fortunately, we have sufficient members to cover two or three events in the same weekend. The weather stayed good for us this year and the children had a fantastic time as did the adults by the looks on their faces. I would like to thank all the SoToW members who turned out to support this event, and YES! we had a great time also.



'Pop Weaver' at Camp Severn

[Paul "Dutch" Alders]

Emma of Jos Events, who run Camp Severn, was very happy with our group. SoToW were asked back as we are adaptable and incorporate the child-centered theme and fun elements of the event.

Your editor attended on the Monday after leaving Wagons Roll that morning. It was quiet by then but I am assured that it was very busy on the Saturday and Sunday. The camp was popular with visitors and the shootout scenes went very well. Congratulations to all those who attended!

[R.B., Ed.]

[Wagons Roll Photographs:
R.B.; Natasha Luczak]

Authentic Rendezvous, Stoke Prior

17th – 19th May 2024

Spirit of the Old West's first Rendezvous event was an outstanding success even with the last-minute change of location. This change was due to no fault of the working council but the speed with which Dan & Tank went into action is to be applauded, as is Stoke Prior Sports Club which is, I might add, a brilliant location.

We made good use of our new tented saloon which is very impressive, as is our resident Soiled Dove. Members were quick to show their appreciation; some were perhaps a little too quick but pride of place has to go to Dutch who gave her a big welcome.

(The young lady in question stated clearly that she was dressed as a saloon girl, not a soiled dove, but some older group members can get carried away! R.B., Ed.)

We all had a fantastic evening in the club with excellent country music, then to crawl into blankets under canvas (or in campers) to sleep the sleep of the innocent. After breakfast on Sunday, we all had an informal meeting and everyone contributed and all agreed that it was a worthwhile weekend and that we are all looking forward to doing it again.

On another note: Three new members have signed-up to the group!

[Paul "Dutch" Alders]



More on this camp, giving a vision for how it could develop, is on page 7.



[Photographs: Marie Evans; Craig Evans]

A Little Friendly Advice

This article is aimed at those who are just starting out in Living History / Reenactment.

Your Editor has noticed that there is a small minority of people who like to put down others' clothing, gun rig or camp set-up without offering any helpful advice. These commenters are very rarely, if ever, seen at events themselves so their own gear cannot be used for reference and their comments should not, therefore, be taken seriously. However, they do sometimes have a point (even if it is not stated in a constructive manner) hence your Editor is going to throw in his two cents' worth with a view to encouraging new starters.

Only being in the scene for three years, your editor is not an expert in all particulars but I have learned some basics that new people should find useful to start building a good impression without wasting money on anachronisms. I have researched extensively for my own impression and have recently been appointed 'Living History Coordinator' for Spirit of the Old West Living History & Reenactment Group (SoToW).

Firstly, be sure what year(s) you are going to be representing. Just as in the 20th and 21st centuries, fashions did not remain stagnant in the 19th for men or women. A couple in 1840 would be dressed quite differently from their 1890 counterparts. Weapons and other equipment changed too.

Secondly, once you know the date you are aiming for, think about your impression. Are you just going to be another generic cowboy, outlaw or lawman? Or are you going to portray someone else? Do not forget that most people in the western frontier were doing the same kinds of jobs as they would have done "back East" – the same kinds of jobs we all do now. It is just that the locations and circumstances were different. Most people would have been either farmers/homesteaders or some kind of townspeople. Do some research and choose something that inspires or appeals to you and that you feel you could do justice to. In my three years, I have met lawmen, cowboys, drifters and mountain men but also bartenders, town drunks,

lawyers, land agents, undertakers, Pinkerton detectives, preachers, miners, storekeepers, land surveyors/engineers, seamstresses and others, not forgetting myself as a newspaper man.

The third stage is where things get more detailed – perhaps more difficult but definitely interesting. You now know the date and the role so get researching. Use the internet but be careful and always ensure you double or triple check everything you find to avoid being taken down dark alleys of misinformation, Hollywoodisms and fancy dress. Do not forget that there are a number of excellent Facebook groups/pages and countless books on every conceivable subject (I have two just on newspapering plus one on printing equipment). Another excellent source for period designs is a replica/reprint store catalog. The 1886 Bloomingdale's one is popular and easy to get but there are others. Search them out online and see what you can find.

The fourth stage is where it can all start getting expensive so the prior research is essential in saving your dollars. Make use of the relevant authenticated photographs and information you have found and look for clothing and equipment to suit those. Maybe you know or can find someone who can make your clothes based on authentic patterns. Alternatively, ask around for the best suppliers in terms of accuracy, quality and price. (Some of them have been noted in previous editions of this newspaper.)

Make sure you check what's being sold second hand – again, there are some Facebook pages and online auction sites but word of mouth helps. This can save you a lot of money on clothing and the expensive items such as weapons, rigs and tents.

If you intend to carry a rig (gun belt and holster), you should do what you can to make sure that it fits your impression in terms of style and date. Both belts and holsters come in a variety of designs that appeared at different times. As an 1880s town businessman, I do not have a civil war type flap holster nor do I wear a double holster or lots of spare bullets. Other impressions will be different so research is key. Again, use books and the internet but also ask in your group as there is usually at least one expert in each subject. The main thing to avoid is the Buscadero or Fast Draw rig. These are a

1920s invention that became dominant in Hollywood films up to the 1990s. They have no place in the 19th century and stand out to anyone with a little knowledge. Many of us have spare more authentic rigs which can be borrowed until new participants have managed to get their own.

Do not worry about things being stitched by hand or machine, especially if you are representing someone from the 1870s onwards. Sewing machines were available from the 1850s and were gaining popularity by the time of the Civil War so, by the last quarter of the century, they were present in some homes and especially in the clothing factories. There are times and situations where clothing would be home-made and basic so hand-stitching would be appropriate but many clothes would have been bought from a store or ordered via a catalog so they would have been machine stitched in factories. I doubt there are many pedants (the much feared “stitch counters”) who can tell the difference between the work of an 1880s machine and that of a 2020s one without examining it very closely.

Material is another issue. Nineteenth century clothing was manufactured from natural materials: wool, cotton, flax, linen, silk and animal skins. Natural material clothing can be expensive and is usually bespoke whilst most affordable off-the-peg period clothing that you will find is made from modern materials and blends. As with the stitching, few people will notice the material a garment is made from but try to find things that at least look right. Avoid the Country & Western outfitters; they have their place but authentic living history is not it. Also, when you have bought the most appropriate looking clothes that you can, remove any extraneous labels. I suspect some trousers/pants did have manufacturers’ labels on the back but they weren’t Frontier Classics or any of the other popular modern ones so unpick them carefully.

If your impression is someone who would be doing physical work, you can put some effort into making your clothing appear a little old and worn but remember that, whilst some clothes would have aged quickly, everything was new once and some people had cleaner jobs than others.

If your wish is to represent a mountain man / trapper or a native, you may wish to get a set of buckskins. I have no personal experience of this but I do know that true deer hide buckskins are hard to obtain and relatively expensive. Some reenactors opt for a type of treated suede but, apparently, that can be obvious to some people so you would have to use your own judgement and choose what is best for you. As always, research and ask around.

Hats. Oh dear, hats! Most men did not wear broad brimmed “cowboy hats” or “ten-gallon hats” as seen in the movies or on the heads of C&W singers. Yes, some cattle punchers, drovers and others who worked outside did have them but they did not look like those on film and they were by no means universal, being seen rarely in towns. Again, research for your impression but consider bowlers/derbies (very common at the time), top hats and others. Hats can be expensive but look at second-hand. A cheap derby can be had from an antique/collectors’ market or even from a charity shop for very little. Look for one with a high crown if you can but anything would do for a start. If desired, an expensive period western hat can be bought later, when you can afford it.

The last thing on clothing is spectacles. Apart from possibly a Buscadero rig, nothing can spoil an otherwise great impression as easily as a modern pair of glasses. Antique frames are easy to find online or in antique stores. There are also companies that make replicas of old styles. The antique ones are cheap but getting prescription lenses put in can be difficult and potentially costly as most chain opticians won’t touch them and you will need to find an independent one to do the job. If you do not have period style spectacles yet, the best thing is to not wear any at all while events are open and the public are visiting. Just try not to trip over anything!

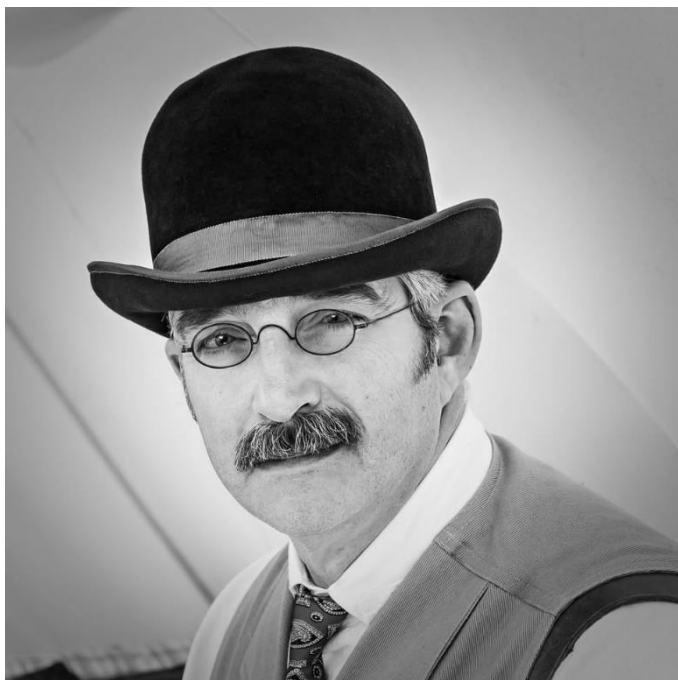
For your camping equipment and accoutrements, ensure anything you get is date and impression appropriate. It does not have to be an actual antique; if it looks 150 years old, it will look wrong anyway. Life was harder but items did not age at 30 or 50 times the rate they do now. Again, everything was new once but it would have been well used. As long as the design looks right and the item looks like it could be up to a few years old, you will be fine. Any flags must be date appropriate and should be sewn cotton on wooden poles (not printed polyester on modern whip poles).

Forthcoming SoToW Events

Relax! You do not have to be completely sorted out for your first camp. You may not even have decided on an exact period or impression yet; these can come over time. Do not try to get everything at once. For one thing, if you decide that you don't actually like camping out with a number of strange people who usually drink too much and tell bad jokes in the evenings, you could have wasted a lot of money. The other point is that historical reenactment is an expensive hobby. We never have everything we need; there is always something else that we would like to get to add to our collections. Just get the basics to start with and build gradually. You don't have to keep your tent open to public view so the internal bits can be modern until you have a chance to improve them. Blank firing pistols are not cheap (even the basic Bruni is going to be £70 plus) but most of us have spares and will lend one together with an appropriate rig. The same goes for just about everything. SoToW even has a couple of spare tents for new people to try the experience. Just ask.

Finally: take it easy, don't worry if you make a mistake (I made a few!) and have fun!

I received much advice and did a lot of research when I started in the scene which helped me greatly. I hope I have managed to pass some of that on.



[R.B., Ed.]

Country Music and Fast Draw Gigs, 2024

The Royal British Legion, 5 Windsor Road, Oldbury, B68 8NY:

1st June – Jeff Gallant

6th July – Cole Jackson

3rd August – Dave Montana

12th October – Adam Harding

7th December – Rootin' Tootin'

End of the Trail,

Location TBC at time of going to press.

Fri. 1st – Sat. 2nd November.

Brean Country Festival

Brean Sands, Somerset, TA8 2RB.

C&W and Living History and many stalls etc.

Free camping for Living History members with Authentic Tents – contact Dan Luczak.

Mon. 24th June – Mon. 1st July 2024

Welshpool Country Music Festival

Powis Castle Showfield, Welshpool, SY21 7NS

C&W and Living History and many stalls etc.

Sat. 20th – Sun. 21st July 2024

Haxey Feast

Willow Fields Campsite, Epworth Rd, Haxey, Doncaster DN9 2LH

A new event for SoToW incorporating both Fast Draw and Living History / Reenactment.

Sat. 27th – Sun 28th July 2024

Driffield Steam Fair

East Yorkshire Showground, Driffield, YO25 9DN.

An established Living History event for us.

Sat. 10th – Sun. 11th August.

For more information:

email: events@sotow.co.uk; phone 07399 882242;

follow Spirit of the Old West on Facebook;

look out for the forthcoming website.

[Craig Evans]

Look out for other events to attend either as day visitors or as guests of other groups (ask them first!). Use any excuse to wear your period clothing and spread the old west word! I know I do!

[R.B., Ed.]

More on the Authentic Rendezvous

Newly Established Camp depicting the American West Brings Together Cowboys, Natives, and Mountain Men

Spirit of the Old West's first Multi-Period Camp breaks ground in exciting fashion!

May 16th, 2024 - In a remote valley beneath the shadow of the Stoke Prior and Bromsgrove Mountain, a unique encampment has sprung to life. Nestled amidst towering trees and surrounded by a gently flowing canal, this settlement showcases a tapestry of life in the American West, spanning the eras from 1760 to 1899. The camp, comprised of a multitude of period-correct canvas tents, is a veritable living museum. Cowboys, with their wide-brimmed hats and spurs, rub shoulders with Native Americans in traditional attire and seasoned mountain men who look as though they have stepped out of a time machine. The driving force behind this camp, Big D (aka Daniel Luczak), said this is a shared vision for all the varied members within the group. "We want to preserve and celebrate the diverse cultures and lifestyles that shaped the West," explained Big D, a newly found mountain man and Chairperson of SoToW. "From the early trappers and traders of the 18th century to the cattle drives and Native tribes that have called this scene home for many generations." Each group within the camp has discussed how to set up their respective areas with attention to historical accuracy. The cowboys are looking to create a lively encampment with Townsfolk leading the way on roles such as Newspaper, Assay Office, leather smiths and more. Their campfires stories crackled around a nice fire and, as each told their story of the trail, the scent of beans and bacon wafts through the air. Adjacent to the cowboy tents, a circle of tepees rises against the sky, each one painted with vibrant patterns. The Native Americans, representing various tribes, have come together to share their customs and traditions. "This is an opportunity to educate and share our experiences with others," says Chief Tank, a Native elder. "We dance, sing, and tell the stories of our experiences, trying to invite others to try the native side of the west." On the edge of the camp, the mountain men have constructed rustic canvas shelters and lean-tos, reminiscent of the fur trade era. Clad in buckskin and armed with flintlock rifles, they demonstrate the skills that were vital for survival in the wilderness. "We bring the past to life," says Jake Green, "From trapping

and skinning to navigating by the stars; it's a glimpse into a bygone era." We welcome new Trappers and Mountain men that are alone in the wilderness.

"Join Us," he holla'd.

Big D welcomed everyone with a general introduction to the camp which then turned into our Camp Assembly. The Natives were first to sit which surprised some of the Townsfolk, dressed in skins and pelts they were ready to pow wow. They were followed by the Mountain men who again wore Buckskins and carried flintlock pistols just in case something needed trapping along the trail. The last to join the table were the Townsfolk with Cowboys in tow who were a little restless but who can blame them as this was the first sit down of a New and Brave Multi Period Camp.

Visitors to the camp are treated to a myriad of activities and demonstrations. We offer people the hands-on experience, to come and try living it with us by way of taster camps, be that in a tent or your own mobile camp(er) van / Caravan.

The camp is open to all who wish to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Western history.

[Daniel "Big D" Luczak]



[Photographs: Marie Evans]

Suppliers

We hope that our readers will furnish us with details of any suppliers that they believe to be worthy of patronage.

Sullivan Press

<https://sullivanpress.com/>

Sullivan Press produce replica/reprint paper goods: books, documents, money and other items, ranging from the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the American West and even World War II. Appropriate to our activities, they sell replica dollars from the Civil War period and in both the 1869 and 1880 designs. I have some from 1880 and I do think the quality is excellent; I just had to scrunch them up a bit to make them look used. The service was very good and the prices are fair. This site is definitely useful for paper items to add to your impression.



Suppliers noted previously are:

Civil War Sutler, civilwarsutler.co.uk.

River Junction Trade Co., riverjunction.com.

Hats Period, hatsperiod.co.uk and on Facebook.

South Union Mills, southunionmills.com.

FLB Westernwear, flbwesternwear.co.uk.

19th Century Tailoring (AKA Sutlers),

19th-century-tailoring.co.uk; sutlers.co.uk.

Historical Emporium www.historicalemporium.com.

Sutler of Fort Scott, sutleroffortscott.com.

All That Glisters Coins,


allthatglisterscoins@gmail.com.

[R.B., Ed.]

[Contribution credits named in text.]

Facebook / Frontier Citizen

MISCELLANEOUS



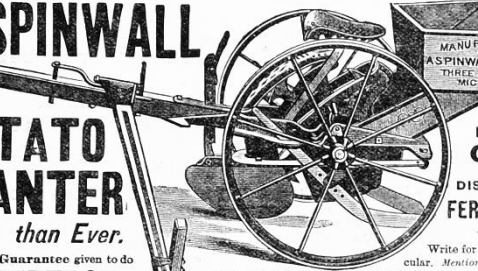
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Frontier Citizen, affiliated to Spirit of the Old West Living History & Reenactment Society.

Richard F. Baker; Owner, Editor and Reporter