

The Trail of Tears

Westward Expansion Articles

Article 5

1830-1839

By 1830, the United States was growing. Many Native American tribes still lived in the states, including the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, the Muscogee-Creek, and the Seminole. President Andrew Jackson felt that these tribes were acting as foreign nations within the states, which was unconstitutional. He proposed the Indian Removal Act in 1830 which stated that Native American tribes living in the states would be removed to west of the Mississippi River to federal territory in exchange for their homelands. The tribes would sign peace treaties stating they would give up their lands in exchange for land in the west. Many Native Americans did not want to leave their land, but with mounting pressure from the government and soldiers, many tribes signed agreements.



In Georgia, the Cherokee especially did not want to be removed. They fought all the way to the Supreme Court, and they won. In order to be removed, both sides would have to agree in a treaty. In 1835, both the Cherokee and the Senate came to an agreement. The removal of the Cherokee began in the summer of 1838. Soldiers came to force the Cherokee off their land.

The army had built removal forts. Cherokee were taken to these forts to wait for the long march to Indian Territory. The forts were terrible places to live, much like a prison camp. There was little food, their personal items were often stolen, and the forts were very dirty. Some Cherokee went to the forts voluntarily, but most waited for soldiers to come and get them. Sometimes they didn't even have time to collect their belongings before they were forced to leave.

The march to Oklahoma was almost 1,000 miles long. The first groups of Cherokee left in the summer. Food, medicine, and water was scarce. Some had to turn and go back to the camps. The rest of the Cherokee left in October or November. 12,000 men, women, and children began the march west. There were about 1,000 Cherokee in each group, along with a doctor. A total of 654 wagons went with the groups, usually to carry supplies. Sometimes the elderly, sick, or women with babies rode in the wagons. Everyone else walked.

Many of the groups took the trail to the north. This was not a good choice. The rain and all of the wagons made it very difficult to travel on these roads. Also, they were traveling towards the north in the winter. Many groups got stuck on the roads in January. The Cherokee did not have the correct supplies for travel, including blankets or shoes. There was very little grass for their animals to eat along the way and animals that could be hunted, like deer or elk, were hard to find.

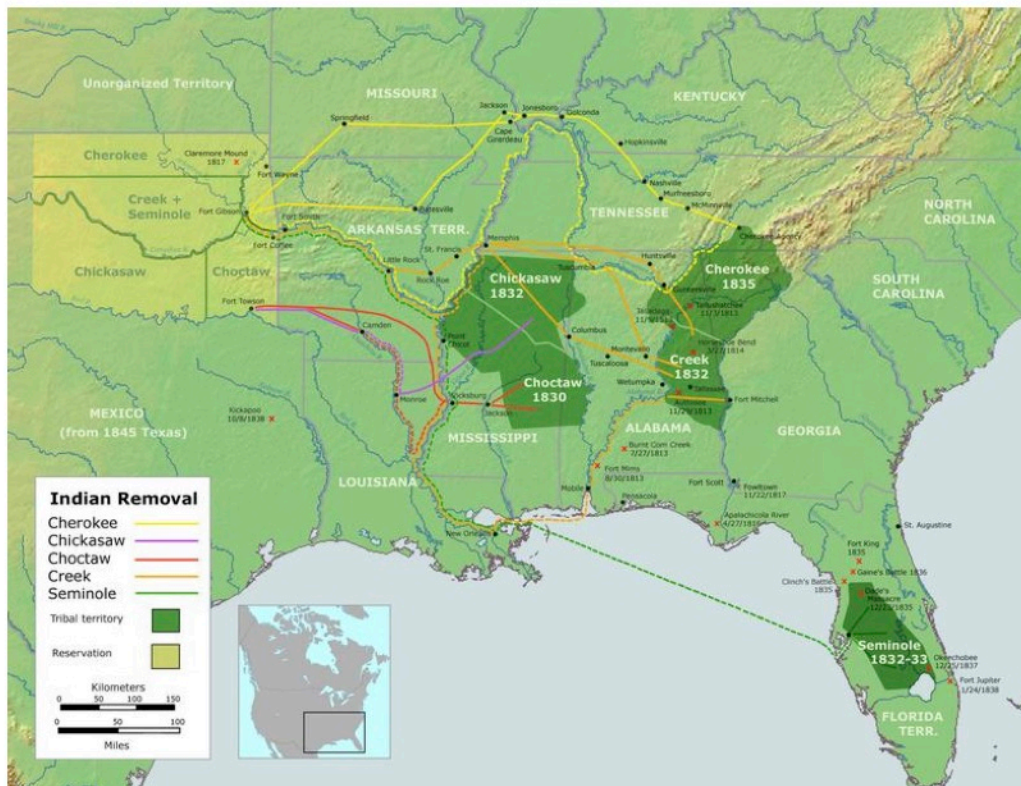
The Cherokee had not been prepared for this long difficult journey. It was especially difficult on the elderly and the children. Many of them died. More than 4,000 Cherokees died on the march. They were forced to bury their dead along the side of the road as they walked. Those that lived made it to Oklahoma by March of 1839. Whenever the Cherokee speak of this time in history, they call it "Nunna-da-ul-tsun-yi" which translates to "the place where they cried". This is why it is now called The Trail of Tears.

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Article 4

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