



## **Sourwood Mountain** **by Seth Austin**

For this issue of Mandolin Sessions, we'll play Sourwood Mountain. This is a classic old time fiddle tune and song, recorded by numerous artists. Old time fiddlers generally play this tune in cross tuning. I really enjoy using cross tunings on mandolin. If you haven't tried these tunings previously, check out my December 2008 column where we played Breaking Up Christmas in open tuning.

Sourwood Mountain is often played in the key of A, using AEAE, low to high. This is one of the most commonly used open tunings in old time fiddle music, and is sometimes called sawmill tuning. We'll play Sourwood Mountain in this tuning. Some fiddlers tune down to GDGD. I generally do this, preferring the archaic sound of the lower tuning. It's also less string tension on your mandolin. Either way the fingering is exactly the same, but it sounds in the key of G instead of A.

Cross tunings make it particularly easy to use double stops or drones. I didn't notate where to add the double stops, however the entire tune can be played with open strings droning either below or above the melody. I play it slightly differently each time through. Add them in wherever it sounds good to you. I sometimes start a measure or phrase with a full open strummed chord, and let it ring through while playing the melody, rather than playing constant double stops..

I often slide up to the seventh fret E on the A string with my 4th finger, and play that note in unison with the open E. An example of this is in the 3rd measure of the A part. I don't play it every time, but use it to increase the impact of that note when wanted. Similarly, if you play the 5th fret of the 3rd string, it's unison with the open A. I do this in the 3rd measure of the B part, since I've just played melody on the 3rd string in the previous measure.

When in this tuning, your treble pair of strings is the same interval as the bass pair. Thus you can play the melody an octave lower as a variation, using the same fingering. In this tune, you can play the entire A part in the lower octave without any alterations, however the B part goes too low so I just jump back into the higher octave where needed.

I hope you enjoy playing Sourwood Mountain! See you next time.

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