Moonshine Encyclopedia Article

Moonshine

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Moonshine

Moonshine is the common name for illegally produced hard liquor—whiskey, rum, brandy, gin, and vodka. (Another name is white lightning.) The term probably was first used in 1785. In that year a British book on vulgar language described "moonshine" as the clear brandy that was smuggled to the coasts of Kent and Sussex in England. In the New World, moonshine was made in homemade stills (apparatus for distilling liquor), usually from corn. It was especially popular in rural areas in the southern United States before, during, and after Prohibition, and it continues to be made today. The alcohol content of moonshine is usually high, often as much as 80 percent (160 proof). First-run moonshine contains a number of impurities, some of which are toxic, so it is necessary to double and triple distill the liquor to purify it for drinking.

See Also

Alcohol: History of Drinking; Prohibition of Alcohol.