

## Trail of Tears

The Trail of Tears was a difficult time in American Indian history. It describes a 1,000-mile relocation journey that the Indians had to endure in 1838 when white settlers moved westward. The settlers pushed many tribes, including the Creek and Cherokee, off their land. The settlers wanted to build communities and search for gold and silver. The Cherokee tribe was hurt the most. They tried to become a part of white society by living as farmers and building roads and churches. They still were forced from their homes.

The United States Congress wanted to take the Indians from their land, including those who lived in parts of Georgia. The Indian Removal Act was passed in 1830. Many Americans objected, but President Andrew Jackson signed the bill. The Cherokees used the U.S. court system to fight the law. The tribe formed the Cherokee Nation and sued the Georgia state government in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. The state of Georgia refused to hear the case.

Although the United States Supreme Court supported the Cherokee position, Jackson ordered the tribe's removal. The Cherokee were divided about moving. Some followed Chief John Ross who had fought white settlers. He opposed the Cherokees' moving. Some Indians followed Major Ridge who signed the Treaty of New Echota, in which the Cherokee agreed to leave their land. It passed in Congress by one vote. Many Cherokee claimed Major Ridge did not try to protect them and had no legal right to speak for all the Cherokee.

The Army began the process of removing the Cherokee in 1838. Under President Jackson's orders, General Winfield Scott led the soldiers who forced the Cherokee from their land.

The Trail of Tears was a tragic event. Every Indian was taken from their homes. They were confined to military forts without adequate food. After leaving the forts, they began the forced march to their new land. Cherokee men, women, and children walked more than 1,000 miles to the Oklahoma Territory. The soldiers forced them to travel in all types of weather. Many died from starvation, cold weather, and sickness.

Chief John Ross appealed to Scott. The chief agreed to lead the Cherokee to Oklahoma if Scott put him in charge and withdrew his soldiers. Scott agreed. After this, fewer Cherokee died. The Indians were still angry about the injustice of their

forced removal. Much of the anger was directed at Cherokee leaders. Some leaders were killed, including Major Ridge who had agreed to the removal.

The Trail of Tears demonstrated that even when the Indians were willing to cooperate with white Americans, they were often treated poorly.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Discussion Questions:

1. Why did the Trail of Tears take place?
2. What act removed the Indians from their land?
3. In what treaty did the Indians agree to leave their land?
4. How many miles did the Indians walk on the Trail of Tears?
5. What change did Chief John Ross want from General Winfield Scott?