

... the government
might more mercifully
have put to death
everyone under a year
or over sixty; rather it
had chosen a most
expensive and painful
way of exterminating
these poor people.

—Missionary Daniel Butrick

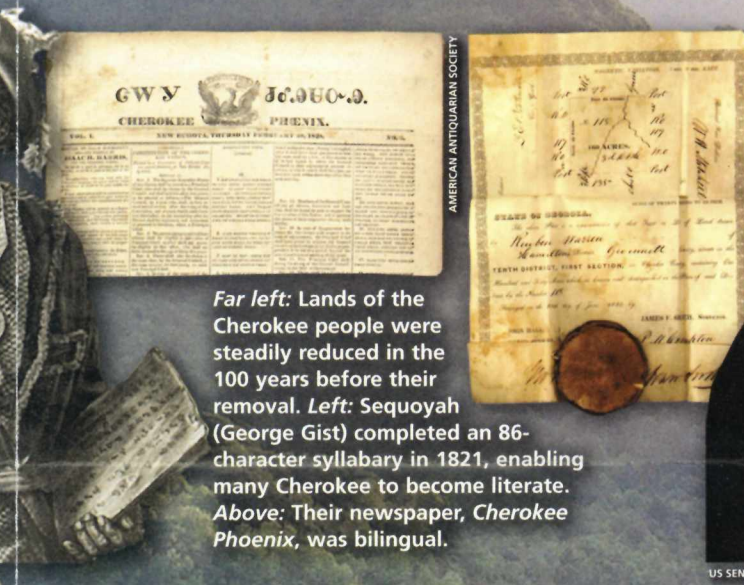
Cherokee Nation

A traveler through the southern Appalachians realizes something is missing from the forested mountains and cascading streams. The people who once lived here no longer work the land or hunt the forests. Their spirits remain and their language is on the landscape, but most of them are gone. Where did they go? Do they survive? The answers are on the Trail of Tears.

In the 1600s about 25,000 Cherokee lived on lands from the Ohio River to northern Georgia. But European diseases devastated the Cherokee throughout the 1700s, and by 1819 America's unquenchable thirst for land had whittled away Cherokee lands—down to 10 percent of their original territory.

Still, they endured. Cherokee Sacred Fire—rekindled each spring in the New Fire Ceremony and the source of every home fire—shone over a unified Cherokee Nation. They adopted many political and economic features of the United States, drafting a constitution, establishing courts, and creating a written language. As a symbol of this revival, they called their newspaper the *Cherokee Phoenix*, after the mythical bird reborn of fire. The Cherokee people had shaped a stable and prosperous life—one envied by their white neighbors.

Dwindling Cherokee Lands



Far left: Lands of the Cherokee people were steadily reduced in the 100 years before their removal. Left: Sequoyah (George Gist) completed an 86-character syllabary in 1821, enabling many Cherokee to become literate. Above: Their newspaper, *Cherokee Phoenix*, was bilingual.

1721 The Cherokee sign the first of several treaties that, over the next 70 years, force them to cede over half their lands.

1791 (July 2) The Treaty of Holston places the Cherokee under US protection.

1828 The discovery of gold in northern Georgia leads to the "Georgia Gold Rush" the following year, much of it on Cherokee lands.

1830 (May 26) Congress passes the Indian Removal Act; President Andrew Jackson signs it into law two days later.

1832 Appropriated Cherokee lands in Georgia are parceled out to white settlers by lottery.

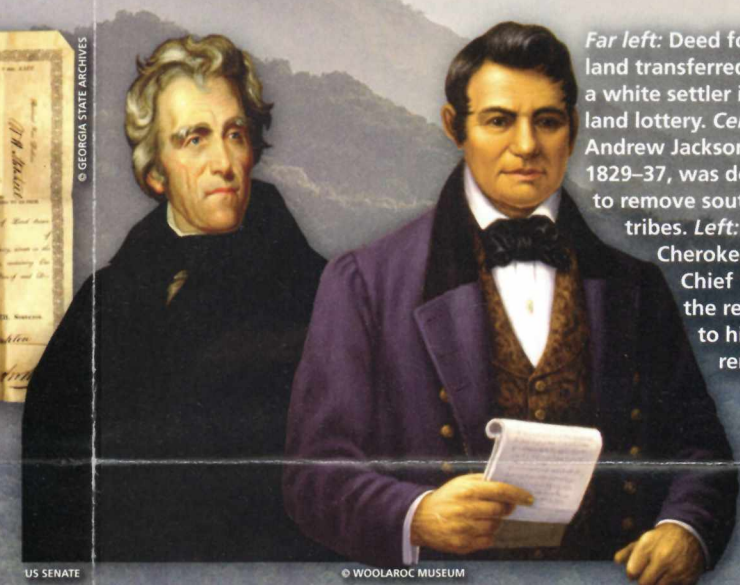
1832 (March 3) In *Worcester v. Georgia* the US Supreme Court confirms that the Cherokee Indians are a nation holding distinct sovereign powers. President Jackson ignores the court and pushes forward with forced removal.

The Gathering Storm

On the heels of the Indian Removal Act, government agents descended on the southeastern native peoples. One by one the tribes were removed. Agents coerced Choctaw chiefs in Mississippi to sign the first removal treaty, and in late 1831 the tribe was quickly moved to Indian Territory—present-day Oklahoma.

By 1836, the government removed most Muscogee Creeks, many in chains, from Alabama and Georgia to Indian Territory. The Chickasaw, whose homeland had stretched from Tennessee to Arkansas and Illinois, were taken away the next year. The Seminoles fiercely resisted removal from their Florida homeland but, after great losses in the Seminole Wars, some 4,000 people were deported to Indian Territory by 1842.

The Cherokee resisted removal and looked to their leaders to sway American political opinion. Still, 20 tribal members, led by Major Ridge and acting outside the authority of the Cherokee government, signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835. The conditions for removal were set: In exchange for \$5 million the tribe would relocate to Indian Territory. Though most Cherokee protested the agreement, by May 1836 Congress made it law. The treaty gave the Cherokee two years to voluntarily move.



Far left: Deed for Cherokee land transferred in 1832 to a white settler in Georgia's land lottery. Center left: Andrew Jackson, president 1829–37, was determined to remove southeastern tribes. Left: John Ross, Cherokee Principal Chief 1828–66, led the resistance to his tribe's removal.



Left: Blocked by icebound rivers, many Cherokee endured weeks of harsh winter weather without adequate clothing. Right: The five "Civilized Tribes" were removed from their homelands in the 1830s.

1835 (Dec. 29) Twenty "treaty party" leaders sign the Treaty of New Echota, which leads to Cherokee removal.

1838 (May) Cherokee are forcibly removed from their homes and marched to nearby temporary camps and forts.

1838 (June 6) The first water route detachment leaves eastern Tennessee for Indian Territory.

1838 (Aug. 23) Cherokee Hair Conrad leads the first land route detachment. Twelve more depart over the next two months. Most travel the northern route.

Cherokee Trail of Tears

Most Cherokee refused to recognize the Treaty of New Echota; few had moved after two years. In early 1838, 7,000 soldiers under Gen. Winfield Scott moved against the Cherokee Nation. The removal effort began in Georgia, where Cherokee families were uprooted and driven—sometimes at bayonet point—to "round-up" camps, then concentrated in larger removal camps.

In June the US Army loaded Cherokee onto flatboats that traveled the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, and Arkansas rivers to Indian Territory. The first boat reached its destination in 13 days, but desertions and fatalities plagued the next two groups. Diseases raged through the cramped, poorly-supplied boats.

To save his people, Principal Chief John Ross urged General Scott to let the Cherokee control their own removal. Ross organized detachments of about 1,000 each, and the Cherokee traveled by foot, horse, and wagon for 800 miles, taking up to eight months to reach Indian Territory. Despite prearranged supply points, they suffered terribly during the hard winter. Of about 15,000 Cherokee forced from their homes, many hundreds died in the camps or on the journey. The Cherokee Nation remained alive though, in the spirits of the people and in the ashes saved from the Sacred Fire they carried along the trail.

A Nation Renewed

Weak and traumatized, 17 detachments of Cherokee arrived in Indian Territory in 1838 and 1839. The treaty strife and the harsh removal had also divided the Cherokee into three factions: pro-treaty, anti-treaty, and the "Old Settlers."

Despite political discord, the Cherokee reconstructed their lives. In September 1839 delegates signed a constitution. The tribe reelected John Ross as principal chief, and Tahlequah became their capital. In 1844 the Cherokee Supreme Court building opened its doors. The *Cherokee Advocate*, a bilingual newspaper, began publication. By 1846 the three factions had signed a treaty that addressed many of their differences. The Sacred Fire of the Cherokee Nation burned again.

Meeting other challenges as they rebuilt their nation, the Cherokee proved resilient in the ensuing years. Today the Cherokee and other removed tribes endure as thriving Indian nations. The Trail of Tears story is one of racial injustice, intolerance, and suffering. This is also a story of survival, of a people thriving in the present while remembering the past—not only in Oklahoma, but also in their homelands of southern Appalachia.

Southeast Indian Removal



1839 (Jan. 4) Cherokee Elijah Hicks arrives with the first land detachment to reach Indian Territory. The last detachments arrive in late March.

1839 (Sept. 6) Cherokee delegates sign a constitution for the reunited Cherokee Nation.

1987 Congress establishes the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. In 2009 more routes are added.

One will not hear the anguished voice
of a forgotten and broken people.
Instead one might hear the pride of
people who faced overwhelming
adversity and persevered.

—Cherokee Nation

The Trail of Tears, by Max D. Standley, portrays displaced Cherokee on the long road from their original home in Appalachia to their new one in Indian Territory.

Before removal, countless generations of Cherokee people lived and hunted in the Appalachian Mountains of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

RETRACE THE TRAIL

The sites of Trail of Tears National Historic Trail stretch 5,043 miles across nine states. Together they form a journey of compassion and understanding.

The National Park Service administers the trail in partnership with the Trail of Tears Association; the Cherokee Nation; the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians; federal, state, county, and local agencies; interested groups; and private landowners. Trail sites are in private, municipal, tribal, federal, or state ownership.

Some trail sites have visitor centers and programs. You can walk on the Trail of Tears at many sites; see the list below.

Get in-depth travel planning at www.nps.gov/trte. Use the links to get information about trail sites. Always ask permission before visiting locations on private lands.



George Murrell married a Cherokee woman and journeyed with her to Indian Territory. In 1845 he built this house near Tahlequah.



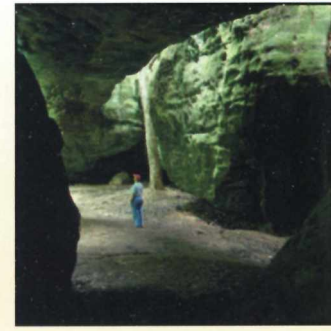
Elkhorn Tavern (reconstructed) at Pea Ridge National Military Park, Arkansas, witnessed thousands of Cherokee passing by.



Camp Ground Cemetery near Anna, Illinois, is said to contain the graves of Cherokee who died in the nearby camp.



Hikers retrace a portion of the original northern route in Illinois.



Blocked by the icebound Ohio, some 1,700 Cherokee camped near Mantle Rock in Livingston County, Kentucky.



This reconstructed council house is at New Echota, a Georgia state park commemorating the Cherokees' first capital.



Brainerd Mission was a stopping point on the trail. For many Cherokee, its cemetery is their final resting place.



Tennessee's Red Clay State Historic Park near Chattanooga features a reconstruction of the Cherokee Council House.

This official national historic trail sign indicates you are following the exact or nearly exact route taken by the Cherokee during their removal to Oklahoma.



KANSAS

TRAIL'S END
The last detachment arrives in Indian Territory on March 24, 1839. The Cherokee are promised subsistence rations through March 1, 1840, in compliance with the Treaty of New Echota.

Disbandment Routes

WESTVILLE AREA
Reverend Bushyhead Grave
Woodhall Homeplace

Tahlequah
(see list and note below)

Drew Route
overland water route

TAHLEQUAH AREA
Cherokee Heritage Center
Hunter's Home
Illinois Campground
Park Hill Mission Cemetery
Ross Cemetery

TAHLEQUAH, OKLAHOMA
The Cherokee National Council designates Tahlequah as the capital of the Cherokee Nation on October 19, 1841.

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Disbandment Routes

Trail of Tears by Robert Lindneux
© WOOLAROC MUSEUM

MISSOURI

Northern Route

Hildebrand Route

BENGE ROUTE
Starting from Fort Payne, on September 28, 1838, Cherokee leader John Benge escorts 1,079 Cherokee toward present-day Stilwell, Oklahoma.

Benge Route

FAYETTEVILLE AREA
Razorback Regional Greenway
Shiloh Museum of Ozark History
Trail of Tears Park

Bell-Whitely-Drane Route
overland water route

ARKANSAS

WATER ROUTES
The water routes were punishing—3,103 departed, 2,273 arrived at Mrs. Webber's Plantation, Lee's Creek (near Stilwell), Fort Coffee, and Illinois Campground (near Tahlequah).

Water Route

ILLINOIS

BELL ROUTE
Starting from Fort Cass on October 11, 1838, John Bell of the Treaty Party leads 660 Cherokee, ending at present-day Evansville, Arkansas.

Bell Route

MISSISSIPPI

Walking the Trail of Tears
Listed east to west; all distances approximate.
Roundup Routes
Unicoi Turnpike, Tellico Plains, TN; 1.5 mi
Bell Route
Hiwassee Heritage Center, Charleston, TN; 0.2 mi
Mountain Goat Trail, Seawee, TN; 4.5 mi
David Crockett State Park, TN; 2.25 mi
Village Creek State Park, AR; 1.5 mi
Benge Route
Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park, TN; 1 mi
Old Greenville Recreation Area, Greenville, MO; 1 mi
Junction of Water Routes
Decatur Interpretive Trail, Decatur, AL; 0.5 mi
Fort Smith National Historic Site, AR; 0.3 mi

Northern Route
Blythe Ferry, TN; 0.5 mi
Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, TN; 0.5 mi
Twin Forks Trail, East Fork Recreation Area, Smyrna, TN; 1 mi
Port Royal State Park, TN; 0.1 mi
Mantle Rock, KY; 2.75 mi
Hamburg Hill, IL; 1 mi
Trail of Tears Greenway, Springfield, MO; 1 mi
Pea Ridge National Military Park, AR; 0.5 mi
Razorback Regional Greenway, AR; 0.5 mi

MORE INFORMATION
National Park Service
National Trails Office
PO Box 728
Santa Fe, NM 87504
505-988-6098
www.nps.gov/trte

Trail of Tears Association
412 N. Hwy. 100, Suite B
PO Box 329
Webbers Falls, OK 74470
918-464-2258
www.nationaltota.com

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North
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0 50 Miles 100

Accessibility
We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information check the park website and contact individual sites you plan to visit.

Protect the Trail
Please respect these historic places. Do not use metal detectors, dig at sites, collect artifacts, or remove anything.

The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail is a component of the National Trails System. Visit www.nps.gov and www.nps.gov/nts to learn more about national parks and national trails.

REMOVAL CAMPS
Most Cherokee are forcibly removed from their homes in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and North Carolina to US Army camps and forts. They are then moved to more centrally located removal camps in Tennessee and Alabama. Weakened by disease, they wait for months to start the 800-mile journey to Indian Territory.

ROSS'S LANDING
Location: Present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee. From June 6 to June 17, 1838, three detachments are forced to leave their homeland for Indian Territory.

VANN'S PLANTATION
Location: Present-day Wolftever Creek, Tennessee. Two detachments totaling 1,642 Cherokee leave in September 1838 bound for Indian Territory.

FORT CASS
Location: Present-day Charleston, Tennessee. From August 23 to December 5, 1838, 10 detachments totaling 9,302 Cherokee are marched from Fort Cass toward Indian Territory.

BLTYHE FERRY
Location: Meigs County, Tennessee. Nine detachments with more than 9,000 Indians cross the Tennessee River.

CHARLESTON AREA
Hiwassee River Heritage Center
Fort Cass

CHATTANOOGA AREA
Audubon Acres/Spring Frog Cabin
Brainerd Mission Cemetery
Brown's Ferry Tavern Site
Ross's Landing
Vann's Plantation

Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park

Fort Payne Area
Andrew Ross Home
Fort Payne Cabin Site
Willstown Mission Cemetery

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