



The Trail of Tears and the Forced Relocation of the Cherokee Nation

The caravan was ready to move out. The wagons were lined up. The mood was somber. One who was there reported that "there was a silence and stillness of the voice that betrayed the sadness of the heart." Behind them the makeshift camp where some had spent three months of a Tennessee summer was already ablaze. There was no going back.



(Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Benjamin Nance, photographer)

A white-haired old man, Chief Going Snake, led the way on his pony, followed by a group of young men on horseback. Just as the wagons moved off along the narrow roadway, they heard a sound. Although the day was bright, there was a black thundercloud in the west. The thunder died away and the wagons continued their long journey westward toward the setting sun. Many who heard the thunder thought it was an omen of more trouble to come.¹

W. Shorey Coodey to John Howard Payne, n.d.; cited in John Ehle, Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 351.