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Trail of Tears
National Historic Trail

Interpretive Plan

Final June 14, 2004

PREFACE

An interpretive planning workshop was conducted in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 1 and 2, 2003, to gather consensus foundational information on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail's (NHT) significance and to apply that information to the development of the desired future interpretive program for the trail. This was the key meeting leading to the Trail of Tears NHT's first *Interpretive Plan*. The entire planning group cited below attended the Memphis workshop.

In 1980 the U.S. Congress asked the National Park Service (NPS) to recommend the most appropriate means of commemorating the Cherokee Trail of Tears, which Congress recognized as the most enduring feature of the tragic Indian Removal period in American History. Through extensive study, the NPS recommended that Congress establish a national historic trail, and, in 1987, Congress designated the Trail of Tears NHT.

The establishing legislation identifies the trail's components as consisting of the land and water routes followed by the Cherokee during their forced removal to the west. However, in the Trail of Tears NHT *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan* (1992), the Cherokee experience was recognized as a window into the experience of all tribes removed from the Southeast United States as a consequence of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. As such, whenever possible, interpretation activities along the Trail of Tears will seek to identify experiences and associations of other tribes who participated in the Removal experience. (The management plan also mentioned the historic routes taken by the Benge detachment and the Bell Treaty Party Cherokee, routes that Congress is considering for inclusion in the National Trails System.)

The National Trails System-Intermountain Region staff and the Trail of Tears Association would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the participants, who gave freely of their time and expertise to forge this document. As the vision for the trail's interpretive efforts over the next 5-10 years, the Trail of Tears NHT *Interpretive Plan* will be a much more effective and inclusive document due to their contributions.

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INTRODUCTION

This Trail of Tears NHT *Interpretive Plan* was developed by National Park Service staff, Trail of Tears Association members, and other trail partners. It serves as the long-range vision for trail-wide interpretive programming for the next 5-10 years. Interpretation is a method of communication that emphasizes meanings and relationships, in contrast to conveying factual information. Interpretive planning is a process that identifies and describes meaningful visitor experiences in a park, recreation area, or in this instance, along the Trail of Tears, and recommends ways to encourage and provide for those experiences. This document is intended to define and guide the Trail of Tears NHT interpretive program (trail-wide) consistent with its goals to increase people's understanding and appreciation of the significances of the trail.

FOUNDATIONAL INFORMATION

Vision Statements for the Future Trail of Tears NHT

Vision statements describe trail conditions in the future.

The Trail of Tears NHT will:

Identity
- be widely known and supported by the public as a result of widespread use and visitation to sites and NHT segments
- be widely regarded as a truly "national" asset by local entities along the NHT

Orientation/Information
- provide visitor orientation and trip planning
- provide visitors with adequate information for trip planning trail wide through a matrix of opportunities

Interpretation/Education
- have a series of interpretive areas along the trail
- provide seamless interpretation
- have a variety of interpretive media available to meet diverse visitor needs
- provide interpretation for visitors while they are traveling
- provide an auditory tour
- have tribal elders providing interpretation
- provide a range of cultural activities and programs
- have reproduction artifacts items available for interpretation/education
- have removal routes for all five tribes identified and marked

Resource Protection
- have public awareness raised – leading to active involvement and advocacy to protect resources
- have trail resources identified, protected, funded, and available for public access

- have strategies in place to identify threats to resources – an "early warning" system
- have a site steward program in place

Research
- have research on-going to identify routes, stories, and resources associated with the trails
- have graphics and illustrations available to help interpret the trail
- have a "richer story" researched, documented, and available for interpretive/education efforts

Organization/Administration
- be recognized nationally
- have an effective and cooperative communication network in place among Trail of Tears NHT partners
- have successful models, in rural and urban settings, of trail development in place (signing, visitor experience)
- provide incentives for future additions to the NHT
- be sufficiently staffed to address the varied needs of trail administration, preservation, and visitor use
- develop a series of local plans for all of the NHT that involve a variety of stakeholders for preservation, development, and interpretation of the trail

Development
- be widely regarded as a economic benefit to local communities adjacent to the NHT
- have a sustainable budget reflective of NHT needs, including a specific program for NHT preservation and development projects
- have a broad coalition of partners and support that effectively leverages trail funding from a wide variety of sources
- provide the opportunity for visitors to retrace the NHT, perhaps by foot, from beginning to end, with sufficient development of facilities so they can have an enriched and meaningful understanding of the trail's history

Purpose Statement

Purpose statements summarize the reasons why the Trail of Tears NHT was established.

Purpose of the Trail of Tears NHT
(Revised from the June 2002 Trail of Tears NHT *Strategic Plan* developed by members of the Trail of Tears Association board, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail Advisory Council, and the National Park Service)

To preserve the history of the removal of the Cherokee Nation and the other tribes affected by the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (primarily Choctaw, Muscogee Creek, Seminole, and Chickasaw).

To preserve and protect resources, (such as artifacts, sites, trail remnants, and their settings) associated with that history.

To interpret the story of the Trail of Tears and provide for recreation and understanding associated with historic appreciation.

Statements of Significance

Statements of significance clearly define the most important things about the trail's resources and values. They serve as the foundation for developing interpretive themes and desirable visitor experiences. Significance statements help trail administrators and partners focus on the preservation and enjoyment of those attributes that directly contribute to the purpose of the trail and that must be protected. These statements are not in any priority order.

(Revised from the June 2002 Trail of Tears NHT *Strategic Plan*)

The Trail of Tears crystallized the idea of race as a determining factor in American public policy.

Early development of racism ideology was a moral pretext for insupportable acts of the federal government at that time.

The physical route of the NHT and historic sites associated with the trail and removal reflect the lifestyles of Indian people at the time of removal, the harshness of the journey west, and their remarkable adaptation to their new surroundings.

The Trail of Tears was a result of a constitutional crisis between the branches of the federal government and the states regarding states' rights.

The Trail of Tears documents the first federally legislated forced removal of American Indians from their traditional homelands.

The Trail of Tears was an episode in American history that included government sponsored ethnic cleansing, relocation camps, and disregard for human rights at that time.

Cherokee court cases dealing with removal shaped relationships among tribal, federal, and state governments that are still in effect today (i.e., tribal sovereignty).

The Trail of Tears represents the tenacity, perseverance, and resilience of the survivors who relocated and rebuilt their homes and institutions in the face of great adversity.

The Trail of Tears represents the tragic impact of Indian removal policy on the history and culture of our nation and continues to have worldwide relevance to people today.

The fight over Cherokee removal was the first time that an Indian Nation used the U.S. Government's own rules and regulations to fight for their rights as a nation to remain on their land.

The Trail of Tears resulted in the separation and fragmentation of the five tribes into eastern and western nations.

The Trail of Tears is a profoundly emotional story of universal human values.

Primary Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes convey the trail's significance. Primary interpretive themes are the key ideas through which the trail's nationally significant resource values are conveyed to the public. They connect trail resources to the larger ideas, meaning, and values of which they are a part. They are the building blocks — the core content — on which the interpretive program is based. Each primary theme may connect to a number of specific stories. These elements are helpful in designing individual interpretive services, ensuring that the main aspects of primary themes are addressed. The themes are inter-related and are not in any priority order.

The history of the Trail of Tears warns how a nation founded on the principles of equality and guaranteed protection under law fell prey to greed, racism, and disregard for human rights to serve special interests – and cautions us to be eternally vigilant to prevent this happening again.

The history of the Trail of Tears includes a range of precedent-setting legal actions and policy decisions between tribal governments and federal and state governments that continue to have power and importance today in the on-going efforts of American Indian nations to maintain and exercise sovereignty.

The terrible suffering of the many groups of the five tribes who traversed the punishing routes of the Trail of Tears speaks of the agony of being forcefully torn from a homeland and cast into the unknown.

The triumph of the five tribes in surviving the Trail of Tears and rebuilding their homes and institutions in a new land is a tribute to their spiritual strength – and a testament to the human drive to protect and perpetuate self, family, and society.

Who are the Trail of Tears NHT Visitors?

Learning Groups
- K-12th grade school groups
- Youth groups – boy scouts, girl scouts, etc.
- Home school groups
- Elderhostels

Researchers
- Media, documentaries
- Scholars

General Public
- Casual drop in, "saw the sign"
- Well-educated lay public
- Local people
- Visitors requiring information – pre-visit, trip planning
- Retirees

Trail/History Enthusiasts
- Web search – students, genealogy, and scholarship
- Military historians
- International visitors – request in-depth interpretation, have higher level of knowledge
- Re-enactors retracing the trail, range of casual interest to the well-read
- Organized historical tours

American Indian Groups
- Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole, and other tribal citizens
- Indian clubs, cultural groups
- Special education initiatives – Indian history and culture

Other
- State agencies
- Water-based tourism
- Recreational users – hikers, bikers, boaters
- Special populations – hearing, seeing-impaired, etc.
- *Local, state officials, members of congress
- *Urban and other under-represented populations

*indicates under-represented audiences

Visitor Experience Considerations

The desired outcome of partnering trail administration is to manage visitor-resource interactions so that trail resources will remain unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations while ensuring that current visitors have opportunities to forge meaningful connections with those resources. The following list of visitor experience considerations, derived from trail partners' understanding of desired visitor experiences, serves to guide the development of interpretive services that will be offered as the trail's desired future interpretive program.

The Trail of Tears interpretive program (trail-wide) should meet the following visitor expectations:

- intimate contact with actual landscape of the Trail of Tears – hands-on/feet-on
- to feel as if the event happened to them personally
- receive detailed, accurate, specific information that is locally relevant. They want the "real" thing.
- to be educated
- to experience the place(s) where historic events occurred in a way that conveys an emotional reaction
- to be able to walk the trail in a setting with historical integrity
- that tribal historians will be on hand to tell stories and answer questions
- to be able to make a personal connection to the Trail of Tears
- opportunities for multiple sensory experiences at a trail site
- to see artifacts
- guided tours with hands-on experiences
- have answers to: What has happened to the tribes? Where are they now? What are they doing now?
- an experience that is enlightening and educational without having to do a lot (or all) of reading
- a well-designed and developed website, or series of linked websites, that inform and teach about the Trail of Tears

GOALS AND SUPPORT FOR A TRAIL-WIDE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

Goals for Interpretation

Interpretation operates within the larger environment of trail administration. A clear statement of what trail partners expect interpretation to contribute to the larger whole is requisite to the design of an interpretive program that will work with other trail programs to achieve the overall goals.

The mission and role of interpretation:

- The mission of interpretation is to increase visitor understanding and appreciation of the significance of park [trail] resources. (Government Performance and Results Act of 1993)

- Interpretive services provide opportunities for people to forge their own intellectual and emotional connections with the ideas and meanings inherent in the resources of the park [trail]. (National Park Service)

Issues and Influences Affecting Interpretation

The trail's interpretation program is subject to internal and external constraints that affect its ability to accomplish the goal of enhancing public understanding and appreciation of trail significances. A review of those issues and influences currently affecting or expected to affect interpretation during the life of this plan allows trail partners to predict and proactively address challenges to effective interpretation.

- lack of Trail of Tears NHT identity
- local story unique in each location
- lack of/disparities in availability of resources (funding, staff)
- variations in dedicated space to tell story
- lack of recent, coordinated scholastic research
- lack of knowledge about trail research – who is doing what, status of research progress, etc.
- lack of basic, evocative message
- lack/scarcity of interpretive media
- lack/scarcity of documentary evidence and appropriate graphics for media
- broad disparity in visitors' needs and interests
- challenge of interpreting a trail through multiple states and jurisdictions

Interpretive References — Resources for Interpretation

Representative resources supporting the interpretive effort and actions to strengthen that support are listed below. The National Park Service and Trail of Tears Association websites will also serve as a resource for finding interpretive references.

Resource-Focused Research
- Building GIS database and on-the-ground identification of Trail of Tears NHT segments
- National Register of Historic Places
- State historic preservation offices (Trail of Tears NHT states)
- State archeologists and archeology databases (Trail of Tears NHT states)

Library
- The National Trails System-Santa Fe maintains a small library of Trail of Tears and Southeast Indian related titles.
- The Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina, both maintain resource-based libraries.
- Local heritage organizations and libraries (Trail of Tears NHT states)
- Land grant colleges

Image Collection
- The National Trails System-Santa Fe is starting an annotated collection of Trail of Tears and Southeast Indian related images.
- The Cherokee Heritage Center and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian both maintain image collections.

Interpretive Collection
- The Cherokee Heritage Center and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian both maintain and operate living history programs.
- Five Civilized Tribes Museum, Muskogee, Oklahoma
- National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Museum Collection and Archives
- The Cherokee Heritage Center is the national archive for the Cherokee Nation.
- The Museum of the Cherokee Indian maintains resource-related collections and archives.
- The National Trails System-Santa Fe is starting a collection of Trail of Tears related documents (copies).
- National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution
- National Archives
- State archives (Trail of Tears NHT states)
- Tribal archives
- American Native Press Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas

Internet Web Sites
- The National Park Service and Trail of Tears Association websites will serve as resources for finding interpretive references. Development of these websites will be coordinated to contain both basic and in-depth information, and to prevent duplication.

DESIRED TRAIL-WIDE FUTURE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

Actions for the Future

Action items are interpretive services and other activities that meet trail-wide goals for interpretation, and that constitute the desired future interpretive program for the Trail of Tears NHT. These are the services and activities that are intended to most effectively communicate each of the trail's primary interpretive themes to trail visitors in a way that assures balance, effectiveness, and attainability. All interpretive media and services will embrace the following tenets:

Universal design and accessibility: The trail-wide interpretive program includes interpretive services that are designed to be useable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design, except when required to meet specific accessibility needs.

Hierarchy of sophistication: The trail-wide interpretive program treats subject matter in a range of ways — from simple-and-basic to complex-and-advanced — to best meet the varied interests of interpretive audiences.

Range of interpretive services: The trail-wide interpretive program includes a range of personal and non-personal interpretive services to best meet the varied learning styles of interpretive audiences.

Multiple points of view: The trail-wide interpretive program treats subject matter from a variety of perspectives to aid in accuracy and relevance to varied interpretive audiences.

Actions for future implementation include:

- Market the trail locally/nationally for the purpose of gaining support and understanding of the trail story.
  - Develop a marketing plan
  - Develop promotional/educational products, such as a film and lapel pins and embroidered patches
  - Format the Trail of Tears NHT *Interpretive Plan* into a full-color promotional brochure
  - Contract with professional services for marketing, fund raising, and other tasks
  - Concentrate planning and marketing within trail region
  - Look for and emulate success stories along the trail
  - Conduct visitor surveys

- Develop and install signs with logo <u>on</u> the trail along its entire length.
  - Collaborate with partners such as state departments of transportation, landowners, and federal agencies
  - Design standards for uniformity
  - Update sign planning – historic route, auto tour route

- Develop script for 1) auditory tour and 2) DVD for portable travel, based upon trail-wide themes.

- Develop a resource documentation notebook (have available online) to serve as an orientation tool for new employees at sites along the trail.

- Inventory existing interpretive waysides and trail markers.
    - Establish a database
    - Maintain the database – NPS in Santa Fe

- Identify sites for future certification.

- Develop research strategy/work plan.
    - Identify all routes of five tribes
    - Establish a research center/clearing house
    - Identify locations of primary documents and develop finding aides for historic people/documents

- Provide forum for publishing research.
    - Print/publish symposium proceedings (web-based)

- Explore avenues for fund raising for specific projects.
    - Develop priority list
    - Strategize funding
    - Seek corporate funding

- Develop and implement a trail monitoring strategy.
    - Public land agency networking
    - Develop contacts with private landowners
    - Educate all partners to look for, and raise alarm for threats – chapters, national association, nations, and federal agencies
    - Identify all resources within trail corridor
    - Identify "key" people in frequent touch with the resources to keep information flowing

- Develop strategy for resource protection.
    - Pro-active stance in working with local zoning in counties, cities, and regions
    - Cyclic "reminder" system in place for all partners
    - Annual updates during preservation workshops/tied to symposium
    - Strengthen the trail community by certifying sites and increasing numbers of partners
    - Place information about resource protection in orientation notebooks

- Strengthen the community of trail partners – property owners, federal agencies, association, etc. – to achieve trail goals through increased communication, and sharing of successes and challenges.

- Develop successful urban and rural models of trail signing and interpretation.

- Develop list of tribal elders/historians willing to provide active interpretation or primary service information.

- Organize sessions at symposiums addressing resource protection, and invite historic preservation experts from other trails.

- Inventory interpretive services and facilities by type and theme to address range of services provided along trail – identify gaps.

- Develop publications (newspaper, site brochures, and full color NPS Unigrid-style brochure) to provide current trail orientation and trip planning.

- Work with the heritage tourism industry for packaging/promoting use of the trail.

- Develop bibliographic database of local written resources, including relevant articles in local historical journals, references in local history books, and past and present newspaper articles.

- Work with the National Archives to develop and publish – on paper and online – a guide to removal resources in the National Archives.

- Compile a blue-ribbon panel of specialists willing to review local and trail-wide interpretation plans.

- Work with each certified site to produce site development plans as needed for NHT visitor use.

- Work with all NHT states' departments of transportation and the Federal Highway Administration to incorporate NHT needs into transportation improvement programs and statewide transportation improvement programs, ensuring the possibility of transportation enhancement funds.

- Develop NHT plans at local level to determine a common vision at local level for preservation and development of the trail.

- Continue to certify all eligible sites, segments, and interpretive facilities.

- Hire a full time fund raiser/grant writer to assist eligible NHT development and preservation projects.

Priority Actions for the Future and Implementation Strategy

In fall 2003, Trail of Tears Association members and other interested stakeholders voted for their highest priority action items. From the possible actions listed above, the following five actions are the highest priorities for implementation:

Market the trail locally/nationally for the purpose of gaining support and understanding of the trail story.

Develop and install signs with logo <u>on</u> the trail along its entire length.

Develop research strategy/work plan.

Identify sites for future certification.

Develop and implement a trail monitoring strategy.

All of these actions are consistent with the June 2002 Trail of Tears NHT *Strategic Plan* developed by members of the Trail of Tears Association board, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail Advisory Council, and the National Park Service. Four of the actions, those emphasizing marketing, a research strategy, site certification, and resource monitoring, will be addressed through the Trail of Tears NHT *Strategic Plan* implementation.

For purposes of this interpretive planning effort, the task of developing and installing way-finding and interpretive signs, bearing the trail logo, will be emphasized. The Trail of Tears Association and National Park Service will work together to develop an implementation strategy for this task. It is intended that this Trail of Tears NHT *Interpretive Plan* be revisited annually during association board meetings and symposiums to assess progress towards meeting stated goals.