Trail of Tears National Historic Trail

University of West Georgia Center for Public History
Chattooga County Historical Society
National Park Service

All the People were Amazed

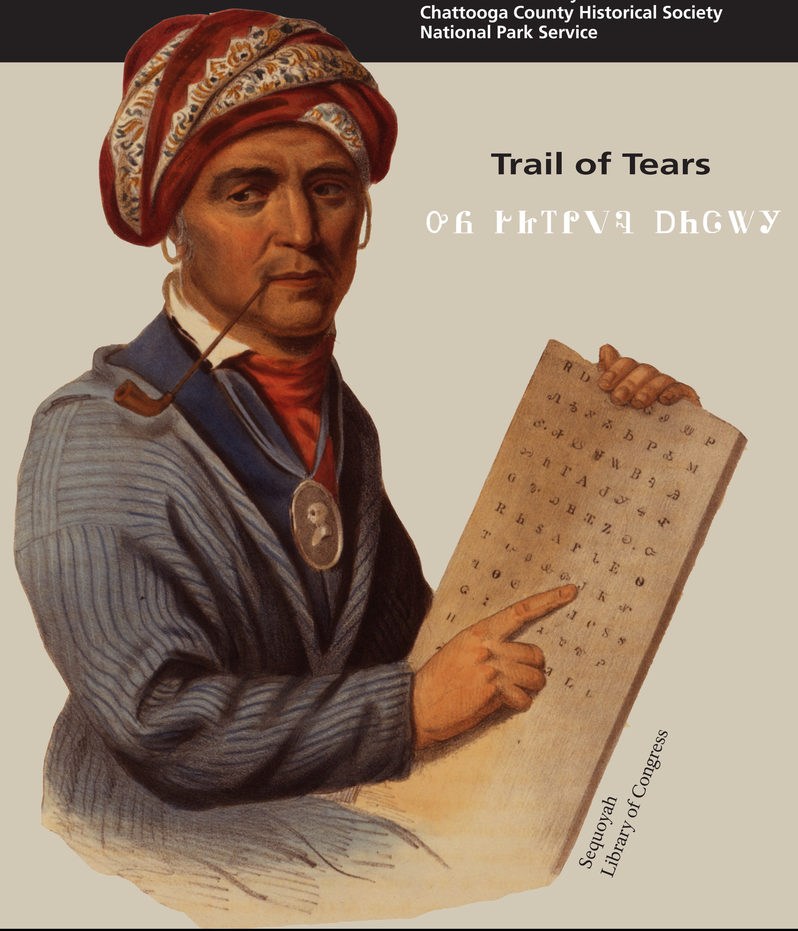
The first public demonstration of the Cherokee syllabary by its inventor Sequoyah (George Gist) was in the Chattooga Valley at the "Indian Court held in Chatouga." Sequoyah had a lawsuit pending in the court and he wrote down a statement of his case. When he read the statement to the court instead of speaking, "all the people were amazed."

Big Rattling Gourd, one of the listeners in the courtroom, was so excited he tracked down Sequoyah the next morning. He told Sequoyah that "he had not slept all night for thinking of the wonder. It surpassed any thing he could have conceived possible for the power of man to accomplish…Big Rattling Gourd asked if he could write down any thing he might choose, or only particular things? Gist replied he could write any thing, provided it was in Cherokee…"

- The Payne-Butrick Papers, Volume I, pp. 139-140

Sequoyah completed the 86-character Cherokee syllabary in 1821, enabling many Cherokee to become literate. The syllabary strengthened the Cherokee's efforts to hold onto lands guaranteed to them by solemn treaties with the US government. Ultimately, despite their almost universal literacy, their sophisticated government, and their great cultural similarity to white neighbors they were forced from their lands.

In May 1838, 7,000 soldiers moved against the Cherokee Nation. The removal effort started in Georgia where the US military and Georgia militia uprooted families and marched them to round-up camps.



Sequoyah
Library of Congress

Trail of Tears

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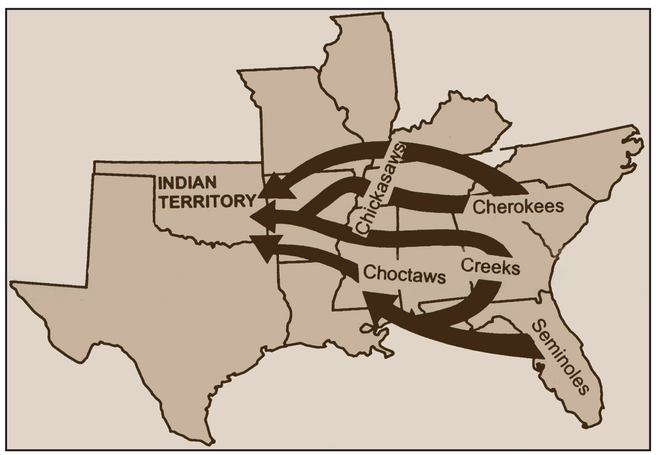
Forced to Move

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 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.

New Nations

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.

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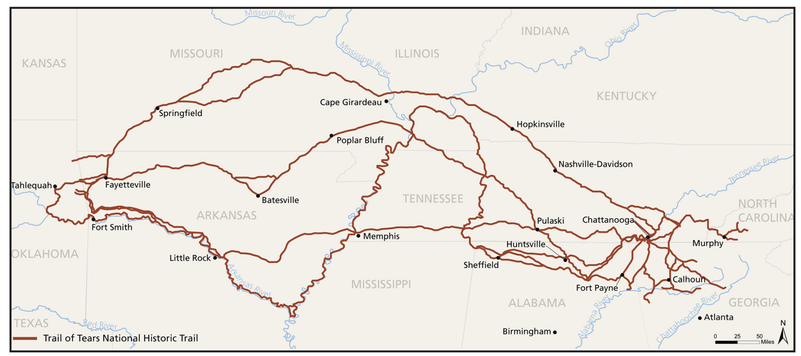

You can visit sites along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. By helping to preserve historic sites and trail segments, and developing areas for public use, the story of the forced removal of the Cherokee people and other American Indian tribes is remembered and told by the National Park Service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

Learn more at www.nps.gov/trte