Trail of Tears National Historic Trail

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

Persistence in Chaos

By 1819, America's thirst for land had forced the Cherokee from their homelands, until only 10 percent remained of their original territory. Amidst this chaos, the Cherokee need for continuity propelled them to keep their communities together. Forced to relocate several times, neighbors, families, tribal elders, and the town council remained a unit as they moved from state to state.

The history of Island Town begins with Kituwah refugees. When General James Grant destroyed the mother town of Kituwah near Cherokee, North Carolina in July 1761, survivors sought refuge in Big Island Town 47 miles to the west in Monroe County, Tennessee. During the American Revolution, the people advanced to newly formed Island Town in northwest Georgia, 94 miles southwest of the original settlement.

At last, in 1838 the US Army forced every Cherokee they could find to round-up camps. All Cherokee would soon be ferried or marched along the Trail of Tears to Indian Territory. Even so, the original Kituwah citizens stayed together in detachments and resettled as town communities.

Sometime in 1838…word was brought that a white man had taken possession of his [Cricket Sixkiller's] house. I went with him to the house and found said Walker Thornton with his family and furniture in the house, and part of Cricket Sixkiller's things moved out into the Entry. We had a long talk with him but failed to get him to give up the house.

- Sworn to and subscribed before David M. Foreman on March 3, 1842 by Six Killer

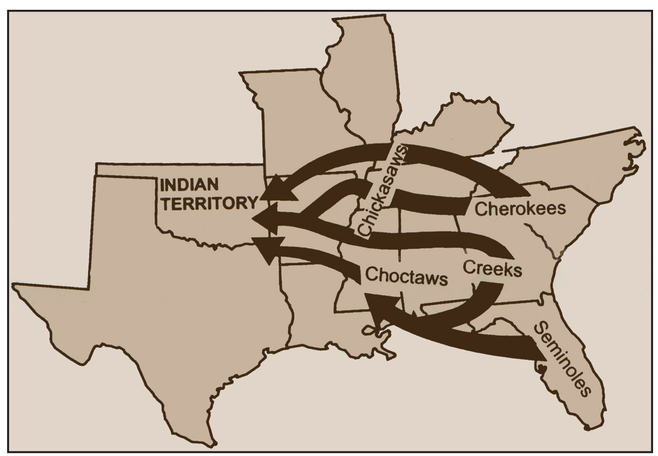
Credit line

Remnant Cherokee log home from Island Town

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.

Trail of Tears National Historic Trail

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