Trail of Tears
Georgia Map and Guide

University of West Georgia
Trail of Tears National Historic Trail
National Park Service

At this very moment a low sound of distant thunder fell upon my ear. In almost an exact western direction a dark spiral cloud was rising above the horizon and sent forth a murmur. I almost fancied a voice of divine indignation for the wrongs of my poor and unhappy countrymen, driven by brutal power from all they loved and cherished in the land of their fathers, to gratify the cravings of avarice [greed].

-Cherokee leader William Shorey Coodey

Connected to the Landscape

The Cherokee people flourished across the fertile landscape of northwest Georgia. Sandstone-capped mountains, narrow valleys, and ridges offered rich soils for farming and vast forests provided plentiful food as well as oak and hickory for housing, boats, and tools. A lifetime of knowledge of vegetation, animals, insects, birds, reptiles, and amphibians helped Cherokee to create everything from wasp soup and bloodroot dye to sassafras tea and turtle-shell rattles.

Their culture thrived—but so much about their world was changing. Beginning in the mid-18th century, encroachment of white people from the East led to food sources disappearing. Deer, turkey, bison, and elk populations dramatically dwindled from overhunting and loss of habitat due to the establishment of farms and pastures. Road building interrupted game trails and diminished coveted bird nesting sites.

While the Cherokee continued to gather foods, medicines, and materials from their local landscapes, they also began raising cattle, goats, sheep, and pigs—and cleared land for peach orchards and other agriculture. Settlements changed from compact villages to towns sprawled along rivers, resembling European-style communities.

On their own, Georgia Cherokee successfully adopted and developed new market economies. A self-sufficient, subsistence-based nation of people had become farmers and traders, readily adapting to the ways of the white people. How could they know what would happen next.

Assertion of Power

Georgia moved first to remove Indians. In 1802, the Compact of Georgia relinquished the state's claims to lands west of the Chattahoochee River in return for the federal government's pledge to remove all Indians from the state as soon as it could be done practicably and peacefully.

After gold was discovered in 1828, the state extended its laws over the Cherokee Nation. In 1832, all Cherokee lands were surveyed and distributed by lottery to white residents. This happened in spite of the fact that the Cherokee had been guaranteed the right to their land by previous treaties and by a US Supreme Court ruling. The state of Georgia and President Andrew Jackson ignored Cherokee rights.

The Indian Removal Act, passed by Congress in 1830, provided an exchange of land with the Indians that would move them west of the Mississippi River. By the mid-1830s, the Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw had arrived in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).

In December 1835, a small group of unauthorized Cherokee tribal members (known as the Treaty Party) signed the Treaty of New Echota agreeing to be removed to the West. Even though most Cherokee signed a petition against the agreement, the conditions for removal were set.

In the early spring of 1838, federal troops supported by Georgia militia began filtering into the Cherokee Nation to set up military forts as staging areas to launch the Indian removal. Georgians had waited 36 long years to claim Cherokee land.

Culture Clash

Most Cherokee refused to recognize the Treaty of New Echota and instead relied on their leaders to sway American political opinion in their favor. In the spring of 1838, they started work in their fields just as they had done for generations.

But on May 10, 1838, Major General Winfield Scott issued a dramatic proclamation that would forever change Cherokee lives:
Cherokees! The President of the United States has sent me with a powerful army, to cause you…to join… your people…on the other side of the Mississippi… Will you then, by resistance, compel us to resort to arms? God forbid! I am an old warrior, and have been present at many a scene of slaughter; but spare me, I beseech you, the horror of witnessing the destruction of the Cherokees.

William Cotter, aide to the soldiers, observed:
After all the warning and with the soldiers in their midst, the inevitable day appointed found the Indians at work in their houses and in their fields. …two or three dropped their hoes and ran as fast as they could when they saw the soldiers coming into the field. The men handled them gently, but picked them up in the road, in the field, anywhere they found them, part of a family at a time, and carried them to the post [fort].

Cherokee memories are starkly different.
Ooloo-Cha, widow of Sweet Water:
The soldiers came and took us from our home. They first surrounded our house and they took the mare while we were at work in the fields and they drove us out of doors and did not permit us to take anything with us, not even a second change of clothes. They… drove us off to a fort that was built at New Echota.

…forward with their bayonets.

The roundup of the Georgia Cherokee proceeded swiftly. Troops knew where Cherokee families lived and how many were in each household. The Georgia militia had constructed 14 roundup forts and camps to take thousands of innocent people as prisoners.

Reverend Daniel S. Butrick ran a mission near Rome and was an eyewitness to the events:
Thus in two or three days about 8,000 people, many of whom were in good circumstances, and some rich, were rendered homeless, houseless and penniless, and exposed to all the ills of captivity. In driving them, a platoon of soldiers walked before and behind, and a file of soldiers on each side, armed with all the common appalling instruments of death; while the soldiers, it is said would often use the same language as if driving hogs, and goad them forward with their bayonets.

One man, on being pricked thus, and seeing his children thus goaded on, picked up a stone and struck a soldier; but for this he was handcuffed, and on arriving at the fort, was punished and on starting again was whipped a hundred lashes.

General Scott appealed to the soldiers:
Considering the number and temper of the mass to be removed…it will readily occur, that simple indiscretions - acts of harshness and cruelty, on the part of the troops, may lead…in the end, to a general war and carnage… Every possible kindness…must, therefore, be shown by the troops…

Overall, this would not be the case.

Cherokee Expelled

All told, it took 20 days to round up the Cherokee people from home and hearth and march them to camps where they slept on bare ground—adjacent to the forts that had been built for the soldiers and their supplies.

They waited only a few days before transport to Tennessee removal camps, forced to walk up to 100 miles. In Tennessee, many Georgia Cherokee were immediately removed to the West by water on flatboats. The rest waited in deportation camps in Tennessee through the summer heat before departing for the West. Both the flatboats and the removal camps were riddled with disease and death.

Cherokee removal from Georgia was an American act of opportunistic oppression. Going west, the Georgia Cherokee would be taken from the bones of their ancestors—to a new land, new waterways, new resources. But just as they had adapted to change in Georgia, they would adjust and eventually thrive on the unknown Oklahoma landscape.

Artwork by Dorothy Sullivan

O how heart rending was the sight of those little sufferers, their little lips blue and trembling with cold… We wept and wept again, … Our prayer is that these dear children, who must doubtless be soon ushered into eternity, may be taken into the arms of their Redeemer.
- Missionary Daniel S. Butrick, May 1838

The US Army built 14 forts and camps in less than two years to round up almost 8,000 Georgia Cherokee. By the end of June 1838, the ephemeral structures were abandoned.

Courtesy of Sara H Hill, design by Trevor Beemon

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GEORGIA'S MILITARY POSTS:

FORT CUMMING - Located on West Indiana Avenue near Park Street, Lafayette (Walker County)

FORT WOOL - Located 273 yards south of the New Echota State Historic Site, Calhoun (Gordon County)

FORT NEWNAN - Located at the intersection of 136 and Antioch Church Road, Blaine (Pickens County)

FORT BUFFINGTON - Located at Buffington Elementary School, on Georgia Highway 20, Canton (Cherokee County)

FORT GILMER - Located on Old US Highway 411 four miles north of Carters Lake (Murray County)

***Site Information**: Although none of the original fort structures remain intact today, these sites can still be visited. Historical markers placed close to each site provide a brief overview of the fort's history in connection with the Trail of Tears. For more information: www.georgiatrailoftears.com/forts.html*

CHIEF JOHN ROSS HOUSE

200 East Lake Avenue, Rossville (Walker County) *(706) 375-7702*

***Site Information**: Built in 1816, this home sits adjacent to Poplar Spring along a historic Cherokee trading route. Ross sold the house in 1827 and moved to Head of Coosa (now Rome), where he owned a ferry. Beginning in 1828, he served as the principal chief of the Cherokee. For the next 10 years, he fought hard against Indian removal, but in 1838 he and other Cherokee were forced to move west.*

CHICKAMAUGA AND CHATTANOOGA NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

3370 Lafayette Road, Fort Oglethorpe (Catoosa County) *(706) 866-9241*

***Site Information**: In 1838 hundreds of Cherokee traveled north along the Crawfish Road in Georgia (Lafayette Road, Chickamauga Battlefield) to one of the deportation camps at Ross's Landing (Chattanooga, Tennessee). After leaving the camp, many Cherokee crossed Moccasin Bend in Tennessee. A Trail of Tears entrance sign stands at Moccasin Bend National Archeological District and outdoor exhibits along the Federal Road Trail recount the Cherokee ordeal.*

CHIEF VANN HOUSE STATE HISTORIC SITE

82 Georgia Highway 225 North, Chatsworth (Murray County) *(706) 695-2598*

***Site Information**: This 23-acre park contains a two-story brick mansion built in 1804 by James Vann, a member of the Cherokee elite. A 3,000-square foot interpretive center includes exhibits about the Vann family, Cherokee Nation, and Trail of Tears. Guided tours of the historic house are provided for all visitors.*

NEW ECHOTA STATE HISTORIC SITE/ WORCESTER HOUSE

1211 Chatsworth Highway NE, Calhoun (Gordon County) *(706) 624-1321*

***Site Information**: In 1825, the Cherokee national legislature established a capital here. Visitors can tour several original and reconstructed buildings, including the council house, court house, print shop, missionary Samuel Worcester's home, and an 1805 store, along with smoke houses, corn cribs, and barns. In the site's visitor center, guests can view interpretive exhibits and a 17-minute film.*

CHIEFTAINS MUSEUM/MAJOR RIDGE HOME

501 Riverside Parkway NE, Rome (Floyd County) *(706) 291-9494*

***Site Information**: The Chieftains Museum tells the story of Major Ridge, the influential Ridge family including prominent son John Ridge, Cherokee history, and the Trail of Tears, as well as subsequent history of the home and region. Major Ridge was one of the Treaty Party leaders who signed the 1835 Treaty of New Echota that resulted in Cherokee removal.*

PEDESTRIAN TRAIL SECTION FROM RIDGE HOME TO ROSS FARM

Riverside Parkway NE, Rome (Floyd County)

***Site Information**: As part of the Downtown Heritage Trail, this hike-bike path runs three miles from Major Ridge's Home south along the Oostanula River's eastern edge to John Ross's farm. By the 1820s, both Major Ridge and his protégé John Ross had become wealthy Cherokee landowners and ferry operators; both were influential voices in Cherokee affairs. As a result, the short road between the leaders' farms became a key connection in the decision making processes that preceded the Treaty of New Echota and the Cherokees' subsequent removal to Indian Territory in 1838-39.*

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

Accessing Sites
The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail is under development. It's not possible to follow the entire trail along the historical course. In most cases travelers will have to follow public roads that are close to the authentic trail. Please ask for permission before visiting any trail sites on private lands and check with public sites for visiting hours and regulations.

For more information on Cherokee history and sites in Georgia, visit
www.gatrailoftears.com/
www.nationaltota.org/
or
Visit the NPS Trail of Tears website and select Places to go - Travel Routes (from links on the right hand side of the Home page) www.nps.gov/trte

RUNNING WATERS/ JOHN RIDGE HOUSE

853 Calhoun Road NE, Rome (Floyd County)
Private residence - closed to the public

***Site Information**: At the time of the Cherokee removal in 1838, John Ridge was one of the most influential leaders in the Cherokee Nation. The Treaty Party was formed at Running Waters, where they conducted their business and discussed in open council the terms of the Treaty of New Echota.*

CEDAR TOWN ENCAMPMENT

Biggers Drive and North Furnace Street, Cedartown (Polk County)
(770) 748-3220 (City of Cedartown)

***Site Information**: This park contains one of 14 camps where Cherokee were brought before being taken to larger camps in southeastern Tennessee. The camp, which was an ad hoc military installation, operated during the late spring and early summer of 1838. Two outdoor exhibits interpret the removal camp.*

ROCKDALE PLANTATION/ GEORGE W. ADAIR HOME

1981 Highway 411, Ranger (Gordon County)
Private residence - closed to the public

***Site Information**: This 47-acre property includes an 18-room structure (known as the Freeman-Hurt-Evans House) dating from 1785, a "Travelers Rest" house dating from the 1830s, and two other historic buildings. The earliest known owner of the property was George W. Adair, a Cherokee settler who owned five slaves.*

FUNK HERITAGE CENTER

Reinhardt University campus, Waleska (Cherokee County) *(770) 720-5970*

***Site Information**: The center comprises an exhibit area interpreting 12,000 years of American Indian life through artifacts, dioramas, and interactive computer programs. The Cherokee exhibit in the Hall of Ancients includes four minutes of video excerpted from Rich Heape's feature film Trail of Tears. Also, a large collection of contemporary American Indian artwork includes paintings, baskets, sculpture, and pottery.*

While traveling along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail, you will see a variety of roadway signs meant to help you explore the stories, routes, and sites on the Trail of Tears.

Trail of Tears
Original Route

Trail of Tears
Auto Tour Route

TRAIL OF TEARS NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL ROUTES

- ROUNDUP ROUTES
- WATER ROUTE
- OVERLAND WATER ROUTE
- NORTHERN ROUTE
- TAYLOR ROUTE
- BENGE ROUTE
- BELL ROUTE

North

0 50 100 Kilometers
0 50 Miles 100

The Different Routes of Travel

During the years of 1838 and 1839 the Cherokee were removed to Indian Territory (Oklahoma) via multiple routes across the country. The Roundup routes were used by the US government starting on May 24, 1838 to gather the Cherokee from their homes and forcibly place them in removal camps, where they awaited the start of their 800-mile journey. The Water, Northern, Taylor, Benge, and Bell routes were used by different removal detachments during this time period to escort thousands of Cherokee to their new land in the West. Many Cherokee perished along each of these routes as harsh weather conditions, poor food supplies, and the spread of sickness affected these traveling parties.