

Horseshoe Bend

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK • ALABAMA



Andrew Jackson

Menawa

"This bend which resembles in its curvature that of a horse-shoe, includes, I conjecture, eighty or a hundred acres. The River immediately around it, is deep, & somewhat upwards of a hundred yards wide. As a situation for defense it was selected with judgment, & improved with great industry and art."

Thus did Andrew Jackson describe the place where, on March 27, 1814, about 3,000 Tennessee frontier troops under his command defeated about 1,000 Creek Indians led by Chief Menawa. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend ended the Creek Indian War and broke the tribe's power in the Southeastern United States. Creek lands comprising three-fifths of the present State of Alabama and one-fifth of Georgia were added to the United States and opened for settlement.

THE CREEK NATION

The Creeks, whose tribal myths place their origin in the Red River region, migrated to Alabama and Georgia about A.D. 1200. By displacing or incorporating other tribes, they built an extensive though loose confederacy of many villages. Hernando De Soto, on his epic trek from Florida to the Mississippi in 1540, found the Creeks a civilized people, living in towns with many houses and farm fields. Agriculture dominated the tribe's economy until the last half of the 18th century, by which time commercial hunting had largely displaced it.

For 250 years Spain, France, and England competed for Creek favor, with trade as the chief instrument of negotiation. England was the ultimate winner, and Creek dependence on British luxuries increased. After the American Revolution, the tribe opened relations with the United States and in 1790 signed the Treaty of New York which defined Creek land boundaries and guaranteed American friendship. For nearly two decades, many Creeks followed U.S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins' program for improving their agriculture and living standards. Because they lived closer to white settlements, the Lower Creeks of Georgia fell more under Hawkins' influence than did the Upper Creeks of Alabama.

THE CREEK WAR, 1813-14

In February 1813, civil war broke out between the Upper and Lower Creeks. Apparent causes were Upper Creek opposition to Hawkins' program, white squatters on Creek lands, and the general advance of the American frontier. Indian nationalism, as preached by the Shawnee Chief Tecumseh, also contributed to the Red Stick (Upper Creek) rebellion.

In July the conflict grew beyond the boundaries of a tribal feud when Creek mixed-bloods and

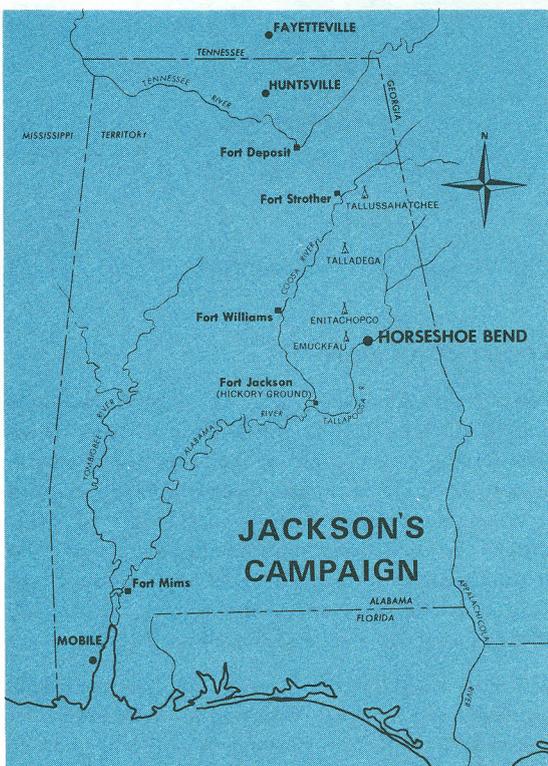
frontier militia ambushed a Red Stick ammunition train on Burnt Corn Creek in Alabama. The next month, in retaliation, the Red Sticks killed about 250 settlers at Fort Mims, north of Mobile. American response was slow, unorganized, and spasmodic. Mississippi and Georgia militia jabbed at several Red Stick strongholds, but failed to crush the rebellion.

Meanwhile, Andrew Jackson had mobilized the Tennessee Militia for a full-scale campaign. He planned to drive southward into the heart of Red Stick country between the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers. Early victories in November at the Upper Creek towns of Tallusahatchee and Talladega raised hopes for a speedy conclusion of the war; but supply delays, enlistment expirations, threat of starvation, and mutiny slowed his advance from Fort Strother on the upper Coosa. In January 1814, resupplied and reinforced, he began his second campaign. After two encounters, at Emuckfau and Enitachopco Creeks, he was once again forced to withdraw to Fort Strother.

Despite Jackson's retreat, the outlook for the Red Sticks was grim. During the preceding autumn and winter, many of the warriors fled to the village of Tohopeka, inside the "horseshoe bend" of the Tallapoosa. There they hoped to be protected by the encircling river, their Prophets' (religious leaders') magic, and a log barricade across the open end of the peninsula. Their numbers and weapons reduced by previous defeats, they subsisted on wild game—and waited.

BATTLE AT HORSESHOE BEND

In March 1814, Jackson's army left Fort Williams on the Coosa, cut a 52-mile trail through the forest in 3 days, and on the 26th made camp 6 miles north of Horseshoe Bend. The next morning, Jackson sent Gen. John Coffee with 700 cavalrymen and 600 Cherokee and Lower Creek allies 3 miles downstream to cross the Tallapoosa and



surround the bend. He took the rest of the army—about 2,000 men, consisting of East and West Tennessee militia and the 39th U.S. Infantry—into the peninsula, and at 10:30 a.m. began an ineffectual 2-hour artillery bombardment of the Red Sticks' log barricade. At noon, some of Coffee's Cherokees crossed the river and assaulted the Red Sticks from the rear. Jackson quickly ordered a frontal charge which poured over the barricade. Fighting ranged over the south end of the peninsula throughout the afternoon. By dark, almost 800 of Chief Menawa's 1,000 Red Sticks were dead. Menawa himself, although severely wounded, managed to escape. Jackson's losses in the battle were 49 killed and 154 wounded, many mortally.

Though the Red Sticks had been crushed at Tohopeka, the remnants of the hostile Creeks held out for several months. In August 1814, exhausted and starving, they surrendered to Jackson near the present city of Montgomery, Ala. The Treaty of Fort Jackson ending the conflict required the Creeks to cede some 20 million acres of land—more than half of their territorial holdings—to the United States. (The State of Alabama would be carved out of this domain and admitted to the Union in 1819.)

For Andrew Jackson, the victory at Horseshoe Bend was the first step on the road to national fame and the White House. Nine months later, on January 8, 1815, he defeated the British in the Battle of New Orleans ending the War of 1812. In 1829 he became President; a year later he signed the Indian Removal Bill forcing all the tribes east of the Mississippi River to move to Oklahoma. The Southeast, cleared of most of the Indians and free from the threat of foreign intervention, thus became part of the United States and was opened for rapid settlement.



ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The park, on Ala. 49, is 12 miles north of Dadeville and 18 miles northeast of Alexander City via New-site. Restaurant and motel facilities are available in both towns. The nearest camping facilities are at Wind Creek State Park, 6 miles south of Alexander City. Additional campgrounds are available at Talladega National Forest and Mt. Cheaha State Park, both 50 miles north of the park on Ala. 49. There is a picnic area at Horseshoe Bend.

A 3-mile road that loops through the battlefield has trails and markers designed to make your visit interesting and informative. A 2.8-mile nature trail through the battlefield starts at Stop 1 (see tour map). The Horseshoe Bend Boy Scout Trail

starts on Ala. 22 at Hillabee Creek, north of Alexander City, and ends in the park. There is an overnight campsite for Boy Scouts on the trail west of the park.

A flintlock rifle demonstration in Tennessee Militia costume is given when staffing permits.

Special tours for groups can be arranged with the superintendent. The park's telephone number is 205-234-7111.

A TOUR OF THE PARK

We suggest that you begin your tour by viewing the visitor center exhibits on Creek culture, frontier life, and the Creek War of 1813-14. These will help you to gain a better understanding of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. As you travel around the battlefield, you will learn more of the story from the interpretive devices at each stop.

1. *Cotton Patch Hill.* Andrew Jackson's army arrived at this point about 10 a.m. on March 27, 1814. Gen. John Coffee's cavalymen and Indian allies had already crossed the Tallapoosa about 3 miles downstream and encircled the "horseshoe" to prevent the Red Sticks from getting assistance from other towns or escaping by swimming the river. Jackson deployed his own force of militia and infantry across the field and placed his artillery on Gun Hill to your right. Straight ahead, behind their log barricade, about 1,000 Red Stick warriors awaited Jackson's attack.

2. *The Island.* On March 27, this 15-acre wooded island glistened with rifles in the hands of Lt. Jesse Bean's Tennessee militia. From the outer perimeter of the horseshoe, General Coffee had "ordered Lt. Bean to take possession of the island . . . with forty men to prevent enemys taking refuge there which was executed with promptitude, & which had a very happy effect as many of the enemy did attempt their escape to the island but not one ever landed—they were sunk by Lt. Bean's command ere they reached the bank."

3. *Gun Hill.* Just before the battle, two small cannon—a 3-pounder and a 6-pounder—were placed here and trained on the Red Sticks' log barricade. As Jackson later reported it to Maj. Gen Thomas Pinckney, "at half past 10 o'clock A.M. I formed my line of battle across this straight, & planted my artillery on an eminence about eighty yards from the nearest point of the wall & about 300 from the farthest. I immidiately opened a brisk fire upon its centre; but altho the balls which passed through, killed several of the enemy, they were not dispursed, nor was any important damage done to the works."

Jackson also described the character of the barricade: "Across the neck of land which leads into it [the peninsula] they had erected a breast-works eighty-poles in length, from five to eight feet high & of remarkable compactness & strength, prepared with double rows of Port Holes well formed & skilfully arranged, it was of such a figure that an Army could not approach it, without being exposed to a cross fire."

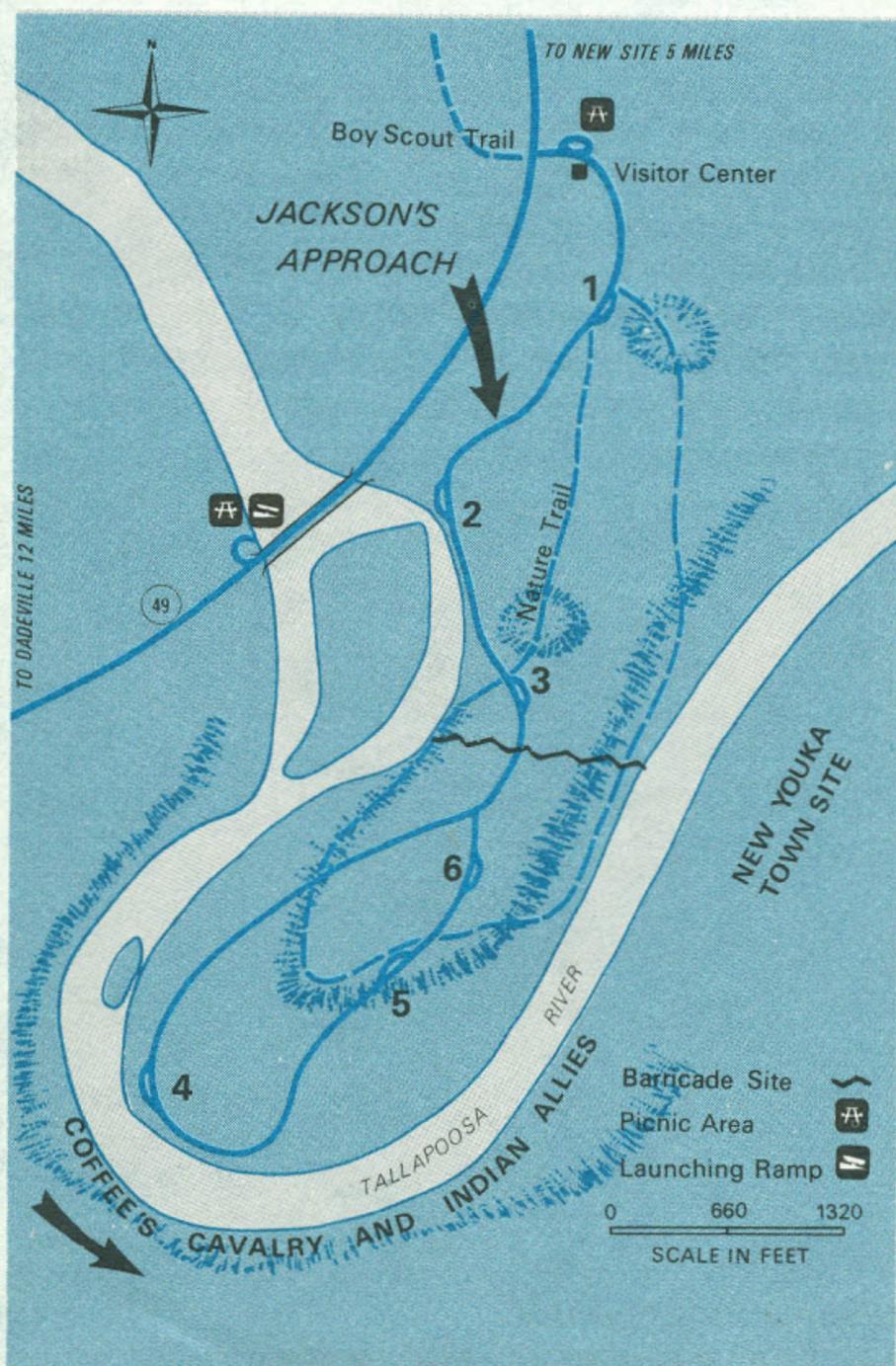
4. *Cherokee Crossing.* The Red Sticks who fled to the "horseshoe" hoped that the encircling river would protect them from Jackson's soldiers. But

Jackson surrounded the bend with Indian allies who, while the militia and regulars kept the Red Sticks busy at the barricade, launched a surprise rear attack into Tohopeka village. General Coffee later recounted the attack in a report to Jackson: "The firing of your cannons & small arms in a short time became general & heavy which animated our Indians, . . . [some of whom] plunged into the water and swam over the river for canoes, that lay at the other shore in considerable numbers & brought them over, in which craft a number of them embarked, & landed in the bend with the enemy, . . . they advanced into the village & very soon drove the enemy up from the bank of the river to the fortified works from which they were fighting you. . . ."

Coffee also said that "attempts to cross the river at all points of the bend were made by the enemy but not one escaped, very few ever reached the bank, and those were killed the very instant they landed."

5. Tohopeka Village. Tohopeka (meaning "the fort") was a temporary refugee village begun several months before the battle. The warriors' families wintered here in crude log huts while the men built the barricade across the peninsula. The women and children stayed here during the battle. When Coffee's Cherokees attacked from across the river, they burned Tohopeka and assaulted the Red Sticks from the rear. After the fighting ended, 350 women and children were taken prisoner. A short trail leads to the overlook shelter.

6. New Youka Town Site. Across the river lay the Upper Creek town of New Youka, named for the 1790 Treaty of New York guaranteeing Creek lands and perpetual friendship with the United States. The town was burned before the battle, and its people joined the other refugees at Tohopeka.



SAFETY

Your safety is important to you and to us. Please be alert to hazards such as poisonous snakes, poison ivy, and biting fire ants. Exercise caution while boating and while walking along the riverbank. Parents, watch your children at all times. Please report all accidents and any hazards you may find to park rangers; they are here to help you enjoy your visit.

Horseshoe Bend National Military Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Route 1, Box 103, Daviston, AL 36256, is in immediate charge.