

They Passed This Way

Home to thousands of men, women, and children, the Cherokee Nation once spread across 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 traditional eastern homeland to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) over the “Trail of Tears.” 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. More than 1,000 died during the journey westward, and more than 4,000 died as a result of their forced migration.

...we have Suffered a great deal...The roads are in very bad Order as the ground was frozen very deep... We have been lying by about two weeks...The [river] has been full of large quantities of floating Ice... we must calculate on suffering a good deal from hardships & exposure before we yet reach our homes in the far West.

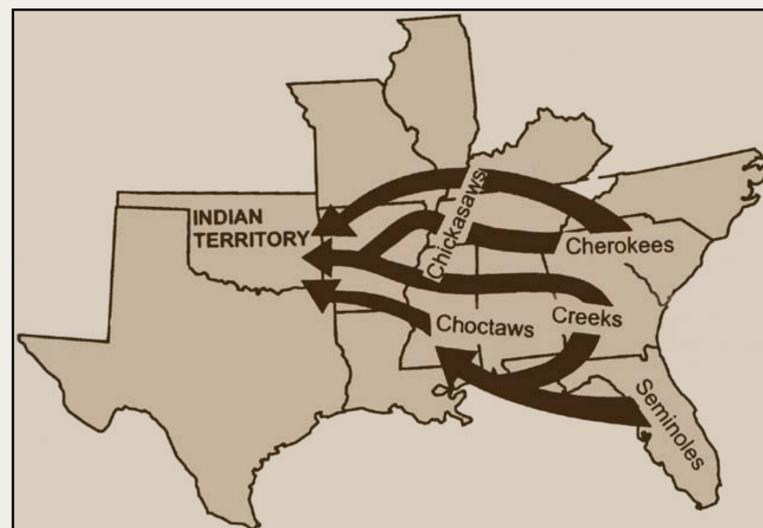
Recollection of a survivor of the Trail of Tears



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.

Despite the hardships of the journey, members of the five removed tribes established new lives in the West.



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

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.

All five removed tribes stand as successful sovereign nations, proudly preserving cultural traditions, while adapting to the challenges of the 21st century.

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.

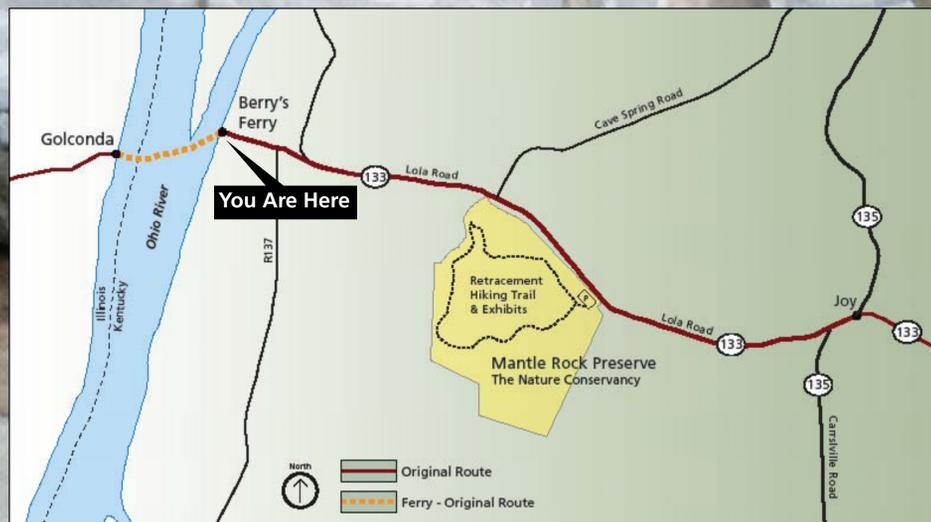
You can visit more sites along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

Learn more at www.nps.gov/trte

Imagine the Scene

Over 1,400 Cherokee men, women, and children from Peter Hildebrand's detachment spent two bitterly cold weeks camped in this area during the harsh winter of 1838-1839.

The detachments ahead of them had successfully crossed the icy Ohio River, but were trapped between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Waiting for the Mississippi River to thaw, all Cherokee detachments in the area were at a standstill and at the mercy of the weather. Hildebrand's detachment camped for miles here along the road until they could continue traveling west to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.



Retrace the trail. Original Route signs indicate that you are driving the historic route. At Mantle Rock Preserve, you can walk in the footsteps of the Cherokee along a hiking trail.

