

They Passed This Way

Home to thousands of men, women, and children, the Cherokee Nation once spread across parts of Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama. The 1830 Indian Removal Act required that the Cherokee surrender their land and move west.

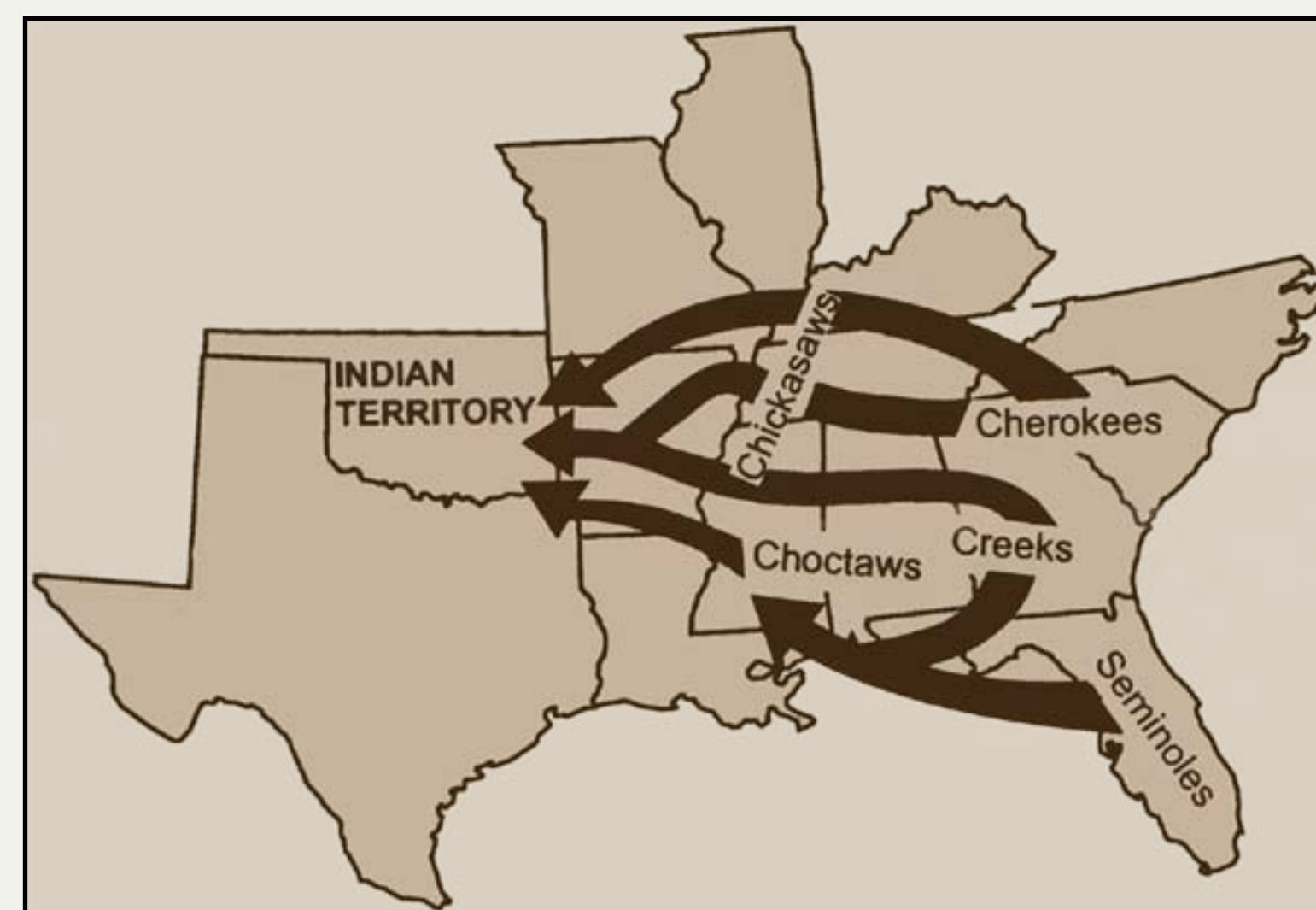
In 1838, more than 15,000 Cherokee began their trek west from their eastern homeland to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) over the “Trail of Tears.” They traveled by roads and rivers, passing through southern Illinois. Nearly 1,000 died during the journey westward, and up to 4,000 died as a result of the forced removal process.



Federal Indian Removal Policy

Federal Indian removal policy aroused fierce and bitter debate. Supporters of the policy claimed it was a benevolent action to save the tribes east of the Mississippi River from being overwhelmed and lost in the onslaught of an expanding American population. Opponents decried its inhumanity and the tragic consequences it had for the Indian peoples. One thing was certain: removal freed millions of acres of desired Indian lands for use by white settlers.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 resulted in the removal of thousands of American Indians from their ancestral lands for new homes in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). They traveled by existing roads and rivers. Many groups left in the fall, hoping to avoid the disease and heat of summer travel, and instead faced treacherous winter weather. Many died during the ordeal of the Trail of Tears.



In the 1830s, the federal government forcibly removed approximately 16,000 Cherokee, 21,000 Muscogee (Creek), 9,000 Choctaw, 6,000 Chickasaw, and 4,000 Seminole from their ancestral homes in the southeastern United States.

Today

Despite the hardships of the journey, members of the five removed tribes established new lives in the West. They stand as successful sovereign nations, proudly preserving cultural traditions, while adapting to the challenges of the 21st century.

Cherokee who survived the Trail of Tears created a new sovereign nation in present-day Oklahoma. Some Cherokee remained in North Carolina and, due to a special exemption, formed the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Trail of Tears National Historic Trail



By helping to preserve historic sites and trail segments, and developing areas for public use, the story of the forced removal of the Cherokee people and other American Indian tribes is remembered and told by the National Park Service and its partners.

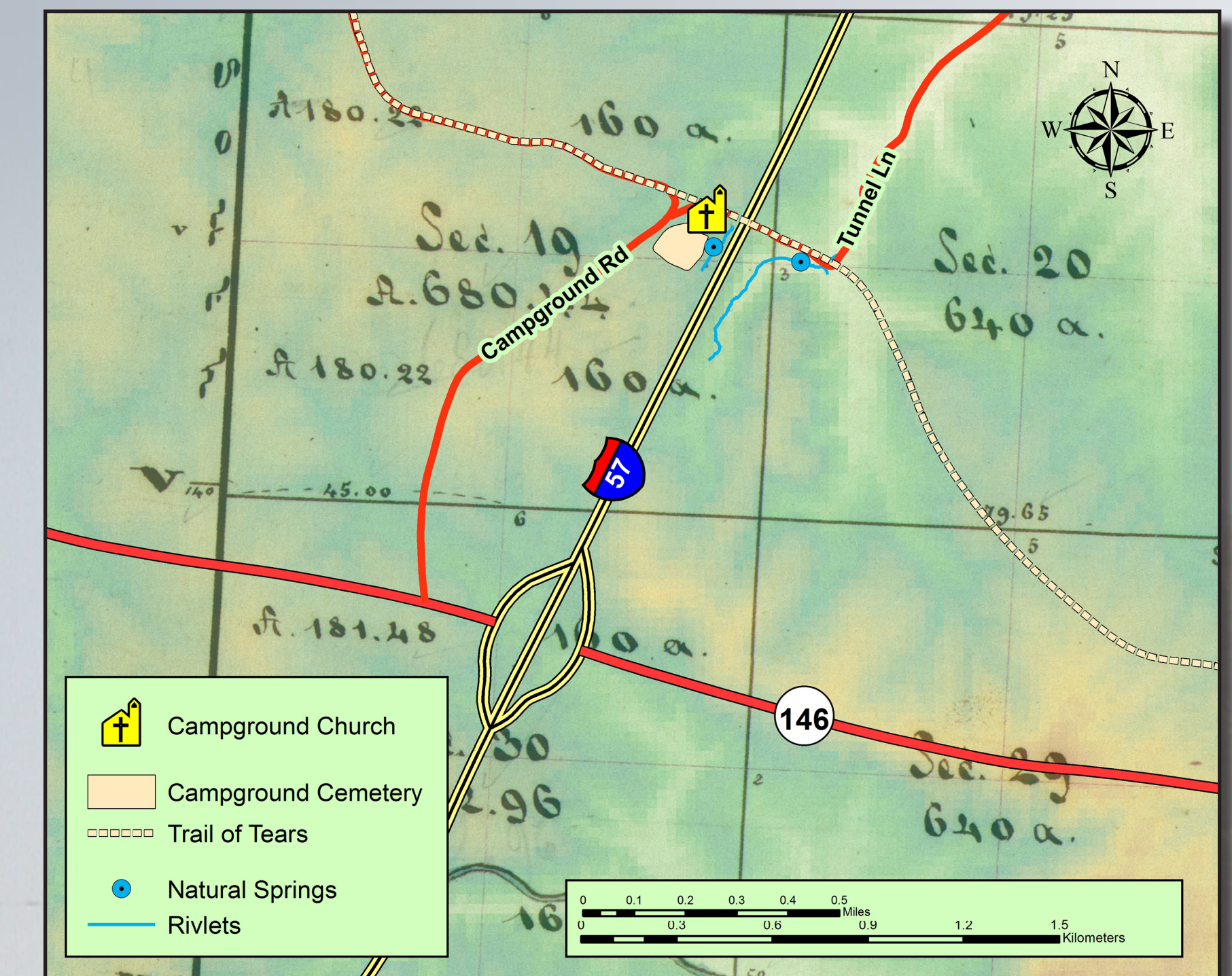
You can visit sites along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

Learn more at www.nps.gov/trte

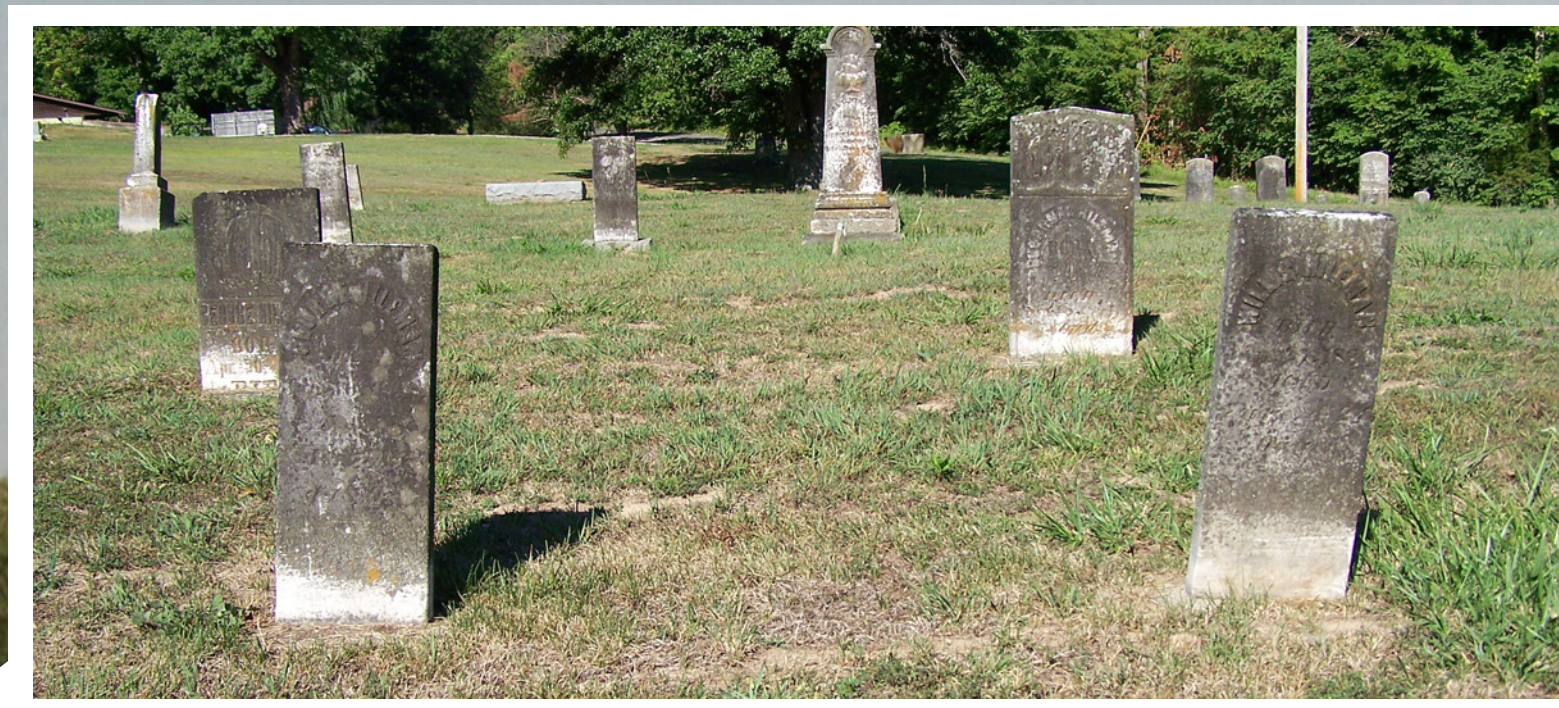
A Place to Rest

In the early 1800s, this area was wooded and known as a camp ground by settlers and travelers, who took advantage of the five springs nearby. Camp Ground Cemetery began as the family cemetery of George Hileman. In 1834, Hileman took a land patent on the acreage that now includes the church and cemetery. When two of his children died in 1838, they were buried in “the field out from the house.”

In the winter of 1838-1839, the Cherokee were making their forced trek west and traveled along the main road - today’s Tunnel Lane. Several detachments, as many as 10,000 people, camped on Hileman’s land and the neighboring property on their way west. It is unknown how many Cherokee died while camping here, but family history relates that those who died were buried in the field next to Hileman’s children.



Abundant woods and rivlets formed by natural thermal springs made this area an ideal place to stop and camp. Cherokee camped here on their way to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).



The Hileman brothers were buried here, the seventh and eighth markers from the left in the row.



Family oral history and modern technology came together to tell the story of the Hileman property and the Cherokee cemetery. Data support historical accounts that speak of the cemetery site as a camp ground for travelers as well as the Cherokee who traveled along the Trail of Tears in the winter of 1838-1839. Ground penetrating radar studies (equipment above) have been useful for detecting unmarked burials that may date to the removal era.

Probable Cherokee burial area – burials date to the removal era.

