

# Preserving the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail

## Background

- Commemorates the forced removal of the Cherokee people from their homelands.
- Represents the removal of the “Five Civilized Tribes” of the Southeast to present-day Oklahoma
  - Cherokee
  - Chickasaw
  - Choctaw
  - Muscogee (Creek)
  - Seminole

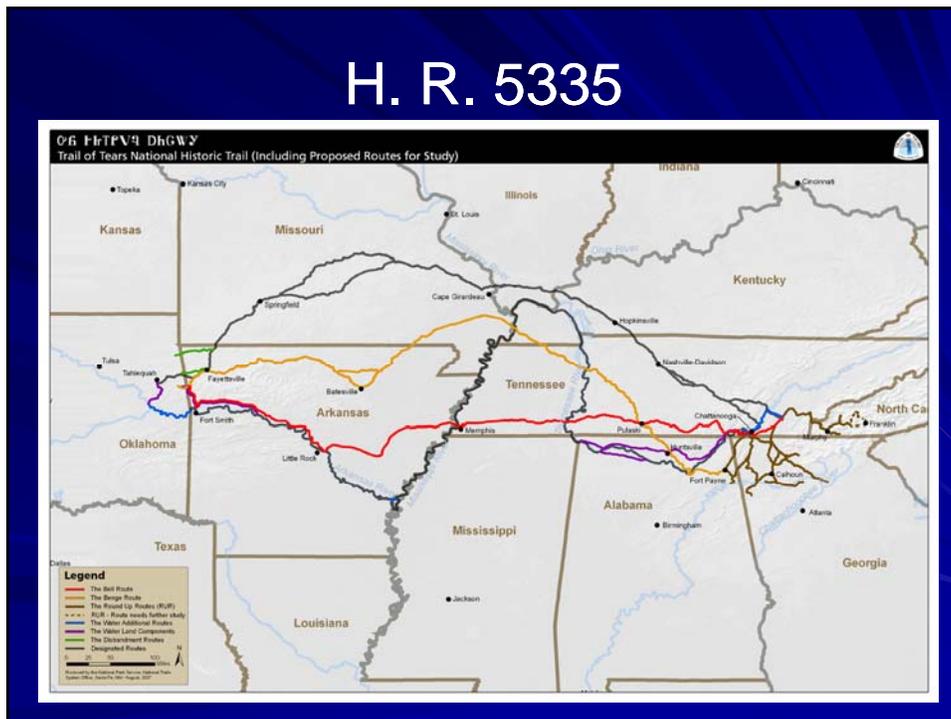
## Trail of Tears National Historic Trail



## Cherokee Removal

- Water Route
- Northern Route
- Other Segments not part of the NHT
  - Bell Route
  - Benge Route
  - Roundup Stockades
  - Trail from stockades to internment camps
  - Dispersment Depots

# H. R. 5335



## Preserving the Story

- How to present interpretation?
- Where to put up interpretation?
- Publications on removal/trail sites and segments

## Preserving Trail Sites & Segments

- Identification of sites and segments
- Establishing relationships with landowners
- Identify sites that are in immediate danger and take appropriate action

Water  
Route

# Ft. Smith National Historic Site



# North Little Rock Riverfront



# Water Route General Panel

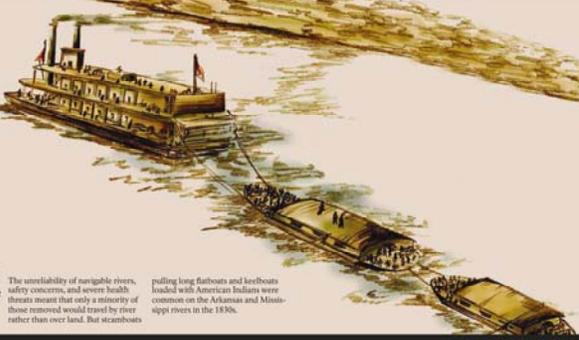
## They Passed This Way

"I have no more land. I am driven away from home, driven up the red waters, let us all go, let us all die together and somewhere upon the banks we will be there."

—Sis-wah's Song, heard on several removal boats along the Trail of Tears.

After passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the United States government forced tens of thousands of American Indians to leave their ancestral lands in the southeast for new homes in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). They traveled over established land and water routes, all of which led through Arkansas. Rather than risk disease and other hazards of summer travel, many groups left in the fall and faced, instead, treacherous winter weather. Thousands died during the ordeal—remembered today as the Trail of Tears.

Despite the hardships of the journey, the people of the five tribes of the Southeast established new lives in the West. They stand now as successful sovereign nations, proudly preserving cultural traditions, while adapting to the challenges of the 21st century.



The unreliability of navigable rivers, safety concerns, and severe health threats meant that only a minority of those removed would travel by river rather than over land. But steamboats pulling long flatboats and keelboats loaded with American Indians were common on the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers in the 1830s.



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 the southeastern United States.

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 the onslaught of an expanding American population. Opponents decried its inhumanity and the tragic consequences it would have for the Indian peoples. One thing was certain: removal freed millions of acres of Indian lands for use by American settlers.



Trail of Tears Removal Routes: Trail - Steam and Keelboats; Keelboat Route; Other Water Routes

In 1997, to commemorate this tragic chapter in American history, the United States Congress designated the primary land and water routes of the Cherokee removal as the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

Today, the National Park Service partners with the southeastern tribes, the Trail of Tears Association and other non-government organizations, federal, state, and local agencies, and private landowners to foster the appreciation and preservation of historic sites and segments and to tell the story of forced removal of the Cherokee people and other American Indian tribes.

You can visit certified sites, segments, and interpretive facilities along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail by following the Auto Tour Route. Look for the official trail logo along the way. For further information, visit [www.nps.gov/trt](http://www.nps.gov/trt).

This project is supported in part by a grant from the Arkansas Humanities Council and the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

# Water Route Specific Panel

## North Little Rock and The Trail of Tears

"The steam boat Victoria arrived here...having on board 228 Cherokees.... They are mostly those who had been prevented by sickness from emigrating by land, with the main body of the nation.... Among those on board... were John Ross and his family. Mr. Ross' wife...died shortly before reaching Little Rock, and was buried in the cemetery of this city."

—Arkansas Gazette, February 6, 1839

**Five Tribes Converge on North Bank of Arkansas River**  
You are standing in an area where tens of thousands of Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole people camped during their forced removal to Oklahoma from the southeastern United States in the 1830s.

Thousands made the journey, many walking from as far away as North Carolina; others took the difficult water route on steamboats, flatboats, and keelboats. No other place in Arkansas bore witness to the miseries of the Trail of Tears as North Little Rock did.

Cherokee Removal Routes in Arkansas



The Old State House across the river in Little Rock is one of the few surviving buildings in Arkansas that stood during Indian Removal.

"A party of 720 Cherokee Indians, under charge of Lieut. Whiteley, U. S. A. arrived here on Saturday last...on their way to the West, and encamped on the north bank of the river, about half a mile above town...where they are now waiting for conveyance to Fort Gibson."

—Arkansas Gazette, July 11, 1838

## Challenges for Water Route

- Locating appropriate & accessible sites for interpretation
  
- Establishing relationships
  - U. S. Corps of Engineers
  - State agencies
  - Other land owners

## Northern (Land) Route

# Pea Ridge National Military Park



# Mantle Rock



# Northern Route General Panel

## They Passed This Way



Trail of Tears National Historic Trail  
National Trails System

Department of Arkansas Heritage  
Arkansas State Parks  
National Park System

"Long time we travel on way to new land...  
Womens cry... Children cry and men cry...but  
they say nothing and just put heads down and  
keep on go towards West. Many days pass and  
people die very much."

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# Northern Route Specific Panel

## Challenges for Northern Route

- Locating appropriate & accessible sites for interpretation
- Establishing relationships
  - State & local agencies
  - U. S. Corps of Engineers
  - Other land owners

## Identification of Sites & Segments

- TOTA members
- State chapters
- National & Local agencies
  - Department of Arkansas Heritage
  - Nature Conservancy
  - The Trust for Public Land
  - Various city governments
  - Southeastern Anthropological Institute
  - UNC's Research Laboratories of Archaeology

## Certified Sites

- 1 – Alabama
- 6 – Arkansas
- 7 – Georgia
- 2 – Illinois
- 4 – Kentucky
- 5 – Missouri
- 3 – North Carolina
- 3 – Oklahoma
- 12 – Tennessee

## Vision for the Future

- Walking/hiking segments
- Interpretive Film
- Interpretation at All Identified Sites
- Visitors Centers
- Funding for these projects



