

# The Trail of Tears in Arkansas

Learning About Indian Removal through Mapping Landscapes

*Students Learning from Statewide and Local Historic Places*



**ARKANSAS HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

Written by

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**An Agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage**

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## Instructional Guidelines

### **Grade Levels:**

7-12

### **Essential Question:**

How did the geography and environment of Arkansas impact the experiences of Native Americans forced to walk the “Trail of Tears”?

### **Relevant Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks:**

H.7.AH.7-8.1 Evaluate ways that historical events in Arkansas were shaped by circumstances in time and place.

WST.1.7.2 Construct geographic representations for the purpose of asking and answering specific geographic questions.

Era4.1.8.4 Analyze purposes, implementation, and effects of public policies (e.g., currency and banking, Indian Removal, disenfranchisement, economic growth, Manifest Destiny).

Era2.2.AH.9-12.1 Evaluate intended and unintended consequences of public policies (e.g., Louisiana Purchase, Missouri Compromise, Indian Removal).

### **Lesson Objective:**

To determine the kinds of environments Native Americans on the Trail of Tears encountered in Arkansas.

## Materials

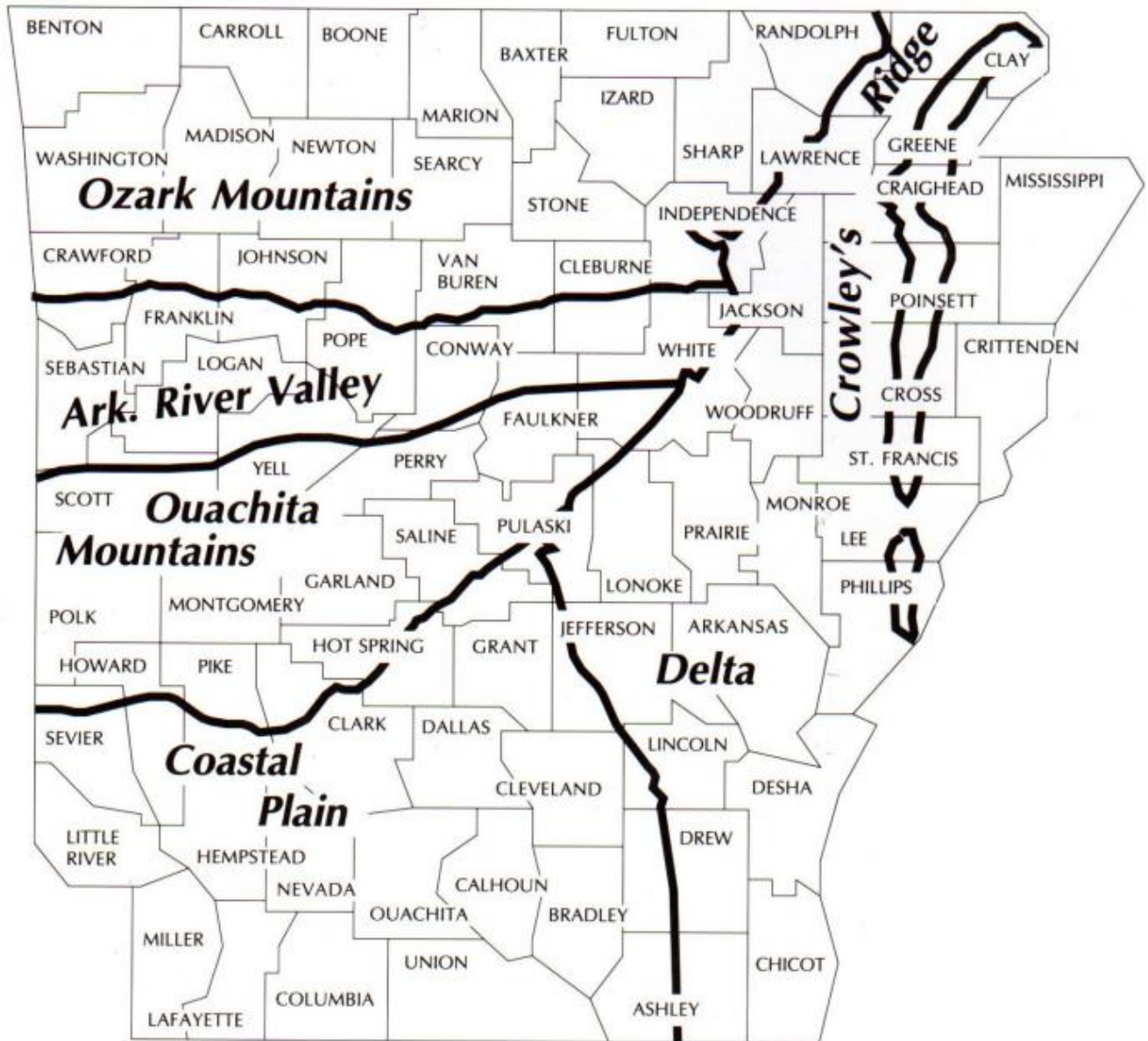
1. **“Arkansas Native Americans and the Trail of Tears” PowerPoint presentation.**” You can either download this program from the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program website, or you can schedule the AHPP Education Outreach Coordinator to present the program in your classroom. Contact [educationoutreach@arkansasheritage.org](mailto:educationoutreach@arkansasheritage.org) for more information. You can also choose to have students read the enclosed essay “Arkansas Native Americans and the Trail of Tears.”
2. Arkansas map showing the locations of road segments used during the Trail of Tears that are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
3. Map of the six geographic regions of Arkansas overlaid on counties.
4. “Trail of Tears Landscapes Map” printed on 8 ½ X 11 paper.
5. Colored pencils or markers.
6. **OR** you can create maps by accessing the mapping software of your choice. There are several great free mapping programs available for teachers, including Animaps.com, ArcGIS online, Google Maps, and Google Earth.
7. Reflection Questions handout included in this document.

## Instructions

1. Introduce students to the topic of Native American removal and the Trail of Tears through the “**Arkansas Native Americans and the Trail of Tears**” **PowerPoint presentation**. You can either download this program from the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program website at <http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/Learn-More/classroom-resources>, or you can schedule the AHPP Education Outreach Coordinator to present the program in your classroom. Contact [educationoutreach@arkansasheritage.org](mailto:educationoutreach@arkansasheritage.org) for more information. You can also choose to have students read the enclosed essay “Arkansas Native Americans and the Trail of Tears.”
2. After introducing students to the topic of Native American Removal, instruct students to compare the “Six Geographic Regions of Arkansas with County Overlay” Map and the “Trail of Tears Road Segments on the National Register of Historic Places” Map. Make a classroom list of the kinds of natural environments people who traveled these road segments might have encountered at each point on the map, using the enclosed worksheet titled “Landscape Comparison Chart.”
3. Lead a class discussion in which students create symbols that represent different kinds of landscapes along the northern and southern routes of the Trail of Tears, as represented by the “Trail of Tears Road Segments on the National Register of Historic Places” Map. If you are using an online service for mapping, look for different symbols that are available and assign them a meaning for your map. This works much better if you are specific about the kinds of landscapes (i.e. include things like swamps, hills, forests, etc.).
4. Instruct students to research the landscapes in each of the counties listed on the finished worksheets, particularly in the areas around the sites listed in the “Trail of Tears Road Segments on the National Register of Historic Places” Map.
5. Instruct students to create a map that uses the symbols created during class discussion to show the kinds of landscapes that people on the Trail of Tears would have encountered on their journeys.
6. Ask students to answer the questions on the “Reflection Questions” handout in this document.
7. Assess according to school requirements. Make sure that students include a key that explains their landscape symbols; also make sure that students map both the northern and southern routes.

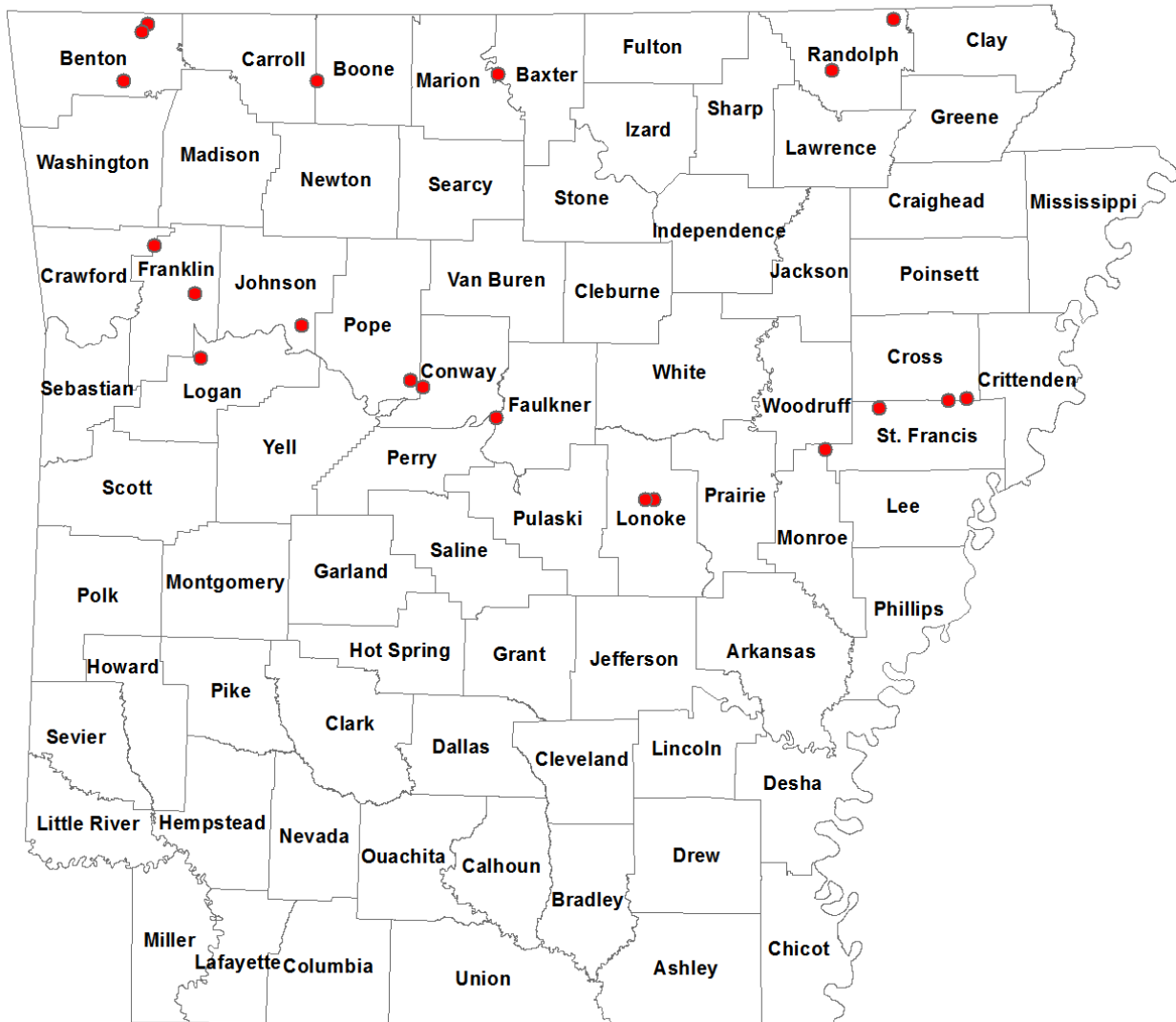


## Six Geographic Regions of Arkansas with County Overlay



Courtesy Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission

## Trail of Tears Road Segments on the National Register of Historic Places and the Arkansas Register of Historic Places





# Trail of Tears Landscapes Map



## Trail of Tears Mapping Reflection Questions

1. What sorts of environmental dangers would Native Americans on the Southern Route encounter in Eastern Arkansas? Why?
2. What sorts of environmental dangers would Native Americans on the Southern Route encounter in Central Arkansas? Why?
3. What sorts of environmental dangers would Native Americans on the Southern Route encounter in Northwestern Arkansas? Why?
4. Based on what you've learned by mapping the environment in Arkansas during the Trail of Tears, which route would have been the least dangerous? Why?
5. Based on what you've learned by mapping the environment in Arkansas during the Trail of Tears, which route would have been the most dangerous? Why?
6. Imagine that you are a Cherokee on the Northern Route, traveling through the winter of 1838-1839. What kinds of preparations would you need to make to comfortably travel this route? Why?
7. Imagine that you are a Cherokee on the Southern Route, traveling through the winter of 1838-1839. What kind of preparations would you need to make to comfortably travel this route? Why?
8. How did the environment around them help or hinder the progress of Native Americans on the Trail of Tears?
9. Look up pictures of the landscape in Oklahoma. How is it different from the landscapes that the Native Americans lived in before removal?
10. Imagine that you are a Cherokee from eastern Tennessee, forced to walk the Trail of Tears during the winter of 1838-1839. What sort of adjustments would you have to make to your lifestyle in Oklahoma because of the different physical environment?

# Arkansas Native Americans and the Trail of Tears.

## Native Americans in Arkansas before European Settlement

Native Americans in Arkansas were, in part, descendants of the Mississippian peoples who lived in Arkansas before European settlement in the state. The time period that we know the most about is the Mississippian Era, between 1000 A.D.-1541 A.D. One example of a Native American settlement in Arkansas of this time period is Parkin, now known as Parkin Archeological State Park. The people who lived here before European settlement are related to the Tunican tribe of Native Americans, and spoke a version of the Tunican language.<sup>12</sup>



Parkin Archeological State Park  
Parkin, Arkansas

In 1541, life for Native Americans in Arkansas changed forever. Hernando De Soto arrived. De Soto was the very first European to set foot in Arkansas. De Soto was a Spanish explorer who came to America to look for gold. His expedition team wrote journals that help historians understand the cultures of the Native Americans they encountered. De Soto first landed in Florida, and in 1539 he left Florida with 600 men and traveled north. In two years, he made it to the Mississippi River. Because of archeological evidence found at the Parkin site (Clarksdale bells, lead shot from a Spanish firearm, a seven-layer glass bead, and a bronze coin), many scholars believe that Parkin is the Native American city of Casqui visited by the expedition and written about in their journals.<sup>3 4</sup>



**Hernando de Soto**  
Spanish Explorer

When French explorers Marquette and Joliet began exploring the Mississippi Valley 130 years after de Soto, all they found were a few small villages along the Mississippi. The Parkin site was abandoned, and Quapaw were living in the area. The Mississippian cultures vanished because of a combination of factors, including warfare, extreme drought, and the appearance of European diseases brought by de Soto and his men.<sup>5</sup>

In 1673, a French Priest, Jacques Marquette, and a professional explorer and fur trader, Louis Joliet, went on an expedition down the Mississippi River to discover whether or not the

Mississippi River actually emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. They stopped at a village on the Mississippi River about twenty miles above the Arkansas River. This village was occupied by the Quapaw, the most well-known of Native groups living in Arkansas during the historical period.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Quapaw**

The Quapaw are part of a number of tribes who speak a Dhegiha Siouan language, and who lived in the Eastern portion of Arkansas when Marquette and Joliet arrived in Arkansas. According to official tribal history, the Quapaw came from the Ohio River Valley in 1650. They called themselves the “downriver people.”

The French called the Quapaw “Arkansas,” which was the Illinai word for “People of the South Wind,” generally believed to be the origin of the state’s name. The Quapaw lived in longhouses, which housed several families. The houses were arranged around a large tribal meeting house for leadership. The Quapaw divided themselves into two groups, the “Sky people” and the “Earth people.” These groups were then further divided into 21 clans.

The Quapaw did not walk the Trail of Tears as we have defined it. Instead, in 1824 the Quapaw ceded their remaining land in Arkansas and moved to a spot on the Red River near Shreveport, Louisiana and lived among the Caddo. Floods and bad relations with the Caddo caused many Quapaw to return to Arkansas by 1830, even though they did not have a permanent residence there. In 1834, the US Government finally succeeded in removing 175 Quapaw to Oklahoma.<sup>7 8</sup>

### **The Caddo**

The Caddo people lived in Southwest Arkansas near the Red River. They lived in the area for so long that archeologists don’t know exactly when they moved there. They also lived in Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. The Caddo people were farmers, salt makers, hunters, craftsmen, and they made elaborate pottery.

The Caddo people lived in houses built with tree trunks and tall grasses that were tied together with strips of tree bark. The Caddo also made elaborate women’s head pieces, called the dush-toh.

The Turkey dance is a very important dance in Caddo culture. The women dance in a circle around the men, and their movements are inspired by the movements of turkeys. The women wear broadcloth dresses, carry blankets, and also wear dush-toh. This dance has been performed for hundreds of years, and is still performed today.

The Caddo people did not walk the Trail of Tears as we have defined it. In 1834, they signed a treaty that required them to move out of the limits of the United States. They moved to Texas, which at the time was its own country called the Republic of Texas. They were not removed to Indian Territory until the 1850s.<sup>9 10 11 12</sup>

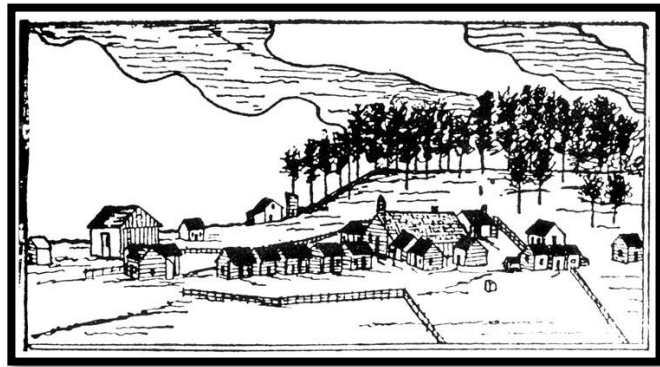
## The Osage

The Osage structure their society in a similar manner to the Quapaw. They have two major divisions, the “Earth People” and the “Sky people” and then subdivided into more than twenty clans. During the 17th and 18th centuries, women were the agriculturalists, growing beans, squash, pumpkins, and corn. They were semi-nomadic in that they would leave their permanent villages for part of the year to take part in buffalo hunts. They clashed with the Western Cherokee who settled in Arkansas briefly before the 1830 Indian Removal Act.

The Osage did not walk the Trail of Tears as we understand it now. Instead, they retreated to lands in Kansas, where they were among the last Native American groups removed from the territory. They were not removed to Oklahoma until the 1850s.<sup>13 14 15</sup>

## The Western Cherokee

As white settlers began to encroach upon their homes in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, some Cherokee began migrating west during the 1780s through the 1820s. This group of Cherokee is sometimes referred to as the “Western Cherokee.” Many of this early group of Cherokee moved into the Arkansas River Valley, between Morrilton and Fort Smith. This land was much more similar to the land they occupied in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.



**Drawing of Dwight Mission in Pope County, Arkansas**  
Courtesy Butler Center for Arkansas Studies

Meanwhile, the Cherokee who had stayed in the east were under increasing pressure to move and open up land for white settlers. In 1817, some Cherokee signed the Turkeytown Treaty, in which land in the east was swapped for land in Arkansas. Many of the Eastern Cherokee felt that the signing of this treaty betrayed the tribe as a whole, and a schism was created between the Western and Eastern Cherokee. The Western Cherokee who migrated to Arkansas after the Turkeytown Treaty lived in what is now Pope and Johnson counties. In 1820, Missionary Cephas Washburn moved into the area and established the Dwight Mission near present-day Russellville. The mission was intended to teach young Cherokee how to live as Anglo-Americans.



**Sequoyah, inventor of the Cherokee Syllabry or Alphabet, lived among the Western Cherokee in Pope County, Arkansas.**

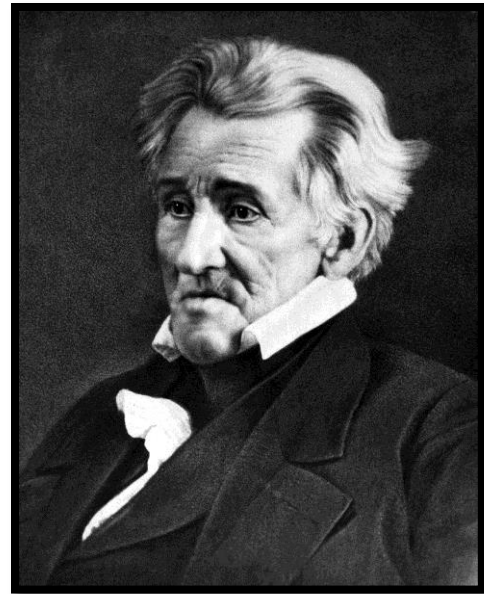
This group of Cherokee was among the first Native Americans to be forced out of their homes and into Indian Territory in Oklahoma. As white settlers began to pour into Arkansas, the Western Cherokee were once again pushed out, even before the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. In 1828, they signed the Treaty of Washington and were forced to move from Arkansas into northeastern Oklahoma. Their brothers in the Eastern Cherokee would join them a decade later.<sup>16 17</sup>

### **Indian Removal Overview**

In 1803, the United States committed to help Georgia remove its Native Americans. President Thomas Jefferson opposed forcibly removing them, and instead promoted a policy of voluntary removal. Presidents James Monroe and John Quincy Adams adopted similar policies. Very few moved under these presidents.

President Andrew Jackson, elected in 1828, had a very different view of Indian Removal. Jackson rejected the policy of voluntary removal. He believed in forced removal. In 1830, Jackson asked Congress for authority to negotiate with tribes and force them out if necessary. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 granted Jackson that authority.

Specifically, the act gave the president authority to negotiate with Native American tribes to exchange their land in the east with land in “Indian Territory” west of the Mississippi River.<sup>18</sup>



**President Andrew Jackson**

### **What Was the Trail of Tears?**

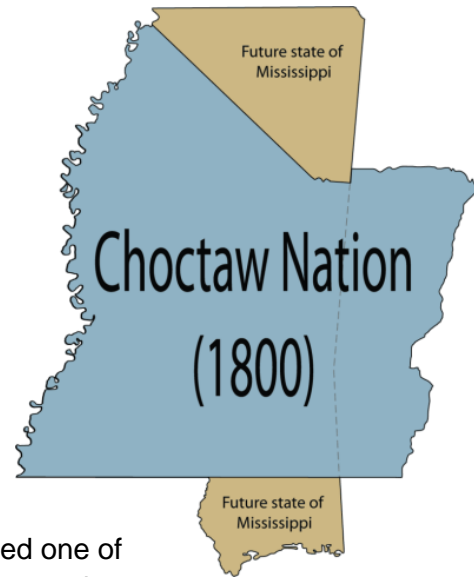
The Trail of Tears was not just one journey, but many journeys over several years. The phrase “Trail of Tears” is often used only to refer to Cherokee removal, which is inaccurate. Other tribes faced their own “Trail of Tears,” between the years 1830-1839. Removal of Native Americans from homelands to government-established reservations lasted for many years after the Cherokee “Trail of Tears” ended in 1839.

Every tribe who walked the “Trail of Tears” came through Arkansas on their way to Indian Territory. This included what was called the “five civilized tribes” of the Southeastern United States: the Choctaw, the Muscogee, the Seminole, the Cherokee, and the Chickasaw.<sup>19</sup>

### The Choctaw Trail of Tears

The traditional homelands of the Choctaw were located in Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas, with the largest population in Mississippi. They speak a language that is part of the Muskogean language family, and they can trace their ancestry back to the mound builders of the Mississippian period.

The Choctaw left Mississippi in three groups. The first group left in November of 1831, and suffered hunger, bad weather, and disease along the route. Their journey took them from Memphis or Vicksburg, across south Arkansas, to their land in Oklahoma. Those on the overland routes in this first group suffered from blizzards and extreme cold. By the time they got to Little Rock, eight children had died. The *Arkansas Gazette* quoted one of the travelers who said that the walk had been “a trail of tears and death.” This is considered to be the first use of the phrase “Trail of Tears.”



The second group of Choctaw who traveled across Arkansas to Indian Territory walked these two road segments during the fall of 1832. While there were steamboats and water routes available to take them to Rock Roe Bayou, where they planned to meet third group of Choctaw on the trail, many of the Choctaw were afraid of cholera and would not get on the boats.

They had good reason to be afraid of the disease—two people came down with the disease on the boat sent to take them to Rock Roe Bayou. Many Choctaw decided to take the overland route instead. Walking between Memphis and Rock Roe, they encountered flooding that forced them to walk through knee-to-waist-deep water for more than 30 miles.<sup>20 21 22 23</sup>

### The Muscogee Trail of Tears

The Muscogee Native Americans were mistakenly called the “Creek” Indians for many years. The tribe calls themselves the Muscogee. Their original homelands were in what is now known as Georgia, Alabama, and parts of Florida. They speak a language that has similarities to the language spoken by the Choctaw peoples. They are descendants of the Mississippian mound builders who lived all over the southeastern United States. Removal of the Muscogee happened over a long period of time, nearly 100 years.



**Memphis to Little Rock Road – Bayou Two Prairie Segment, Lonoke County**

The Muscogee left their homelands in stages. In 1832, they signed a treaty that ceded all of their traditional homelands to the U.S. Government. At this point, 2,500 Muscogee voluntarily removed themselves to Indian Territory. Over the next few years, the Muscogee people removed to Indian Territory in a series of groups.

The first group of 630 Muscogee passed through Arkansas in 1834. A second group of 511 Muscogee passed through in 1835. In the fall of 1836, 13,000 Muscogee bottlenecked at Memphis, waiting for smaller groups to head west toward Oklahoma. The last of the Muscogee arrived in Indian Territory in December of 1837.<sup>24 25 26</sup>

### The Seminole Trail of Tears

Some of the Seminole people of Florida were originally part of the Creek or Muscogee tribes, often called the “Lower Creek”. They originally lived in southern Georgia and northern Florida, but were pushed further south into the Everglades by white settlers. As compared to any other native group impacted by Indian Removal policies, the Seminoles were the first to feel the brunt of Andrew Jackson’s ideas about Native Americans during the first

Seminole war in 1816. They also resisted forced removal more fiercely than any other Native group.



**Seminole family of tribal elder Cypress Tiger at their camp near Kendall, Florida, 1916. Photo taken by botanist John Kunkel Small.**

The United States government was never able to completely remove all of the Seminole from Florida, but their concentrated efforts lasted from 1817, when the United States took control of Florida, to 1858 – twenty years after the last of the Cherokee moved west. Collectively, this resistance is known as the Seminole Wars. The Seminole people are a mixture of several different groups, including the Muscogee, other tribes in Florida, and run-away slaves with African roots.

Seminole removal from Florida was different from many of the other Indian removals because most of them were removed via ship from Florida to New Orleans, and then on steam boats up the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers to Fort Gibson in Indian Territory. Seminole removal started in April of 1836, with a group of 408 Seminoles. Low water caused this group to walk from Dardanelle to Fort Gibson.

In 1838, six groups of Seminoles headed to Indian Territory, and then a few smaller groups were removed from Florida up to the 1850s. Of all the groups who removed to Indian Territory

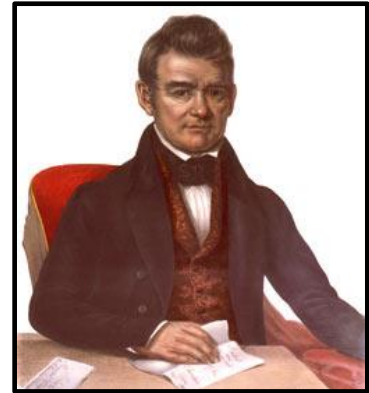


during this time period, the Seminoles had the lowest number of deaths, which may be attributed to smallpox vaccines given to the Seminoles before they started their journeys. Seminole removal lasted longer than any other: 23 years.<sup>27 28</sup>

### The Cherokee Trail of Tears

The Cherokee are the most well-known tribe to walk the Trail of Tears. Their original homeland was in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. By the time of the Trail of Tears, the Cherokee were probably the most assimilated into European culture, with many Cherokee intermarrying with whites for nearly 200 years before removal.

Cherokee culture was divided into seven clans. They governed themselves through a mixture of democracy and hereditary leadership. They functioned under two governments and so had two leaders. The “Peace Chief” ruled the Cherokee during times of peace. The color white is associated with the Peace Government. During times of War, the “Red Chief” or the “War Chief” ruled.



**Chief John Ross, leader of the Eastern Cherokee at the time of removal.**

The Cherokee were traditionally matrilineal, and included women in all parts of their society. This confused white settlers when they first encountered the Cherokee, as whites did have the same respect for women as did Cherokee society. As the Cherokee assimilated into European culture, some of their matrilineal practices began to fade away.

Many Cherokee were *forcibly* removed from their homes and *forcibly* moved to Indian Territory. Removal of the Eastern Cherokee began in 1834 and lasted until 1839. There were several groups of Cherokee who left at different times and took different routes to Indian Territory.

#### Cherokee Routes

**Northern Route:** Went through Tennessee, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas.

#### Southern Routes:

**Drane Route:** Took the Tennessee River north to the Mississippi River, took the Mississippi River south to Arkansas Post, and then took the Arkansas River to Lewisburg (now Morrilton). The group then took the military road the rest of the way to Indian Territory.

**Deas-Whiteley Route:** Started overland in Alabama, walked to the Tennessee River, and then took the Drane Route the rest of the way to Indian Territory.

**Taylor Route:** Started near Chattanooga, Tennessee, and then walked the Northern Route.

**Bell Route:** Overland from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Memphis, and then overland on the Military Road to Indian Territory.

**Benge Route:** Started at Fort Payne, Alabama and went overland through Tennessee, Illinois and eastern Missouri. Turned south to Batesville, Arkansas, and then northwest through the Ozarks to Indian Territory.<sup>29 30 31 32 33</sup>

### Chickasaw Trail of Tears

The Chickasaw originally inhabited parts of northern Mississippi and Alabama, southern Kentucky, and parts of Eastern Tennessee that bordered Arkansas. Like some other tribes from the southeast, they Chickasaw were a matrilineal society that traced ancestry through the mother. Their society was divided into eleven clans.

The Chickasaw were the last of the group to be removed to Oklahoma, and they had maybe the least traumatic of any other removal. The reason their removal went smoother than others is because they chose to pay for their own move. By doing so, they maintained control over when and how the removal happened. Very few Chickasaw actually walked the trail. Instead, those that went overland rode horses or were passengers in wagons. This may have been another reason that many of the Chickasaw arrived in Indian Territory in better shape than others.

The first group of Chickasaw to remove opted to go overland, taking the Military Road, in July 1837. They walked the Cadron section of the Military Road (Faulkner County) in August of 1837. They arrived in Indian Territory by September 1837.



The Cadron Segment of the Military Road, Faulkner County, Arkansas.

The second group left Memphis in December of 1837.

This was the largest single group of Chickasaw to remove at once, including more than 4,000 people. Portions of the group walked overland and some took steamboats up the Arkansas River.

The third large group of Chickasaw to remove to Indian Territory traveled through Arkansas in early 1838. By autumn 1839, most of the Chickasaw were in Indian Territory. Some Chickasaw continued to trickle into Indian Territory through the 1850s. The Chickasaw were the only tribe to leave no remnant tribe in the east.<sup>34 35 36</sup>

### What Were the Consequences of the Trail of Tears?

The most significant consequence of the Trail of Tears was the large number of deaths among the tribes who walked the trail. Between 2,500-6,000 Choctaw died during removal, about 4,000 Cherokee died, around 3,500 Muscogee died, many Chickasaw died from cholera ( the exact number is unclear), and hundreds of Seminole died during the removal and hundreds more

during the Seminole wars. A rough total of the number of people who died as a direct result of Indian Removal policies is around 14,000.

Forcing Native Americans onto reservations had other consequences as well. It removed them from the larger culture and its resources, forced them into poverty, and kept them from making decisions about their own communities. It also spurred other tragic policies, like the Indian boarding schools that were active from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century well into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. These boarding schools punished students for speaking their own language and participating in their own cultures.

Politically, the Native American Removal Act of 1830 had consequences that are still apparent today. According to historian Mark Stewart, the 1830 Indian Removal Act was counter to the constitutional idea that all people are created equal. This spurred discussions about fairness and equality that dominated American politics for years after Indian Removal. The act also changed the role of the president in two ways: first, the president's direct influence over law-making was weakened by the act. Second, the president's ability to act in the name of national security was strengthened.

Can you still see the consequences of Indian Removal policies in our culture today?<sup>37 38 39 40</sup>

## Witness Structures

A “witness structure” is a building that existed and may have even been used by people involved in an important historic event. In Arkansas, there are at least three surviving structures that “witnessed” the Trail of Tears.



**The Drennen-Scott house** was built as a one-room structure between 1834 and 1836. The house belonged to John Drennen, one of the founders of Van Buren, and an Indian agent for the Cherokee during the Trail of Tears. He was responsible for giving settlement payments to the Cherokee, so it is highly likely that many of the Cherokee on the Trail of Tears passed by this house while they prepared to go into Indian Territory. The Van Buren and Fort Smith area was used as staging point for the Cherokee just before they entered into Indian Territory.



**The Old State House** was Arkansas’s first Capitol building, and is the oldest state capitol building west of the Mississippi. The building was under construction when the Cherokee and other tribes passed through Little Rock on the Trail of Tears. Native Americans on the Drane, Deas-Whiteley, and Bell routes would have seen the building as they traveled through.



**The Jacob Wolf house** in Norfolk the oldest public building in Arkansas. It was built in 1829, and was originally built as the courthouse for IZARD County. The house was built by Jacob Wolf, a politician, merchant, blacksmith, and carpenter. The Cherokee on the Bengé route would have almost certainly seen the house, if not stopped in the area.

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