

Horseshoe Bend

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Military Park
Alabama

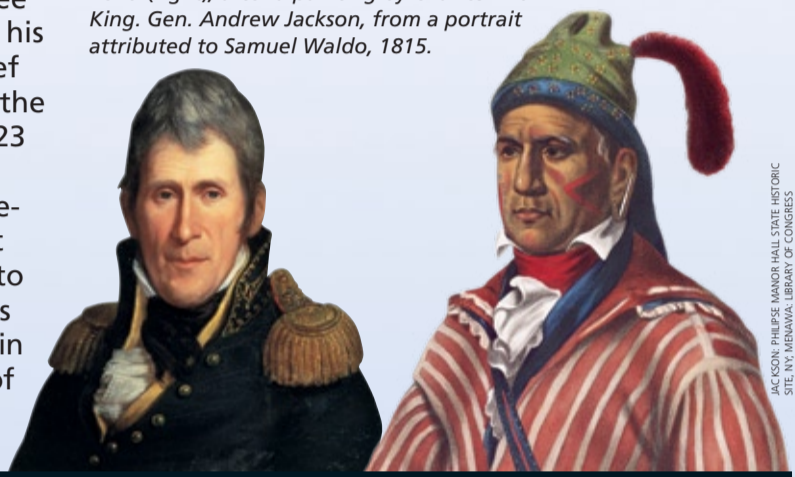


Horseshoe Bend of the Tallapoosa ©EASTERN NATIONAL

“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.”

With those words, Andrew Jackson described the place where, on March 27, 1814, 3,300 Tennessee militia, U.S. Regulars, and allied warriors under his command defeated 1,000 Red Sticks led by Chief Menawa. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend ended the Creek Indian War, and the peace treaty added 23 million acres of Creek land to the southeastern United States—three-fifths of Alabama and one-fifth of Georgia. For Andrew Jackson, 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, the last major battle of the War of 1812.

Menawa, Red Stick war leader at Horseshoe Bend (right), after a painting by Charles Bird King. Gen. Andrew Jackson, from a portrait attributed to Samuel Waldo, 1815.



JACKSON: PHELPS MANOR HALL STATE HISTORIC SITE, NY; MENAWA: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Creek Nation

Tribal beliefs place the Creeks' origin in the American Southwest. They migrated eastward, eventually occupying much of today's Alabama and Georgia. Their name derives from “Ochese Creek Indians,” after the branch of the Ocmulgee River the Creeks lived along when the British first encountered them.

By displacing or incorporating other tribes, they built a loose but broad confederacy divided geographically by the Chattahoochee River into Upper Towns and Lower Towns.

For over 100 years Spain, France, and Britain vied for Creek favor, chiefly using trade for negotiation. As Creek dependence on European luxuries grew, the impact on their way of life was tremendous.

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 20 years, many Creeks followed U.S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins's program



Benjamin Hawkins, U.S. agent to southeastern Indians, 1796–1816. Right: Tecumseh, Shawnee chief and prominent Indian Nationalist.

HAWKINS: NORTH CAROLINA STATE ARCHIVES; TECUMSEH: SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

for improving their agriculture and living standards, a program that was designed to foster peaceful relations between the Creeks and the United States. Because they lived closer to

settlers in Georgia, the Lower Creeks fell under the influence of Hawkins more than Alabama's Upper Creeks did.

The growing division between the Lower

and Upper Creeks over Hawkins's “civilization” program intensified as the Lower Creeks were drawn into closer contact with their Georgia neighbors.

Fueling the situation were squatters on Creek lands, tribal punishments for Creek attacks on settlers, and Indian nationalism, as set forth by Shawnee Chief Tecumseh.

Most Lower Creeks ignored Tecumseh's eloquent pleas to rise up and to drive the “white man” from Indian lands, but many Upper Creeks, eventually called Red Sticks because they painted their war clubs red—listened attentively and agreed.

Upper Creeks, like those who lived in the villages of New-yaucau and Tohopeka, grew their own corn but depended

on the richness of the area for fish, game, and other foods.



The Creek War, 1813–14

The split between the Creeks widened in February 1813 when an Upper Creek war party murdered seven frontier families after being misinformed that war had broken out between the Creeks and the United States. Pressed by the federal government, a Creek tribal council tried and executed those responsible for the killings. In retaliation, Red Sticks leaders tried to eliminate everyone connected with the executions and all evidence of Hawkins's hated civilization program.

In July 1813 conflict worsened when Mississippi Territory militia ambushed Red Sticks, who were returning from Pensacola with ammunition, at Burnt Corn Creek in Alabama. Retaliating in August the Red Sticks attacked and killed 250 settlers at Fort Mims, 40 miles north of Mobile. U.S. response was immediate. The governors of Mississippi Territory, Georgia, and Tennessee mobilized militia and launched a full-scale campaign to crush the Red Stick towns.

Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson of the Tennessee Militia organized his force and struck southward into the heart of Red



Jackson's difficulty in fighting the Red Sticks was not so much their numbers as that their towns were so inaccessible. The total number of Red Sticks at war with the United States was less than

4,000, and not more than 1,000 warriors fought in any single battle. As in other wars, fighting was not the main problem. Jackson's challenges were keeping, moving, and feeding his soldiers.

Sticks country between the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers. Early victories in November at the Upper Creek towns of Tallushatchee and Talladega raised hopes for the war's speedy end, but supply delays, enlistment expirations, threat of starvation, and mutiny slowed Jackson's advance from Fort Strother on the upper Coosa. He began his second campaign in January 1814. After two bloody encounters—at Emuckfau and Enitachopco creeks—he withdrew to Fort Strother.

Despite Jackson's retreat, the outlook for the Red Sticks was grim. During the preceding autumn and winter, warriors and their families built the village of Tohopeka inside the horseshoe bend of the Tallapoosa. The Creeks called the bend Cholocco Litabixee, “horse's flat foot.” There they hoped for protection by the encircling river, their Prophet's magic, and a log barricade across the neck of the bend for the direction by Chief Menawa, also called the Great Warrior. With their numbers and their weapons reduced by previous defeats, the Red Sticks subsisted on wild game—and waited.

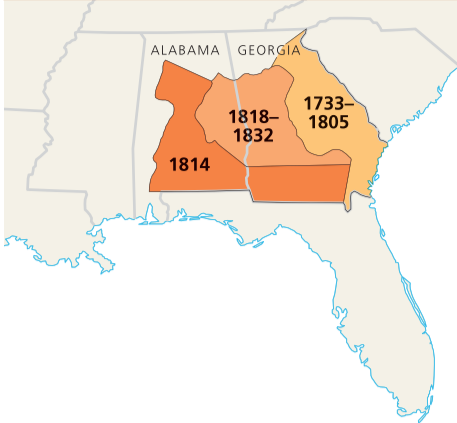
Horseshoe Bend

The Battle at Horseshoe Bend

In March 1814 General Jackson left Fort Strother and built a new fort, Fort Williams, farther south on the Coosa. Reinforced by Lower Creek and Cherokee allies and a regiment of U.S. infantry, Jackson's army marched out of Fort Williams, cutting a 52-mile trail through the forest in three days. On March 26, the army made camp six miles north of Horseshoe Bend. In the morning Jackson sent Brig. Gen. John Coffee and 700 mounted infantry plus 600 Cherokee and Lower Creek allies three miles downstream to cross the Tallapoosa and surround the bend. He took the rest of the army, 2,000 men from East and West Tennessee militia and the Thirty-ninth U.S. Infantry, into the peninsula. At 10:30 a.m. their artillery bombarded the Red Sticks' log barricade for two hours without effect.

At noon some of Coffee's Cherokees crossed the river and attacked the Red Sticks from the rear. Once aware of the

Creek Land Cessions, 1733–1832



attack, Jackson quickly ordered a frontal assault that poured over the barricade. Fighting ranged over the peninsula's south end through the afternoon. By dark at least 800 of Chief Menawa's 1,000 Red Sticks were dead. Menawa was severely wounded but managed to escape.

Jackson's losses were 49 killed and 154 wounded, many of them mortally.

The Red Sticks suffered defeat at Tohopeka but many refused to surrender and joined the Seminoles in Florida. In August 1814 a delegation of Creek chiefs surrendered to Jackson at Wetumpka, near today's Montgomery, Ala. In the Treaty of Fort Jackson ending the conflict, Creeks ceded 23 million acres—nearly half their ancestral territory—to the United States. The state of Alabama, created from this land, joined the Union in 1819.

In 1828, partly for his fame from the battles of Horseshoe Bend and New Orleans, Andrew Jackson was elected president of the United States. Two years later he signed the Indian Removal Bill requiring southeastern tribes to move west of the Mississippi River to Indian Territory (Oklahoma), a journey the Cherokees called the "Trail of Tears."



"Gen. Andrew Jackson" at an annual March Battle Anniversary program.



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



A Creek Stomp Dance demonstration at the annual March Battle Anniversary program.

About Your Visit

The park is on Ala. 49, 12 miles north of Dadeville and 18 miles north of Alexander City. Both towns offer restaurants and motels. The nearest camping is at Wind Creek State Park, six miles south of Alexander City. Campgrounds are also 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 informative markers. A 2.8-mile nature trail through the battlefield begins at the Overlook parking lot.

To arrange flintlock musket demonstrations and group tours, contact the park.

A Junior Ranger program is offered for children 6–12 years old.

For Your Safety Please be alert to hazards like poisonous snakes, poison ivy,

and biting fire ants. Be cautious while boating or while walking near the riverbank. Watch children at all times.

Report all accidents or any hazards to park rangers, who are here to help you enjoy your visit.

More Information
Horseshoe Bend National Military Park
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Daviston, AL 36256; 256-234-7111
email hobe_Administration@nps.gov
www.nps.gov/hobe

Horseshoe Bend is one of over 390 parks in the National Park

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Laws protect all natural and historical features. To disturb them is strictly prohibited.

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A Tour of the Park

Before you tour the battlefield, stop at the visitor center to see the 23-minute orientation film and museum exhibits about Creek culture, the Creek War, and the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

Overlook Andrew Jackson's army arrived here about 10 a.m. on March 27, 1814. Brig. Gen. John Coffee's mounted infantry and Indian allies crossed the Tallapoosa about three miles downstream and encircled the "horseshoe" so the Red Sticks could not get help from other towns or escape by swimming the river. Jackson deployed his own 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), 1,000 Red Stick warriors awaited Jackson's attack.

Note: This hill, called Cotton Patch Hill for its terraced cultivation before the park was created, is steep. Visitors with disabilities may find it difficult to climb. You can see the battlefield from Tour Stop 5 with no accessibility problem.

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 cannon here, a 3-pounder and a 6-pounder, trained 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 12:30 p.m., Jackson ordered a frontal attack of the Creek position. Surging forward, his troops quickly overran the barricade and, after vicious hand-to-hand fighting, drove the Red Sticks down the peninsula toward Coffee's mounted infantry and Indian allies. "The event could no longer be in doubt," Jackson would later write. "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."

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."

- 1 The Island** On March 27, Coffee ordered 40 men of Lt. Jesse Bean's Tennessee militia company to occupy this 15-acre island. Their mission was to prevent Red Stick warriors seeking refuge there. Many Creeks did attempt to escape to the island but were "sunk by Lt. Bean's command ere they reached the bank."
- 2 The Barricade** The log breastwork the Red Sticks built across the peninsula was, Jackson wrote, "eighty-poles in length, from five to

- 3 Cherokee Crossing** The Red Sticks gathered in the "horseshoe" hoped the encircling river would protect them from Jackson's attack. But Jackson surrounded the bend with his allied warriors, who, led by a Cherokee named Whale, launched a surprise rear attack into Tohopeka village. The warriors crossed the river in canoes stolen from the Creeks, Coffee said, "advanced into the village & very soon drove the enemy up from the bank of the
- 4 Tohopeka Village** Tohopeka (meaning fort or fortification) was a temporary Red Stick 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. The Cherokees burned Tohopeka during their assault on the Red Sticks' position. After the fighting ended, 350 Red Stick women and children were taken prisoner. A short trail leads to the overlook shelter.
- 5 Newyaucau Town and the Aftermath** This Upper Creek town, across the river to the northeast, was named for the 1790 Treaty of New York guaranteeing Creek lands and perpetual friendship with the United States. The Georgia militia under Maj. Gen. David Adams burned it before the battle, and, and its people joined the other refugees at Tohopeka.

After the battle the surrounding land and much of east-central Alabama remained Creek. This area was not ceded to the United States under the Treaty of Fort Jackson, and Creek people continued to live here until the 1830s. Starting in 1836 the U.S. Army forcibly removed over 19,000 Creeks from Alabama.

