

Introduction

The involvement of modern American Indians in the review process for various state and federally funded or mandated projects understandably raises the issue of the nineteenth century historical event known as the Trail of Tears. Related archeological sites, including graves, inevitably occur along the numerous routes taken by the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles during their forced removals to the West. Considerations of trail and related site locations have become increasingly important to federal and state land managers and State Historic Preservation Officers in the face of modern construction and mitigations. In order to encompass these potential sites and burials, *Footprints Across Arkansas* delineates “removal corridors” which expand upon existing awareness of removal routes to include not only the roads and rivers used, but also associated adjacent properties.

Footprints Across Arkansas was made possible by a generous grant from the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Over sixty sources, primarily secondary sources and period Arkansas maps, were used to collect information for the location of American Indian removal routes, including landmarks and roads. Newly constructed military roads were heavily used during removals, including the Little Rock-Memphis, the Little Rock-Fort Gibson, and the Little Rock-Fort Towson roads. These roads appear in detail on the Government Land Office (GLO) plat maps and other period maps; they were carefully transferred onto modern maps for this atlas. Segments of many modern roads follow these older roads; also, fragments of major roads that appear on the plat maps are shown as dotted lines, or unimproved roads, on modern USGS maps. Additionally, several old military road fragments remain on the ground today in the same condition in which they would have appeared during removal. Many of these remnants have been nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (i.e., the Village Creek Segment of the Little Rock-Memphis military road, shown in Figure 1).

Using these Maps

Removal corridors for the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles were geo-referenced to modern 1:100,000 minute USGS maps. The National Geographic TOPO!® mapping program was used to create a series of seamless maps for each individual tribe. Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates have been included around the borders of each map. The routes taken by the American Indians are represented by black lines for overland routes and blue lines for water routes. Corridor boundaries are colored red. Both center lines and corridor boundary lines appear dotted where locations are approximate.

Water-route removal corridors are centered over the middle of the river traveled, and land-route removal corridors are centered over the road followed. Arkansas county boundaries that were designated by rivers have been used as the “center line” for water routes because these historic boundaries more accurately reflect removal-period river positions. A width of one kilometer was measured out from either side of the center line for a total corridor width of two kilometers (1.24 miles). The only exception to this rule is

that a width of three kilometers was measured from the removal-period boundary between Arkansas and Mississippi along the Mississippi River routes. Three kilometers was used in this case because of the Mississippi River's more intensive river dynamics, relatively flat riverbanks (compared to the Arkansas and Ouachita rivers), and higher frequency of removal traffic.

Indian Removal

Prior to removal, American Indians had homelands throughout the United States. Many groups were highly mobile, especially after the introduction of Spanish horses, and lacked strict territorial boundaries. Also, many landmarks mentioned in early sources have changed or cannot be matched with certainty to modern equivalents. Therefore, definitive locations of the various tribal entities are extremely difficult to pinpoint on a modern map. However, certain Indian groups did regard specific regions as their homelands (Morris et al. 1986). Land exchanges and cessions to European Americans reorganized existing mobility patterns, defined and enforced exact boundaries, and finally forced American Indians to move to Indian Territory.

The first "Trail of Tears" was actually made by the tribes living in the Old Northwest; by 1825 almost all Indians living north of the Ohio River had been forced to remove to Indian Territory. The Potawatomis (a northeastern tribe) had referred to their journey as the "Trail of Death." But because the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Cherokees wept during the long, hard march westward from their southeastern homelands, the name "Trail of Tears" was applied and has endured (Jahoda 1975). The term comes from the Cherokee language: *Nuna dat suhn'yi*, or, "the trail where they cried" (Holm 1976).

This atlas focuses on the removal of Southeastern Indians, specifically those historically referred to as the "Five Civilized Tribes": the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles. The Five Civilized Tribes were so designated because they were deemed by European Americans to have a "character and intelligence far above the average aboriginal" (Foreman 1934). This was because, following contact with white settlers, some Southeastern American Indians adopted several fundamental aspects of the whites' culture, such as metallurgy, spinning and weaving, written laws, and advancements in agriculture (Foreman 1934; Gibson 1976). Tribal leaders also welcomed white missionaries onto their lands and established schools for Indian youths (Gibson 1976). The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole people purposefully modified many of their own age-old ways in hopes that "the white man" would be more willing to accept them as neighbors.

Another strategy for peaceful coexistence on the part of the American Indians was the cession of tribal lands to whites. Since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and prior to removal, the United States government had ratified nine land cession treaties with the Cherokees, six with the Creeks, four with the Choctaws, three with the Chickasaws, and one with the Seminoles (Foreman 1966). By 1820, the Cherokees had surrendered most of their lands, retaining a domain in northwestern Georgia centering on their tribal capital at New Echota; the Chickasaws had retreated to a small domain in northern Mississippi

and northwestern Alabama; the Choctaws had surrendered much of their territory in central and southern Mississippi and were on the verge of agreeing to another large cession; the Creeks had surrendered their lands in southern Georgia and retained a homeland core in Alabama; and the Seminoles were in the process of accepting reduced territory in Florida, much of which was swampy. On these reduced domains, the Five Civilized Tribes made their last stand to preserve the homelands of their ancestors from the onslaught of the settlers (Gibson 1976; Mills 1919). Map A shows the final frontiers of the Five Civilized Tribes just prior to removal.

While the Indians were laboring to preserve their territories, the settlers were gearing up their own strategies to “encourage” them to move west. The whites believed that any way of life other than their own was to be scorned and rejected, and even regarded the tribes’ “progress” as a threat. Special laws were created and enforced upon the Indians in an effort to make their lives so miserable that they would go away on their own. This device was somewhat successful, for as early as the 1790s Southern Indians had been moving voluntarily westward simply to escape the oppressive effects of the white men on their way of life. Also, tribal agents sent by the United States government tried to persuade tribal leaders to take their people peacefully and without further ado to the removal grounds (Gibson 1976).

By 1825, Congress had designated an area of land identified as “Indian Territory.” White settlers in this colonization zone were required to vacate. It was located west of Missouri and Arkansas extending to the 100th Meridian, and was bounded on the north by the Platte River and on the south by the Red River. The dividing line was the 37th parallel (the dividing line between present-day Oklahoma and Kansas). The tribes from the Old Northwest were assigned land in the northern half, and the tribes from the Old Southwest were assigned to the southern half. Subsequent removals of Indians from the Northeast and the Southeast were also located in the northern and southern halves of Indian Territory, respectively. To further complicate matters, the preexisting tribes in Indian Territory were required to “make room” for the new arrivals, which created even more friction (Gibson 1976).

With the 1828 inauguration of Andrew Jackson, “the Devil became President of the United States,” as some Choctaws of Mississippi phrased it (Jahoda 1975). In his first annual message to Congress in 1829, Jackson called for the removal of all the Southeastern tribes to the lands across the Mississippi (Holm 1976). Jackson had spent much of his life on the frontier in Tennessee, and like the typical frontiersman viewed the Indians as a barrier to further white settlement. Jackson refused to acknowledge the Federal Government’s responsibility to protect the Indians from state and citizen actions. He even refused to enforce the United States Supreme Court’s 1832 declaration (*Worcester v. Georgia*), by Chief Justice John Marshall, that anti-tribal state laws were unconstitutional. Jackson told protesting tribal leaders that he was “powerless in the matter” and that the Indians’ only hope was to “accept their fate and move to the West” (Gibson 1976).

Eventually, treaties and laws legalized the forced removal of the tribes. The Indian Removal Bill (Appendix A) was passed by Congress 102–97 on May 28, 1830 (Green 1990; Jahoda 1975); this document made legal the effective removal of American Indians (Welsh 1976). The leaders of each of the Five Tribes were more-or-less forced into signing final land cession treaties, often by trickery and bribery on the part of the United States. The Choctaws signed away the remainder of their lands on September 27, 1830; the Creeks signed on March 24, 1832; the Chickasaws on May 24, 1834; the Cherokees on December 29, 1835; and the Seminoles and Creeks signed a joint removal treaty on August 7, 1856 (Mills 1919).

Before 1830, Indian removal had been a matter of choice; there was an unorganized phase of removal whereby a few thousand emigrated independently to Indian Territory. The signing of the treaties finalized the departure of the Indians. Roads in Arkansas Territory were improved in 1831 in order to accommodate the heavy traffic that Indian removal would bring. Three new bridges were built over the Little Cossatot, Big Cossatot, and Saline rivers (DeRosier 1970).

More than 60,000 people were removed to what is now Oklahoma. The journeys that crossed Arkansas during these forced removals took place roughly between 1830 and 1840 (Foreman 1934). Before, during, and after these government-sponsored removals numerous commutation parties found their own way west by their own means; \$10 was promised to each individual who emigrated at his/her own expense (Wright 1928). During removal, suffering was great. Thousands died along the way. The survivors were demoralized, destitute, and devastated. Some of the treaties by which their land had been surrendered were sealed under coercion and bribes paid to leading members of the tribes, which rendered the people suspicious of their leaders (Foreman 1934).

The Stokes Commission, in charge at Fort Gibson in Indian Territory, supervised the settlement of the Eastern tribes in their new land and adjudicated tribal boundaries and domains (Gibson 1976). Map B shows the areas into which the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole peoples initially settled in Indian Territory.

The struggles of the journeys' survivors were far from over. Indigenous tribes as well as people who had emigrated before the 1830 Removal Bill were expected, if not required, to make room for and establish peaceful relations with the newcomers. The new arrivals had to adjust to their strange new country and endured poverty as a result of their displacement (Foreman 1934). The people of Indian Territory were not even classified as citizens of the United States until March 3, 1901 (Mills 1919).