

# Horseshoe Bend

National Military Park  
Alabama  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Official Guide and Map



Horseshoe Bend of the Tallapoosa.

Eastern National Park & Monument Association

"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 and U.S. regulars under his command defeated about 1,000 Upper 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 white settlement. 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.

Below right: Menawa, Upper Creek leader at Horseshoe Bend, after a painting by Charles Bird King. Below left: Gen. Andrew Jackson, from a portrait attributed to Samuel Waldo, 1815. Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site, NY

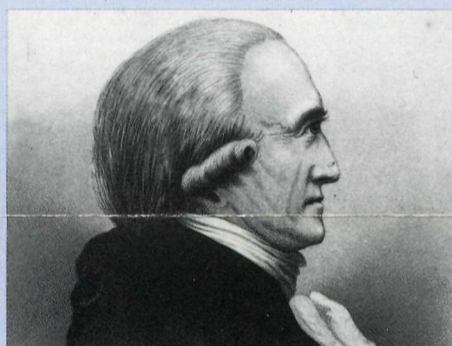


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## The Creek Nation

The Creeks, whose tribal beliefs place their origin in the Red River region, migrated eastward about A.D. 1200 and eventually came to occupy large parts of the present States of Alabama and Georgia. Their name derives from a shortening of "Ocheese Creek Indians," Ocheese being an early name for the Ocmulgee River, along which most of the Creeks were living when Europeans first came into contact with them. By displacing or incorporating other tribes, they built an extensive though loose confederacy of many villages.

For 250 years Spain, France, and England competed for Creek favor, with trade as the chief instrument of ne-



Benjamin Hawkins, U.S. agent to southeastern Indians, 1796-1816.

gotiation. 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, a program designed to foster peaceful relations between Creeks



Tecumseh, Shawnee chief and Indian nationalist.

and Americans. 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 division that developed between the Lower and Upper Creeks

over Hawkins' civilization program intensified as the Lower Creeks were drawn into closer contact with their white neighbors. Fueling the situation were white squatters on Creek lands, tribal punishments for Creek attacks on white settlers, the

inexorable advance of the American frontier, and Indian nationalism as preached by the Shawnee Chief Tecumseh. While most of the Lower Creeks turned a deaf ear to Tecumseh's eloquent pleas to rise up and drive the white man from Indian lands, many of the more militant Upper Creeks (called Red Sticks because they painted themselves and their war clubs bright red) listened attentively and agreed.

Upper Creeks, like those who lived in the villages of Newyaucau and Tohopeka, grew their own corn but depended on the richness of the area for fish, game, and other foods.

Illustration by Gilbert Cohen.



## The Creek War, 1813-14

The split between the Creeks widened in February 1813 when a party of Red Sticks murdered seven frontier families after being told erroneously that war had broken out between the Creeks and the United States. When a Creek tribal council tried and executed the Indians responsible for the killings, Red Sticks under Menawa and other leaders set themselves the task of eliminating everyone connected with the executions and removing all evidence of Hawkins' hated civilization program.

In July 1813 the conflict worsened when Creek mixed-bloods and white 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, about 40 miles 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. Supported by Lower Creek and Cherokee allies and a regiment of U.S. infantry, he planned to



Jackson's difficulty in conquering the Creeks was due not so much to the size of the Creek forces and their skill in combat as it was to the inaccessible nature of their villages. The total number of Creeks overtly hostile to the American government

seldom numbered more than 4,000, and probably no more than a thousand warriors were ever mustered for any one battle. Fighting the Creeks was never a problem for Jackson, but moving and supplying his army in their territory was.

drive southward into the heart of Red Stick country between the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers. Early victories in November at the Upper Creeks towns of Tallushatchee 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 bloody encounters, at Emuckfau and Enitachopco creeks, he was once again forced to withdraw to Fort Strother.

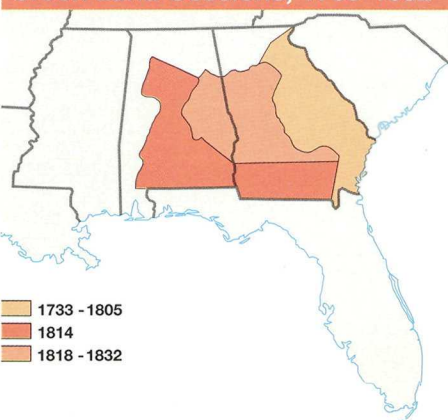
Despite Jackson's retreat, the outlook for the Red Sticks was grim. During the preceding autumn and winter, many of the warriors fled to the village of Tohopeka, inside the "horseshoe bend" of the Tallapoosa, or, in the Muskogean tongue, *Cholocco Litabixee*, meaning "horse's flat foot or hoof." There they hoped to be protected by the encircling river, their Prophets' (shamen's) magic, a log barricade across the open end of the peninsula, and a thousand warriors under the great war chief Menawa. Their numbers and weapons reduced by previous defeats, the Red Sticks subsisted on wild game—and waited.

# Horseshoe Bend

## The Battle at Horseshoe Bend

In March 1814, General Jackson's army left Fort Williams on the Coosa, cut a 52-mile trail through the forest in three days, and on the 26th made camp six miles north of Horseshoe Bend. The next morning, Jackson sent Gen. John Coffee and 700 mounted infantry and 600 Cherokee and Lower Creek allies three 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 Thirty-ninth U.S. Infantry—into the peninsula, and at 10:30 a.m. began an ineffectual two-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 bayonet charge, which poured over the barricade. Fighting ranged over the south end of the peninsula throughout the afternoon. By dark, at least 800 of Chief Menawa's 1,000 Red Sticks were dead (557 slain on the field and 200-300 in the river). Menawa himself, although severely

### Creek Land Cessions, 1733-1832



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 at Wetumpka, 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 ancestral territorial holdings—to the United States. (The state of Alabama was carved out of this domain and admitted to the Union in 1819.)

In 1829, partly as a result of his fame from the battles of Horseshoe Bend and New Orleans, Andrew Jackson was elected President of the United States; a year later he signed the Indian Removal Bill forcing all the tribes east of the Mississippi River to move to Oklahoma, a journey the Cherokees called the "Trail of Tears." The Southeast, cleared of most Indians and free from the threat of foreign intervention, thus became part of the United States and was opened for settlement by whites.



The Thirty-ninth U.S. Infantry: a recreated platoon for living history at the military park.



The park's 1918 monument commemorating Horseshoe Bend carries the wrong date for the battle.



Members of the recreated platoon provide a soldier-and-laundress-life demonstration.

## About Your Visit

The park, on Ala. 49, is 12 miles north of Dadeville and 18 miles north-east 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, six miles south of Alexander City. Additional campgrounds are 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 loop road 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 the Overlook (see tour map below).

Flintlock musket or rifle demonstrations are given if staffing permits.

Special group tours can be arranged with the superintendent.

### Safety

Your safety is important to us. Please be alert to such hazards 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 might find

to park rangers; they are here to help you enjoy your visit.

**For More Information** Write: Superintendent, Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, 11288 Horseshoe Bend Road, Davison, AL 36256; phone (256) 234-7111; or email hobe\_Administration@nps.gov. You can also

find information at [www.nps.gov/hobe](http://www.nps.gov/hobe) on the Internet.

**Note: All natural and historical features are protected by law and disturbing them is strictly prohibited.**

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## A Tour of the Park

Before you tour the battlefield, stop by the visitor center to view the slide program and the museum exhibits. These presentations provide information on Creek culture, frontier life, and the Creek War, as well as the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

**Overlook** Andrew Jackson's army arrived here about 10 a.m. on March 27, 1814. Gen. John Coffee's mounted infantry and Indian allies had already crossed the Tallapoosa about three 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 regulars across the field and placed his artillery on the hill to your right. Straight ahead, behind their log barricade (marked by the line of white stakes), about 1,000 Red Stick warriors awaited Jackson's attack.

*Please note: This hill, known as Cotton Patch Hill because of its terraced cultivation before the creation of the park, is steep, and visitors with disabilities may find it difficult to climb. The battlefield is also visible from Tour Stop 5, which presents no accessibility problems.*

**1 The Island** On March 27, this 15-acre wooded island glistened with rifles in the hands of Lt. Jesse Bean's Tennessee militia. General Coffee had ordered Red Stick warriors from seeking refuge there. Many Creeks did attempt to escape to the

island but they were "sunk by Lt. Bean's command ere they reached the bank."

**2 The Barricade** The log breastwork that the Red Sticks had erected across the peninsula was, according to Jackson, "eighty-poles in length, from five to eight feet high & of remarkable compactness & strength . . ." It was "prepared with double rows of Port Holes well formed & skilfully arranged, [and] was of such a figure that an Army could not approach it, without being exposed to a cross fire." Just before the battle, Jackson placed two small cannons—a 3 pounder and a 6 pounder—here and trained them on the barricade. About 10:30 a.m., he "opened a brisk fire upon its centre; but altho the balls which passed through, killed several of the enemy, they were not dispersed, nor was any important damage done to the works." Finally, at about 12:30 p.m., Jackson ordered a frontal attack against the Creek position. Surging forward, his troops quickly overran the barricade and, after a vicious hand-to-hand struggle, drove the Red Sticks down the peninsula toward Coffee's mounted infantry and Indian allies. "The event could no longer be in doubt," Jackson later wrote. "The enemy altho many of them fought to the last with the kind of bravery desperation inspires, were at last entirely routed and cut to pieces. The whole margin of the river which surrounded the peninsula was strewn with the slain."

**3 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, led by Cherokee Chief Whale, launched a surprise rear attack into Tohopeka village. According to Coffee, Whale's warriors crossed the river in canoes stolen from the Creeks, "advanced into the village & very soon drove the enemy up from the bank of the river" to the barricade then under attack by Jackson's militia and regulars. 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."

**4 Tohopeka Village** Tohopeka (meaning fort or fortification) was a temporary Upper Creek 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. Whale's Cherokees burned Tohopeka during their assault on the Red Sticks' position. After the fighting ended, 350 Upper Creek women and children were taken prisoner. A short trail leads to the overlook shelter.

**5 Newyaucau Village Site** This Upper Creek village, located across the river, was named for the 1790 Treaty of New York guaranteeing Creek lands and perpetual friendship with the United States. It was burned before the battle by Georgia militia under Maj. Gen. David Adams, and its people joined the other refugees at Tohopeka.

