The Diary of Lieutenant John Phelps, June 22, 1838

Territory. The stage was set for Cherokee removal.

In 1837 the North Carolina legislature approved the mandate to be removed and went about planting crops and building homes. During the spring of 1838 the Old Army Road, stretching between Andrews and Robbinsville, was improved in 10 miles, and trails. The Unicoi Turnpike, established in 1830, supplied an easy removal path as it ran through northern Georgia, western North Carolina, and eastern Tennessee.

Fort Butler had been established in 1836 to keep order after the ratification of the Treaty of New Echota. Two years later, the army quickly constructed four more forts in the surrounding area.

In 1837 the North Carolina legislature approved construction of the Great State Road between Franklin and Fort Butler to expedite the sale and settlement of Cherokee lands. During the spring of 1838 the Old Army Road, stretching between Andrews and Robbinsville, was improved in 10 days from a Cherokee foot path to a wagon road.

From these collection points and conduits, all of the North Carolina Cherokee captured by the army were funneled through Fort Butler.

The first deployment of Cherokee left Fort Butler on June 18, 1838, forced to walk 80 miles to the Fort Cass depot in Indian Territory. Other groups followed through early July. Due to multiple delays, the Cherokee languished at Fort Cass for months before departing overland to Indian Territory in October.

The Cherokee were assigned to one of these detachments, numbering about 1,000 people each. Cherokee leaders included Big Chief Peter Jones, Bushyhead, Sutie (Sitwakus), the braddock of Hiwassee Town and Aquohee District judge; and Chaswula (Chowswala) or Old Bark of Taquohee.

Dickageeska, one of the homeless Cherokee, recalled the steep price of resistance. They were compelled to submit on the spot of trees and roots, and nearly all the children. And only two children remained out of a population of near 100 persons. Yet by 1840 these Cherokee were forming settlements and reviving the customs of councils, dances, ball playing, and other practices.

The US Army and state militias built forts and roads in the Cherokee Nation to gather and collect the Cherokee. Rather than revolt, the Cherokee simply ignored the mandate to be removed and went about planting crops and building homes. In early June Capt. L. B. Webster noted, There are about ten thousand in our neighborhood. They all remain quietly at work on their little farms. They sold as few cheap anything they have to spare, and look upon the regular troops as their friends... These are innocent and simple people into whose homes we are to obtrude ourselves... When the troops began their deportation operations on June 12, Lt. John Phelps said,... seven companies of us marched thither... By night fall about a hundred [indentured] had assembled... By the morning of the 14th we were all on or near a thousand Indians.

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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, roads 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 North Carolina, visit www.nctrailoftears.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

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. If you are unfamiliar with the area, it is recommended to stop and ask for permission before crossing private land.

ROUNDDOWN ROUTES
During the years of 1838 and 1839 the Cherokee were removed to Indian Territory (Oklahoma) via multiple routes across the country. The Roundup routes, shown here in North Carolina, were used by the US government starting in late spring 1838 to gather the Cherokee from their homes and forcibly place them in removal camps, where they awaited the start of their 800-mile (1300-km) journey. Many Cherokee perished as harsh weather conditions, poor food supplies, and the spread of sickness affected these traveling parties.