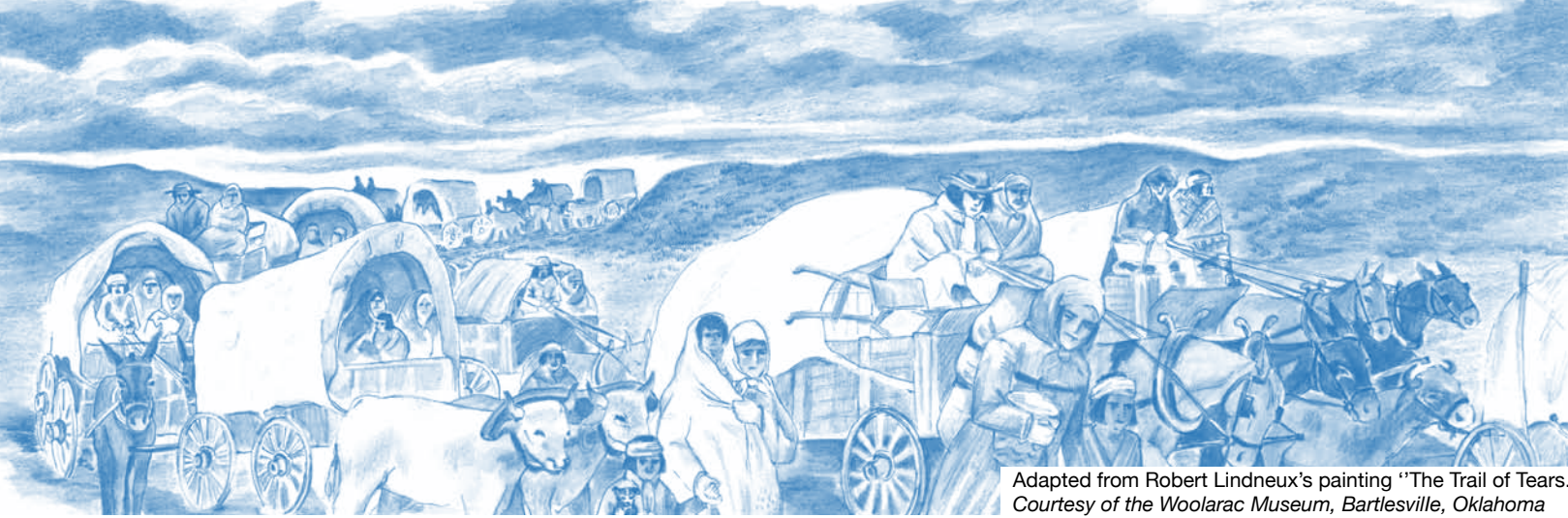


# Trail of Tears

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**National Historic Trail**  
Alabama-Arkansas-Georgia-Kentucky-Illinois-  
Missouri-North Carolina-Oklahoma-Tennessee

**National Park Service**  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Adapted from Robert Lindneux's painting "The Trail of Tears." Courtesy of the Woolarac Museum, Bartlesville, Oklahoma

### Federal Indian Removal Policy

Early in the 19th century, the United States felt threatened by England and Spain, who held land in the western continent. At the same time, American settlers clamored for more land. Thomas Jefferson proposed the creation of a buffer zone between U.S. and European holdings, to be inhabited by eastern American Indians. This plan would also allow for American expansion westward from the original colonies to the Mississippi River.

Between 1816 and 1840, tribes located between the original states and the Mississippi River, including Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles, signed more than 40 treaties ceding their lands to the U.S. In his 1829 inaugural address, President Andrew Jackson set a policy to relocate eastern Indians. In 1830, it was endorsed when Congress passed the Indian Removal Act to force those remaining to move west of the Mississippi. Between 1830 and 1850, about 100,000 American Indians living between Michigan, Louisiana, and Florida moved west after the U.S. government coerced treaties or used the U.S. Army against those resisting. Many were treated brutally. An estimated 3,500 Creeks died in Alabama and on their westward journey. Some were transported in chains.

### The Cherokees

Historically, Cherokees occupied lands in several southeastern states. As European settlers arrived, Cherokees traded and intermarried with them. They began to adopt European customs and gradually turned to an agricultural economy, while being pressured to give up traditional homelands. Between 1721 and 1819, over 90 percent of their lands were ceded to others. By the 1820s, Sequoyah's syllabary brought literacy and a formal governing system with a written constitution.

In 1830—the same year the Indian Removal Act was passed—gold was found on Cherokee lands. Georgia held lotteries to give Cherokee land and gold rights to whites. Cherokees were not allowed to conduct tribal business, contract, testify in courts against whites, or mine for gold.

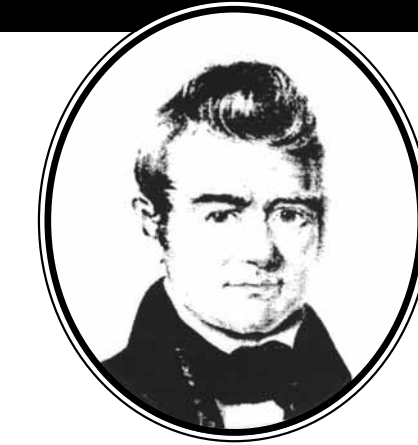
The Cherokees successfully challenged Georgia in the U.S. Supreme Court. President Jackson, when hearing of the Court's decision, reportedly said, "[Chief Justice] John Marshall has made his decision; let him enforce it now if he can."

### The Treaty of New Echota

Most Cherokees opposed removal. Yet a minority felt that it was futile to continue to fight. They believed that they might survive as a people only if they signed a treaty with the U.S.

In December 1835, the U.S. sought out this minority to effect a treaty at New Echota, Georgia. Only 300 to 500 Cherokees were there; none were elected officials of the Cherokee Nation. Twenty signed the treaty, ceding all Cherokee territory east of the Mississippi to the U.S., in exchange for \$5 million and new homelands in Indian Territory.

More than 15,000 Cherokees protested the illegal treaty. Yet, on May 23, 1836, the Treaty of New Echota was ratified by the U.S. Senate by just one vote.



John Ridge was elected Principal Chief in 1828. Photograph courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Traditional Cherokee homestead of the 1820s. Illustration by Charles O. Walker.



Major Ridge led the minority faction that signed the Treaty of New Echota, leading to the Cherokee removal. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian.

### "Many Days Pass And People Die Very Much"

Most Cherokees, including Chief John Ross, did not believe that they would be forced to move. In May 1838, Federal troops and state militias began the roundup of the Cherokees into stockades. In spite of warnings to troops to treat the Cherokees kindly, the roundup proved harrowing.

Families were separated—the elderly and ill forced out at gunpoint—people given only moments to collect cherished possessions. White looters followed, ransacking homesteads as Cherokees were led away.

Three groups left in the summer, traveling from present-day Chattanooga by rail, boat, and wagon, primarily on the Water Route. But river levels were too low for navigation; one group, traveling overland in Arkansas, suffered three to five deaths each day due to illness and drought.

Fifteen thousand captives still awaited removal. Crowding, poor sanitation, and drought made them miserable. Many died. The Cherokees asked to postpone removal until the fall, and to voluntarily remove themselves. The delay was granted, provided they remain in internment camps until travel resumed.

By November, 12 groups of 1,000 each were trudging 800 miles overland to the west. The last party, including Chief Ross, went by water. Now, heavy autumn rains and hundreds of wagons on the muddy route made roads impassable; little grazing and game could be found to supplement meager rations.

Two-thirds of the ill-equipped Cherokees were trapped between the icebound Ohio and Mississippi Rivers during January. Although suffering from a cold, Quatie Ross, the Chiefs wife, gave her only blanket to a child.

*"Long time we travel on way to new land. People feel bad when they leave Old Nation. Womens cry and make sad wails. Children cry and many men cry ... but they say nothing and just put heads down and keep on go towards West. Many days pass and people die very much."*  
Recollections of a survivor

She died of pneumonia at Little Rock. Some drank stagnant water and succumbed to disease. One survivor told how his father got sick and died; then, his mother; then, one by one, his five brothers and sisters. "One each day. Then all are gone."

By March 1839, all survivors had arrived in the west. No one knows how many died throughout the ordeal, but the trip was especially hard on infants, children, and the elderly. Missionary doctor Elizur Butler, who accompanied the Cherokees, estimated that over 4,000 died—nearly a fifth of the Cherokee population.

### Epilogue

In August 1839, John Ross was elected Principal Chief of the reconstituted Cherokee Nation. Tahlequah, Oklahoma was its capital. It remains tribal headquarters for the Cherokee Nation today.

About 1,000 Cherokees in Tennessee and North Carolina escaped the roundup. They gained recognition in 1866, establishing their tribal government in 1868 in Cherokee, North Carolina. Today, they are known as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

"Every possible kindness...must be shown by the troops...."

General Winfield Scott  
May 17, 1838

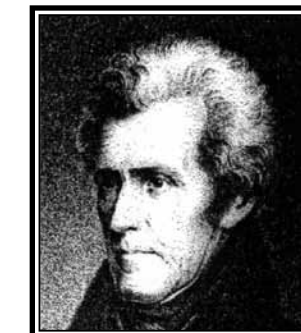


General Winfield Scott was placed in charge of the Cherokee removal. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.

"I saw the...Cherokees...dragged from their homes, and driven at the bayonet point into the stockades ....I saw them loaded like cattle...into wagons.... Many of them had been driven from home barefooted.

Private John G. Burnett, U.S. Army

The Cherokees played a decisive role in Andrew Jackson's victory at Horseshoe Bend during the Creek War. As president, Jackson implemented the U.S. Indian Removal Policy. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.



### For More Information

National Trails Intermountain Region  
National Park Service  
P.O. Box 728  
Santa Fe, NM 87504-0728  
505-988-6888  
www.nps.gov/trte

## The Trail Today

The story did not end with the arrival of the Cherokee people in Oklahoma. Despite this tragic event, they built successful communities that exist today. Old traces, historic buildings, and other sites are being preserved to commemorate the sorrowful journey.

A variety of local, state, and national efforts have commenced to preserve and interpret Trail resources. A growing awareness of this important story—and those of other removed tribes—has stimulated interest to nationally recognize this chapter in our Nation's past. The Trail of Tears tells of the Cherokee's ordeal—but many tribes can tell similar stories.

In 1987, Congress acknowledged the significance of the Trail by establishing the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. The National Park Service administers the Trail in cooperation with federal, state, and local agencies; the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians; interested groups; and private landowners.

The National Park Service coordinates activities, offering technical and limited financial assistance toward preservation, development, and commemoration of the Trail. Management of Trail resources remains with landowners; non-profit groups; and federal, state, and local agencies. Activities include marking an auto tour route which closely parallels or follows the historical land routes with the official Trail marker; marking the Water Route; historical research; resource protection; development of Trail brochures and other publications, including this interim brochure; and production of exhibits and an interpretive film.

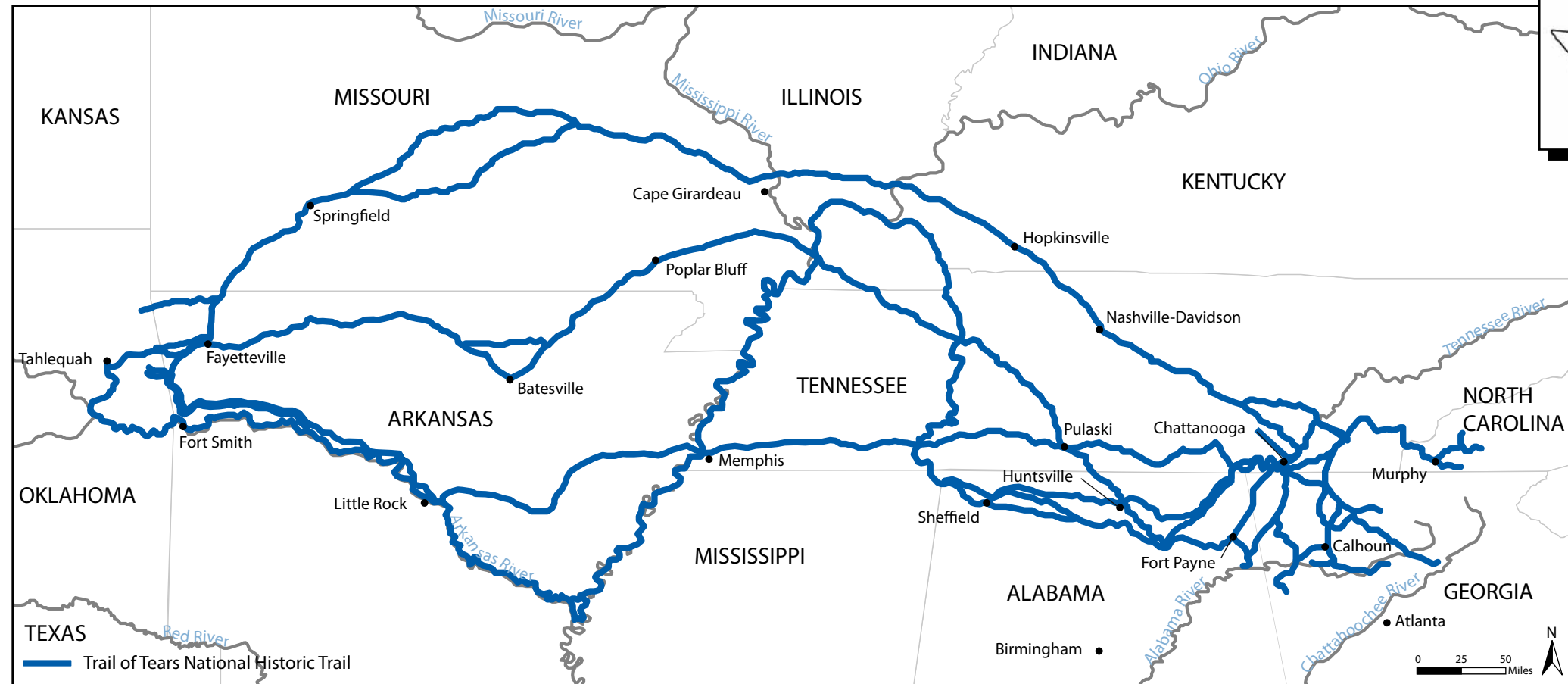
## Auto Tour Route

Auto tour route highways, closely following the historic land routes, are marked with the official Trail marker to aid you in visiting Trail sites. Contact the National Park Service for more information. Stop at local chambers of commerce and information centers to learn about related sites and other interesting features and activities. Many Trail sites lack amenities; plan ahead—use public restrooms and other facilities before you visit sites.

## We Need Your Help

The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail will only be successful with the hard work and dedication of public officials, citizen volunteers, and private landowners who want to preserve the historic resources of the Trail and make its story known. The Trail can aid community efforts in historic preservation and interpretation, trails and greenways, and other public recreation efforts.

Many organizations are helping to plan and develop the National Historic Trail. The Trail of Tears Association, a non-profit organization formed in 1993 to promote public awareness and appreciation of the Trail, works closely with the National Park Service. Its address is: Trail of Tears Association, 1100 North University, Suite 143, Little Rock, Arkansas 72207. 501/666-9032.



## Certified Trail Sites

Non-federal historic sites, Trail segments, and interpretive facilities become part of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail through certification—a voluntary process in which an owner or manager agrees to adhere to National Park Service standards for resource preservation and public enjoyment. Look for the official Trail marker at all certified locations. Updated lists of certified sites and facilities are issued periodically by the National Park Service's National Trails Intermountain Region office.

You can help with the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail by joining or supporting the work of the Trail of Tears Association, state and local historical societies, and other groups that promote or assist with the National Historic Trail. Landowners and site managers can pursue certification of their sites or Trail segments to further public use and protection of Trail resources. Permanent protection of these resources can be achieved by donation of lands or easements to land trusts or other appropriate groups. Financial contributions can support Trail programs. Donations of money, land, or easements may qualify as tax-deductible gifts. For more information, contact the National Park Service at the address listed.

## Non-certified Sites and Facilities

State, county, and city parks along the Trail route preserve Trail resources. Although not yet certified, they are open for public use.

Some sites on the Trail of Tears are privately owned, while many sites are on or along existing highways. Consult guidebooks and ask permission before going on private land.

## Traveling the Trail

Today, you can contemplate the Trail of Tears as you visit sites along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. We want to help you have a safe and meaningful visit.

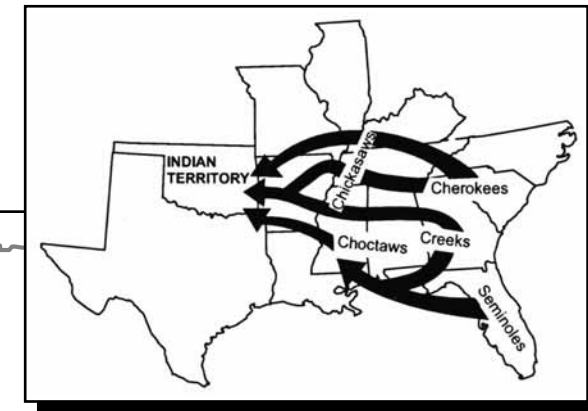
**Remember that You're a Guest:** Please respect your hosts' hospitality when you visit their certified sites. Leave everything as you find it. Summon owners only in emergencies. They retain the right to ask you to leave at any time. Obey signs—use designated parking areas—and limit your stay to the time necessary to appreciate the historic site.

## Federal Sites

The historic Trail route passes through and by lands now managed by several federal agencies, such as the USDA Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the National Park Service. Some units of these agencies may provide interpretive information related to the Trail of Tears. Check locally, or consult the National Park Service.

**Protect the Trail:** Respect the features of the sites that you visit. Don't use metal-detectors or dig at sites—collect artifacts, or remove anything. Some sites contain burials. Please respect these sacred places.

**Stay Safe:** Many parts of the historic routes are on road rights-of-way. Remain alert, and aware of your children's and pets' locations. Beware of traffic. Know where your nearest emergency help can be found.



Federal Indian Removal Policy forced the relocation of Southeastern tribes to Indian Territory (Oklahoma).



Unauthorized use of the official Trail of Tears National Historic Trail Logo (TM) is prohibited.

