



**THE TRAIL OF TEARS NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL  
AND THE TENNESSEE, WHEELER AND WHITE RIVER  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES**

**HISTORICAL AND INTERPRETATION STUDY**

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA**

**ORDER NO. 982106M207**

**THOMASON AND ASSOCIATES  
PRESERVATION PLANNERS  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### *OVERVIEW AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

This report was prepared for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) under Order No. 982106M207. The purpose of this study is to provide baseline historical information pertaining to those portions of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail that cross onto lands managed by the FWS at the White River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Arkansas, the Wheeler NWR in Alabama, and the Tennessee NWR in Tennessee. The Trail of Tears refers to the removal of the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee and Seminole tribes from their lands east of the Mississippi River and their relocation to the Indian Territory in the 1820s and 1830s. Because of the loss of life and suffering during the removal, this event in the nation's history has been termed the "Trail of Tears" and research and documentation of its history has increased significantly in recent decades.

This study documents the historic events occurring along the trail within the boundaries of FWS lands and recommends interpretation and management alternatives of the trail. This project was completed as part of the National Trails System Act which established the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. The Act recommends that where the trail crosses land administered by Federal agencies, appropriate markers shall be erected at appropriate points and maintained by the Federal agency administering the trail according to standards set by the Secretary of the Interior. As part of this project, the FWS sought to develop information pertaining to the history of the trail at these points in order to determine its impact, if any, on the existing environmental habitat and ecology.

The firm of Thomason and Associates (Contractor) completed research and conducted field investigations at all three wildlife refuges in 2006-2007. This research included a review of materials at the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville, the Alabama State Archives in Montgomery, the Arkansas State Library in Little Rock, and the Sequoyah Research Center in Little Rock. Following archival research, the Contractor visited each site with associations with the Trail of Tears to determine integrity, National Register eligibility and potential for interpretation. This report details the results of this archival and field survey investigation.

Thanks are due to a number of historians who provided valuable information and research. These include Carolyn Kent of Little Rock who has conducted research on the ferries at Clarendon and Jo Claire English who shared her knowledge of Clarendon and its association with the Trail of Tears. Particular thanks are due to Daniel Littlefield, Director of the Sequoyah Research Center at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock who assisted locating and identifying documents related to Indian Removal and the Trail of Tears. Mark Christ of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program aided this report through his extensive knowledge and involvement with the Trail of Tears in Arkansas. Review of the Military Road through the White River bottoms was assisted by Historian Holly Hope and GPS Coordinator Tony Feaster of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

Assisting the Contractor from the Fish and Wildlife Service was Richard Kanaski, Regional Historic Preservation Officer for the Southeast Region in Savannah, Steve Reagan at the White River NWR, Dwight Cooley at the Wheeler NWR, and John Taylor at the Tennessee NWR. The administrative oversight of Eugene Marino, Service Archaeologist in Washington (and his patience while the White River receded) was also appreciated.

# Tennessee

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*



Figure 1: Map of the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge in Tennessee.

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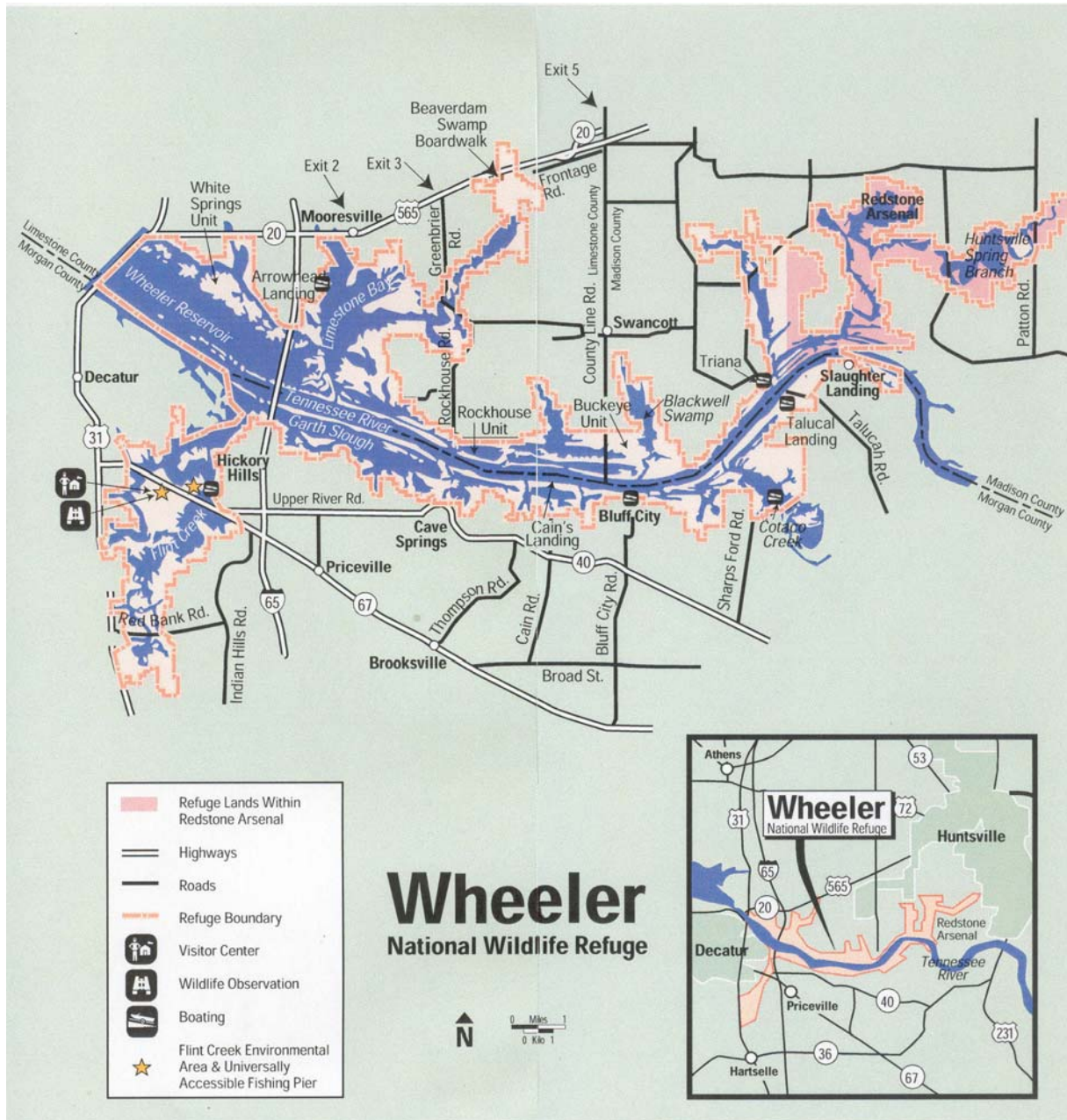


Figure 2: Map of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama.



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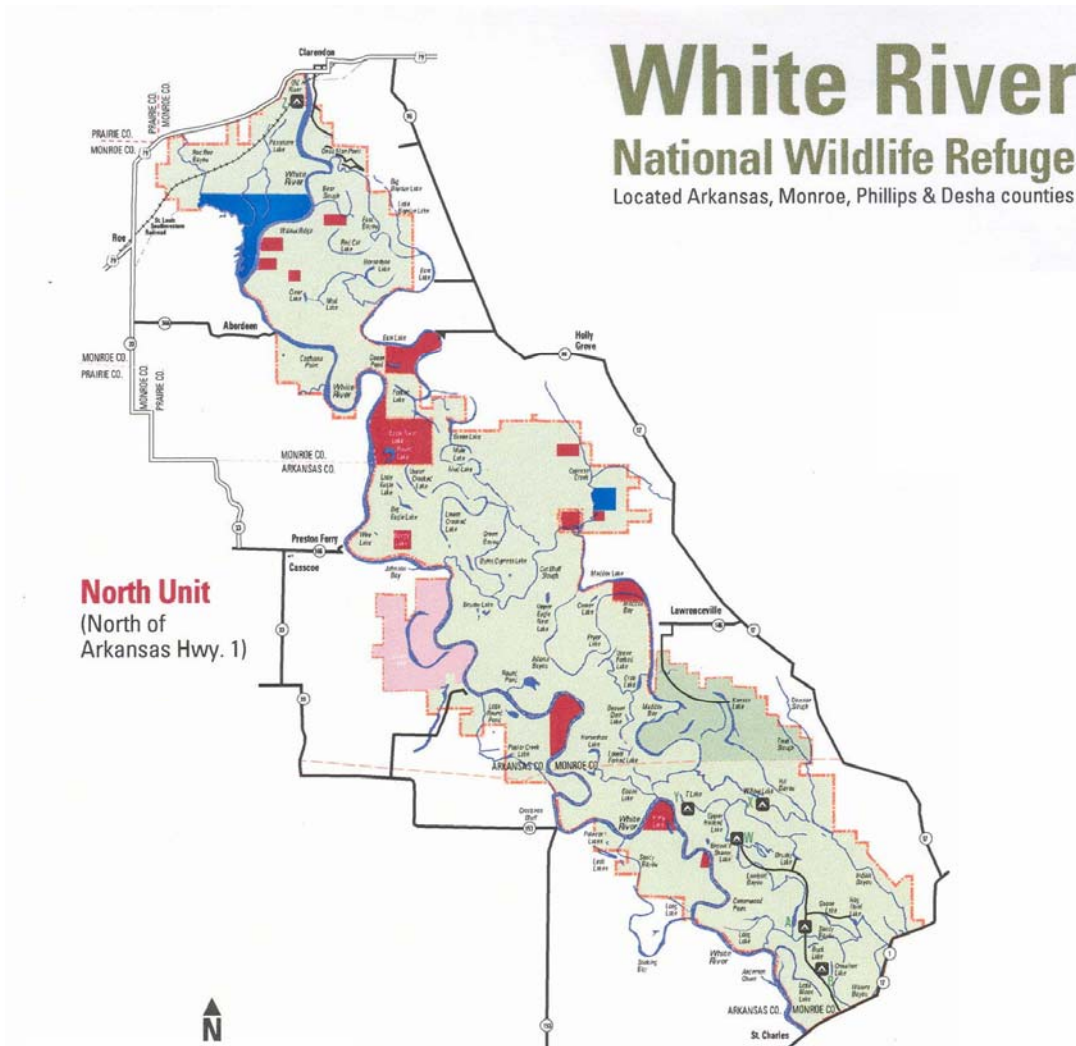
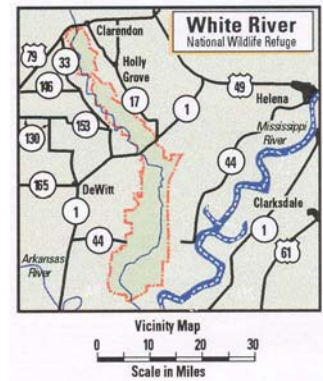


Figure 3: Map of the White River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas and detail of the north unit of the refuge.



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### *MANAGEMENT SUMMARY*

This study was begun in October of 2006 and included extensive archival research as well as field investigations at the White River, Wheeler and Tennessee NWRs. A review of the National Register data base within the National Park Service (NPS) found that there are no properties presently listed, or determined eligible for listing, on the National Register at these locations associated with the Trail of Tears. Throughout the winter and spring of 2007, research and site analysis resulted in the following recommendations:

- **Tennessee NWR** – No direct association with the Trail of Tears was identified with the Tennessee NWR. The Tennessee River was used to transport detachments of the Chickasaw, Creek and Cherokee tribes via steamboat from Alabama north through the refuge. Many of these detachments departed from the landing at Waterloo, Alabama and traveled along the Tennessee River over a two day period to Paducah and the Ohio River. From the available records, none of these steamboats stopped along the river in Tennessee for overnight camping. No campsites or gravesites associated with the Trail of Tears appear to be within the boundaries of the Tennessee NWR. None of the officers in charge of the Cherokee detachments mention going ashore in order to camp overnight or to perform a burial service. It is possible that the detachment under Lt. R.H.K. Whitely stopped to acquire wood for the steamboat at one or more landings within the refuge but these locations cannot be accurately ascertained. No known campsites or gravesites in the refuge are associated with the Chickasaw or Creek emigration, however, these records have yet to be fully researched.

Recommended interpretive efforts for the Trail of Tears in the Tennessee NWR include the creation of an exhibit at the refuge headquarters in Paris, Tennessee and the erection of a wayside exhibit at Cuba Landing marina or a similar accessible location directly on the river. Such exhibits should discuss the history of the Trail of Tears and the role of the Tennessee River in transporting the tribes to the west.

- **Wheeler NWR** – The emigration of the Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole tribes all took place to the west and south of the property which comprises the Wheeler NWR. However, three of the Water Route detachments of the emigrating Cherokee traveled through the refuge on the Tennessee River in 1838 and 1839. Two of these detachments, those led by Lt. Edward Deas and Lt. R.H.K. Whitely, are known to have camped on the banks of the river and their approximate location can be identified. The third detachment led by Lt. John Drew passed through the refuge but no known campsites or other association with the refuge property is known. These detachments left Ross's Landing (present day Chattanooga) using both steamboats and flatboats on the Tennessee River as they traveled west.

The Lt. Edward Deas Detachment of approximately 500 Cherokee camped within the refuge boundary on June 8, 1838 approximately six miles above Decatur. This location would be just east of where Limestone Creek empties into the Tennessee River. Only the approximate location of this campsite is known and there are no accounts which identify which side of the river was utilized. The impoundment of the Tennessee River in 1936 drastically altered the shoreline on both sides of the river in the general vicinity of the campsite. On the north side of the river the bottomland was inundated east of Limestone Creek and only a narrow strip of land remains at this location as opposed to the broad swath of farmland or woodlands which would have existed in 1838. Likewise, the 1838 bottomland on the south side of the river is also altered and only a strip of land now exists to denote the original shoreline. Directly behind this strip of land is the Garth Slough which encompasses much of the bottomland area which existed here in 1838. No integrity of the Lt. Edward Deas Detachment Campsite remains extant and the site does not meet National Register criteria.

The detachment of approximately 1,000 Cherokee led by Lt. R.H.K. Whitely left Ross's Landing aboard eight flatboats and a steamboat. This detachment moved downriver into the present day boundary of the Wheeler NWR and camped on the north side of the river two miles above Decatur on June 20, 1838. While the approximate location of this campsite is known it lacks integrity of feeling, setting and association. The impoundment of the Tennessee River in 1936 drastically altered the shoreline and inundated almost all of the property corresponding with Whitely's campsite description. This broad band of bottomland used as the campsite is now almost completely underwater and the characteristics of this site from 1838 are no longer extant. Because of this change to the landscape, the campsite associated with the Lt. R.H. K. Whitely detachment does not possess sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria.

Recommended interpretive efforts include the creation of an exhibit at the refuge headquarters and visitor center at Decatur. Such an exhibit would detail the association of the refuge with the Cherokee removal of 1838 and feature historical information as well as maps showing the location of the campsites. Although outside of the refuge boundary, the Wheeler NWR is encouraged to work in association with the City of Decatur to fund and erect a wayside exhibit at Point Mallard Park. This city owned park is on the south side of the Tennessee River and almost directly across from the Whitely campsite location. Such an exhibit should include specific references to the three detachments that passed through the refuge with an emphasis on the Whitely detachment due to its proximity to the park.

- **White River NWR** – The boundary of the White River NWR includes a section of the Military Road and its crossing at the White River and the Rock Roe Bayou. The Military Road was built in the 1820s to help facilitate removal of the tribes and it was extensively used by the emigrating parties of the Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw and Cherokee in the 1830s. The Military Road was built to connect Memphis and Little Rock and crossed the White River at the site of the present day community of Clarendon. A ferry at this location transported those traveling on the Military Road across the river and to the west of the river a bridge and ferry were in operation at the Rock Roe Bayou during the removal period.

Within the boundary of the White River NWR is the west bank ferry landing, the Rock Roe Bayou crossing, and approximately 3.5 miles of the roadbed of the Military Road. The west bank ferry landing was altered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when a railroad bridge was constructed at the site. This construction resulted in the alteration of the landing site as well as the addition of a significant visual change to the landscape. Due to the loss of integrity at this site, the ferry landing does not meet National Register criteria. The approximate location of the Military Road can be followed through the bottoms area between the White River and the Rock Roe Bayou. However, the erosion and seasonal flooding occurring in the bottoms since 1838 has removed almost all traces of the roadbed. While there remains some indentations and embankments indicative of a historic roadbed, there is insufficient continuity and overall lack of distance and profile for the Military Road in the White River NWR to meet National Register criteria.

The Rock Roe Bayou crossing within the White River NWR is readily identifiable due to the presence of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century wood bridge pilings which remain visible in the bayou. During the 1830s, a ferry was used at this crossing and at least one toll bridge was also constructed in these years and used during Indian removal. The Rock Roe Bayou ferry and bridge site evokes a sense of time and place from the era of the Trail of Tears and retains sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria within this context.



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Recommended interpretation efforts include the creation of an exhibit on the Trail of Tears at the refuge headquarters and visitor's center at St. Charles, Arkansas. The White River NWR is also encouraged to work with the Arkansas Department of Transportation to create a pull-off and wayside exhibit on the proposed new US Highway 79 Bridge at its crossing of the Rock Roe Bayou. The existing bridge was built in 1931 and is scheduled to be replaced with a new bridge within the next decade. As the bridge is designed, the opportunity exists to create an overlook or parking area at the bayou with one or more wayside exhibits with information on the history and significance of the Military Road and the crossings of the White River and Rock Roe Bayou.

Presently, a dirt road leads from US Highway 79 down to the bayou and along the west bank adjacent to the bridge site. This road is primarily used by four-wheel vehicles due to its rutted condition and the seasonal flooding that often takes place. The refuge should consider improving this road or transform it into a walking trail to lead visitors from a parking area adjacent to the highway to the Rock Roe Bridge site. A wayside exhibit or marker at the site would provide information on the history and significance of the Rock Roe Bayou crossing and its role during the Trail of Tears. The design of such an exhibit would be a challenge due to the flooding along the bayou but the installation of such an exhibit should be considered.

Another important site just outside of the White River NWR boundary is the Rock Roe landing. This steamboat landing was on the west bank of the White River at the mouth of the Rock Roe Bayou. The landing played an important role in the removal of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Creek tribes in the 1830s and the site meets National Register criteria. This landing is directly across the bayou from the boundary of the refuge and interpretation efforts undertaken by the White River NWR should also include information on the history and significance of this site.

The Tennessee River, Wheeler, and White River NWRs all had associations with the Trail of Tears of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The associations with the Tennessee River NWR were transitory and no National Register-eligible properties have been identified. The Wheeler NWR contains two known campsites associated with the Cherokee removal of 1838. Both of these campsites were impacted by the impoundment of the Tennessee River in the 1930s and do not retain sufficient integrity of site, feeling and association to meet National Register criteria. At the White River NWR is the historic location of the Military Road and the crossings of the White River and Rock Roe Bayou. Within the boundary of the refuge the Rock Roe Bayou bridge site retains sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria. At all three refuges the opportunity exists for the creation of exhibits and installation of markers and interpretive materials to inform visitors and employees of the significance and remaining landscape features of the Trail of Tears.

## II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE TRAIL OF TEARS

The history of The Trail of Tears is one of the most difficult and complex chapters in the American experience. It reveals national character and political policy at their worst, yet it also illuminates the strength of tribal people to survive against all odds, including the turbulence of Jacksonian democracy. Within this epic, the resilience of Native Americans, combined with acts of courage by both Indians and whites, prevented the complete annihilation of cultures overwhelmed by the demands of land hungry states, settlers, and speculators.

Despite ethnic, linguistic, and geographic tribal distinctions, what befell the Cherokee and other tribes in the Southeast during the 1830s provides a basic context for understanding Indian-white relations throughout the nineteenth century. Under the anti-Indian presidency of Andrew Jackson, removal of native peoples from their homes to Indian reservations established itself as a perceived necessity for the economic success of the new republic, no matter what the cost was to Native Americans. As the United States continued its territorial expansion west beyond the Mississippi River, the Indian nations of the Plains, the Northwest, Southwest and California confronted the same problems of white encroachment on their lands and erosion of their rights as sovereign nations as the Eastern tribes did, oftentimes with removal taking place at the very doorstep of their homes.

Between 1776 and 1830, nearly all the tribes east of the Mississippi River and extending from the Great Lakes to Florida signed treaties with the United States government. While the earliest treaties were drafted as measures to allow fluid and peaceful relations along western frontiers as settlers moved west, white encroachments, increasing competition for resources, and the desire to gain access to interior transportation routes led to violent confrontations for which tribes bore the brunt of blame even though they were only trying to protect their families and towns from individuals who failed to respect the boundary lines guaranteed by treaty rights.

By the 1830s, pressure to open interior lands for settlement and resource development was intrinsically a part of Jackson's America. Tennessean Andrew Jackson was a strong proponent of Indian removal. As a military leader in the early 1800s, Jackson had defeated factions of the Creek and Seminole nations in the Southeast, and between 1814 and 1824 he was instrumental in negotiating numerous treaties with southern tribes to exchange their eastern lands for lands in the west. In 1828 Jackson was elected president of the United States. In this powerful position, Jackson successfully pushed the Indian Removal Act through Congress in May 1830, which initiated the formal removal of Native Americans from the Southeastern United States. The Act was to “provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi.”<sup>1</sup> Directed primarily at southern tribes, including the Creeks, Seminoles, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Cherokees, the act gave the president authority to negotiate treaties with the tribes in order to secure their removal to the West. According to the Act removal was supposed to be voluntary, tribes were to be compensated for their improved lands, and the United States government was to provide the Indians with aid and assistance for the first year following removal. This single act of legislation served as the foundation for removal policies and treaties that resulted in the exodus of Native Americans from the southeastern United States, which is manifested in the Trail of Tears.

The majority of Indians resisted the exchange of eastern for western lands “offered” in the Indian Removal Act and were eventually forced to leave. In his annual message to Congress in December of 1835, Jackson stated his firm intention to remove the indigenous people who remained east of the Mississippi River to lands

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government, Indian Removal Act of 1830, CHAP. CXLVIII.

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west of Missouri and Arkansas. In his annual message to Congress in December 1835, he stated:

The plan of removing the aboriginal people who yet remain within the settled portions of the United States to the country west of the Mississippi approaches its consummation. It was adopted on the most mature consideration of the condition of this race...All preceding experiments for the improvement of the Indians have failed. It seems now to be an established fact that they can not [sic] live in contact with a civilized community and prosper.<sup>2</sup>

Jackson's congressional message revealed a troubling disregard for the reality of Southern tribes during the 1830s since his plans for removal specifically and most forcefully targeted the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws and Seminoles. Collectively referred to as the Five Civilized Tribes, they had built roads and turnpikes, large homes and plantations, inns for travelers, gristmills and sawmills. Many sent their children to northern schools to be educated. The most elite among them embraced the growing market economy of the South and grew wealthy, while others in these nations found comfortable lives as small farmers and livestock owners.

The Cherokee lived in what today are portions of Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Kentucky. The Creeks inhabited large areas of Georgia and Alabama. The Chickasaws' land lay in western Tennessee, northern Mississippi, and Alabama; the Choctaws also dwelled in Alabama and Mississippi, with some settlements extending as far east as Georgia. The Seminoles, located in Florida, formed an amalgamation of dissident Creek factions, Miccosukees, and the descendants of tribes whose populations had been decimated through contact with European colonists during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Seminole Nation included a significant number of Africans, most of whom were runaway slaves.<sup>3</sup> Like the Seminoles, the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks and Chickasaws also counted as kin the survivors and progeny of earlier tribal displacements--Catawbas, Cheraws, Shawnees, Natchez, Coushattas, Yuchis, Yamassees, Apalachicolas, Alabamas, Biloxis, Tohomes, Tunicas, Pascagoulas, Eufalas, Hichitis, Oconees and Mowas.

The idea of removing Indian peoples to lands west of the Mississippi River began during Thomas Jefferson's administration and specifically targeted these nations, even though they were considered to be highly advanced in comparison to other American Indians because of their adaptations of farming, cotton production, Western education, and Christianity. As the inheritors of the rich, mound building culture that thrived between the Great Lakes region, Florida and the Gulf of Mexico from approximately A. D. 600-1500, Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws and Seminoles also drew from ancient Mississippian dwelling patterns and ceremonial traditions.<sup>4</sup> Dependence on agriculture, particularly the cultivation of maize, had allowed long-term, stationary settlement and sophisticated theocracies to develop during the Mississippian period. Mississippian heritage remains an important part of Southeastern tribal life and can still be found in dances, dress, works of art, languages, songs, storytelling and religion.

Many of the old Mississippian town sites are visible today in the landscape of the Southeast and Mississippi River region; some, like Cahokia, Town Creek, and Nanih Wayia, have been reconstructed or otherwise

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents in United States Indian Policy*. Second Edition. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 71; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York, NY: Viking, 2001), passim.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians*. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-88; Peter Nabokov and Dean Snow, "Farmers of the Woodlands," in *America in 1492*, Alvin M. Josephy, ed. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 122-45.

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preserved by local, state, and federal agencies. Of these, Cahokia, near present-day St. Louis, is the largest and was a political, religious, and trading center built about A. D. 800; Town Creek is a reconstructed South Appalachian Mississippian site near Mount Gilead, North Carolina which was settled around A. D. 1300. Nanih Wayia in Mississippi is the site where the Chickasaws and Choctaws, once united as a people, parted ways and where the Choctaws built a large temple mound. The Choctaws consider Nanih Wayia their birthplace. The Chickasaws, who had traveled in company with the Choctaws from the north sometime around A. D. 900, established their towns in northern Mississippi and western Alabama. Until 1805, they also controlled lands as far east as present-day Nashville, Tennessee. Creeks, who speak both Hitchiti and a Muskogean-based language similar to that of the Choctaws and Chickasaws, were also at one time united with them.<sup>5</sup>

All of these nations endured enormous suffering during the Removal era, but it was the Cherokee who experienced the greatest loss of life and the tribe with whom the Trail of Tears is most often associated. They called themselves Ani'Yun'wiya, or the Principal People. The name Cherokee appears to be an English translation from a 1557 Portuguese narrative of Hernando de Soto's expedition, in which they were called Chalaque. Cherokees today call their Iroquoian-based language Tsalagi and their exodus into the Trans-Mississippi West nunahi-duna-dio-hilu-i, "the trail where they cried." The Cherokee who survived the journey along the Trail of Tears brought with them to Oklahoma the sacred fire of the Old Nation, which they rekindled along the way in keeping with their ancient tradition. They also brought the syllabary invented by Sequoyah during the 1820s, continuing to use it in their letters and publications into the present day. Cherokee is still spoken in Oklahoma, where most of the Nation settled after 1838, and in North Carolina, where descendants of the approximately 400 Cherokee who were permitted to stay primarily on the Qualla and Snowbird reservations. Since they lived outside the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation by terms of an 1819 treaty, the Qualla Indians were not required to emigrate and were permitted to remain in North Carolina. Cherokee remains one of the most widely spoken American Indian languages, with about 10,000 speakers in Oklahoma and 1,200 in North Carolina.<sup>6</sup>

To fully comprehend the economic, emotional, and spiritual impact removal had upon the many thousands of people it uprooted, divided, and sent into the Trans-Mississippi West, it is essential to understand both the time and the landscape in which it occurred. The population pressures that brought about this fate originated with global forces set in motion by European exploration and colonization. Spanish expeditions under Juan Ponce de Leon, Panfilo de Narvaez, and Hernando de Soto arrived along the Gulf Coast during the first half of the sixteenth century. Seeking gold and other valuable minerals, these individuals were not kindly sojourners. Despite the welcoming hospitality of the many tribes they encountered, the Spaniards looted villages, captured some of their hosts as slaves, murdered others, and left behind a legacy of disease and distrust that shaped future relations between Native Americans and Europeans.<sup>7</sup>

By the early seventeenth century, significant numbers of Spanish, French, and British merchants, soldiers, hunters and travelers began to arrive in the Southeast. Many of them penetrated deep into the Indian nations via the Chattahoochee, French Broad, and Mississippi Rivers. Colonial era contact with Europeans affected Southeastern native peoples biologically through the introduction of diseases such as smallpox and measles, while trade transformed native societies through the introduction of market economy goods such as liquor,

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<sup>5</sup> Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians*, 83; Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change Among Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 7.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Crawford, "Southeastern Indian Languages," *Studies in Southeastern Indian Languages* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 23.

<sup>7</sup> White, *The Roots of Dependency*, 7.

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guns, manufactured cloth, and iron utensils. Trade also brought about an adaptation of chattel slavery and increased the number of marriages between non-Indian men and Native American women.<sup>8</sup>

The tensions arising from market relations with colonial governments competing for resources led to raiding and warfare and destabilized tribal governments and intertribal relations. They also very quickly created a general market for native lands as more and more Europeans, the English in particular, arrived along the Atlantic seaboard. In combination, epidemic diseases, increased white populations, and warfare resulted in mass native depopulation, destruction of crops, and food scarcity; increased hunting of deer and other animals for profit-driven European markets also seriously depleted food sources, eventually forcing the acceptance of domesticated animals such as hogs, cattle, and chickens into the Southeastern tribal landscape.<sup>9</sup>

As difficult as war and trade made life and as far reaching as the social transformations were, most devastating to the tribes' survival and well being were the treaties which ceded large tracts of land to non-Indians. Treaties allowed white settlers to build cabins, forts, trading posts and roads in close proximity to Native American towns, within surrounding hunting peripheries, and in the fertile river valleys of the Carolina backcountry and Cumberland regions. Despite the many concessions and agreements Indian nations made between 1721 and 1835, treaty rights and boundaries were seldom respected, and payments rarely equaled what the treaties promised, leading to distrust and tribal factionalism increasingly opposed to treaty making.

As the number of speculators, traders, and non-Indian settlers in the Southeast grew, so did the pressures of conflicting beliefs about indigenous peoples' right to possess their lands. Many whites felt that native peoples did not make adequate use of their land, that they used it only for hunting and gathering and practiced no agriculture or permanent dwellings. Despite the abundant physical evidence to the contrary, this pervasive stereotype of all Native Americans as nomadic peoples shaped political thought, speech, writing and policy throughout the nineteenth century.

Although the Indian Removal Act was not passed until 1830, the 1775 Treaty of Sycamore Shoals set the stage 55 years earlier by providing white settlers with a route that led west, deep into Indian country.<sup>10</sup> Signed just prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, it provided for a road to be constructed that would allow the safe passage of settlers who wanted to move west from Virginia and the Carolinas into Kentucky. During this period, the Cherokee Nation was divided into three districts, the Lower towns, the Middle or Valley towns, and the Overhill towns, primarily for the convenience of colonial traders. The three regions were united under the leadership of Attakullakulla, who was also called The Little Carpenter, Oconostota, a war leader known as The Great Warrior, and Nan'ye hi, better known as Nancy Ward. Ward was the Ghigau or Beloved Woman, whose duty it was to settle disputes that could not be worked out at the town council level by members of the seven Cherokee clans.

These leaders resided in Chota, the Cherokee capital located in the Overhill region along the Little Tennessee River, about 50 miles south of present-day Knoxville. Chota, which translates as the Meeting Place, became a vibrant, multicultural hub of social, political, and ceremonial activity between 1755 and 1784. The town was

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<sup>8</sup> Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 45-61.

<sup>9</sup> Gary C. Goodwin, "Cherokees in Transition: A Study of Changing Culture and Environment Prior to 1775" (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper No. 181, 1977), 1-5.

<sup>10</sup> James Paul Pate, "The Chickamaugas: A Forgotten Segment of Resistance on the Southern Frontier," Ph.D. dissertation (Mississippi State University, 1969), 58-65, 128; ; William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 80-81; Sara G. Parker, "The Transformation of Cherokee Appalachia, 1755-1808," (Ph.D. dissertation, Berkeley, CA, 1991), 24-37.

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destroyed during the Revolution, largely because of its proximity to the new white settlements. A small monument marks a portion of the site today; most of Chota was excavated prior to its inundation by Tellico Dam in 1979. After Chota was burned by Revolutionary Army soldiers, the Cherokee established an interim capital at Ustanali then issued a resolution in the 1820s to establish New Echota in Georgia as the Nation's capital.<sup>11</sup>

Attakullakulla and Oconostota died during the Revolution. During that same period, Ward and her family were among the Cherokee rounded up and held prisoners on the Long Island of Holston (part of what is now Kingsport, Tennessee), then forced to move south to an area along the Hiwassee River. For the remainder of Ward's life, she appeared at treaty councils or sent a speaker on her behalf to plead against any sales of Cherokee lands to whites.

Encouraged by the 1770 Treaty of Hard Labor, which had opened more than 9,000 square miles between the Holston and Cumberland rivers, ever-growing numbers of white settlers moved through western Virginia towards Cherokee towns in the years immediately preceding the Revolutionary War. They were joined by others who migrated from central North Carolina after the Battle of Alamance. In early 1771, at Attakullakulla's request, the boundary lines were surveyed by John Donelson, who would later become one of the founders of Nashville. Donelson's survey determined that the settlers were living within the borders of the Cherokee Nation, but they refused to move, even after being ordered to do so by the Commonwealth of Virginia.<sup>12</sup>

The Sycamore Shoals "treaty" was in reality a private sale of approximately half of the hunting grounds shared by Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws and Shawnees to a group of speculators under the leadership of Richard Henderson, a land speculator and North Carolina judge instrumental in the white settlement of Kentucky by virtue of his role in the Transylvania Company. In order to obtain the Cherokees' signatures, Henderson convinced the elder headmen that they were simply providing an easement along the northern boundary of their country which would allow the safe passage of white families who desired to emigrate to lands in Kent-to-ke (Kentucky), beyond the Cherokees' domain. James McCormick, a mixed blood interpreter present during the negotiations, tried to stop the headmen from signing the document, but Attakullakulla and other Overhill Cherokee put their marks on the contract, hoping to appease the whites by allowing them to bypass Cherokee towns, avoid conflict, and secure Chota from desecration.

Despite the Proclamation of 1763, which forbade any white migration across the Allegheny and Appalachian Mountains, explorers, hunters, and survey parties continued to move towards Kentucky. Westward moving pioneers, finding the Overhill country fertile and abundant with game, proceeded to build cabins, settlements, and forts within the borders of the Cherokee Nation and in the hunting periphery. Much of this land had already been surveyed during the 1750s by George Washington and Christopher Gist, Sequoyah's grandfather, under the auspices of the Ohio Company. Permanent settlers were led into the regions by Daniel Boone, one of a number of "Overmountain Men" hired by Henderson. Grants were subsequently issued by the incipient State of Virginia to hundreds of whites who, by settling and making "improvements," claimed the acreage as their own. Known as the Watauga Settlement, it became part of the short-lived State of Franklin.<sup>13</sup> When Tennessee declared statehood in 1796, this land fell within its borders.

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<sup>11</sup> Brett Riggs, Staff Archaeologist, Eastern Band of Cherokees, personal communication, July 6, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Dunmore to William Dartmouth, May 16, 1774. North Carolina Records, Vol.10, 763-83; C.O. Vol. 5, 1352.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, TN, 1924), passim.



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During the Revolution, land warrants were issued as enticements for soldiers to enlist in the Continental Army, adding about 2,000 more white settlers to the region, many of whom the British-allied Chickamauga Cherokee fought against during the war. Claimants of these warrants, and also of grants issued just prior to the war, included George Washington, James Monroe, Patrick Henry, Joseph Martin and Daniel Boone.

In 1784, Thomas Jefferson directed Joseph Martin, who was married to Nancy Ward's daughter, Elizabeth (Betsy), to negotiate with the Cherokee for more land between the Carolinas and the Mississippi, with the intention of establishing United States sovereignty over the region. Jefferson believed that such a purchase would improve the ease with which goods, cotton in particular, could be shipped to overseas markets. It would also help to fulfill the land warrants issued to Revolutionary War veterans and their heirs. In 1792, all Virginia grants west of Big Sandy River were transferred to the Commonwealth of Kentucky. In 1805, the United States agreed to pay the Cherokee \$11,000, plus an annuity of \$3,000 for the 5.2 million acres located between the Cherokee town of Tellico, Big Sandy Valley, and eastern Kentucky. In all, 572 grants and 1331 warrants were issued to settlers.<sup>14</sup>

The continuing erosion of the homelands through such treaties fractured the Cherokee Nation and brought about the dissident response of many of its younger citizens, who, recognizing the threat the Americans presented, formed the secessionist Chickamaugas under the leadership of Dragging Canoe. They were among the first Cherokee to voluntarily move west into the Arkansas Territory.

With the Wilderness and Cumberland roads on the northern perimeter and the Natchez Trace and Federal Turnpike penetrating from the south and east, Cherokee country became extraordinarily vulnerable to the further incursions of whites. By 1835, the Cherokee had signed a total of 23 treaties that reduced their land base by 75 per cent and pushed them almost one hundred miles south and west.<sup>15</sup> The last of these, the Treaty of New Echota, was the document that spelled doom for the Cherokee who wished to remain in their homes. Most Cherokee were united in opposition to removal under the leadership of Chief John Ross, who, despite being only one-eighth Cherokee, was a significant leader among the Cherokee people. Signed December 29, 1835, the Treaty of New Echota forfeited all remaining Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi River to the federal government. In return, the Cherokee were to be paid five million dollars. The treaty was orchestrated and signed by unsanctioned representatives of the Nation, with fewer than 100 of the 17,000 Cherokee who remained in the east in attendance.

The Treaty Party was led by Major Ridge (The Ridge), his son John Ridge, Elias Boudinot (Buck Watie), editor of *The Cherokee Phoenix*, the first independent Indian-published newspaper in the United States, and Andrew Ross, John Ross' brother. The elder Ridge was persuaded by his son to become part of the pro-treaty faction; both John Ridge and Elias Boudinot were educated at Cornwall Seminary in Connecticut; all three were assassinated in 1839 for their pro-removal politics.

John Ross was able to obtain 14,910 Cherokee signatures protesting the treaty and immediately traveled to Washington to try to convince the United States Senate not to ratify it.<sup>16</sup> At the time, there was a substantial amount of nationwide public support for Ross's position and less than overwhelming enthusiasm for Removal within the Senate. The treaty passed by only one vote and was subsequently signed into law by Andrew

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<sup>14</sup> Draper Mss., 46J57; William Rouse Jillson, *Old Kentucky Entries and Deeds* (Louisville, KY, 1926), 1.

<sup>15</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, 25, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin C. Nance, "The Trail of Tears in Tennessee: A Study of the Routes Used During the Cherokee Removal of 1838." (Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Division of Archaeology, 2001), 11-12; Stanley Hoig, *Night of the Cruel Moon: Cherokee Removal and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Facts on File, 1996), 68-73.

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Jackson on May 23, 1836. Ross again circulated a petition in protest, this time obtaining 15,665 Cherokee signatures.

At its inception, Removal was intended to be a voluntary exchange of land. However, it was soon apparent that the majority of the tribes were unwilling to cede their homes for unfamiliar western territory. As Grant Foreman stated over 70 years ago in *Indian Removal*:

They loved their streams and valleys, their hills, and forests, their fields, and herds, their homes and firesides, families and friends. They cherished a passionate attachment for the earth that held the bones of their ancestors and relatives. The trees that shaded their homes, the cooling spring that ministered to every family, friendly watercourses, familiar trails and prospects, bush grounds, and their property and their friends.<sup>17</sup>

Under the pressure of ever increasing white populations, some Cherokee voluntarily moved to Missouri and Arkansas well before the era of Removal. In 1782, a small group of Cherokee sought permission from Don Estevan Miro, governor of the Louisiana Territory, to settle west of the Mississippi in lands still controlled by Spain. In the 1790s, following the Treaty of Hopewell, more than 600 Cherokee under the leadership of The Bowl built settlements along the St. Francis River in Arkansas and southeastern Missouri; by 1803, an estimated 6,000 Cherokee were living in this region.<sup>18</sup>

By 1805, some Cherokee combined hunting expeditions with visits to relatives in Arkansas. They also aided Western Cherokee in fighting the Osage, whose territory was encroached by the Cherokee moving into Missouri and Arkansas. In 1808, approximately 1,000 Chickamauga Cherokee relocated to Arkansas to escape the white squatters whose incursions continually violated the Cherokees' treaty rights and made peace impossible. Between 1810 and 1819, Cherokee under the leadership of Chief Tahlonteskee and John Jolly emigrated. The Treaty of Turkey Town signed in 1817 gave the earliest emigrants, or Old Settlers, as they came to be called, title to land in northwestern Arkansas, but in 1828 they were forced to exchange the Arkansas land for territory further west in Oklahoma. Most of these emigrants traveled along the trail that would become the main route taken in 1838, crossing Tennessee and Kentucky into Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas.<sup>19</sup>

Most Cherokee, however, along with their Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole neighbors, preferred to remain in the East, where their roots were strong and life was familiar. Architecture, creative arts, culture, spirituality and identity were fixed in the Southeastern landscape.<sup>20</sup> They had created their nations and way of life in balance with their beliefs and resources, with cultivated fields, communal gardens, and borderlands rich in nut trees, timber, and game.

By the early nineteenth century, a number of Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw families had turned from small farming to participating in a plantation lifestyle which mirrored that of their white neighbors, often surpassing them in wealth, market success, and number of black slaves they held. Many had converted to Christianity, attended school in New England, and married white men and women. At the same time, they maintained their ceremonial life, religion, culture, and tribal laws. Their lands and homes were beautiful and comfortable, the

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<sup>17</sup> Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal*, (Norman, OK: 1932), preface.

<sup>18</sup> Hoig, *Night of the Cruel Moon*, 16-17, 56-57; Nance, "The Trail of Tears in Tennessee," 11.

<sup>19</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publication #M-685, roll 12; John P. Brown, *Old Frontiers* (Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, 1938), 472-476.; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, 233-34.

<sup>20</sup> W.H. Holmes, *Handbook of Aboriginal American Antiquities*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 60, Part 1, 1919), 90-91.

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graves of their ancestors were close by, their orchards and fields were productive and profitable. Despite frequent confrontations with white settlers, they wanted nothing more than to be able to continue to raise their families, livestock, and crops in peace and harmony with their fellow countrymen and with their new neighbors.

In his address to the Cherokee Nation in January of 1806, Jefferson expressed his satisfaction with "the endeavors we have been making to encourage and lead you in the way of improving your situation....You are becoming farmers, learning the use of the plough and the hoe, enclosing your grounds...I see handsome specimens of cotton cloth raised, spun and wove by yourselves. You are also raising cattle and hogs for your food, and horses to assist your labors. Go on, my children, in the same way and be assured the further you advance in it the happier and more respectable you will be."<sup>21</sup>

Jefferson's paternalism notwithstanding, the Cherokee already had a long, pragmatic history of adapting European plants and animals into their landscape. The peach trees that thrived among their hills had come from the Spanish sojourners who had visited them more than two centuries before Jefferson's address; horses entered their culture at around the same time. Because of the many water borne diseases carried by cattle, they had been adopted only after the scorched earth policies of Revolutionary War era militias had left the tribes little choice. Legend credits Nancy Ward with the introduction of beef and dairy products into the Cherokee diet. By the 1830s and the time of Removal, many families were raising cattle, dairy cows, hogs and chickens.

While it may have originated as a concern for the safety of both Indians and whites, removal policy swiftly became an overt expropriation of more than 25 million acres, 102,000 square miles of land for the Cherokee alone, and an inestimable amount for minerals, livestock, guns, wagons, provisions, household goods, and other personal property. In the 1820s, hunger for land and mineral resources increased to such an extent that the State of Georgia called upon President James Monroe to enforce the Georgia Compact of 1802. In that year, the federal government had signed an agreement with Georgia to extinguish Indian land titles within the state as soon as it could be accomplished. This was to be done in order "to promote the interest and happiness" of Cherokees and Creeks by exchanging their homelands for country located to the west.<sup>22</sup>

With the Louisiana Purchase, sufficient land had been secured by Jefferson to create an Indian Territory in the Trans-Mississippi West, but no widespread, wholesale effort came until gold was discovered at Dahlonega, on the eastern edge of the Cherokee Nation, in 1828. Hugh Montgomery, a contemporary observer, described the ensuing encroachments:

On the subject of gold diggers, the last accounts gave the number at from four to seven thousand. Their morrals [sic] are as bad as it is possible for you to conceive; you can suppose the gamblers, swindlers, debauchers and profane Blackguards all collected from six or seven states without either law or any other power to prevent them from giving full vent to their vicious propensities.<sup>23</sup>

With the discovery of gold and the increasing pressure for white settlement in the Southeast, the removal of the Five Civilized Tribes began in earnest.

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Public and Private Papers*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), 235.

<sup>22</sup> James Monroe to the Senate and House of Representatives, January 27, 1825. James D. Richardson, comp. *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 2:280-81.

<sup>23</sup> Hugh Montgomery to John Forsyth, July 12, 1828. Georgia Archives, Atlanta.

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The Choctaws were the first to emigrate west to the Indian Territory. Concentrated in Mississippi, this tribe had become factionalized and felt so much pressure from American officials in 1829-1830 that they signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in September of 1830. While the majority of the Choctaws opposed removal, the treaty was signed by an acculturated leadership reflecting a small number of the tribe. In 1831, Choctaw Agent Colonel William Ward refused to allow almost 1,000 Choctaws to remain in Mississippi despite their protests. Only a small number of Choctaws were allowed to stay by Ward and most of those were white men with Choctaw wives or prominent "half-breeds." (The sites of the Choctaw Council House and Choctaw Agency were located on what is now the Noxubee NWR. This refuge also contains a 1.75 mile section of the National Register-listed Old Robinson Road used as an emigration route by the Choctaws. A historic marker or other interpretation should be considered to commemorate the role of the refuge in the Trail of Tears).

The Creeks and Chickasaws did not fare any better. The Chickasaws' removal route ran along the Clear Boggy River, approximately 120 miles south of Fort Coffee on the Arkansas River. Even though they did not as a group resist removal following the signing of the Treaty of Pontotoc Creek on October 20, 1832, they were held prisoners in a large camp where dysentery, fevers, smallpox and corrupt businessmen decimated them--500 Chickasaws died from smallpox; many others died from starvation largely due to the Army's slow processing of provisions. By the time rations shipped from New Orleans reached their camp, they were spoiled and inedible. Other spoiled foods were sold to the Chickasaws at exploitative prices. Out of their own tribal funds, they paid \$200,000 for the unusable provisions and an additional \$700,000 to suppliers for food they never received.<sup>24</sup>

It is estimated that the Creek Nation lost over 3,000 people during Removal. Most of the Creeks were forcibly removed in 1836, with approximately 14,500 relocated to Indian Territory. Between 2,700 and 3,000 died along the way from disease, exposure, and starvation. At Fort Gibson, government rations were wasted, and there was widespread graft and corruption on the part of Indian and state officials. Under the management of the contractors Harrison and Glasgow, whose partners included Arkansas Governor James S. Conway, cattle and corn weights were grossly overestimated. The Creek chief Artus Fixico, who headed a company of 78 people into the new territory, reported that his party received five barrels of flour. Four of them were sour and one contained lime.<sup>25</sup> It was not uncommon for contractors to bill the government for 500-550 pounds for an animal that in actuality weighed 350 pounds. Similarly, corn was measured at two bushels when it actually measured out at one and a half bushels. In addition, the drought in 1838 was so severe that the Indians who had already resettled in the new territory experienced near total crop failure. Adding to woes of the tribes were the whiskey traders. In little more than a day, Creeks camped near Little Rock purchased 400 barrels of whiskey with funds that were meant to purchase corn rations. By June of 1838, at which time Creek removal was complete, more than 8,000 members of that nation had no provisions whatsoever.<sup>26</sup>

For the Seminoles, it became a prolonged war, perhaps the most costly to the United States, in terms of lives lost and money spent, of any of the Indian wars. Even though a few Seminole leaders were pressured into signing the Treaty of Payne's Landing in May of 1832, the men who signed it were not given the authority to do so by the tribe and only 134 Seminoles emigrated in 1834. Under the leadership of Osceola, the rest of the Seminoles retreated deep into the Florida Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp, where both the United States Army and Navy used bloodhounds to drag them out a few at a time. After the loss of 1,500 soldiers and 20 million dollars, Army officers felt they had "committed the error of attempting to remove [the Seminoles]

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<sup>24</sup> Dan Littlefield, Presentation, Trail of Tears Association Annual Meeting (Cape Girardeau, MO: April 2001); Jahoda, 171; Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 204ff.

<sup>25</sup> Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 160-62.

<sup>26</sup> Austin J. Raines to Cyrus Harris, Governor, Chickasaw Nation, June 4, 1838. Office of Indian Affairs, File R, 269, 289.

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when their lands were not required for agricultural purposes; when they were not in the way of white inhabitants; and when the greater portion of their country was an unexplored wilderness, of the interior of which we were as ignorant as the interior of China..."<sup>27</sup> Resistance also cost the Seminoles dearly - their population, approximately 6,000 in 1821, was diminished by nearly 40 per cent. Those who were caught, put in chains and taken west numbered 2,254, according to an 1859 census.<sup>28</sup> The rest of the Seminole Nation remained in Florida, where they were granted a reservation in the 1930s.

A number of Seminoles were briefly interred on Egmont Key during the Third Seminole War (1856-1858), including Billy Bowlegs, members of his family, and other Seminole leaders. In mid-1858, Bowleg's band of 38 warriors and 85 women and children, and 41 captured Seminoles who were not members of his band were transported west from Egmont Key by steamboat to the Indian Territory. In addition to Bowlegs' band, several hundred other captured Seminoles were imprisoned on Egmont Key during the war. At least three Seminole children and an unknown number of adults were buried at the Key and later removed and reburied in various National Cemeteries. (Egmont Key is cooperatively managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Coast Guard and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Recommended Trail of Tears commemoration includes updating the National Register nomination for the site to include the Seminole imprisonment and work with the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma to develop an interpretive marker on the Key).

With the Dahlonega gold rush and increased pressure by white settlers, attempts were made to legally disenfranchise the Cherokee Nation. Instead of trying to restrain the intruders, Georgia quickly passed laws forbidding Indians to mine or sell gold; it further constricted Native American rights by disallowing them to testify or bring any complaint into Georgia's courts. Georgia also required that any non-Indian wishing to conduct any business within the Nation to swear an oath of allegiance and obtain a license from the State.

In 1832, the state of Georgia distributed former Cherokee lands in the northwest portion of the state to whites through a lottery system. Through the 1832 Land and Gold Lotteries, Georgia divided the former Cherokee land into lots of various sizes and local white citizens entered their name for a random drawing of the lots. Lots were claimed by paying a registration fee. Georgia had used a similar lottery system since 1805 to distribute the lands of the Creeks. The system effectively opened the lands for white settlement and the formation of new counties as new settlers quickly established farmsteads, communities and towns on the former tribal lands.

The Cherokee National Council attempted to fight its battle as a sovereign nation in federal court, even as tribal annuities failed to be distributed and legal bills mounted. Without the financial support of the annuities, the Cherokee had difficulty effectively governing their nation and bringing test cases to court that would stop other states from following Georgia's lead.

Even if the Cherokee Nation had ceased to be recognized by Georgia, it did not mean that it had ceased to exist in Tennessee and North Carolina.<sup>29</sup> The jurisdictional competition pitted states' rights against both tribal and federal authority. The opportunity for a test case came in the fall of 1830, when Corn Tassel (George Tassel) was arrested by the Georgia Guard for murdering another Cherokee. Corn Tassel was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. Despite the mounting legal debts, the Cherokee hired William Wirt, a former Attorney General of the United States who would soon run for President against Andrew Jackson. Wirt argued that Georgia had no jurisdiction over a crime that, under treaty law, was within the police rights of self-

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 360 and Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians*, 467.

<sup>28</sup> Angie Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States*, (Norman, Oklahoma: 1970), 126.

<sup>29</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, 438.

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government retained by the Cherokee. At that point, the arm of Georgia justice moved swiftly. Wasting no time, Corn Tassel was executed before any ruling could be made in federal court.

In 1831, the Cherokee attempted again to sue Georgia in federal court. The case, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, was denied a writ of certiorari because the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice John Marshall, decided that the tribe was not a foreign nation in the manner intended by the Constitution, but instead "a domestic dependent nation."<sup>30</sup> A year later, the Vermont missionary Samuel Worcester, who was serving a sentence in a Georgia penitentiary for refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the State of Georgia or obtain a permit in order to conduct his missionary work among the Cherokee, brought a suit into federal court. This time the Supreme Court maintained that the Cherokee were "undisputed possessors of the soil" and free from the jurisdiction of the State of Georgia. These decisions became the basis for tribal sovereignty that yet persists in judicial and political affairs involving Indian tribes within the borders of the United States. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) disallowed state jurisdiction over Indian nations, yet Andrew Jackson is reported to have responded to the decisions brought forth by the Supreme Court with a terse "John Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it."<sup>31</sup> Jackson subsequently signed the Treaty of New Echota into law on May 23, 1836.

After the signing of the treaty, some Cherokee felt that further resistance was futile and emigrated west to the Indian Territory. The first group to leave the Cherokee Nation was made up of about 600 wealthy, pro- treaty Cherokee. They departed in January of 1837 and were among the few who received compensation for their land and property; in March of that year, other treaty supporters, including Major Ridge, left the Nation under the supervision of General Nathaniel Smith. John Ridge and Elias Boudinot, along with their families, left Creek Path, Alabama in mid-October, traveling through Nashville, where Ridge stopped at the Hermitage to visit Jackson. His group was small, outfitted for travel with horses, carriages, and winter clothing. They arrived in Indian Territory a month before Lieutenant B.B. Cannon's detachment, which had departed at about the same time from the Cherokee Agency area near present day Charleston, Tennessee. Cannon's party traveled overland through Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas. These emigrants encountered severe weather that delayed them, and a number of ill and elderly Cherokee died and were buried along the way. Cannon's route would later be followed by the majority of the emigrating detachments in 1838-39.

Despite the decisions made by the Court, Jackson and his successor, Martin Van Buren, went ahead with Removal plans. Without sufficient time to prepare for the journey west, forced to abandon their personal property, without tools, provisions, ammunition, or money, the Cherokee endured hardships beyond measure. With rare exception, the Indians who were forcibly removed under Jackson's policy lost all their personal property and were driven from their homes with little more than the clothes they were wearing when the soldiers arrived at their door. Ethnographer James Mooney later interviewed a number of Cherokee who survived the ordeal:

[O]n turning for one last look as they crossed the ridge, [the captives] saw their homes in flames, fired by the lawless rabble that followed on the heels of the soldiers to loot and pillage. So keen were these outlaws on the scene that in some instances they were driving off the cattle and other stock of the Indians almost before the soldiers had fairly started the owners in the opposite direction... To prevent escape the soldiers had been ordered to approach and surround each house...so as to come upon the occupants without warning. One old patriarch when thus surprised calmly called his children and grandchildren around him,

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<sup>30</sup> Prucha, ed. *Documents in United States Policy*, 58-62.

<sup>31</sup> Joan Gilbert, *The Trail of Tears Across Missouri*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 14.



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and kneeling down, bid them pray with him in their own language, while the astonished soldiers looked on in silence. Then rising he led the way into exile.

A woman, on finding her house surrounded, went to the door and called up the chickens to be fed for the last time, after which taking her infant on her back and her other children by the hand, she followed her husband with the soldiers.<sup>32</sup>

The forcible emigration for the Cherokee began June 6, 1838 under the command of General Winfield Scott. The Cherokee were first assembled at temporary forts or concentration camps in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Intense summer heat, overcrowding, and lack of sanitation, food, clean water and medicine left the Cherokee malnourished, weak, and sick. Between four and ten Cherokee died every day in the camps from heat, lack of food and water, and disease. After several weeks in these temporary camps, the Cherokee were marched to emigration depots to be assigned into various detachments for the journey west. Emigration depots were created at the Cherokee Agency at Charleston, Tennessee, near Ross's landing at present-day Chattanooga, and south of Fort Payne, Alabama. The journey to these depots was also a hardship for the Cherokee. Eyewitness accounts reported in newspapers such as the *Niles National Register* and *The Arkansas Gazette* described the ensuing chaos among the Cherokee:

The scenes of distress at Ross's Landing defy all description. On arrival there of the Indians, the horses brought by some of them were demanded by the commissioners of Indian property... for the purpose of being sold. The owners refused to give them up - men, women, children and horses were driven permiscuously [sic] into one large pen and the horses taken out by force, and cried off to the highest bidder, and sold for almost nothing.<sup>33</sup>

At the emigration depots, seventeen detachments were assembled for the trip west. Four detachments would travel by water while the rest journeyed overland. Those taking the water routes embarked at Ross's Landing and at the Cherokee Agency on the Hiwassee River between June and December of 1838. Under military escort, they followed the Tennessee River to its confluence with the Ohio, then to the Mississippi and finally to the Arkansas River.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the Cherokee Nation traveled overland in detachments that varied in size, with some exceeding 1,000 persons. The government provided one wagon with an ox team and six riding horses for every 15 people. Each person was allowed \$65.88 to cover food, clothing, medicine, and ferry and toll road fees.<sup>35</sup> The overland detachments attempted to leave the Cherokee Agency camps in August. However, after marching to Blythe's Ferry on the Tennessee River, the heat and lack of water caused the detachments to be recalled and the actual emigration was postponed to October 1st.<sup>36</sup> While necessitated by the summer's drought, this late start would result in marching through the worst of the winter on the journey to the Indian Territory.

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<sup>32</sup> James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, Bureau of American Ethnology Nineteenth Annual Report, Part I (Washington, DC: 1900), 131.

<sup>33</sup> *Niles' National Register*, LIV (Aug. 18, 1838):385. Printed in Thurman Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People* (Norman, OK and London: 1986), 320-21; *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, October 2, 1839, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Duane King, "Report on the Cherokee Trail of Tears: correcting and Updating the 1992 Map Supplement." Unpublished manuscript, 1999, Section 1, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Nance, 15; Hoig, 91-96.

<sup>36</sup> Hoig, 99.

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Once underway, the majority of the detachments crossed the Tennessee River at Blythe's Ferry and struggled across the rugged Walden's Ridge and Cumberland Plateau. Known as the Northern Route, the Cherokee detachments passed through Nashville and into Kentucky. Crossing the Ohio River at Golconda, Illinois, many of the Cherokee detachments were forced to camp for weeks in southern Illinois waiting for the ice-bound Mississippi River to clear. Dozens of deaths occurred in these camps as the Cherokee suffered in the winter months of December and January. Once across the river, the Cherokee marched through central Missouri, northwest Arkansas and on into the Indian Territory. A detachment under John Benge left northern Alabama in October and traveled on a separate route through central Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri and Arkansas. A third overland route was taken by a pro-treaty detachment led by John Bell. Wishing to avoid contact with the other detachments, this group traveled west through Tennessee crossing the Mississippi River at Memphis. The Bell detachment marched through central Arkansas before disbanding on the edge of the Indian Territory.

The loss of life along the Trail of Tears was severe and estimates of deaths range from approximately 500 to over 4,000. The Reverend Daniel S. Butrick, a missionary who accompanied the Cherokee, estimated that over 4,600 Cherokee lost their lives in the camps and along the trail from cholera, smallpox, influenza, pneumonia, starvation, exposure and broken hearts. Among those who died was Quatie Ross, John Ross's wife, who succumbed from pneumonia near Little Rock, Arkansas. Although she was in fragile health, Mrs. Ross gave her blanket to a sick child.

After five to six months of travel the overland Cherokee detachments finally reached the Indian Territory, arriving from January to March of 1839. Once in the Indian Territory, the detachments were disbanded and the Cherokee dispersed to begin new lives. The struggles associated with Removal did not cease at the end of the journey west. Life upon arrival in the Indian Territory proved difficult and would remain so for decades to come. Conflicts with the Osage, Sauk and Fox Nations arose due to historic animosity among the Creeks, Cherokee, and Osage. Osage raiding parties made resettlement an uneasy task which cost yet more lives.

Despite the tragedy of the ordeal faced by the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks and Seminoles, the presence of these nations in Oklahoma, North Carolina, Mississippi and Florida today, as well as in Native American diaspora communities throughout the United States, bears witness to their ability to survive under the very worst of circumstances. Each of these nations established new capitals, tribal governments, schools, farms and businesses in Oklahoma. Today, Tahlequah, is the bustling capital of the Western Cherokee, where it is possible to get a Cherokee-English dictionary, to attend pow wows, stomp dances, and Baptist services. The Chickasaws established a capital at Tishomingo, the Choctaws in Tuskahoma, the Creeks in Okmulgee, and the Seminoles in Wewoka. All of these places have national museums, heritage centers, and on-going celebrations that draw native peoples and visitors from around the world-as many as seven million tourists annually.

Indian Removal has marked the American past deeply. The loss of land and lives can never be forgotten. In the end, it was an epic of tragedy and triumph, the physical remains of which can be found in the geography of the Trail of Tears. It is a trail that touches all hearts, a reminder of the strength of the human spirit to survive and carry on, in centuries past and in those yet to come.

### **III. THE TRAIL OF TEARS – ROUTES AND INVOLVEMENT WITH THE TENNESSEE, WHEELER, AND WHITE RIVER NWRs**

#### **Choctaw Removal and the Trail of Tears - Overview**

The Choctaw Nation's tribal lands were primarily in what is now Mississippi and Alabama. The first removal treaty to be made under the 1830 Indian Removal Bill was with the Choctaws. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed on September 27, 1830 and finalized the relocation of the Choctaws to the Indian Territory. The treaty provided that removal would take place over a three year period with about one-third of the tribe to be moved each year. The federal government would provide financial assistance and assign conductors to lead them west. In leaving their homes in Mississippi, it was speculated that most of the tribe would emigrate by water via Vicksburg or by water and land via Memphis. It is estimated that there were 19,554 Choctaw before removal, of which 12,500 moved to Indian Territory. An estimated 2,500 died along the way, and 5000 to 6000 remained in Mississippi. Most of those left in Mississippi were forced to move by the Federal government later in the century, but enough remained to form the Mississippi Band of Choctaw that was officially recognized as a tribe in 1945.

The Choctaw emigration primarily involved traveling via steamboat or by land across the Mississippi River and through Arkansas to the Indian Territory. Some parties also marched overland to Memphis where they then either traveled west on the Memphis–Little Rock Military Road or boarded steamboats for passage west. As a result there is no known Choctaw involvement with either the Wheeler or Tennessee NWRs. However, there was extensive involvement both within and just outside the boundary of the White River NWR.

#### **Choctaw Removal and the White River NWR**

In November and December of 1830, two parties totaling 400 Choctaws crossed the Mississippi River at Vicksburg and proceeded west without any government assistance. Other small parties continued to cross the Mississippi River into 1831. Prior to the first large wave of Choctaw emigration, the *Arkansas Gazette* stated that “The route which the Choctaws and Chickasaws will travel, in emigrating to their new homes, is not yet, we believe, fully determined on; but it is quite probable that a large proportion of them will cross the Mississippi at Helena, and White River at the Mouth of Cache, and proceed on the Memphis Road in the direction of this place.”<sup>37</sup> However, throughout 1831, the majority of the first wave of some 4,000 Choctaws did not use the Military Road but instead left Memphis and Vicksburg via steamboat and traveled by water up the Arkansas River to Fort Smith. The one exception was some 500 members of the Northeastern District of the Choctaw tribe which crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis on December 1, 1831. This group was in charge of transporting some of the tribe's horses to the Indian Territory and they crossed the White River in mid-December. An article in the *Arkansas Gazette* described one of the parties in this group:

“The Emigrating Indians – A small party of 18 or 20 Choctaws, having in charge about 100 head of Indian horses, arrived on the opposite side of the river on Sunday evening last, and left there yesterday morning for Fort Smith. They crossed the Mississippi at Memphis, and came through by land from that place.”<sup>38</sup>

This group of Choctaws appears to have been the only sizable party which traveled the Military Road in 1831.

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<sup>37</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, February 23, 1831.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, December 21, 1831

The Memphis-Little Rock Military Road crossed the White River at the mouth of the Cache River in 1831. Originally planned to cross the White River at a different site to the north, the alignment of the Military Road was changed to this location to connect with an operating ferry. At the December Term 1825 of the Circuit Court of Phillips County, John Pyburn was given “leave to keep a ferry on White River at or near the mouth of the River Cash.”<sup>39</sup> This ferry was later operated by John Burris and Richard Pyburn during the period of Indian removal in the 1830s. In addition to the ferry crossing on the White River, a ferry license was also granted to Alpheus Maddox at the Rock Roe Bayou.<sup>40</sup> Maddox established this ferry in 1829 and also operated a toll bridge across the bayou on the Military Road. This bridge appears to have been used when the bayou water level was low. At times of high water the four miles of the bottomlands between the White River and Rock Roe Bayou were often flooded and the ferry operators were allowed to charge more in order to convey passengers across this wide expanse. Both the ferries and the bridge are mentioned in many of the accounts of Indian removal in the 1830s.

In 1832, the second wave of Choctaw emigrants was set to travel west in October. As part of this removal effort, John T. Fulton, the Assistant Agent for the Choctaw Removal advertised in the *Arkansas Gazette* for proposals to feed the Choctaw in anticipation of their travels across Arkansas on the Military Road. Fulton’s article requested proposals for both rations for the Indians and forage for their horses. Successful bidders were required to deliver rations and forage along the route in the Arkansas Territory (A.T.) “From Memphis, Tennessee, via Strong’s to Mouth of Cache on White River, A.T. From Helena, A.T. to Mouth of Cache, on White River, A.T. From Mouth of Cache, via Mrs. Black’s Erwin’s settlement and Greathouse’s, to Cadron Creek, A.T.” This was signed by Fulton at Little Rock on September 25, 1832.<sup>41</sup>

On October 10, 1832 the *Arkansas Gazette* printed a new request for proposals from Fulton. This new request for proposals was to provide subsistence and forage from Rock Roe to Little Rock rather than from Memphis to Little Rock. The newspaper article stated that “This change, we understand became necessary, in consequence of an order from Maj. Armstrong, Superintendent of the Removal of Indians, who has, by personal examination and inquiry, satisfied himself that the route via the Mouth of the White river and Rock Roe, on the same river, is preferable, both as it regards economy and expedition, to any of the routes which have been proposed for the removal of the Indians from their country east of the Mississippi, to that west of that river.”<sup>42</sup> With this decision, the White River landing at Rock Roe south of the Military Road assumed a prominent role in the transportation and removal of the Choctaws.

Rock Roe (also spelled Roc Roe) was located six miles below the ferry crossing on the White River and at the mouth of the Rock Roe Bayou. Rock Roe was located on a bluff some 50 feet above the bayou and river. The wide tableland of the bluff appears to have attracted the interest of land speculators as early as the 1830s when a separate survey of the bluff and its environs was recorded by government surveyors in September of 1835.<sup>43</sup> An elaborate plan for a community at Rock Roe was also created during this period showing a wide central avenue and dozens of rectangular streets (Figure 4).<sup>44</sup> This plat is located in the papers of John E. Knight who was a prominent Little Rock resident and had business dealings with numerous land speculators. Like many speculative communities of the period, Rock Roe remained a prosperous town only on paper. The *Arkansas*

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<sup>39</sup> Phillips County Circuit Records, Book A, p. 140-141.

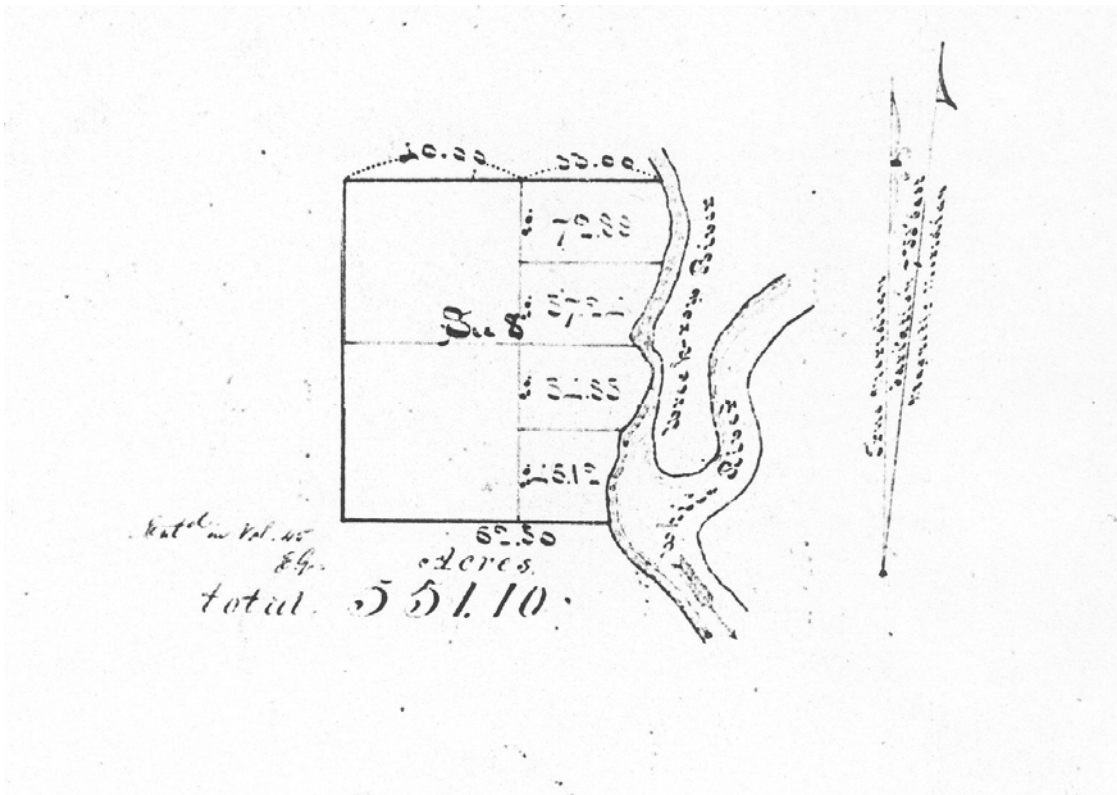
<sup>40</sup> Phillips County Circuit Records Book B, January Term.

<sup>41</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 26, 1832.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, October 10, 1832.

<sup>43</sup> United States Government Survey Records, Arkansas State Archives, September 30, 1835.

<sup>44</sup> Plat of Rock Roe, no date, Knight Collection, Arkansas State Library and Archives.



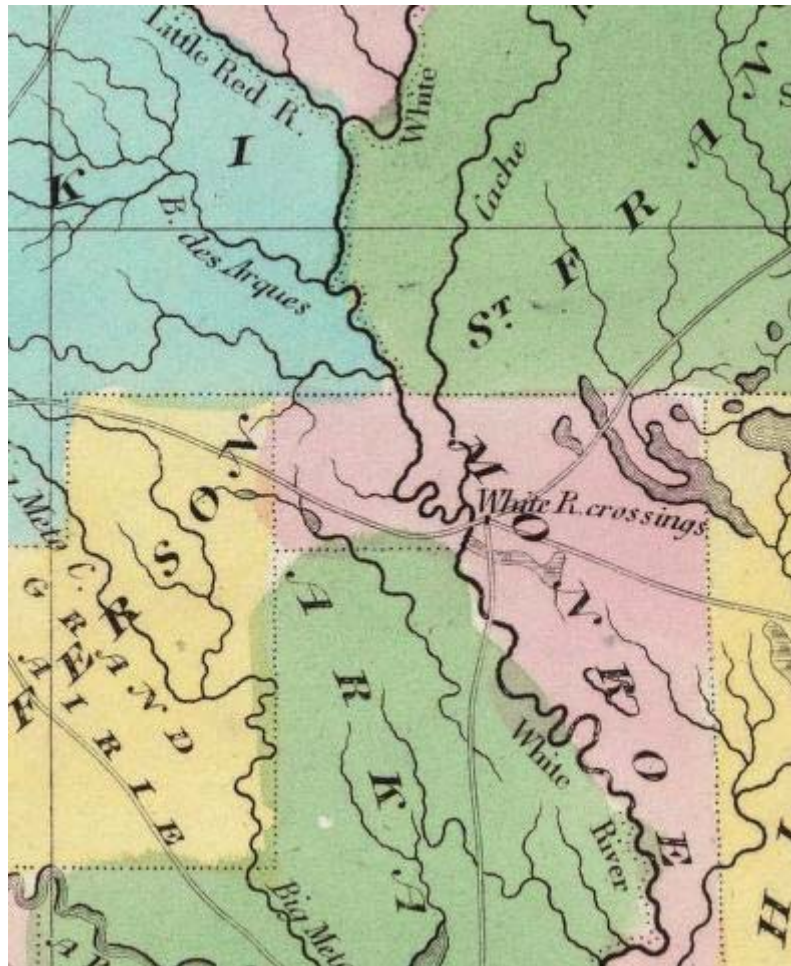
**Figure 4: Survey of the Rock Roe site in 1835 from the Government Land Records at the State Archives.**

*Gazette* mentioned Rock Roe when it published an article stating that “We understand the Indians will be embarked on board of steam-boats at Memphis, Vicksburg, and other places on the Mississippi, and conveyed from thence up White river, to a point known by the name of Rock Roe, a few miles below the mouth of Cache, from which they will proceed by land to their destinations in the new Choctaw country west of Arkansas.”<sup>45</sup> The use of the term “point” versus that of a town or community indicates that Rock Roe was more of a location than an actual settlement. The site of Rock Roe is on private land directly across the bayou from the White River NWR.

The reasoning behind using Rock Roe lay with the continued problems with the condition of the Military Road. The Military Road between Memphis and Little Rock was commissioned by Secretary of War John C. Calhoun in 1824. The original route was to be north of the Mouth of Cache on the White River but Lt. Charles Thomas, commissioned to build the road in 1826, amended the route to connect with the ferry then in operation at the confluence of the Cache and White Rivers.<sup>46</sup> Over the next several years the construction and use of the road remained problematic with work on the road suspended during times of high water. In anticipation of using the road for Indian removal, Congress appropriated \$20,000 for repair of the “Memphis and Little Rock road” on July 3, 1832, and charged territorial governor John Pope with the responsibility of

<sup>45</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, October 10, 1832.

<sup>46</sup> Julie Ward Longnecker, “A Road Divided: From Memphis to Little Rock Through the Great Mississippi Swamp,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XLIV, Autumn, 1985 No. 3, 210.



**Figure 5: The Memphis-Little Rock Military Road is shown as crossing the White River at the “White R. crossings” on the David Burr Map of Arkansas in 1835.**

directing the work.<sup>47</sup> Governor Pope supervised repairs between Little Rock and the St. Francis River for a year, often traveling to William Strong’s house, and then on October 23, 1833, the territorial assembly petitioned Congress for more money stating that “The difficulty of making a road over the route heretofore marked out far transcends all the calculations which have been made.” In response, Congress appropriated an additional \$100,000 and ordered a new survey of the route from Memphis to the St. Francis River under the direction of the Topographical Bureau of the War Department.<sup>48</sup> As a result, construction and rerouting of the road, especially between Memphis and the St. Francis River, continued even as it was traversed by large groups of emigrating Indians and their livestock.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 214.



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In October and November of 1832, some 4,600 Choctaws left Mississippi and traveled both by water and overland to Rock Roe. This emigration was mentioned in the November 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Arkansas Advocate* which wrote “Choctaw Emigrants. We are informed, that about 22 hundred Emigrating Choctaws arrived at Memphis, on or about the 28<sup>th</sup> ult., and would embark on board some steam-boat, in a few days, for Rock Roe, on White river; where the U.S. Teams will receive them, and transport them to their new homes west of this territory.”<sup>49</sup> The group mentioned in the article was the 2,000 Choctaws from Chief Mushulatubbe’s district which had left Mississippi and arrived at Memphis on the 31<sup>st</sup> of the month. At Memphis they were joined by other parties of Choctaw led by Wharton Rector and Capt. John Page. Rector’s group had been stricken with cholera and the fear of this disease caused many Choctaws to refuse to board the steamboats believing that the crowded conditions would spread the illness. As a result this group split into those going by land and those traveling via the Military Road.

Choctaw Chief David Folsom and about 600 persons departed on the steamboat *Reindeer* on November 1<sup>st</sup> and arrived at Rock Roe a few days later. The overland party of 400 tribe members including Chief Mushulatubbe traveled overland on the Military Road under the direction of Lt. J.A. Phillips and Capt. William Armstrong. Following the Memphis to Little Rock Road, they entered a landscape where fall flooding caused them to travel through knee- to waist-deep water for more than 30 miles. These two parties reunited at Rock Roe by November 12<sup>th</sup>. Another group of 617 Choctaw also arrived at Rock Roe on November 12<sup>th</sup> via the steamboats *Harry Hill* and *Archimedes* from Vicksburg. These Choctaws were from Chief Greenwood LeFlore’s district and were conducted by Capt. S. T. Cross. At Rock Roe these groups split into two with one group traveling to Little Rock on the Military Road while the other group traveled to Fort Smith. The steamboats employed to transport the Choctaw as well as the other tribes were involved in regular traffic on the Arkansas and White Rivers and advertisements for them were commonplace in the *Arkansas Gazette*.<sup>50</sup>

The group of 1,000 Choctaws conducted by Capt. John Page also traveled both by land and water. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 300 women and children were placed aboard the steamboat *Thomas Yeatman* and transported down the Mississippi River and up the White River to Rock Roe. The rest of the Choctaws along with their wagons and 600 horses were ferried across the river and traveled on the Military Road rejoining the contingent at Rock Roe on November 9<sup>th</sup>. This group then left for Mrs. Black’s and continued west to arrive in the Indian Territory in December.

The presence of cholera among the Choctaws caused great consternation among the citizens in Little Rock who feared a spread of the contagious disease as the Choctaws passed through the city. There were several articles in the *Arkansas Gazette* and *Arkansas Advocate* in early November which reported rumors of large numbers of Choctaws dying or ill at Rock Roe. As more accurate information was gathered the *Arkansas Gazette* printed an update on the situation which stated “Cholera. On Wednesday evening last, considerable excitement was occasioned in our town, by reports brought by several teamsters and others from Rock Roe, that the Cholera had broken out and was raging with great violence among a party of near 500 Indians who had just arrived at that point, and that several deaths had occurred...We are happy, however, to have it in our power to say, that subsequent advices from that quarter, leave no doubt that our first rumors greatly exaggerated the extent of the disease and its ravages...”<sup>51</sup> Although an outbreak of cholera among Arkansas residents did not occur, it continued to take many lives among the Choctaw as they traveled through the state.

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<sup>49</sup> *Arkansas Advocate*, November 7, 1832.

<sup>50</sup> Amanda Paige, Fuller Bumpers and Daniel Littlefield, “The North Little Rock Site on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail” (Little Rock: American Native Press Archives, 2004), 16.

<sup>51</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, November 14, 1832.

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The arrival of thousands of Choctaw in the state resulted in numerous articles in the state's two primary newspapers during November. Articles specific to the Choctaw and their arrival at Rock Roe include:

"The Emigrating Indians. Our latest information from Rock Roe, the general rendezvous of the of the Emigrating Choctaws, is to Sunday morning last, at which time about 1000 of the emigrants had reached that point – upwards of 800 came up on the steam-boats Reindeer and Harry Hill, and the remainder came through by land from Memphis, via the Military Road. Near 2,000 more, under Col. Rector, landed on the west bank of the Mississippi, opposite Memphis, on the 4<sup>th</sup> inst., and had left for Rock Roe – about 1200 on the U.S. steam-boat Archimedes, and the remainder by land with their horses, wagons, &c. – and it is probable that all reached that point on Sunday last."<sup>52</sup>

"Emigrating Choctaws. A party of 450 Emigrating Choctaws, we are informed, arrived at Rock Roe, on White river, on board the steamer Reindeer, on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst., under the superintendence of Maj. ARMSTRONG, Choctaw Agent. From Rock Roe, this party of Emigrants will proceed, in wagons, to the lands set apart for them by the Government, west of this Territory. The Volant, we also learn, was hourly expected at Rock Roe, with about as many more emigrants. We much regret to learn, that the Asiatic or Spasmodic Cholera has made its appearance among this party of Emigrants. On the night of their arrival at Rock Roe, 15 or 20 were attacked – 8 of which number died in the course of the night and following day. Later accounts report 10 deaths in all, and 25 or 30 new cases."<sup>53</sup>

"The Emigrating Indians. Two parties of the Emigrating Choctaws, consisting of about 1400 souls, commenced arriving opposite this place, from Rock Roe, on Sunday last, and have now mostly come up. One of them is of the band or party of Col. David Fulsome (sic), about 800 in number, in charge of Col. Cross... Two other parties, of Mushalatubba's band, one of near 1100, in charge of Col. Rector, and another of about 900, in charge of Capt. PAGE, USA, were expected to leave Rock Roe on Monday or Tuesday, for Fort Smith, and are probably on their journey..." Another party of upward of 2000 Choctaws, we understand, are expected at Rock Roe, about this time, in charge of Maj. F.W. Armstrong, Superintendent Removal of Choctaws west of the Mississippi. His brother, Wm. Armstrong, Esq. Superintendent of Choctaws east of the Mississippi, has been at Rock Roe, during the last 12 or 15 days, organizing the parties and superintending the departure of the Indians from that point."<sup>54</sup>

Another large contingent of some 2,000 Choctaws left from Chief Nitakechi's district and assembled at Vicksburg on November 4<sup>th</sup>. At Vicksburg they boarded the steamboats *Volant*, *Reindeer*, and *Thomas Yeatman* and traveled up the White River to Rock Roe arriving on November 21<sup>st</sup>. At Rock Roe the Choctaws were organized into two groups led by Lt. William R. Montgomery and Lt. Isaac P. Simonton. These two groups and left Rock Roe on November 22<sup>nd</sup> and arrived at Mrs. Black's on November 24<sup>th</sup>. The *Arkansas Gazette* described this party in its November 28<sup>th</sup> edition as

"The Emigrating Indians. Maj. F.W. Armstrong, Superintendent Choctaw Removal west of the Mississippi, arrived at Rock Roe, a few days since, from Vicksburg, with the steam-boats Reindeer, Volant, Thomas Yeatman and Archimedes, on board of which were about

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *Arkansas Advocate*, November 14, 1832.

<sup>54</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, November 21, 1832.

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1800 Emigrating Choctaw Indians; and last evening, reached the opposite side of the river from this place, with them, together with a considerable number of stragglers from other parties whom he has picked up on the road, increasing the party now with him to near 2000...All the Indians have left Rock Roe, and this, we understand, is the last party that will emigrate on this route during the present season."<sup>55</sup>

A later article mentioned that many of the Choctaws were ill and that nineteen had died since leaving Rock Roe.<sup>56</sup> The departure of Chief Nitakechi's Choctaws from Rock Roe was the last large party of this tribe which passed through this section of Arkansas during Indian removal.

The Rock Roe landing, Memphis-Little Rock Military Road and Rock Roe Bayou Bridge all figured prominently in the removal of the Choctaws in November of 1832. Steamboats brought thousands of Choctaws up the White River to the Rock Roe landing where they disembarked. The Choctaws camped on the ridges west of the Rock Roe Bayou as they were organized into various groups to head west on the Military Road. Smaller groups of Choctaws used the Military Road to go overland from Memphis and would have used the White River ferry and Rock Roe Bayou Bridge as they headed west. The intense use of this landing, associated roadbeds and immediate environs makes it a significant site in the history of Indian removal.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, November 28, 1832.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, December 5, 1832.

## **Creek Removal and the Trail of Tears – Overview**

The Creek Indians were forced to move west following the treaty signed on March 24, 1832 which surrendered the remaining Creek lands in Alabama.<sup>57</sup> Over the next several years several thousand Creeks emigrated to the Indian Territory but other members of the tribe began a resistance which became known as the Creek Wars. The U.S. Army joined with Alabama militia to round up some 14,500 members of the tribe and move them west in 1836 and 1837. These Creeks were escorted west by the U.S. Army with assistance by civilian agents hired to facilitate Indian removal. Most of the Creeks were transported via steamboat from Montgomery and Mobile through the Gulf of Mexico and up the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers to the Indian Territory. Other groups marched to Tuscumbia, Alabama and were loaded onto steamboats bound for Memphis and then west on the Military Road. From the available records it does not appear that any Creeks emigrated through the Wheeler NWR but there was involvement with both the Tennessee and White River NWRs.

## **Creek Removal and the Tennessee River NWR**

The involvement of the Creeks with the Tennessee River NWR appears to have consisted primarily of passage along the river and no associated campsites or other sites have been identified. As noted previously, the Creek emigration documents are among the many thousands of records at the National Archives which have yet to be examined. It may be that some vouchers issued by the military will be discovered which document payments for food or wood for the steamboats. Based on the examination of available Cherokee records it does not appear that this involvement would be substantial. After boarding steamboats at Tuscumbia, most boats appear to have sailed directly for Paducah, a destination accessible in one day. While taking on wood for fuel was probably required, it is unlikely that there was any need to stop and disembark to camp along the river. Until all of the records relating to Creek removal are reviewed, no substantial involvement with the Tennessee River NWR can be ascertained.

## **Creek Removal and the White River NWR**

The White River NWR had direct involvement with Creek removal through the use of the Memphis-Little Rock Military Road and the associative site of Rock Roe. The first large group of Creeks to travel through Arkansas was a party of 630 tribal members led by Capt. John Page and William Beattie in December of 1834. In anticipation of the provisioning of the Creeks, an advertisement was placed in the *Arkansas Gazette* in October to solicit proposals for supply depots along the Military Road including the Rock Roe settlement.

“Notice for Proposals to Furnish Indian Rations. Separate proposals, in writing and sealed, will be received by the subscriber, until 12 o’clock M. of Thursday the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1834, for furnishing and delivering of all Rations, more or less, that shall be required at the following places, from the 10<sup>th</sup> day of November, 1834 to the 31<sup>st</sup> day of March, 1835 – each number forming one contract, viz:

No. 1. For all Rations that shall be required at Wm. Strong’s on the Memphis Road, near the St. Francis.

No. 2. For all Rations that shall be required at John Buriss’ – at the Ferry – north bank, and at Rock Roe, south bank of White River.

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<sup>57</sup> Jahoda, 144.

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No. 3. For all Rations that shall be required at Mrs. Black's Grand Prairie; at James Irwin's; and at Newell's near Palarm Bayou.

J. Brown Capt. U.S.A.  
Prin'l Disb'g Ag't Ind. Rem'l  
Little Rock, A.T. Oct. 16, 1834”<sup>58</sup>

In January of 1835, the contingent of Creeks under the direction of Capt. John Page divided into two groups at Memphis with one going by steamboat on the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers while the other led by William Beattie traveled on the Military Road. The *Arkansas Gazette* described this contingent of Creeks as “Emigrating Indians. A letter to Capt. J. Brown, was received by yesterday's mail, from Capt. John Page, Special Agent for removal of Indians, dated 29<sup>th</sup> ult. Capt. P. was then at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, with 525 Creek Indians and near 200 ponies, on his way to the Indian country west of Arkansas, and is probably at Memphis by this time. The Indians were to be embarked on a steamboat at that place, and landed at Rock Roe, on White river, from whence they will proceed by land to their destination. Their ponies were to cross the Mississippi at Memphis.”<sup>59</sup> The Page contingent paid John Burris for ferriage over the White River and Alpheus Maddox for ferriage over the Rock Roe Bayou on January 12th.

Instead of going to Rock Roe the water contingent came up the Arkansas River to Little Rock on February 24<sup>th</sup> aboard the steamboat *Harry Hill* while the overland party marched along the Military Road with horses and livestock. The impending arrival of this group was noted in the *Arkansas Gazette* on February 24<sup>th</sup>.

“Emigrating Creek Indians – The s.b. Harry Hill, arrived at this place, this morning, having on board near 500 of these sons of the forest, from Alabama, who will be joined, to-day or to-morrow, by another party, with upwards of 200 ponies, who came through by land from Memphis and arrived at Mrs. Black's, in the Big Prairie, some days since. The former party are under the charge of Capt. Page, U.S.A. and the latter under that of Mr. Beaty (sic).”<sup>60</sup>

A second group of emigrating Creeks was a party of some 500 Creeks led by Benjamin Marshall and conducted by Lt. Edward Deas and William Beattie. At Tuscumbia, most of the Creeks were loaded onto a steamboat while a smaller party marched overland to Memphis with horses and livestock. Both parties arrived at Memphis on December 31, 1835 where they again divided into water and land groups. The water party traveled down the Mississippi River to the Arkansas River and then past Little Rock to Fort Gibson. The land party traveled west on the Military Road on January 1, 1836 and crossed the White River ferry before arriving at Little Rock on January 9<sup>th</sup>.

During the summer of 1836, the U.S. Army captured more than 14,500 Creeks in Alabama and began to send them west under military escort. Approximately 2,500 of these Creeks were considered hostile and were transported on steamboats to New Orleans. Here the Creeks were loaded onto three steamboats under the command of Lt. J. Waller Barry. The civilian agents responsible for assisting the removal were employed by the J.W.A. Sanford Emigrating Company. The steamboats left New Orleans on July 21, 1836 and ascended the Mississippi and White Rivers to Rock Roe where they landed on July 29<sup>th</sup>. The Creeks camped at Rock Roe for eight days while they took on supplies and organized into groups going west under military escort. The Creeks departed Rock Roe on August 8<sup>th</sup> and traveled to Little Rock and on to Fort Gibson.

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<sup>58</sup> *Arkansas Advocate*, October 31, 1834.

<sup>59</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, January 20, 1835.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, February 24, 1835.

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The size of this group of Creeks was noted in an article in the *Arkansas Gazette* on August 2<sup>nd</sup>.

“Emigrating Creeks. We are informed by Mr. Willard, one of the conductors of the Emigrating Creeks, who reached here a day or two since, on express to Capt. BROWN, that 2300 Creeks had been landed at Rock Roe, White River, on the 29<sup>th</sup> ult. on the way to their new country, West. They are in charge of Messrs. Howell and Beatie (sic), conductors of the firm of J.W.A. Sanford & Co. accompanied by Lt. Barry and Dr. Aberdy, U.S. Army. The Emigrants are healthy and subordinate – and appear anxious to reach their place of destination. The party is accompanied by Neah Micco, Principal Chief and Neah Mathla, the principal hostile Chief, and leader of the late disturbances in Alabama. The emigrants were embarked at Montgomery, Ala. On the 15<sup>th</sup> July, and came by way of New-Orleans, across Lake Ponchartrain – route which has proved more expeditious than the one by land. They were less than 15 days from Montgomery to White River. This party is composed almost exclusively of the hostile Indians.”<sup>61</sup>

Most of the remaining Creeks rounded up by the U.S. Army were marched from Alabama to Memphis where they were divided into various groups to travel by water and land. Almost 12,000 Creeks were included in this emigration to the Indian Territory. These parties contained between six hundred to 2,300 Creeks each and were led by Capt. M.W. Batman, Lt. R. B. Screven, Marine Lt. John T. Sprague, Lt. Edward Deas, and John A. Campbell. Lt. Sprague sought to steal a march on Capt. Batman and Lt. Screven, who had arrived at Memphis before him, to ensure his party received adequate measures of the scanty supplies set out for the Creek emigrants. Sprague put 1,300 people, mostly women and children, aboard the steamboat *John Nelson* and two flat boats and sent between 600 and 700 men with the group’s horses along the Memphis to Little Rock Road through the Mississippi Swamp. Most of the overland group joined their river-borne companions opposite Little Rock on November 4th, though many of the men stayed in the swamp to hunt.

Lt. Screven’s party of 3,142 Creeks also split at Memphis, with most going to Rock Roe by boat while the horse herd followed the Memphis to Little Rock Road, arriving opposite Little Rock on November 20th. The desperately hungry Creeks straggled from the main group, killing hogs and stealing food, and only 2,000 of those who traveled the Military Road from Little Rock arrived at Little Rock under Lt. Screven’s command. Some 1,200 Creeks of Capt. Batman’s contingent left Memphis aboard the steamboat *Farmer* on October 13th, arriving at Rock Roe four days later. Other members of Capt. Batman’s group also marched overland on the Military Road. John A. Campbell split his contingent of 1,170 Creeks at Memphis, with some leaving on boats for Rock Roe on November 5th while the rest drove their livestock through the swamps on the Military Road.

Lt. Deas’ party, which numbered 2,320 when it left Alabama, set out from Memphis on November 5, 1836, intending to split as had the earlier groups. A sizeable group of Creeks refused to board the boats, choosing instead to follow the horse herd along the Military Road under the leadership of a conductor who Lt. Deas appointed. The water-borne party waited at Rock Roe, but only a portion of the overland party arrived with the conductor. After waiting two weeks, Lt. Deas set back toward Strong’s place on the St. Francis River to round up the stragglers. He found 300-400 starving, stranded Creeks, some of whom had been with the parties of Capt. Batman and Lt. Screven, scattered along the route and arranged for their escort to join the rest of his band.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, August 2, 1836.



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As in the case of the Choctaws four years earlier, the huge numbers of emigrating Creeks was a cause for alarm in Arkansas. On November 20, 1836 Lt. Screven wrote to Governor James Conway to inform him of the arrival of 3,200 Creek Indians near Little Rock. A report in the *Arkansas Gazette* stated that “This is the third party of Indians which have passed our town within two or three weeks, for the west. About 15,000 of the tribe are now traversing the State, from east to west – making an almost continuous line from Rock Roe, to our western boundary. Although they are by no means hostile or threatening, yet they are, unquestionably, a great annoyance to the public – and ought always to be sent with a strong guard.”<sup>62</sup>

A final party of Creeks used the Rock Roe landing and the Military Road in November of 1837. These were mainly the families of Creek warriors who had been recruited to fight Seminole Indians in Florida. After spending months in camps in Alabama and Mississippi, a period in which nearly 200 of them died, the group was transported to New Orleans. After traveling by steamboat to Rock Roe, some 3,000 Creeks led by Capt. John Page traveled overland to the Indian Territory. The passage of this final contingent of Creeks was noted by the *Arkansas Gazette* on November 21<sup>st</sup> when an article stated that “Capt. Page, of the U.S.A. arrived here on Saturday evening last. He is engaged at present in superintending the removal of the Creeks, and has now the whole Creek nation, amounting to more than 3,000, below Rock Roe, on White river. They will take up their line of march, through the country, immediately.”<sup>63</sup>

From 1835 to 1837, over 17,000 Creeks emigrated west either going overland along the Military Road or by using the steamboat landing at Rock Roe. The Creeks appear to have camped in the vicinity of the Rock Roe landing for longer periods of time than either the Choctaws or Chickasaws. This appears to have been the result of many of the tribe members becoming lost in the swamps along the Military Road or due to insufficient rations causing them to have to hunt or forage for food along the way. For five weeks in October and November of 1836, Rock Roe was a central depot and camp site for thousands of Creeks heading west. In such numbers the Creeks would have camped along much of the ridgeline between the Rock Roe landing and the Military Road.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, November 22, 1836

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, November 21, 1837.

### **Chickasaw Removal and the Trail of Tears**

The Chickasaw Nation's ancestral lands originally included sections of western Kentucky and Tennessee as well as parts of north Alabama and Mississippi. The Chickasaw ceded their lands in Tennessee and Kentucky as part of the Jackson Purchase in 1818. On October 20, 1832, representatives of the Chickasaw Nation, under pressure from the U.S. government signed the Treaty of Pontotoc in which the tribe ceded its property for sale as public land. The government would hold proceeds while tribe members decided where they wanted to move in the West. After the treaty was signed an exploration party consisting of 21 Chickasaw chiefs traveled to the Indian Territory to inspect the proposed relocation lands. They departed Tuscumbia, Alabama on October 12, 1833 and reached Memphis by steamboat on October 21<sup>st</sup>. The Chickasaw delegation then traveled the Military Road crossing the White River towards the end of the month. The party then continued on to Little Rock and arrived at Fort Towson in the Indian Territory on December 4<sup>th</sup>. Negotiations with the Choctaw Nation to procure western Choctaw land failed, as did similar parleys in November of 1835. Finally, in January of 1837 the Choctaw Nation sold a large strip in the western part of Choctaw lands in the Indian Territory for the use of the Chickasaw, also allowing the tribe to enjoy most of the privileges of Choctaw citizenship.

The emigration of some 4,500 Chickasaw from their homes in Alabama and Mississippi took place during 1837. From the available records it does not appear that the Chickasaw took the same route as their tribal representatives which traveled via steamboat from Tuscumbia. Instead, the Chickasaw divided into several parties and marched west to Memphis where they either boarded steamboats from transport west or marched along the Military Road. There is no record of the Chickasaw being transported up the White River to Rock Roe. Instead those who traveled via steamboat came up the Arkansas River to Little Rock or Fort Gibson. With the exception of the Chickasaw exploratory party of 1833, there is no known involvement with the Tennessee River NWR.

## Chickasaw Removal and the White River NWR

The first major party of Chickasaws that moved west consisted of 500 persons and was conducted by A.M.M. Upshaw, Superintendent of Chickasaw Removal. They left in June of 1837 and marched overland to Memphis. The Chickasaws crossed the Mississippi River on July 4<sup>th</sup> and marched west on the Military Road toward Little Rock. Over the next two weeks the Chickasaw crossed Black Fish Lake and passed by Strong's stand. The party reached the Mouth of the Cache on July 17<sup>th</sup> and spent the next two days ferrying across the river.<sup>64</sup> The party then proceeded four miles to the Rock Roe Bridge and camped at the bridge on July 19<sup>th</sup>. Millard's journal survives and he made the following account on July 19<sup>th</sup>.

July 19, Camp at Rock Row Bridge

We finished crossing the wagons and horses over the river and passed through the noted white river bottoms 4 miles to this place. All the Indians, now more than five hundred in number, are in camp and impatient for the march through the great Prairie.

20<sup>th</sup> July Left Rock Row at 6 ock. P.M. and passed through the prairie 25 miles and arrived at Mrs. Black's before light on the morning of the 21st.<sup>65</sup>

The party departed Rock Roe on July 20<sup>th</sup> went on to camp at Mrs. Black's over the next several days before continuing on to Little Rock. Once at Little Rock this party was described as containing 516 persons and "in the train are 551 Indian ponies and 13 wagins (sic), and we understand there are 30 more of the same tribe behind, who are not enrolled, and who are expected to join the main party at this place."<sup>66</sup>

On November 9, 1837 about 4,000 Chickasaws assembled at Memphis after leaving their homes. Most of the group traveled by steamboat to the Indian Territory on the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers but about 1,000 of the Chickasaws traveled by land and were divided into three parties led by the emigrating firm of Langtree, Welbourne, and Millard. These groups crossed the Mississippi River on December 3, 1837 and crossed the White River at the Mouth of the Cache on December 7<sup>th</sup>. These parties continued on the Military Road to Little Rock. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported on December 19<sup>th</sup> that "Capt. John Millard, conductor of a party of Chickasaw Indians, reached Strong's last evening, with almost 300 Indians, 38 wagons and 1100 Indian ponies. The balance of his party, supposed to be from 700 to 800 in number, is still in the swamp, and will not reach here for some days owing to the desperate condition of the road. Capt. Millard thinks that not less than 70 or 80 Indian ponies have been bogged and left dead in the mud."<sup>67</sup> While Millard's group struggled through the Arkansas swamps, other large groups of Chickasaws left Memphis and traveled west by steamboat. Captain Joseph A. Phillips led a group of 979 emigrants west from Memphis on January 6, 1838 and another party of about 799 Chickasaws under charge of R.B. Crocket departed Memphis on January 15, 1838 and arrived at Little Rock in early February 1838.

Another group of 130 Chickasaws under the direction of Chief Ishtehopa left Pontotoc Creek in June of 1838 with Colonel A.M.M. Upshaw as their conductor. This contingent left Memphis on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and after crossing the White River, arrived at Little Rock on July 15<sup>th</sup>. A final group of 300 Chickasaws was led west by Colonel Upshaw in November. They crossed the White River and reached Little Rock towards the end of the month.

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<sup>64</sup> King, Bell Detachment in Arkansas, 15.

<sup>65</sup> J.M. Millard Journal, September 23, 1837, On file at the Sequoyah Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>66</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, July 25, 1837.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, December 19, 1837

The *Arkansas Gazette* noted their passage on July 18<sup>th</sup>.

“Chickasaw Emigrants – A party of about 300 Chickasaw Indians, with their baggage, wagons, ponies, cattle, &c., in charge of Col. Upshaw, Conducting Agent, has been crossing the river at this place, since Sunday morning, and will probably be ready to resume their journey to their country high up on Red river, to-day or to-morrow. The party appear to enjoy good health, and look cheerful and happy. This is the past party of Chickasaws who are to be removed.”<sup>68</sup>

With the passage of Upshaw’s party of Chickasaws, the last of this tribe was moved west.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, July 18, 1838

## **Cherokee Removal and the Trail of Tears - Overview**

The removal of the Cherokee followed four major routes, two of which have involvement with the Wheeler, White River, and Tennessee NWRs. The majority of the Cherokee emigrated west on what became known as the “Northern Route.” This route was overland and the Cherokee traveled from two emigration depots in southeast Tennessee across the Cumberland Plateau and on to Nashville. From Nashville, the Cherokee traveled through Hopkinsville, Kentucky and on the Ohio River ferry crossing at Golconda, Illinois. The detachments then passed through southern Illinois and crossed the Mississippi River north of present-day Cape Girardeau, Missouri. The detachments then moved southwest across Missouri to Springfield and on into northwest Arkansas. The detachments disbanded once they reached the Indian Territory during the winter of 1838-1839.

The second route was taken by the Alabama Cherokee led by conductor John Benge. Benge’s detachment left northeast Alabama and crossed the Tennessee River at Gunter’s Landing (now Guntersville). After crossing the river the detachment traveled through Tennessee crossing the Tennessee River at Reynoldsburg, approximately ten miles north of the Tennessee NWR. The detachment then moved through Kentucky, Missouri and northern Arkansas before disbanding in the Indian Territory.

The third route was taken by the detachment led by conductor John Bell. Bell’s route took his detachment across southern Tennessee and crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis. The detachment then took the Memphis to Little Rock Military Road and crossed the White River at the site of present-day Clarendon. They then proceeded west through what is now the White River NWR as they continued on to Little Rock and the Indian Territory.

The fourth route, known as the “Water Route,” was utilized by four detachments which traveled by steamboat and flatboat down the Tennessee River. The detachments were led by Captain G.S. Drane and Lieutenants Edward Deas, John Drew, and R.H.K. Whitely. The Deas, Drew, and Whitely detachments traveled by boat through what is now the Wheeler NWR and two campsites within the refuge associated with the Deas and Whitely detachments have been identified. The Drane detachment marched overland across northern Alabama and did not enter the refuge. All four detachments traveled by steamboat from Waterloo, Alabama down the Tennessee River and passed through what is now the Tennessee NWR. No campsites or other involvement with the Tennessee NWR has been identified.

## **Cherokee Removal – The Northern Route**

Before and after the passage of the Indian Removal Act by Congress in 1830, numerous Cherokee families sold their property and moved west to the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). In 1832, Benjamin Currey led 626 Cherokee by boat from the Hiwassee River west to the Indian Territory and another group of 457 Cherokee left in 1834.<sup>69</sup> With the signing of the Treaty of New Echota in 1835, additional Cherokee felt resisting removal was futile and moved west. These included a group of approximately 600 pro-treaty Cherokee who left New Echota in January of 1837 and an additional 466 Cherokee led by Major Ridge which left from Ross's Landing in March of 1837.

Approximately 360 Cherokee led by Lt. B.B. Cannon left the Cherokee Agency near Charleston on October 14, 1837. Cannon marched his group west across the Cumberland Plateau to Nashville and then crossed the Ohio River at Golconda, Illinois. After traveling through southern Illinois, Cannon and his party crossed the Mississippi River at the Hamburg Landing to Bainbridge, Missouri. Cannon's party then traveled to Jackson,

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69 Nance, 11.

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Farmington, and Caledonia before stopping for several days on Huzzah Creek in Crawford County due to illness in many families. After a few days, Cannon's group of Cherokee continued southwest through Missouri passing through Springfield and into Arkansas. After going through Fayetteville, the Cannon party entered the Indian Territory and disbanded at Bean's on the Barren Fork south of present-day Westville, Oklahoma on December 30, 1837.

Cannon's journey was an important one because his route was followed by the majority of the Cherokee who would emigrate in 1838. Because of the difficulty of the journey and the deaths which occurred along the way, the Cannon party's physician, Dr. G.S. Townsend, wrote to the Bureau of Indian Affairs urging them to transport the Cherokee by boat rather than by going overland.<sup>70</sup> Townsend argued that going by boat to Boonville, Missouri the Cherokee would only have 200 miles of overland travel rather than the 800 miles completed by the Cannon group. Despite this warning no substantial efforts to transport the bulk of the Cherokee via water routes were implemented by the US government.

The United States War Department began to forcibly roundup and confine the Cherokee people in 1838. General Winfield Scott was in charge of the removal and had a force of over 7,000 troops and state militia to assist in the operation. Scott divided the Cherokee Nation into three military districts and established several military posts throughout the nation. Troops detained the Cherokee at these various posts until officials finalized details of the trip. The Cherokee were then transported to three main emigration depots from which they began their journey.

These three emigration depots were the Cherokee Agency at Fort Cass in present-day Charleston, Tennessee, a camp four miles upstream from Ross's Landing in present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee, and a camp south of Fort Payne, Alabama. Seventeen detachments left from the three main emigrating depots, between June 6th and December 5th of 1838. The journey took place over various land and water routes and averaged over 1,000 miles. The first three detachments departed from Ross's Landing in June of 1838. They were accompanied by military escorts and were largely composed of "uncooperative" Georgia Cherokee strongly opposed to the removal.<sup>71</sup> Two of these three groups left Ross's Landing and traveled west by steamboat. The third group traveled overland from Ross's Landing to Waterloo, Alabama, and from that point traveled by river to the Indian Territory. Only one other detachment received a military escort - that conducted by John Bell who led the "pro-treaty" Cherokee. The remainder of the Cherokee was transferred under the supervision of Cherokee Chief John Ross, who had made an arrangement with General Scott to allow the Cherokee to conduct the removal themselves. Scott also agreed to delay the removal until the fall and improved weather conditions.<sup>72</sup>

The majority of the Cherokee were concentrated at the Cherokee Agency area. Several camps were located in this general vicinity, which covered a four mile by twelve mile area along the Hiwassee River extending from the Cherokee Agency at Calhoun to Fort Cass, which was near present day Charleston. Camps in the area included those located on Savannah Branch, Gunstocker Spring, Candies Creek, and Mouse Creek. Approximately 2,000 Cherokee were located at Camp Ross, which was situated about thirteen miles south of Fort Cass, where the town of Cleveland is today. In Cleveland at Fort Hill Cemetery is a site of a Cherokee internment camp.<sup>73</sup> Camps were also organized around four miles above Ross's Landing in present-day Chattanooga. The camp in Alabama was located approximately eight miles south of Fort Payne and contained around 1,000 Cherokee.

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<sup>70</sup> Gilbert, 62.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>72</sup> Nance, "The Trail of Tears in Tennessee," 14-15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 23.

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Eleven of the thirteen detachments comprising some 11,500 Cherokee, traveled overland following what is known as the Northern Route. Nine of the eleven detachments that took this route left from camps in the vicinity of the Cherokee Agency, near Fort Cass and Camp Ross. Two detachments, those conducted by Richard Taylor and James Brown, left from camps upstream from Ross's Landing, near present day Chattanooga. This variation of the Northern Route is known as the Taylor Route. Another variation of the northern route is the Hildebrand Route, taken by the detachment conducted by Peter Hildebrand.

The detachments left the Cherokee Agency over a period of two months in October and November of 1838. Detachments that left the area of the Cherokee Agency crossed the Tennessee River at Blythe's Ferry. From Blythe's Ferry, the route headed northwestward and ascended Walden's Ridge and crossed this wide upland area. The detachments descended Walden's Ridge through Lloyd's Gap and entered the Sequatchie Valley. After crossing this narrow valley, the Cherokee ascended the escarpment to the top of the Cumberland Plateau on the Higgenbotham Trace, also known as Rainey's Trace.<sup>74</sup> The Cherokee remained on the Higgenbotham Trace to the town of McMinnville and then headed northwest along what is now the general route of State Route 1 (US 70S) to first Woodbury and then Murfreesboro and Nashville.

Through Nashville, the Cherokee most likely followed Cherry Street (now Fourth Avenue) and crossed the Cumberland River at the suspension bridge. After crossing the Cumberland the detachments marched northwest to the community of Port Royal. The Northern Route enters Kentucky west of the town of Guthrie. The parties then continued heading northwest toward Hopkinsville. From Hopkinsville, the detachments continued to move northwestward passing first through Princeton and then leading to Fredonia.<sup>75</sup> The detachments then followed the route now approximated by State Route 133 to Berry's Ferry on the Ohio River.<sup>76</sup>

The detachments of the Northern Route of the Trail of Tears crossed the Ohio River from Kentucky into Illinois at Berry's Ferry. This ferry connected Kentucky with the community of Golconda, Illinois on the west bank of the Ohio River. The detachments then headed west along the general alignment of present day State Route 146 to Vienna and Jonesboro. The various detachments crossed the Mississippi River at Green's Ferry and Littleton's Ferry at Bainbridge, Missouri. Green's Ferry was the primary crossing point on the river and on the Missouri side this crossing is now commemorated by the Trail of Tears State Park. In Missouri, the detachments headed west along a road similar to the alignment of State Route 177 to the town of Jackson. Here they turned northwestward to the town of Farmington and then west through the community of Caledonia. The detachments continued west through Steelville and passed by the Massey Ironworks. Past the community of Rolla, the detachments followed roads southwest to Waynesville and Springfield. Continuing their march to the southwest, the detachments followed the road to Cassville, Missouri and crossed into Arkansas near Pea Ridge. The detachments continued west through the towns of Prairie Grove and Lincoln, and then on into the Indian Territory where they disbanded.

### **Cherokee Removal - Benge's Route**

John Benge led the one detachment of Cherokee that left from Alabama. They embarked on their long journey on October 4, 1838 from a camp in Wills Valley, approximately eight miles south of Fort Payne, Alabama. Of all the routes of the Trail of Tears, Benge's route is the most obscure. It is known that the group traveled through Huntsville and Gunter's Landing in Alabama, and Reynoldsburg on the Tennessee River in Tennessee. Evidence also suggests that they crossed the Mississippi River at Columbus, Kentucky. Although

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<sup>74</sup> King, 22; Nance, 29.

<sup>75</sup> King, 29; NPS Map Supplement, Maps 29-31.

<sup>76</sup> NPS Map Supplement, Maps 32-33.

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the specific route of the Benge detachment is not known, a likely route has been determined through an examination of period maps.<sup>77</sup>

The site of the camp near Fort Payne, Alabama, has never been identified, but it is believed to be approximately eight miles south of Fort Payne. Duane King suggests that the site might be present day Lebanon in Big Will's Valley. Reports to John Ross and General Scott from the Benge detachment reveal that it crossed the Tennessee River at Gunter's Landing in Alabama and then headed north to Huntsville. Gunter's Landing is now the site of present-day Guntersville which is approximately 25 miles east of the Wheeler NWR. From Gunter's Landing, the Benge detachment most likely traveled what was the main road between Guntersville and Huntsville, which ran through the communities of Cottonville and New Hope.<sup>78</sup> From Huntsville, Benge's detachment most likely entered Tennessee south of the community of Ardmore in Giles County along the general route of present day US 31.

In Tennessee, the Benge detachment traveled north from Ardmore to Pulaski. The detachment then headed northwest along a series of roads which connected with the community of Mt. Pleasant in Maury County. Past Mt. Pleasant, the detachment ascended a ridgeline and crossed the Natchez Trace past Isom's Store. The detachment then followed a road northwest to Centerville, crossing the Duck River by bridge or ferry. Continuing northwest the detachment would have been on roads taking it past the Duck River iron furnace and on to Reynoldsburg on the Tennessee River.

Reynoldsburg was originally the county seat of Humphreys County and a two-story brick courthouse was built at the community in 1812. In 1837, the county seat was moved to Waverly but Reynoldsburg continued to be an important ferry crossing and steamboat stop on the river when the Benge detachment crossed in 1838. Benge's detachment crossed the Tennessee River at Reynoldsburg Landing on November 3, 1838.<sup>79</sup> Thomas Wyly operated the ferry and was a leading merchant in the town from 1822 to 1860. Wyly was from Alabama, reportedly spoke Cherokee, and sold some \$400 worth of provisions to the detachment.<sup>80</sup> Reynoldsburg's importance declined after the county seat was moved and what remained of the town was burned in the Civil War. At present, the DuPont Company owns a large tract of land in the area, and numerous factories now cover the town site. The river landing site has been inundated by Kentucky Lake. Some small segments of the original Reynoldsburg Turnpike are visible just to the south of the Napier Cemetery. The site of Reynoldsburg is located approximately ten miles north of the Duck River Unit of the Tennessee NWR.

After being ferried across the Tennessee River, the Benge detachment marched northwest through the county seat community of Paris and then on to the Mississippi River at Columbus, Kentucky. After crossing the river into Missouri, Benge's detachment then proceeded southwest to the Arkansas state line crossing the Current River at Indian Ford near Hicks Ferry on or about December 7th. In Arkansas, Benge's detachment continued until it reached Smithville.<sup>81</sup> From Smithville, there are two logical routes that the Benge detachment might have taken. It is known that at least a portion of the detachment traveled south to Batesville. The *Batesville News* reported that on December 15th a large number of Cherokee passed nearby and a number came into the town for supplies. This group likely rejoined the main detachment near Athens. After Athens the detachment continued west toward Fayetteville, where they joined the main Northern Route into the Indian Territory. This detachment possibly disbanded near the Woodhall Farm west of the Arkansas state line.

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<sup>77</sup> Nance, 38.

<sup>78</sup> King, 78-79, maps T-94, T-95.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>80</sup> King, 1999, 80.

<sup>81</sup> King, Map T-99.



## Cherokee Removal – Bell’s Route

This detachment led by conductor John Bell differed from the parties under Cherokee Chief John Ross's supervision. Bell's detachment was composed of approximately 660 Cherokee who had favored the Treaty of New Echota and opposed Ross. Possibly to avoid conflict with the Ross parties, the Bell detachment opted for a more direct route to the Indian territory through Tennessee and Arkansas using the Memphis–Little Rock Military Road. The group also differed from the Ross detachments in that it was accompanied by a military escort under Lieutenant Edward Deas.<sup>82</sup> Deas' presence was to protect Bell's Cherokee from any reprisals from the anti-treaty Cherokee. The route of the Bell detachment can be followed with some reasonable accuracy due to the existence of payment vouchers which detail expenditures along the route. These vouchers record amounts expended on ferries, supplies, toll bridges and other costs and to whom payment was made. Through historical research, many individuals and locations have been identified that provide an understanding of the route and progress of the Bell detachment.

The Bell detachment left the emigration depot north of Charleston on October 11, 1838 and traveled to Chattanooga. After crossing the Tennessee River three times, the detachment then turned westward to climb the Cumberland Plateau at Monteagle Mountain. After crossing the mountain, the detachment traveled west on the main roads connecting the county seat communities of Winchester, Fayetteville, Pulaski, Lawrenceburg and Waynesboro. The detachment crossed the Tennessee River again at the ferry landing at Savannah. Continuing west across the state, the detachment crossed the Hatchie River at a bridge and ferry site west of Bolivar. After passing through Bolivar, the detachment traveled to Somerville and then on to Memphis. At Memphis, the detachment crossed the Mississippi River and entered Arkansas in late November.<sup>83</sup>

The route of the Bell detachment through Arkansas was the subject of a study by Duane King in 2001 for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. The Bell detachment crossed the Mississippi River on November 25th and 26th and traveled toward present-day Marion, Arkansas. From the Marion area the detachment proceeded southwestward along an alignment similar to that of today's State Route 218. On November 28th, payment vouchers were issued to H.N. Ferguson for ferriage across Blackfish Lake. From Blackfish Lake, the Bell detachment continued west on a newly improved road to the St. Francis River, where they crossed on a ferry operated by William Strong. To the west of the Blackfish Ferry and the St. Francis River was the four-story log dwelling of William Strong. Strong's house was used as an inn on the Military Road and was one of the major supply stations during Indian removal in the 1830s. This imposing dwelling was built in 1827 by plantation owner William Strong. Located at the base of Crowley's Ridge, William Strong sold provisions to Bell's detachment on November 29th and 30th and his plantation was likely a campsite. After purchasing supplies at Strong's, the detachment continued on the Military Road through what is now Village Creek State Park. For some distance the trail followed the alignment of present State Highway 306 and crossed the L'Angeuille River on a bridge built by William Strong.<sup>84</sup>

Bell's detachment reached the White River on December 8<sup>th</sup> and spent two days being ferried across the river. Deas' list of disbursements included \$150 paid to Richard Pyburn who provided the ferry service across the river.<sup>85</sup> On December 9<sup>th</sup>, Deas also disbursed funds to Hopkan Burkhart and William Harris, presumably for food or forage for animals. On December 10<sup>th</sup> funds were disbursed to Daniel Wilder who lived on the west side of the Rock Roe Bayou and operated a small stand. The Bell Detachment left the White River area and continued west towards Little Rock. During these two days the detachment would have camped on both banks

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<sup>82</sup> Nance, 33.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 37; King, 87.

<sup>84</sup> Correspondence from Duane King to Mark Christ, October 6, 2002.

<sup>85</sup> King, Bell Detachment in Arkansas, 29.

of the river and on the high ground to the west of the Rock Roe Bayou Bridge.

The Bell detachment then proceeded west to Little Rock on the Military Road.<sup>86</sup> The Bell detachment reached Little Rock on December 16<sup>th</sup>. From Little Rock the detachment marched overland to Van Buren. The detachment turned northward at Van Buren and traveled to Vineyard Post Office, what is now Evansville, along the general route of present day US 59. The detachment disbanded at Vineyard Post Office on January 7, 1839 just east of the Indian Territory in an effort to avoid any encounters with the Ross detachments.<sup>87</sup>

### **Cherokee Removal – the Water Routes**

In 1838, four detachments of Cherokee traveled to Indian Territory primarily via river. Three of these detachments were composed of Georgia Cherokee and were accompanied by military escorts. The commanders were Lieutenant Edward Deas, Lieutenant R.H.K. Whitely, and Captain G.S. Drane. The fourth detachment that traveled by water was a Ross affiliated group headed by Captain John Drew.<sup>88</sup> All four of the detachments traveled down the Tennessee River to Paducah on the Ohio River. From Paducah, the water route was south to the Mississippi River and then up the Arkansas River until embarking overland to the Indian Territory.

The Water Routes of the Cherokee passed through the present boundaries of the Wheeler and Tennessee NWRs. For the most part this consisted of the Cherokee and their escorts traveling along the water via steamboats or flatboats. Potential property types associated with this route of the Cherokee Trail of Tears would include campsites and gravesites. The Water Routes of the Cherokee did not ascend the White River and there was no involvement with the White River NWR.

### **The Lt. Edward Deas Detachment and the Wheeler NWR**

The first detachment to leave by water was the detachment led by Lt. Edward Deas, which left from the camps four miles above Ross's Landing on June 6, 1838. There were 489 people in the group when it started. Ross's Landing was established by John Ross in 1815 who operated a ferry and warehouse at this location. At Ross's Landing, the Deas detachment boarded the steamboat the *George Guess* and traveled down the Tennessee River. The detachment passed Gunter's Landing at 9:00 A.M. on June 8<sup>th</sup> and the steamboat continued downstream until stopping six miles above Decatur. According to Deas' journal "...and such of the people as choose have gone ashore to sleep and cook."<sup>89</sup> Deas does not mention which side of the river the Cherokee camped. The detachment reached Decatur on the morning of June 9<sup>th</sup> and was to travel by rail to Tuscumbia Landing. No train cars were available that day and the Cherokee did not board and go by rail until June 10<sup>th</sup>. At the Tuscumbia Landing most of the detachment boarded the steamboat *Smelter* and proceeded downstream to the town of Waterloo where they camped overnight before continuing on the Tennessee River to Paducah and beyond to the Indian Territory.

### **The Lt. Edward Deas Detachment and the Tennessee NWR**

The Deas Detachment left Waterloo on the steamboat *Smelter* on around 2:00 P.M. on June 11<sup>th</sup> and sailed down the Tennessee River. According to Deas the *Smelter* traveled at a rate of 10 to 12 miles per hour and did

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<sup>86</sup> King, 88, Maps T-106-108.

<sup>87</sup> King, 88, Maps T-107 - T-110; NPS Map Supplement, Maps 238-243.

<sup>88</sup> King, 56-63.

<sup>89</sup> Rozema, Voices From the Trail of Tears, 103.

not stop to take on wood until 11:00 A.M. on June 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>90</sup> This would have meant that the *Smelter* traveled some 200 to 250 miles placing this location somewhere in southern Kentucky. The *Smelter* reached Paducah and the Ohio River between 4:00 and 5:00 P.M. on June 12th. The detachment then proceeded down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers before continuing west on the Arkansas River to the Indian Territory. Once this detachment was delivered, Lt. Deas returned to Tennessee where he would later conduct the John Bell detachment overland to the Indian Territory.<sup>91</sup>

### **The Lt. R.H.K. Whitely Detachment and the Wheeler NWR**

The second detachment to leave by water was approximately 1,000 Cherokee led by Lt. R.H.K. Whitely. The journey of this detachment followed much of the same route as the detachment led by Lt. Edward Deas. On June 12, 1838, this detachment left its camp four miles north of Chattanooga and proceeded to Ross's Landing. Six flatboats were used to transport the detachment downriver to Brown's Ferry where they camped and waited for additional Cherokee to join them. On June 16th the detachment left in eight flatboats and "floated rapidly through the suck, pot, skillet, and pan, all places of dangerous navigation."<sup>92</sup>

The steamboat *George Guess* was also used to transport some of the detachment. On June 16th the detachment camped overnight at Kelly's Ferry. Past Kelly's Ferry, the flatboats were towed behind steamboat *George Guess* downriver. On the evening of June 19<sup>th</sup> the detachment camped on the "bank of the Tennessee river at 6:00 P.M." about 22 miles upstream from Decatur.<sup>93</sup> The next day on June 20<sup>th</sup> the detachment traveled 20 miles before landing at 1:30 P.M. two miles above Decatur and camping on the opposite bank of the river. The next day, the detachment reached Decatur in the morning and boarded the train cars of the Decatur, Courtland and Tuscumbia River for the short journey west to the depot at the Tuscumbia Landing. Between June 22nd and June 26th the detachment was forced to camp at or near the Tuscumbia Landing while awaiting boats to carry them downriver.<sup>94</sup>

On June 27th, the detachment left Tuscumbia Landing and floated on flatboats down the Tennessee to Colbert's Shoals and then on to Waterloo. Here the detachment camped on the south side of the river opposite the community. The steamboat *Smelter* arrived at Waterloo on June 29th and the detachment boarded the boat and proceeded downriver the following day.

### **The Lt. R.H.K. Whitely Detachment and the Tennessee NWR**

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Lt. Whitely Detachment left Waterloo, Alabama in the morning and stopped for wood at 3:30 P.M. and again at 10:00 P.M. No information on the location of these stops is known and no vouchers for the payments for wood have yet been located. After traveling 150 miles downriver the *Smelter* was forced to stop for the night on account of fog. The next morning on July 1<sup>st</sup>, the *Smelter* got underway at 6:30 A.M. and traveled 125 miles to Paducah where the boat took on supplies.<sup>95</sup> The *Smelter* stopped on July 3rd at Memphis for supplies and traveled up the White River entering the Arkansas River via the cut-off. The detachment then traveled by both water and land before entering the Indian Territory and disbanding on the head of Lee's Creek southeast of Stillwell.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> King, 60.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 56-62, Maps T-82 - T-83.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 1999, 67.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>95</sup> King, 68.

<sup>96</sup> Duane King, October 16, 2002, keynote address, Trail of Tears Association Meeting.

### **The Capt. G.S. Drane Detachment and the Wheeler NWR**

The third detachment to leave by water was that commanded by Capt. G.S. Drane. Because of drought conditions, this detachment traveled overland to Waterloo, Alabama, and did not pass through the present boundary of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. Containing some 1,000 Cherokee, the detachment left from the camps above Ross's Landing on June 17, 1838 and traveled on the south side of the Tennessee River to Ross's Landing.<sup>97</sup> The Drane detachment crossed the Tennessee River at Ross's Landing, across Moccasin Bend, and crossed the Tennessee again at Brown's Ferry. The group then took several roads before entering Alabama along a route similar to that of today's US 72.<sup>98</sup> Drane's detachment approximated the present day US 72 alignment to Florence, Alabama which would have been north of the any of the property currently within the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. At this point the detachment turned west following the general route of what is now State Route 14, which took them into Waterloo.

### **The Capt. G.S. Drane Detachment and the Tennessee NWR**

At Waterloo, the detachment boarded steamboats to travel downriver to Paducah. No journal describing any stopping points along the Tennessee River have been identified.<sup>99</sup> The steamboats took them down the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers to the White River cut-off, from which they entered the Arkansas River. At Lewisburg, Arkansas, above Little Rock, the steamboats could not proceed further upriver due to low water. The Drane detachment then traveled overland before disbanding at Mrs. Webber's in the Indian Territory on September 5, 1838.<sup>100</sup>

### **The Capt. John Drew Detachment and the Wheeler NWR**

The Capt. John Drew detachment was the last group of Cherokee to leave the east. The detachment consisting of just 231 Cherokee, left the Agency near Calhoun on December 5, 1838 and included Cherokee Chief John G. Ross and his family. By this time the drought in Tennessee was over resulting in higher water in the rivers. This detachment left the Agency on four flatboats and floated down the Hiwassee and Tennessee Rivers to Ross's Landing.<sup>101</sup> During the month of December the detachment floated down the Tennessee River paying for pilots to safely transport them through the "Suck" and other hazardous areas near Chattanooga. The exact days when the detachment passed through the present boundary of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge is unknown as is any campsites used along the river.

### **The Capt. John Drew Detachment and the Tennessee NWR**

Past Decatur, the Capt. John Drew Detachment paid tolls to use the Muscle Shoals Canal which bypassed the worst of the rapids in the Muscle Shoals area. This canal was built by the state of Alabama and was used until the mid-1840s.<sup>102</sup> This canal is now under Wilson Lake. At Tuscumbia, John Ross purchased the steamboat *Victoria* for \$10,000 and the detachment boarded the boat for the trip downriver.<sup>103</sup> The *Victoria* followed the route previously followed by the other water route detachments and passed through the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge mid-January. The exact days when the detachment passed through the present boundary of

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<sup>97</sup> Nance, 42.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>99</sup> King, 56.

<sup>100</sup> Duane King, October 16, 2002 keynote address, Trail of Tears Association Meeting.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 1999, 64.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 64.

the refuge is unknown as is any campsites used along the river. The detachment proceeded to Paducah and Memphis before entering the Arkansas River. It was the intent of Drew and Ross to proceed upriver to Fort Gibson but low water forced the *Victoria* to stop at the mouth of the Illinois River near present-day Dardenelle. Ross was forced to hire teamsters and wagons which transported the detachment into the Indian Territory along a road approximating US 64 and State Route 82 to the Illinois Campground near Tahlequah and the detachment disbanded on March 18, 1839.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 57-58, 63-65.

#### IV. THE TRAIL OF TEARS – NATIONAL REGISTER-ELIGIBILITY AND THE TENNESSEE, WHEELER AND WHITE RIVER NWRS

##### *The Tennessee NWR*

The associations of the Trail of Tears with the Tennessee NWR consist of the passage through the refuge via steamboat by Cherokee, Creek and Chickasaw contingents. No evidence has yet been discovered suggesting that any of these parties disembarked and camped along the shore. All of these contingents boarded steamboats at either Waterloo or Tuscumbia, Alabama and then sailed downstream on the Tennessee River to the Ohio River at Paducah. The distance between Tuscumbia and Paducah is 252 miles by river and steamboats disembarking from both Tuscumbia and downstream at Waterloo would have been able to sail this length in less than 24 hours. While it is possible that these steamboats stopped to take on wood at landings in the refuge, no definitive accounts of this occurring have been identified.

The first involvement by any of the Indian tribes going west through the refuge that of the exploration party of the Chickasaws in October of 1833. After the signing of the Treaty of Pontotoc, an exploration party consisting of 21 Chickasaw chiefs traveled to the Indian Territory to inspect the proposed relocation lands. They departed Tuscumbia, Alabama on October 12, 1833 and reached Memphis by steamboat on October 21<sup>st</sup>. The second group to pass through the refuge was the contingent of 500 Creeks which traveled west in December of 1835. This group was led by Benjamin Marshall and conducted by Lt. Edward Deas and William Beattie. At Tuscumbia, most of this party of Creeks embarked on a steamboat while a smaller group marched overland to Memphis with horses and livestock. Both parties arrived at Memphis on December 31, 1835 where they again divided into water and land groups. No other contingents of Chickasaws or Creeks are known to have passed through the Tennessee NWR. As previously noted, most of the records detailing the passage west of these two tribes have yet to be fully researched at the National Archives. It is possible that future research efforts may identify more direct involvement with the refuge.

All four of the Water Route detachments of the Cherokee passed through the Tennessee NWR but there is no record that any of these detachments stopped to take on wood or camp on land within the refuge. The Lt. Edward Deas Detachment left Waterloo on the steamboat *Smelter* on around 2:00 P.M. on June 11, 1838 and according to Deas the *Smelter* traveled at a rate of 10 to 12 miles per hour and did not stop to take on wood until 11:00 A.M. the next day. This would have meant that the *Smelter* traveled some 200 to 250 miles placing this location somewhere in southern Kentucky. The *Smelter* reached Paducah and the Ohio River between 4:00 and 5:00 P.M. on June 12th.

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Lt. R.H.K. Whitely Detachment left Waterloo, Alabama in the morning and stopped for wood at 3:30 P.M. and again at 10:00 P.M. No information on the location of these stops is known and no vouchers for the payments for wood appear to have been issued. It may be that no vouchers were issued because the wood may have been included in the overall cost of procuring the steamboat. After traveling 150 miles downriver, Whitely's account states that the *Smelter* was forced to stop for the night on account of fog. If Whitely's reckoning of the distance is correct, this would place this overnight stop at approximately mile marker 77 on the Tennessee River. This location is one mile south of the mouth of Hurricane Creek and approximately 3.5 miles south of the southern boundary of the Big Sandy Unit of the Tennessee NWR.

It should be noted that Whitely's overall mileage accounts appears to be in error. Today, Waterloo is 227 miles from the mouth of the river at Paducah. In 1838, Whitely calculated his mileage between Waterloo and Paducah at 275 miles. A review of historic maps from 1838 shows that the length of the river has not changed extensively over the past 170 years, and certainly not totaling the 48 additional miles claimed by Whitely. For the most part the mileage and information documented by Whitely and his fellow Army officers during Indian

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Removal is fairly accurate, and Whitely may have been simply misinformed or wrote down his mileage incorrectly.

At Waterloo, the detachment under Capt. G.S. Drane boarded steamboats on July 14, 1838 to travel downriver to Paducah. No journal or vouchers describing any stopping points along the Tennessee River has been identified. The final Water Route detachment to travel through the Tennessee NWR was that of Capt. John Drew in January of 1839. At Tusculumbia, John Ross purchased the steamboat *Victoria* for \$10,000 and the detachment boarded the boat for the trip downriver. The *Victoria* followed the route previously followed by the other water route detachments and passed through the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge. The exact days when the detachment passed through the present boundary of the refuge is unknown as is any campsites used along the river. The detachment proceeded to Paducah and Memphis before entering the Arkansas River.

From the available records, no campsites or gravesites associated with the Trail of Tears appear to be within the boundaries of the Tennessee NWR. None of the officers in charge of the Cherokee detachments mention going ashore in order to camp overnight or to perform a burial service. It is possible that Whitely's detachment stopped for wood within the refuge but these locations cannot be accurately ascertained. No known campsites or gravesites in the refuge are associated with the Chickasaw or Creek emigration, however, these records have yet to be fully researched.

### ***The Wheeler NWR***

The emigration of the Creek, Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations took place to the west of the property now part of the Wheeler NWR and there are no known historical associations with these tribes during the Trail of Tears. The lands comprising the Wheeler NWR were located to the west and northwest of the Cherokee Nation and have associations with the Cherokee emigration of 1838. Three of the Water Route detachments of the Cherokee traveled down the Tennessee River and through the boundary of the Wheeler NWR. Two of these detachments, those led by Lt. Edward Deas and Lt. R.H.K. Whitely, are known to have camped on the banks of the river and their approximate location can be identified.

### ***The Lt. Edward Deas Detachment Campsite - Description***

The detachment led Lt. Deas left from the camps four miles above Ross's Landing on June 6, 1838 with 800 people. At Ross's Landing, the Deas detachment boarded the steamboat the *George Guess* and traveled down the Tennessee River. The detachment passed Gunter's Landing at 9:00 A.M. on June 8<sup>th</sup> and the steamboat continued downstream until stopping six miles above Decatur. According to Deas' journal "...and such of the people as choose have gone ashore to sleep and cook."<sup>105</sup> Deas did not mention which side of the river the Cherokee camped. The detachment reached Decatur on the morning of June 9<sup>th</sup> and then traveled by rail to Tuscumbia Landing before continuing west. Throughout his journey, and especially in Alabama, Deas reported many Cherokee slipping away to join other detachments or returning back to the mountains. When Deas arrived in Arkansas his detachment consisted of 489 persons.

Efforts to more accurately locate Deas' campsite were unsuccessful. Copies of the vouchers Deas' paid for supplies during his trip are located at the Sequoyah Research Center in Little Rock. A review of these records shows that he paid two firms for provisions at Ross's Landing but did not issue any other vouchers or disbursements until June 17<sup>th</sup> when he paid for provisions in Tuscumbia.<sup>106</sup> It was hoped that there may have been a voucher issued on the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> to a property owner for provisions but Deas' evidently had sufficient provisions purchased at Ross's Landing to last until Tuscumbia. Sources were also consulted at the Alabama State Library and Archives including a review of the *Madison County Democrat* newspaper published in Huntsville in 1838. Issues during the months of June and July were researched but there was no mention of any parties of Cherokee camping on the Tennessee River.<sup>107</sup> Diaries and journals from this period were also reviewed at the state archives but no mention of this campsite was identified.

Although no account of Deas' campsite was mentioned in the *Madison County Democrat*, the newspaper did publish a story which it obtained from the *Athens, Tennessee Courier* on July 21<sup>st</sup> which mentioned the arrival of Deas Detachment in Arkansas. This article stated the following:

#### **"The Work Goes Bravely On"**

The detachment of 1100 Cherokees which left Ross' Landing on the 6<sup>th</sup> ult. reached Fort Gibson, Arkansas, on the 18<sup>th</sup> after a passage of less than twelve days! – and what will still be more gratifying to those who feel an interest in Indian Removal, not a single death occurred, although there were numbers of feeble and aged men and squaw among the party,

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<sup>105</sup> Rozema, *Voices From the Trail of Tears*, 103.

<sup>106</sup> Lt. Edward Deas Disbursements, Cherokee Emigration Records, Sequoyah Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>107</sup> *Madison County Democrat*, Issues, June 2, June 16, June 20, July 7, July 11, and July 21, 1838. Alabama State Library and Archives, Montgomery, Alabama.



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and only one of the emigrants was sick, and the physician reported this one as convalescent, and out of all danger. Much credit is due to Lt. Deas, of the United States Army, and Dr. Folger, of North Carolina, the Attending Physician, for their care and attention to the emigrants. By the proper ventilation of the boats, and by a vigilant examination of all on board, the Agent and Physician succeeded in preventing all sickness, and in carrying this large body of emigrants with comfort and in good health to their new and (we doubt not) happier homes.”

Although overstating the number of Cherokee in the detachment, the article was correct in noting that no deaths occurred on the trip. Deaths were rare among the detachments that traveled the majority of the way by steamboat as opposed to the high death toll of those who went overland.

The historic downtown section of Decatur is located right at mile marker 305 of the Tennessee River. Deas’ description of his campsite as six miles above Decatur would place this location at mile marker 311. If the detachment camped on the north side of the river this would place the campsite just east of where Limestone Creek empties into the Tennessee in Limestone County. If the detachment camped on the south side of the river this would place the campsite in the vicinity of the Garth Slough in Morgan County.

The historic shoreline of both these locations has changed extensively since 1838. Historic maps of Alabama from the early 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are consistent in showing the river bed in the same location in the section southeast from Decatur (Figures 6-8). The Morgan County Soil Survey Map of 1918 shows a wide band of bottomland along the south side of the river (Figure 10). The Limestone County Soil Survey Map of 1914 also shows a wide section of bottomland to the east of Limestone Creek at the approximate location of the campsite if it were on the north side of the river (Figure 9).

Both of these locations were impacted when the Wheeler Dam was completed by the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1936. Located south of Elgin, Alabama this dam impounded a large area of the Tennessee River and inundated much of the bottomlands adjacent to the historic shoreline as part of the Wheeler Reservoir. In the same year as the impoundment, the United States Geological Survey completed a quadrangle map for the Decatur area. This quad map shows only a narrow strip of land remaining above the river at mile marker 311 on the south side of the river in Morgan County (Figure 11). Similarly, the map shows a narrow strip of land remaining on the north side in Limestone County. Since 1936, this shoreline has remained consistent and the Decatur quad map of 1982 shows the same configuration of land and water on both sides of the river (Figure 12).



Figure 6: The 1837 John LaTourrette Map of Alabama shows the Tennessee River shoreline and the approximate location of the Deas campsite.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John LaTourrette, *An Accurate Map of the State of Alabama and West Florida* (New York: Colton & Co., 1837), Alabama State Library and Archives, Montgomery, Alabama.



Figure 7: The Thomas Bradford Map of Alabama of 1838 shows a consistent shoreline on the river east of Decatur.

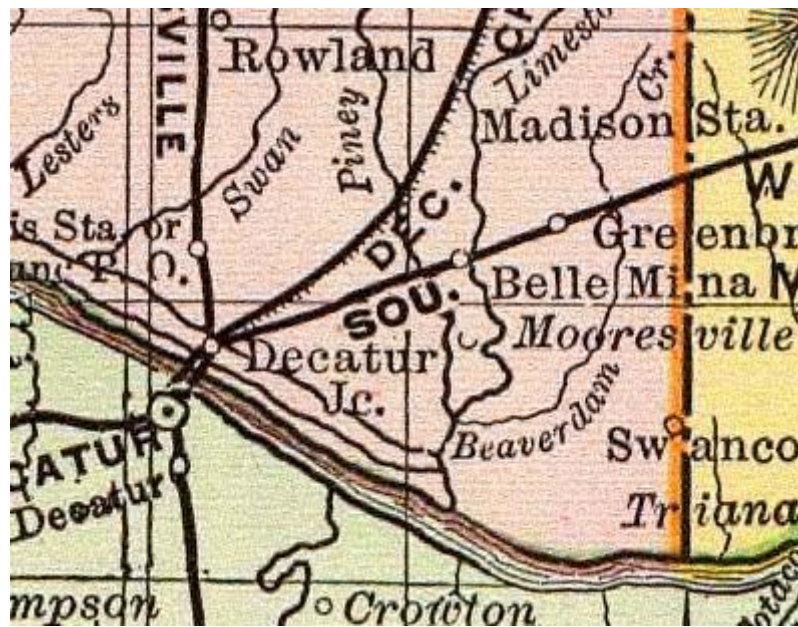
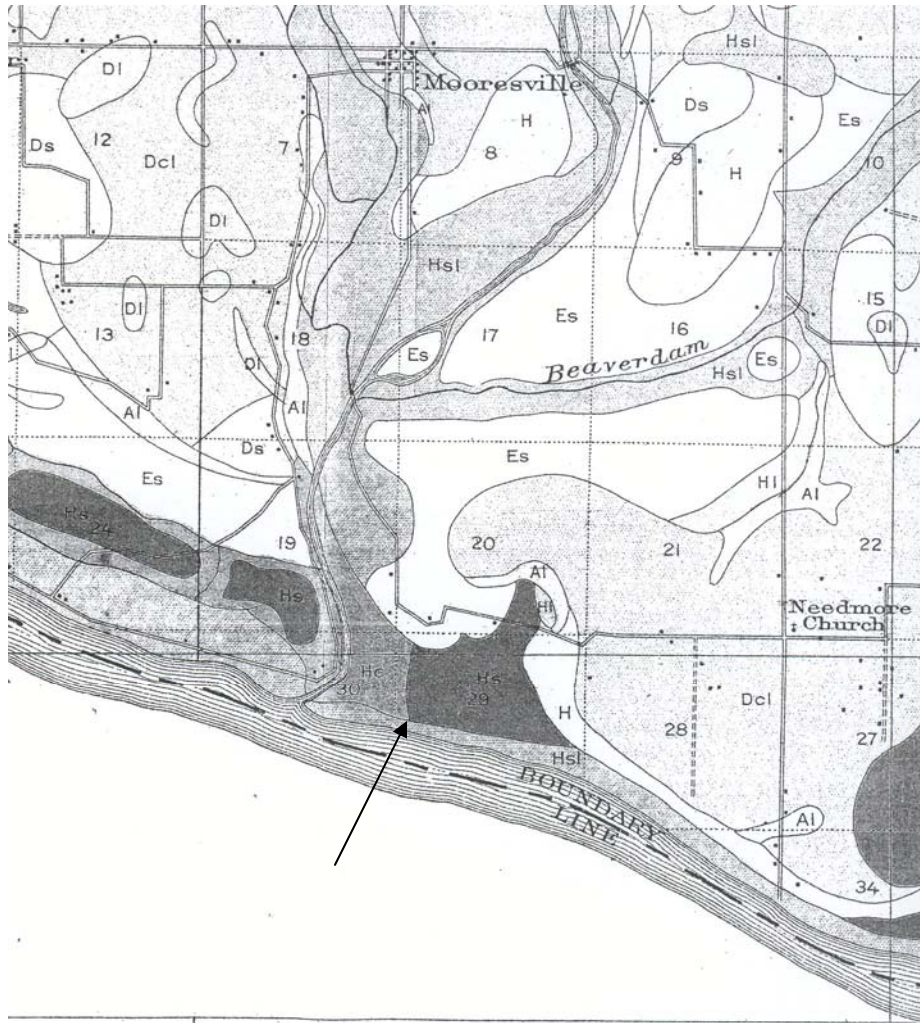


Figure 8: Tennessee River shoreline in 1897 (Rand McNally Map of Alabama).





**Figure 9:** The Limestone County Soil Survey map of 1914 shows a large area of bottomland on the north side of the Tennessee River in the approximate location of Deas' Campsite.

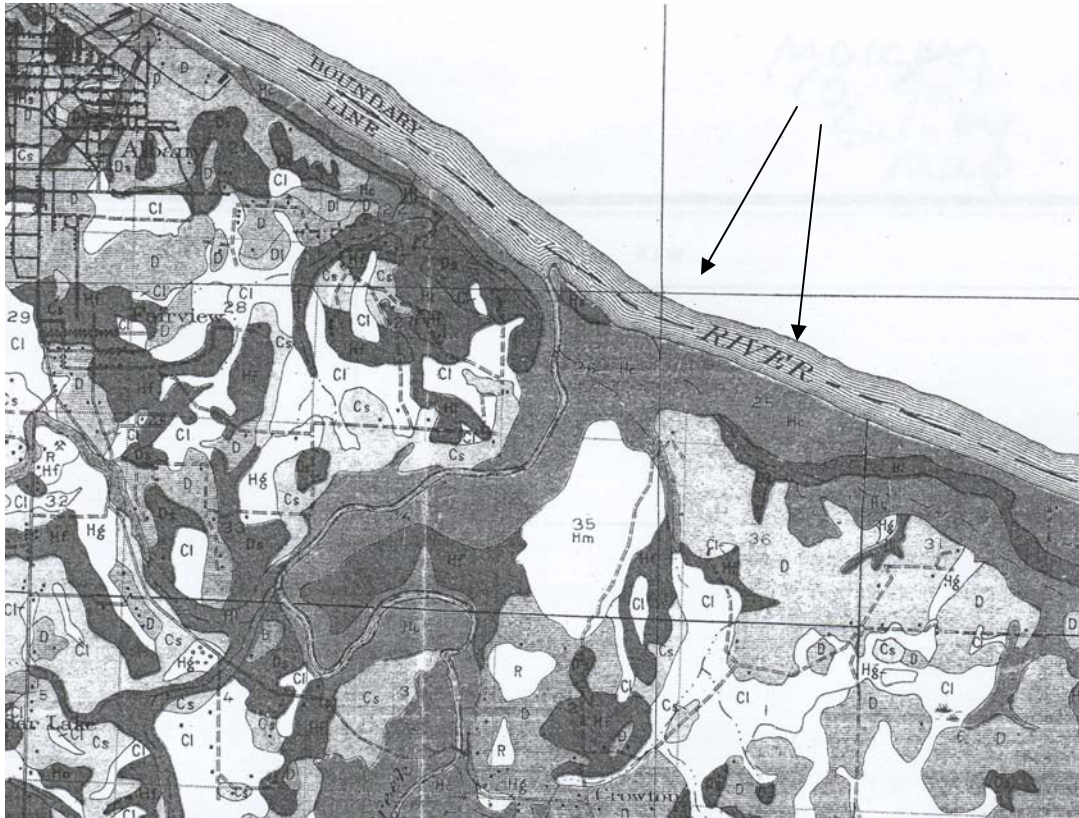
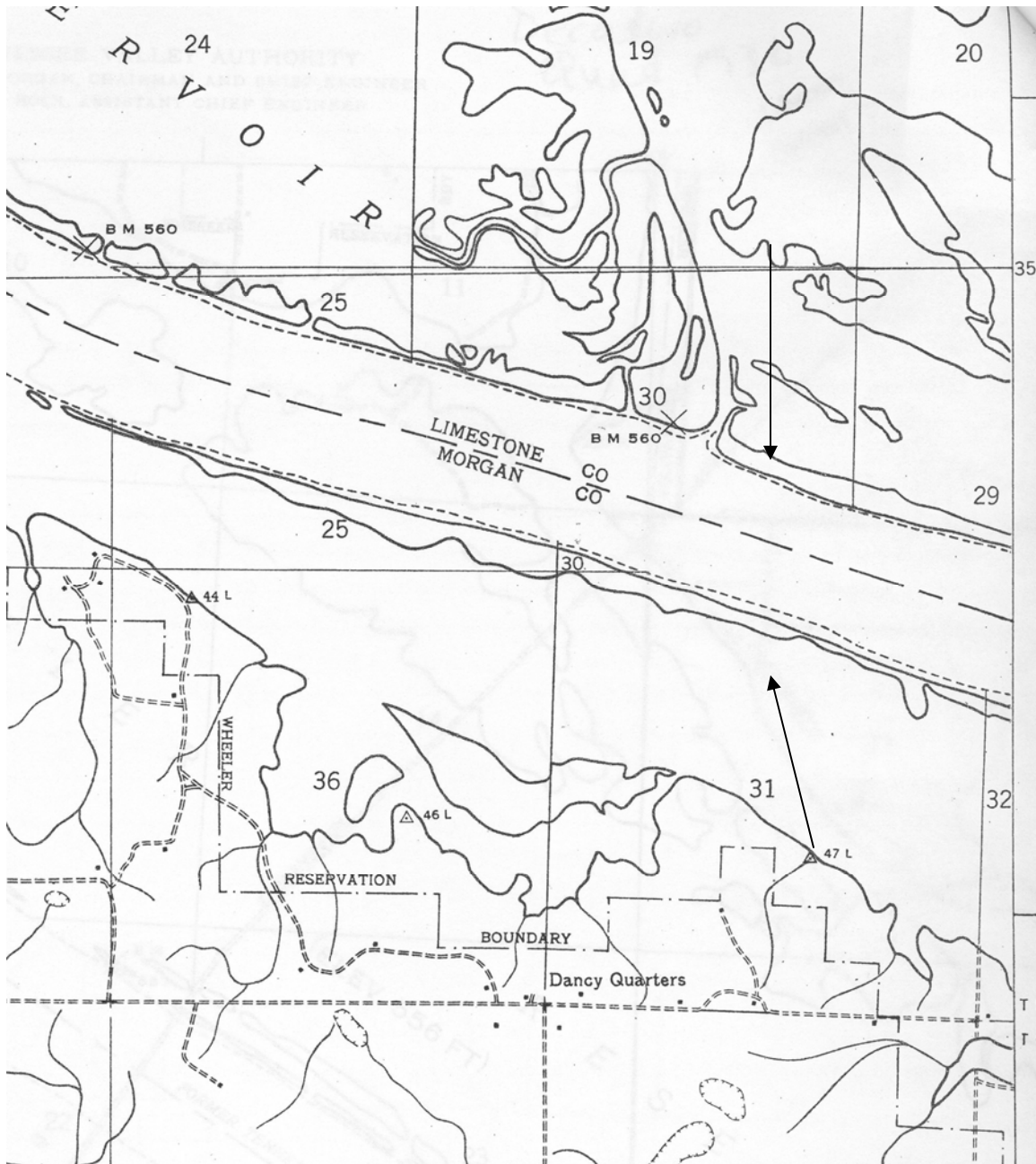
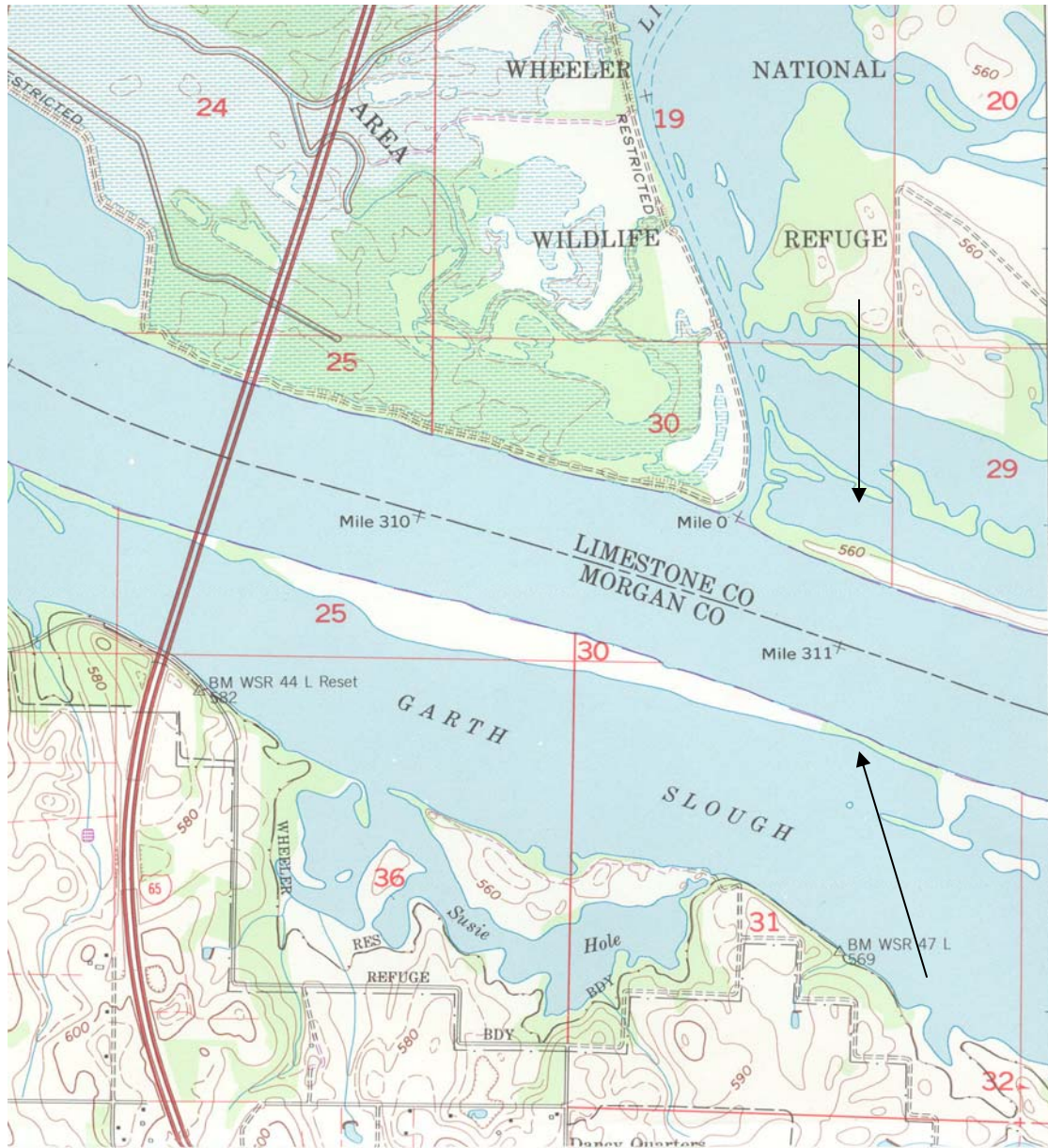


Figure 10: The Morgan County Soil Survey Map of 1918 shows the bottomland along the south side of the river at the location of the Whitley Campsite.



**Figure 11:** The Decatur USGS quad map of 1936 shows the original riverbed and the altered shoreline following the impoundment of Wheeler Lake in 1936. The arrows show the approximate location of Deas' Campsite.





**Figure 12:** The arrows show the location on the river which corresponds with Deas' description of camping six miles above Decatur. The shorelines on both sides of the river were substantially impacted when Wheeler Lake was created in 1936 (Decatur USGS quad map 1982).

## Historical and Interpretation Study, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail

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### *The Lt. Edward Deas Detachment Campsite – National Register Eligibility*

In 2002, the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), “The Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the Cherokee Trail of Tears” was submitted to the National Park Service. This MPDF outlined the property types associated with the Cherokee Trail of Tears and the integrity requirements needed to meet the criteria of the National Register. One of the property types so identified was “Campsites.” Campsites were defined as temporary sites used by the Cherokee as they left the emigration depots and journeyed west. The Cherokee were largely forced to sleep out in the elements on the open ground in tents supplied by the US government. For example, the Deas detachment camped as needed at the end of the day and where they could find adequate space and water as they descended the Tennessee River.

Campsites meeting registration requirements will be significant under National Register criteria A or D for their historic associations with the Cherokee Trail of Tears, and for their potential archaeological record. Under criterion A, the identification and location of campsites is important to understanding the exact routes taken by the Cherokee and to better understand the progression of their journey. Campsites also have the possibility of being significant under criterion D. While most campsites were ephemeral in nature and were used only a day or two, they may still have the potential to yield information on the Cherokee emigration.

A campsite must possess sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria. In particular a campsite must retain integrity of location, setting, feeling and association. Integrity of location is dependent upon the historical accuracy of the campsite and there should be sufficient historical evidence that identifies the site as a property where the Cherokee camped. The feeling and association of a campsite is largely conveyed through its surroundings and its ability to evoke a sense of time and place of the period of significance. The campsite must retain sufficient physical characteristics of its 1838-1839 appearance to convey the sense of an early 19th century camp. The setting of the campsite is retained through its location and surroundings and must closely resemble its physical appearance from its period of significance.

Through the application of this standard of integrity, the Lt. Edward Deas Detachment Campsite in the Wheeler NWR does not meet the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Only the approximate location of this campsite is known and there are no accounts which identify which side of the river was utilized. Of equal importance is the lack of feeling, setting and association. The impoundment of the Tennessee River in 1936 drastically altered the shoreline on both sides of the river in the general vicinity of the campsite. On the north side of the river the bottomland was inundated east of Limestone Creek and only a narrow strip of land remains at this location as opposed to the broad swath of farmland or woodlands which would have existed in 1838. Likewise, the 1838 bottomland on the south side of the river is also altered and only a strip of land now exists to denote the original shoreline. Directly behind this strip of land is the Garth Slough which encompasses much of the bottomland area which existed here in 1838. No integrity of the Lt. Edward Deas Detachment Campsite remains extant.





**Figure 13: The north shore of the Tennessee River is now a narrow island at the approximate location of the Deas campsite.**



**Figure 14: If the Deas Detachment camped on the north shore of the Tennessee River much of their campsite would now be under water due to the presence of the inlet east of Limestone Creek.**



**Figure 15: The south shore line of the Tennessee River is now a narrow island in the location of the Deas campsite.**



**Figure 16: If the Deas campsite were on the south shore of the Tennessee River much of the campsite would now be beneath the Garth Slough.**

*The Lt. R.H.K. Whitely Detachment Campsite - Description*

The second detachment to leave by water was approximately 1,000 Cherokee led by Lt. R.H.K. Whitely. The journey of this detachment followed much of the same route as the detachment led by Lt. Edward Deas. On June 12, 1838, this detachment left its camp four miles north of Chattanooga and proceeded to Ross's Landing. Six flatboats were used to transport the detachment downriver to Brown's Ferry where they camped and waited for additional Cherokee to join them. On June 16th the detachment left in eight flatboats and "floated rapidly through the suck, pot, skillet, and pan, all places of dangerous navigation."<sup>109</sup>

The steamboat *George Guess* was also used to transport some of the detachment. On June 16th the detachment camped overnight at Kelly's Ferry. Past Kelly's Ferry, the flatboats were towed behind steamboat *George Guess* downriver. On the evening of June 19<sup>th</sup> the detachment camped on the "bank of the Tennessee river at 6:00 P.M." about 22 miles upstream from Decatur.<sup>110</sup> The next day on June 20<sup>th</sup> the detachment traveled 20 miles before landing at 1:30 P.M. two miles above Decatur and camping on the opposite bank of the river. The next day, the detachment reached Decatur in the morning and traveled by train to the Tuscumbia Landing.

As in the case of the Deas detachment, efforts to get additional information on Whitely's two campsites on the Tennessee River were unsuccessful. Copies of the vouchers Whitely paid for supplies during his trip shows that he paid for provisions at Ross's Landing on June 14<sup>th</sup> but did not issue any other vouchers or disbursements until June 22nd when he paid for provisions in Tuscumbia.<sup>111</sup> It was hoped that there may have been a voucher issued on the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> for provisions but no such voucher was identified. Sources were also consulted at the Alabama State Library and Archives including a review of the *Madison County Democrat* newspaper published in Huntsville in 1838. Issues during the months of June and July were researched but there was no mention of any parties of Cherokee camping on the Tennessee River.<sup>112</sup> Diaries and journals from this period were also reviewed at the state archives but no mention of this campsite was identified.

The original townsite of Decatur is located at mile marker 305 of the Tennessee River. Whitely described two campsites on the Tennessee River; the first, 22 miles upstream, and the second, two miles upstream and on the north side of the river. The first site, 22 miles upstream from Decatur, would place this location at mile marker 327. This location is approximately 2.5 miles southeast of the eastern boundary of the Wheeler NWR. Although outside of the Wheeler NWR, this site interestingly coincides with the historic location of Johnson's Landing on the south side of the river. However, no information has been identified to accurately ascertain which side of the river was used by Whitely's detachment.

The second campsite was on the north shore of the Tennessee River at mile marker 307. This location is across the river and northwest from Point Mallard Park. The historic shoreline of this location has changed extensively since 1838. Historic maps of Alabama from the early 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are consistent in showing the river bed in the same location in the section in the general vicinity of Decatur. The Limestone County Soil Survey Map of 1918 shows a wide band of bottomland across the river from Decatur containing a road and numerous houses (Figure 18). Approximately one-half mile behind this land was a narrow body of water known as Goose Pond.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1999, 67.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>111</sup> Lt. R.H.K. Whitely Disbursements, Cherokee Emigration Records, Sequoyah Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>112</sup> *Madison County Democrat*, Issues, June 2, June 16, June 20, July 7, July 11, and July 21, 1838. Alabama State Library and Archives, Montgomery, Alabama.



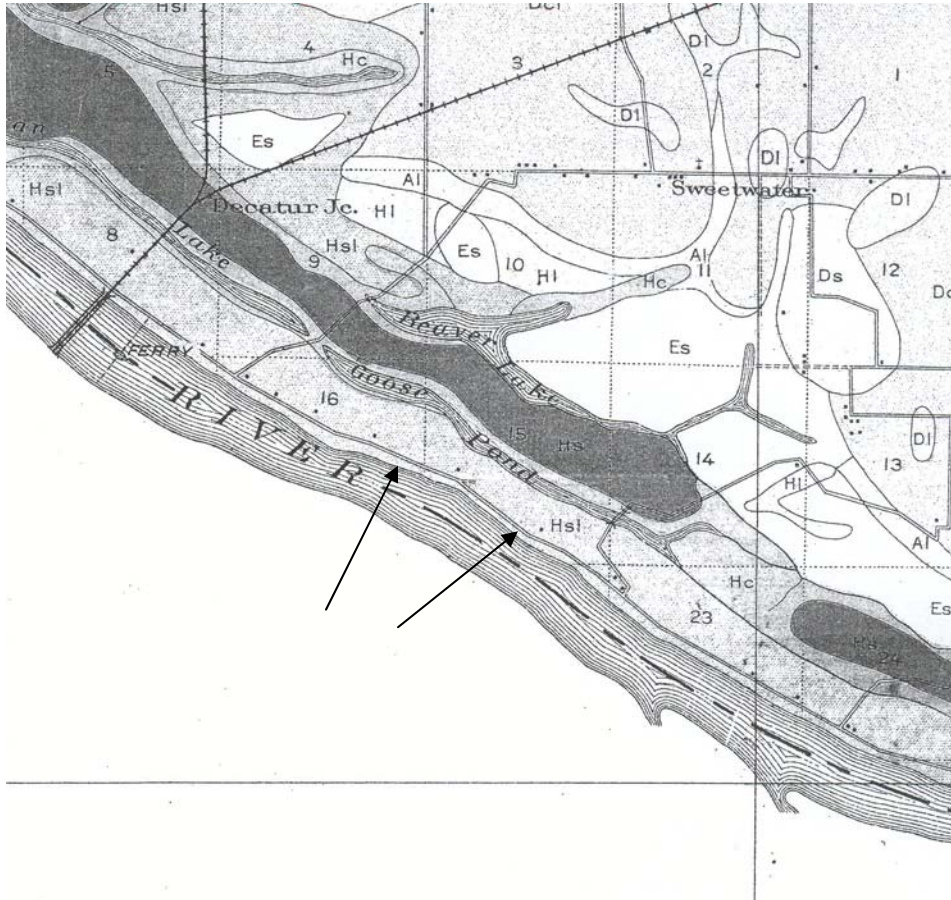
## Historical and Interpretation Study, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail

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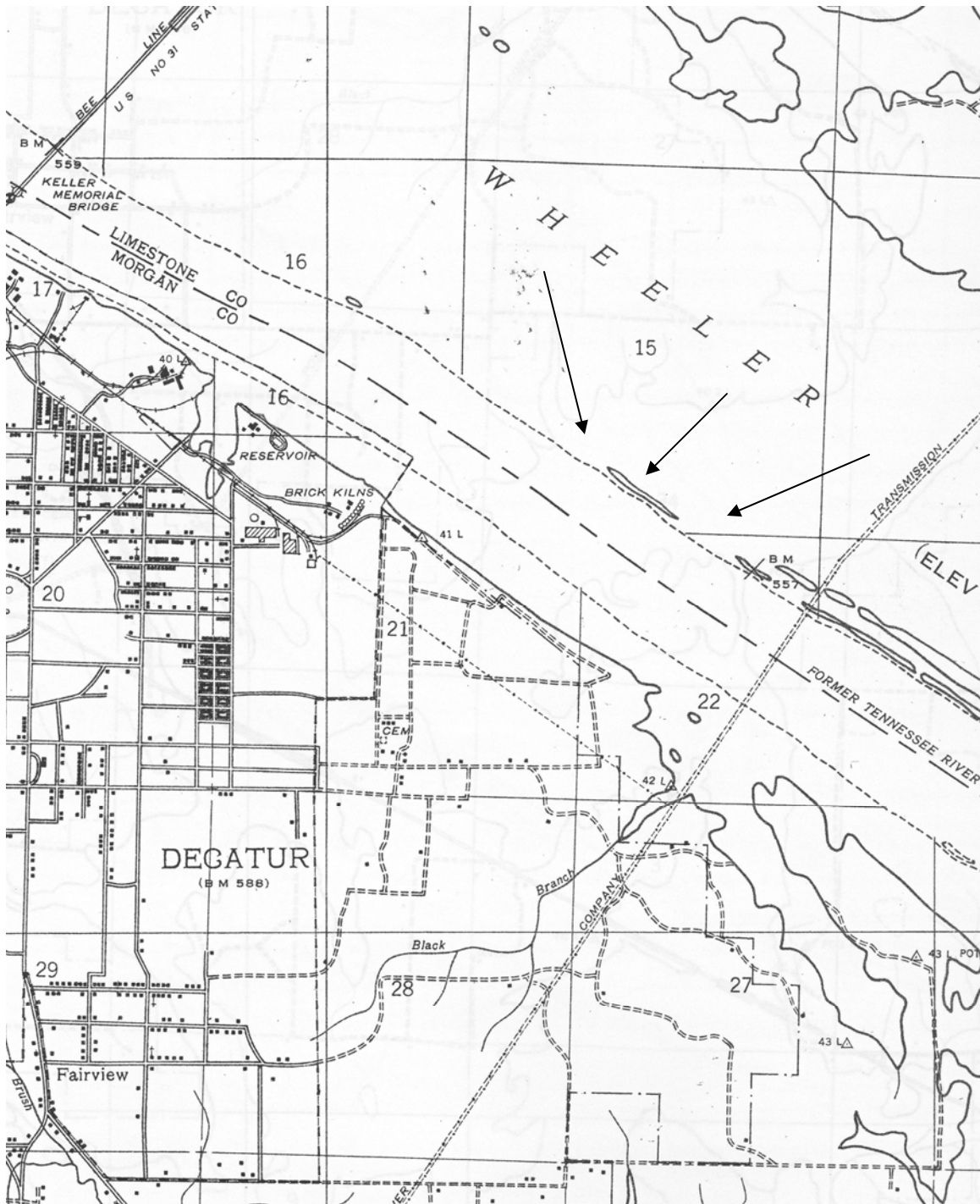
The topography of this shoreline was impacted with the completion of the Wheeler Dam in 1936. The Decatur USGS quadrangle of 1936 shows only a small island remaining along this section of shoreline and the majority of the land used by Whitely would be under the lake (Figure 19). Since 1936, this shoreline has been increased through the deposits of sediment and a narrow strip of land is shown on the Decatur quad map of 1982 (Figure 20).



**Figure 17:** The Tennessee River shoreline south of Decatur is shown on the John LaTourette map of Alabama from 1837. The arrow shows the approximate location of the Whitely Campsite.

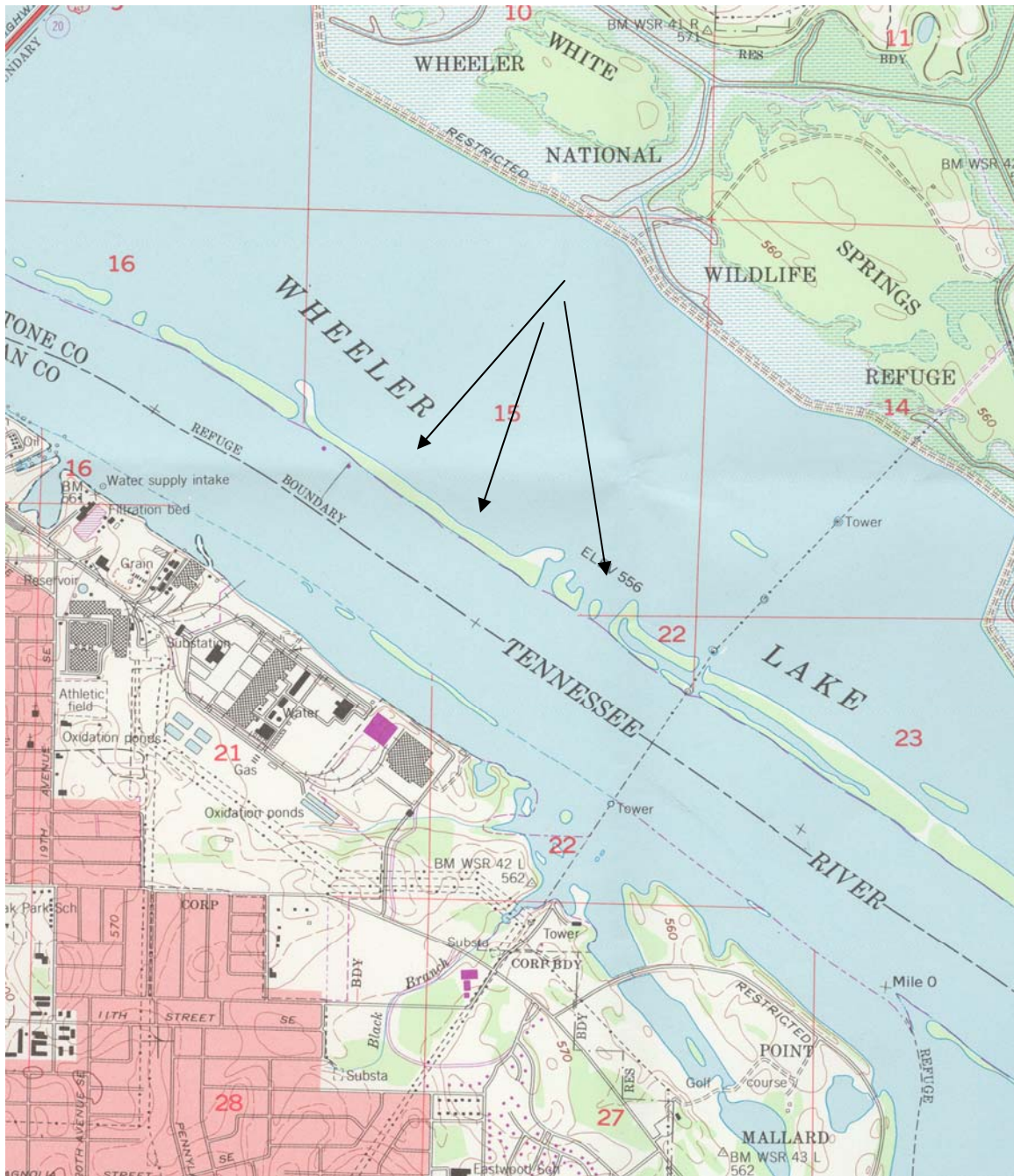


**Figure 18:** The Limestone County Soil Survey Map of 1918 shows a broad swath of bottom land along with several houses and a road at the location of the Whitely Campsite. The arrows show the approximate location of the campsite.



**Figure 19:** The arrows show the approximate location of the Whitley Campsite on the north side of the river and downstream from downtown Decatur. This quad map from 1936 shows the original riverbed and inundated shoreline following the creation of Wheeler Lake (Decatur USGS quad map 1936).





**Figure 20: The Whitley Detachment Campsite would have been in the general location as shown by the arrows on the Decatur USGS quad map. The broad bottom area of land which would have served as the campsite was largely inundated when Wheeler Lake was created in 1936.**

*The Lt. R.H.K. Whitely Detachment Campsite – National Register Eligibility*

As previously mentioned, campsites meeting registration requirements will be significant under National Register criteria A or D for their historic associations with the Cherokee Trail of Tears, and for their potential archaeological record. In order to meet National Register criteria a campsite must possess sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria. In particular a campsite must retain integrity of location, setting, feeling and association. Campsites must retain integrity of its surrounding and their ability to evoke a sense of time and place of the period of significance. Through the application of this standard of integrity, the Lt. R.H.K. Whitely Detachment Campsite two miles above Decatur in the Wheeler NWR does not meet the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. While the approximate location of this campsite is known it lacks integrity of feeling, setting and association. The impoundment of the Tennessee River in 1936 drastically altered the shoreline and inundated almost all of the property corresponding with Whitely's campsite description. This broad band of bottomland used as the campsite is now almost completely underwater and the characteristics of this site from 1838 are no longer extant.



**Figure 21: The Whitely campsite location is now the site of a series of islands on the north shore of the Tennessee River.**





**Figure 22: The islands are divided by a series of small inlets in the Whitely campsite vicinity.**

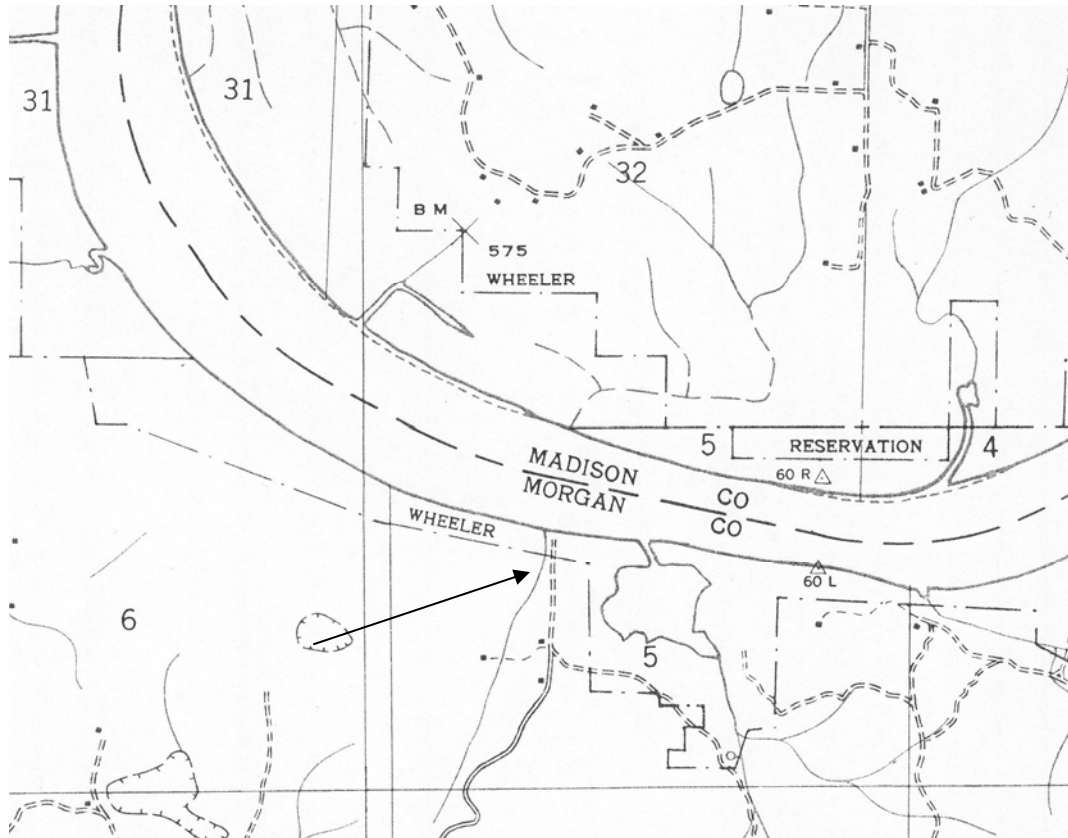


**Figure 23: View of the narrow island and inlet at the location of the Whitely campsite.**

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Although outside of the Wheeler NWR, it should be noted that much of the original shoreline remains intact of the Tennessee River at mile marker 327 (Figure 24). The current shoreline corresponds with the historic shoreline in this area east of Slaughter Landing and the eastern boundary of the Wheeler NWR. It is unknown which side of the river was used by Whitely but at this location is Johnson's Landing which was a 19<sup>th</sup> century steamboat stop. This site may meet National Register criteria if any information is unearthed to accurately identify it as Whitely's campsite.



**Figure 24:** Just south of the Wheeler NWR is the site of Johnson's Landing which corresponds to the description of the Whitely Campsite 22 miles above Decatur.

### ***The White River NWR***

The White River NWR has strong associations with the Trail of Tears. The refuge property encompasses the historical right-of-way of the Memphis-Little Rock Military Road as well as landings and bridge sites used during the Trail of Tears to cross the White River and Rock Roe Bayou. In the immediate vicinity of the refuge is the site of the community of Rock Roe which was a highly significant steamboat landing used by the Creek and Choctaw tribes as they emigrated west. Although the Rock Roe site is on private land outside the refuge boundary, its proximity to the refuge and potential connecting road systems resulted in its review for this study.

In 2002, the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), “The Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the Cherokee Trail of Tears” was submitted to the National Park Service. This MPDF outlined the property types associated with the Cherokee Trail of Tears and the integrity requirements needed to meet the criteria of the National Register. Two property types are known to be associated with the land now encompassing the White River NWR; “Ferry Crossings, Bridge Sites, Landings and Fords,” and “Roadbeds.” The criteria for National Register listing used for the Cherokee Trail of Tears is also considered applicable to the property types associated with the other tribes during the emigration period.<sup>113</sup>

In recent years there have been two studies of historical and archaeological sites in the project area. The first of these was the *Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Study of the White River Navigation Project* performed by Panamerican Consultants Inc., in 2001. This study was completed under contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Memphis Office and included the analysis of 245 miles of the White River to identify properties of cultural or archaeological significance. Of particular note was the mapping of changes in the river’s course from the early 1800s to the present (Figure 25). The report does not contain any substantive discussion of the Military Road or Rock Roe site.

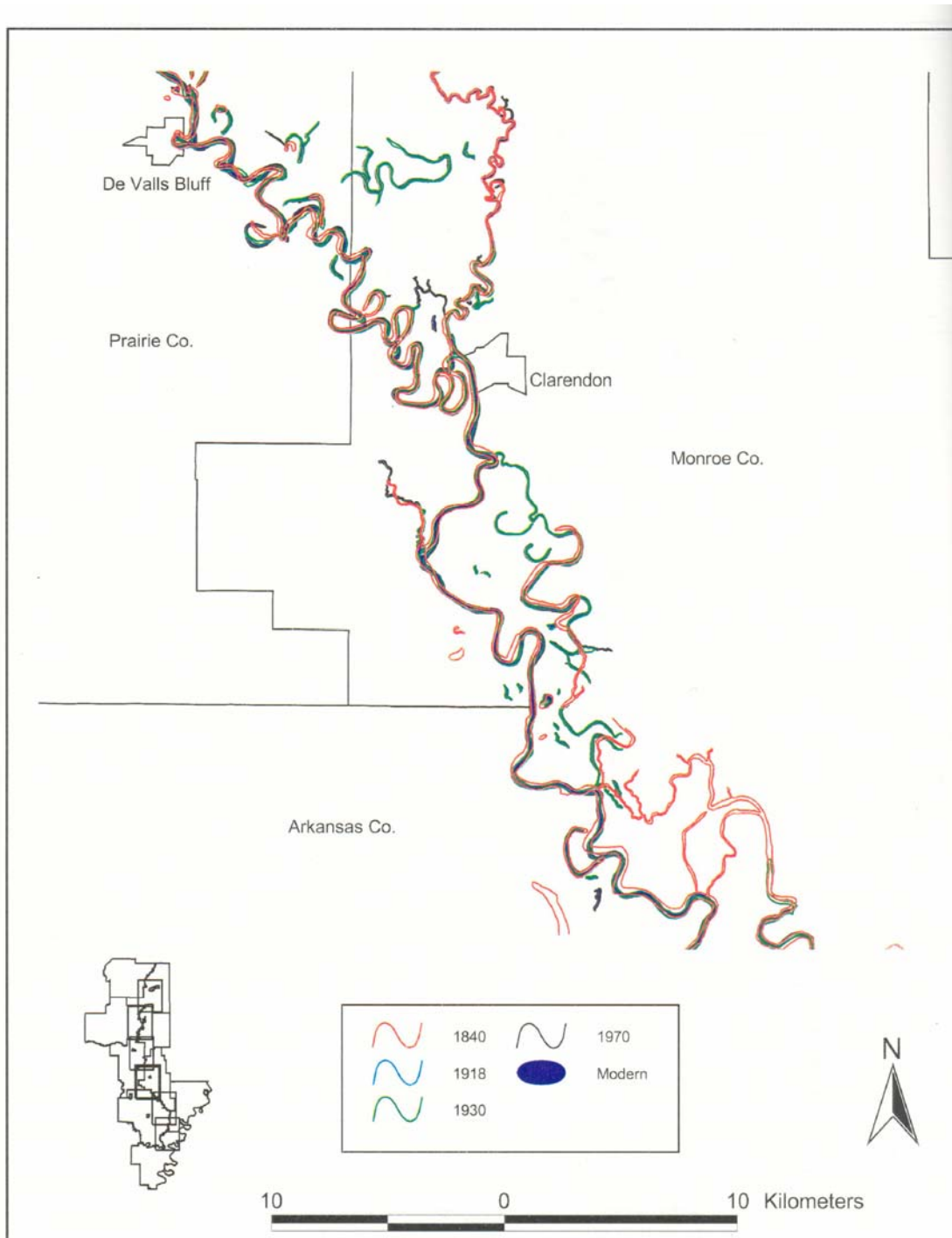
The second major study was *A Cultural Resources Survey of Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department Job Number 110123, White River and Relief Structures and Approaches (Clarendon) U.S. Highway 79, Monroe County, Arkansas* completed in 2006 by the Environmental Division of the Arkansas Highway & Transportation Department. This study was completed to meet Section 106 requirements for the planned replacement of the 1931 bridge and causeway system over the White River and the Rock Roe Bayou. As part of this study an archaeological survey was conducted along the proposed alignment of the new bridge and causeway. Attempts to find a discernible section of the original alignment of the Military Road in the White River bottoms were unsuccessful. However, a section of the Military Road was identified just to the west of the Rock Roe Bayou where it ascends the ridgeline.<sup>114</sup> In addition to this feature, the survey also recorded the wooden pilings of a bridge where the Military Road crossed the Rock Roe Bayou. Because both of these features were located to the north of the project area, neither was assessed by the Environmental Division for their potential to meet National Register criteria.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Mark Christ, National Register Coordinator, Arkansas State Historic Preservation Office, Personal Interview, 11 October 2006.

<sup>114</sup> *A Cultural Resources Survey of Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department Job Number 110123, White River and Relief Structures and Approaches (Clarendon) U.S. Highway 79, Monroe County, Arkansas*, Environmental Division of the Arkansas Highway & Transportation Department, 2006, 43.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 53.



**Figure 25:** The White River and Rock Roe Bayou configuration has remained largely the same with the exception of the cutoff of the loop across the river from Clarendon in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This cutoff loop is now known as First Old River. (Map from *Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Study of the White River Navigation Project*, Pan American Consultants, Inc. 2001).

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### *The White River and Rock Roe Bayou Ferries and Bridge Crossings – Description*

The Memphis-Little Rock Military Road crossed the White River at the Mouth of the Cache River in 1831. Originally planned to cross the White River at a different site to the north, the alignment of the Military Road was changed to this location to connect with an operating ferry. At the December Term 1825 of the Circuit Court of Phillips County, John Pyburn was given “leave to keep a ferry on White River at or near the mouth of the River Cash.”<sup>116</sup> At the January Term 1829 of the Phillips County Court, George W. Ferebee and James P. Kellium were granted a license to keep a ferry at the crossing of the Memphis-Little Rock Road. The license also required that when the White River was out of its banks the ferry would then go to the high land four miles to the west past the Rock Roe Bayou on property owned by Alpheus Maddox.<sup>117</sup>

It appears that two ferries were in operation across the White River at the Military Road crossing in the 1830s. The records show that John and Richard Pyburn operated a ferry during much of the 1830s while a second ferry was operated by John Burris and George W. Ferebee. John Pyburn received a ferry license in 1825 and Richard Pyburn is recorded as operating a ferry during the Choctaw and Cherokee removal periods. The exact relationship of John and Richard Pyburn is unclear but they may have been father and son. John Pyburn is listed as a head of household in the 1830 census while both John and Richard Pyburn are listed as heads of households in the 1840 census.<sup>118</sup> When the Choctaws emigrated west on the Military Road in 1832, the Pyburn Ferry received most of the business and Alpheus Maddox also ferried parties over the Rock Roe Bayou as needed.<sup>119</sup> The Pyburn Ferry was also mentioned by Dr. W.I.I. Morrow in April of 1837 as he traveled east after accompanying the B.B. Cannon party of Cherokee to the Indian Territory.

“started east 9<sup>th</sup> Apr. gave a man \$2 Fields and myself out to pilot us to White River found it worse than we expected – Rock Roe bridge dangerous – came near swimming at two places – had some difficulty in making the Ferryman hear us, had to shoot several rounds with our Pistols – got over safe, paid \$1.00 a piece, got some liquor at Pyburns...”<sup>120</sup>

The reference to Pyburn indicates that he also operated a stand or store at his ferry landing. The next year Pyburn was paid \$150 by Lt. Edward Deas conductor of the John Bell Detachment on December 10, 1838 for “Ferriage at the Mouth of Cache of a party of Cherokee 650 in number, together with the Wagons, Teams, Saddle-Horses etc. employed in the emigration of the same and also the agents with the party.”<sup>121</sup>

The Burris/Ferebee Ferry evolved from the ferry license granted to Sylvanus Phillips. Phillips was one of the first residents and landowners at the Mouth of the Cache and although there are records of a ferry license granted to Phillips in 1827 it does not appear that he ever operated the ferry at the White River. Phillips died in 1830 and in 1832 John Burris married Rebecca Phillips, widow of Sylvanus.<sup>122</sup> John Burris operated the ferry

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<sup>116</sup> Phillips County Circuit Records, Book A, p. 140-141.

<sup>117</sup> Phillips County Circuit County Records Book B, January Term.

<sup>118</sup> Jo Claire English, *Pages From the Past Revisited, Historical Notes on Clarendon, Monroe County and Early Arkansas*, (Clarendon, Arkansas: Private Printing, 1991), 24-25.

<sup>119</sup> Document 512, *Correspondence on the Subject of the Emigration of Indians Between 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1831 and 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1833, with abstracts of Expenditures of Disbursing Agents, in the Removal and Substance of Indians, etc. etc.* Printed by Duff Green in Washington, 1834. On file at the Sequoyah Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1013-1044.

<sup>120</sup> *Diary of Dr. W.I.I. Morrow*, On file at the Sequoyah Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas, 7.

<sup>121</sup> Treaty Party, Disbursements for Subsistence and Transportation, Document on file at the Sequoyah Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas.

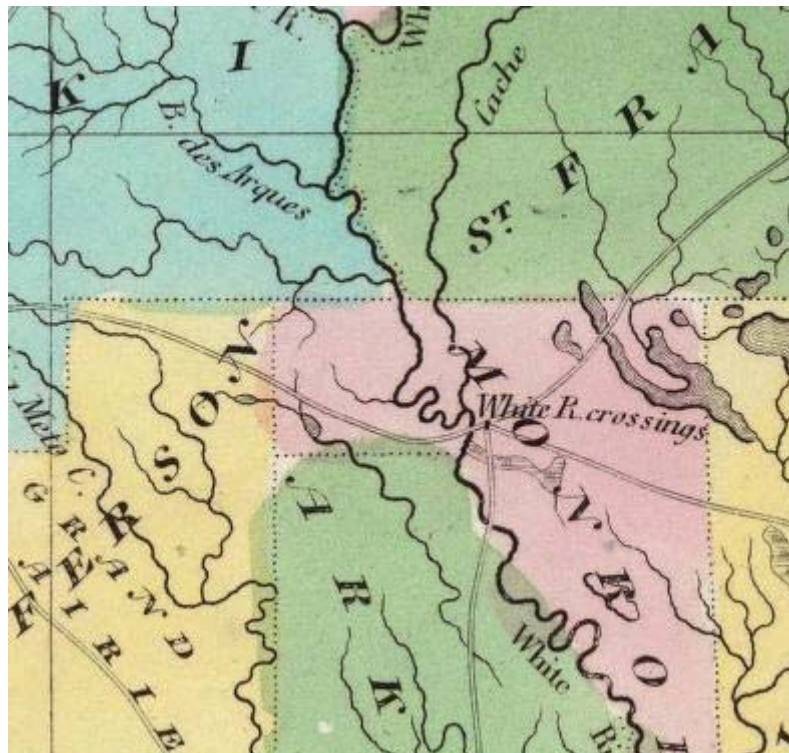
<sup>122</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, May 16, 1832.

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across the White River from 1833 to 1835 when he sold the ferry license and a 640 acre tract for \$5,000 to George W. Ferebee.<sup>123</sup> Ferebee was listed as operating a ferry in July of 1837 when the 500 Chickasaw led by Col. A.M.M. Upshaw crossed the White River.<sup>124</sup> Ferebee died in the spring of 1838 and in his will he states that his wife should continue to manage the ferry as well as his plantation. His executor William B. Duncan, then renewed the ferry license for several years afterward.

The Rock Roe crossing on the Military Road consisted of both a bridge and ferry operated by Alpheus Maddox in the 1830s. From available accounts it appears that the bridge was used at times of low water and the ferry employed when the bridge was submerged. It is also likely that the bridge was rebuilt at least once during this decade following floods on the bayou. As noted above Morrow describes the bridge as “dangerous” indicating poor construction or deterioration due to flooding. After the removal period Robert Stevens was given a license in 1840 to build a permanent bridge over the bayou at the Military Road crossing. A second license was also granted to Daniel Wilder to build a temporary bridge at the Rock Roe crossing, thirty yards below the old bridge.<sup>125</sup> The existence of two bridges as well as at least one ferry at this site also indicates high usage of the Military Road during this period.



**Figure 26: The Memphis-Little Rock Military Road is shown as crossing the White River at the “White R. crossings” on the David Burr Map of Arkansas in 1835.**

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<sup>123</sup> English, *Pages From the Past Revisited*, 54.

<sup>124</sup> Capt. J.A. Phillips, *Journal and Distribution Records*, Chickasaw Files, Sequoyah Research Center, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>125</sup> English, *Pages From the Past Revisited*, 23.



*The White River and Rock Roe Bayou Ferries and Bridge Crossings – National Register Eligibility*

The ferry and bridge crossings at both the White River and Rock Roe Bayou figured prominently in the Trail of Tears. Large parties of Choctaw first used these crossings in 1832 when thousands of Choctaw traveled along the Military Road going from Memphis to Little Rock. The Pyburn Ferry is mentioned in a number of these accounts as they crossed the White River. During the Creek removal the Military Road was used by several parties of Creeks including that of William Beattie who paid both John Burris and Alpheus Maddox for ferriage in January of 1835. In 1836 and 1837, thousands of Creeks and Chickasaws led by various civilian and military conductors traveled west on the Military Road and used both the White River and Rock Roe crossings. The final use of these crossings during the Trail of Tears was that of the John Bell Detachment of the Treaty Party of Cherokee which paid Richard Pyburn for ferriage across the White River on December 10, 1838.

Ferry crossings, bridge sites, landings and fords meeting registration requirements for listing on the National Register will be significant primarily under criteria A or D for their historic associations with the Trail of Tears and for their potential archaeological record. Ferry crossings, bridge sites, landings, and fords are significant under criterion A for the role they played in the transportation of the various tribes to the Indian Territory. Planning the journey west had to take into account the availability and dependability of ferries for transport across major waterways. The location of ferries, their connection with major road systems, and the potential of supply replenishment along the way all played major roles in planning the routes taken by the tribes. Ferries were essential components in getting the tribes and their possessions to their final destination. Under criterion D, these sites have the potential to yield information important to our understanding of the Trail of Tears.

To meet the registration requirements for this property type a site must possess integrity of location, design, materials, setting, feeling and association. To possess integrity of location a property must be accurately identified as a ferry site, bridge site, landing, or ford in use during the period of significance and identified as used during the Trail of Tears and supported through historical research. In order to meet the registration requirement of design, a property must have the physical characteristics consistent with that of an early 19th century landing/ferry crossing such as at the end of a roadbed or a cleared area adjacent to the watercourse. To meet the registration requirement of materials, a property retaining the highest degree of integrity will still have its site consisting of earth or gravel. The existence of asphalt, concrete, or other modern paving materials will only be acceptable if the landing site meets the majority of the other aspects of integrity.

The feeling, setting and association of landings, ferry and bridge sites, and fords associated with the Trail of Tears is conveyed by the location, surroundings, and by its ability to convey the sense of a 19th century river crossing. The site must evoke a sense of travel for the Trail of Tears period of significance. Because of the naturally occurring fluctuations in water levels, slight changes in the water level do not significantly detract from the historic character of a property. In order to retain integrity of feeling, a property must retain sufficient physical characteristics of an early 19th century ferry, bridge site, landing, or ford to convey the sense of its period of significance. Post-1839 development should not conceal or alter the original site. Development in the general vicinity is acceptable if the site itself is intact, and if the property is readily visible and in its approximate location of the 1830s. While most river shorelines have been altered through changes in channels and variations in water levels, the approximate landing/ferry/ford location should remain extant.

The White River ferry operation during the 1830s was between the east and west banks of the river at Clarendon. The ferry landing on the east bank of the river is believed to have been just northwest of the present-day courthouse. This site has been impacted by modern development and the construction of an extensive levee system. Due to the extent of these alterations this ferry landing site no longer retains integrity

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from the 1830s. The ferry landing on the west side of the river was within what is now the White River NWR. This ferry landing was located at what is now the approximate site of the Union Pacific Bridge built in 1882. Due to the construction of the bridge the ferry landing was moved from its original site on the west bank to a new location to the south of the bridge. No physical remains of the west bank ferry landing are visible and the setting, feeling and association have been altered due to the prominence of the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge. The White River ferry landing site at Clarendon no longer retains integrity of its 1830s operations and does not meet National Register criteria.

The ferry and bridge at the Rock Roe Bayou was also an important crossing point on the Military Road during Indian Removal of the 1830s. This crossing is located within the boundary of the White River NWR. Approximately 0.2 mile north of the US 79 bridge are the remains of bridge pilings in the bayou (Figures 27-28). This location aligns with the known route of the Military Road and to the west of the bridge site the Military Road is evident as it ascends the bluff west of the Rock Roe bottoms. It is unlikely that the visible wooden piers in the bayou date to the removal period but the site retains integrity of its location, setting, feeling and association. The 1931 highway bridge is located a sufficient distance to the south to be a limited visual intrusion to the site. As an important crossing point during the Trail of Tears, the Rock Roe Bridge and Ferry Site meets National Register criterion A for its historical significance.



**Figure 27:** Rock Roe Bridge site showing wooden bridge piers. View is from the west bank of the bayou, towards the east.





**Figure 28: The Rock Roe Bridge and Ferry site retains its integrity of setting and location.**

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### *The Memphis- Little Rock Military Road – Description*

The Military Road between Memphis and Little Rock was commissioned by Secretary of War John C. Calhoun in 1824. The original route was to be north of the Mouth of Cache on the White River but Lt. Charles Thomas, commissioned to build the road in 1826, amended the route to connect with the ferry then in operation at the confluence of the Cache and White Rivers. Lt. Frederick L. Griffith was appointed superintendent of the Memphis to Little Rock Road on January 27, 1826, with instructions to make a road “at least twenty four feet wide throughout” with all timber and brush removed and stumps cut as low as possible, marshes and swamps to be “causewayed with poles or split timber,” and ditches four feet wide and three feet deep to be dug on either side of the road. “The hills on the route are to be dug down and wound round in such a manner as to make them practicable for carriages or loaded wagons.”<sup>126</sup>

In anticipation of using the road for Indian removal, Congress appropriated \$20,000 for repair of the “Memphis and Little Rock road” on July 3, 1832, and charged territorial governor John Pope with the responsibility of directing the work. Construction continued even as thousands of Choctaw traveled the road in 1832 with their wagons and horses. After the territorial government cited the great difficulties in maintaining the road, Congress appropriated an additional \$100,000 in 1833 and ordered a new survey of the route from Memphis to the St. Francis River under the direction of the Topographical Bureau of the War Department. As a result, construction and rerouting of the road, especially between Memphis and the St. Francis River, continued even as it was traversed by large groups of emigrating Indians and their livestock. The importance of the Military Road is evidenced by the fact that during the years of federal involvement Congress spent \$267,000 of the \$660,000 appropriated for territorial Arkansas’s transportation needs on construction of the Memphis to Little Rock Road.

Within the White River NWR is a four mile section of the Military Road right-of-way between the White River on the east and the western boundary of the refuge on the west. This roadbed was used by thousands of Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw and Cherokee between 1832 and 1838. Roadbeds from this time period such as the Military Road would have had a dirt or gravel surface and widths of ten to twenty feet. Typically roadbeds from this period would have had sunken shapes in the form of a “U” with embankments of varying height. Studies of the Chickasaw Trace, Natchez Trace and other roadbeds associated with the Trail of Tears found that wagon and human wear creates a “U” shaped path rather than “V” shapes caused by natural erosion. Wagon traffic on these roads created ruts with parallel grooves approximately five to six feet apart which were filled in over time by erosion.<sup>127</sup> A study of the entire Natchez Trace route in Tennessee as well as roadbeds used by the Cherokee in the Trail of Tears confirmed this characteristic shape and profile of early 19th century roadbeds.<sup>128</sup> Another identified pattern of these studies was the presence of “multiple tracks” on slopes where several parallel roadbeds exist. As one roadbed became too eroded or steep, a new roadbed was formed nearby and sometimes three or four roadbeds exist side by side.

When the Military Road was built through the White River bottoms it appears that a raised causeway was first utilized. In a description of the road in 1827, the commissioners stated that “There will be required about six miles of causeways, some of which will have to be raised about four feet, but the general height will be from

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<sup>126</sup> National Register Nomination, “Memphis to Little Rock Road, Bayou Two Prairie Segment, Lonoke County,” Nomination on file at the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Office.

<sup>127</sup> Richard Stearns, “Geology, Width, and Wear of the Chickasaw Path and the Old Natchez Trace at Meriwether Lewis Monument, Lewis County, Tennessee,” *Journal of the Tennessee Academy of Science*, Vol. 72, No. 3-4, 72.

<sup>128</sup> Thomason and Associates, A Re-Evaluation of the National Register-Listed Natchez Trace in Tennessee, Report Prepared for the Tennessee Department of Transportation, 1999, 23.

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one to two feet.”<sup>129</sup> Because of the constant problems with flooding in the White River bottoms the reference to causeways likely applies to this section of the road. An alignment through the bottoms without raising the roadbed would have been impractical and difficult to traverse, especially by wagons.



Figure 29: The alignment of the Military Road through the White River bottoms is shown on the Government Land Office Map of Township 1N, Range 3W in 1846. The road extends from the ferry landing on the west side of the White River west to the Rock Roe Bayou.

Following the era of the Trail of Tears, the Military Road continued to be used as a major east-west thoroughfare in the state. Like most roads in Arkansas before the “Goods Road” movement, the Military Road does not appear to have been paved and remained a dirt and gravel road along its original alignment. The use of this roadbed would have remained problematic throughout the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries due to seasonal flooding of the river and bayou. The Harris Ferry at the Rock Roe landing was frequently used during these decades when the Military Road was impassible. Following the disastrous flood of 1927, the state legislature commissioned a \$1.5 million bridge that spanned the White River, White River bottoms and the Rock Roe Bayou. Completed in 1931, this steel and concrete bridge was built first to the north and then to the

<sup>129</sup> King, *The Emigration Route of the John Bell Detachment*, 15.

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south of the Military Road right-of-way. The Military Road through the bottoms was abandoned as a through road after the construction of the bridge.



Figure 30: The Military Road alignment on the Government Land Office Map of Township 1N, Range 3W in 1854.



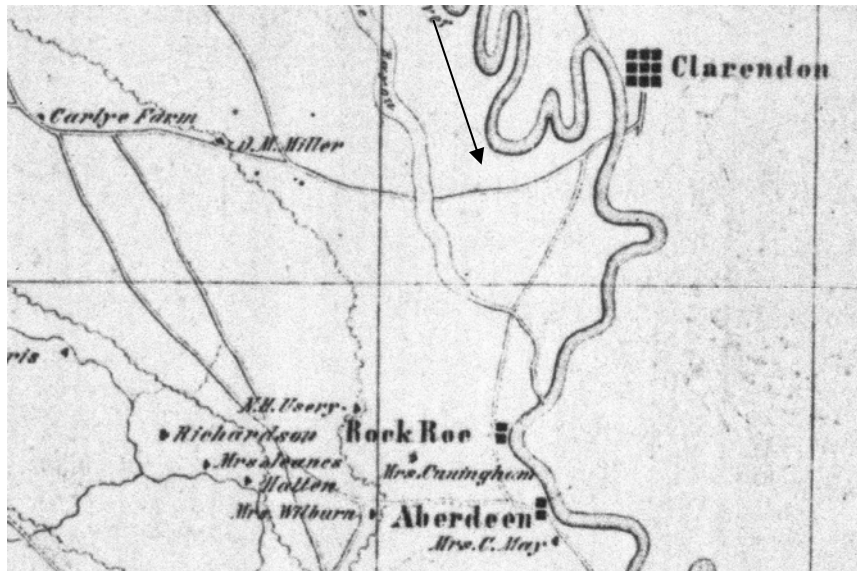


Figure 31: The White River & Vicinity Map of 1864 shows the roadbed through the bottoms and a connecting road with Rock Roe.

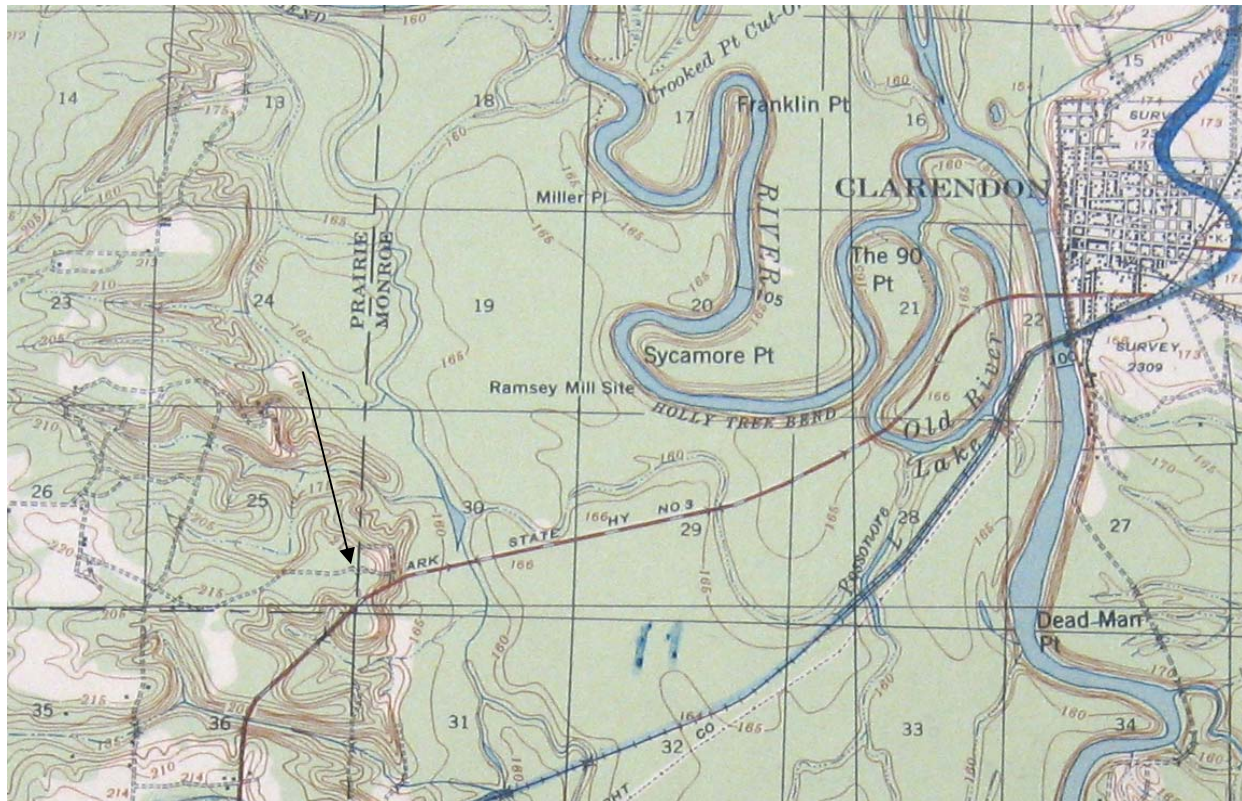


Figure 32: The 1935 Clarendon USGS quad map shows the new bridges and causeway for State Highway 3 (now US 79) but no alignment of the Military Road is shown in the bottoms area. The arrow shows the Military Road where it comes up the bluff west of the Rock Roe Bayou.

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### *The Memphis-Little Rock Military Road – National Register Eligibility*

The Military Road was one of the main transportation corridors utilized for the removal of the Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw and Cherokee during the Trail of Tears. Thousands of members of these tribes traversed the Military Road along with their wagons, horses, oxen and other possessions and they traveled west to the Indian Territory. After crossing the White River ferries, the members of these tribes and their escorts would have continued along the Military Road for four miles through the White River bottoms and then across the Rock Roe Bayou. From 1832 to 1838 there would have been periods of constant use by these tribes as they moved west. Because of its significance, several sections of the Memphis-Little Rock Military Road in Arkansas have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places in recent years. These listings include: Memphis to Little Rock Road, Village Creek State Park, Cross County, listed 4/11/2003; Memphis to Little Rock Road, Henard Cemetery Road Segment, Monroe County, listed 5/30/2003; Memphis to Little Rock Road, Brownsville Segment, Lonoke County, listed 9/27/2003; Military Road, Cadron Segment, Faulkner County, listed 1/28/2004, and; Memphis to Little Rock Road, Bayou Two Prairie Segment, Lonoke County, listed 9/20/2006.

Roadbeds such as the Memphis-Little Rock Military Road will be significant under criterion A for their direct connection and association with the routes taken during the Trail of Tears. Roadbeds provide a physical link and sense of time and place of the actual Trail of Tears experience. They provide an understanding of the difficulties inherent in overland travel in the 1830s and the challenges faced by the emigrants on a daily basis. Roadbeds will also be significant under criterion A for the information they impart regarding the actual routes taken by the tribes on their journey west.

Roadbeds may be significant under criterion C for the information they convey about the type of road conditions and characteristics experienced by the various tribes. They will also provide information on construction techniques, design elements, and use patterns of early 19th century roads and highways in the region. Roads of the early 19th century varied in widths, materials, and maintenance, and roadbeds used by the tribes have the potential to explain why certain routes were taken and the difficulties involved in their use.

Under criterion D, roadbeds have the potential to yield information on the tribal experience on the various overland routes. Accounts of the Trail of Tears describe the hardships of travel, and along the way many personal possessions were discarded on the roadside. Breakdowns of wagons and other horse-drawn vehicles were also common and left by the side of the road. Debris such as horseshoes, wagon tongues, and wagon wheels would have littered the roads used by the various tribes. Intact sections of roadbed have the potential of providing archaeological data concerning the types of possessions and equipment utilized by the tribes along the routes.

To meet registration requirements, roadbeds must retain the seven aspects of integrity as outlined by the National Register criteria. In order to retain integrity of location, roadbeds used during the Trail of Tears must be identified as used during the period of the Trail of Tears and its accuracy must be supported by historical accounts and local historians. In order to retain integrity of design, a roadbed must retain physical characteristics typical of an early 19th century roadbed. This would include retention of original widths and embankments. In order to retain integrity of materials and workmanship, the roadbed should be of earth, naturally occurring chert or gravel, or a modern gravel surface. Integrity of feeling, setting and association of a roadbed is conveyed by its location, by its design and materials, by its surroundings, and by its ability to convey the sense of a 19th century roadbed.

In order to retain integrity of feeling, setting and association a roadbed must retain physical characteristics of an early 19th century roadbed such as original widths, embankments, and surfaces of earth, naturally



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occurring chert or gravel, or a modern gravel surface. The section of roadbed must be of sufficient length to evoke a sense of travel or destination. Lengthy sections of roadbed that are broken into discontinuous segments will also retain integrity of feeling if the intervening property is minimal and a sense of cohesion remains evident. However, each of the individual lengths or sections within such a discontinuous segment should individually meet registration requirements. The rural settings of roadbeds should be maintained and be largely characterized by agricultural use or woodlands. Post-1839 buildings or structures should be limited in number along the length of the roadbed. Eligible sections will either have few post-1839 buildings or structures within view, or such buildings or structures will be widely scattered and not impact the overall visual qualities of the roadbed setting.

The field survey of the Memphis-Little Rock Military Road in the White River bottoms did not identify sufficient lengths or intact sections to meet National Register criteria. Because of the consistent flooding of the bottoms area for over 150 years, this 19<sup>th</sup> century roadbed has either eroded or washed away to the point where it cannot be followed and only faint traces remain visible (Figures 33-34) These traces appear to be remnants of the roadbed with some slight embankments on either side. However, none of these traces are longer than 100' and do not possess sufficient integrity of design, feeling and association to meet National Register criteria.



**Figure 33: Some faint traces of the Military Road can be followed through the White River bottoms.**



**Figure 34: The definition of the roadbed has been eroded significantly since it was last used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

No definable section of the Military Road is visible in the vicinity of the Rock Roe Bayou crossing. However, once the roadbed leaves the bottom area and the White River NWR it becomes visible as it ascends the ridgeline west of the bayou. This visible section of the Military Road is on private property and appears to have been rebuilt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The roadbed is raised and terraced and does not have the sunken profile appearance of a 19<sup>th</sup> century roadbed (Figure 35). At the top of the ridgeline is an eroded sunken section of the road but this feature is presently being used as a refuse pit by the owner (Figure 36). Because of the extent of alterations to the Military Road on this ridge slope, it does not retain sufficient integrity of design, feeling and association with the Trail of Tears to meet National Register criteria.





**Figure 35: Early 20<sup>th</sup> century profile of the Military Road on the ridge slope west of the Rock Roe Bayou.**



**Figure 36: Sunken section of the Military Road parallel to the rebuilt section to the north. This short section of sunken roadbed is now used as a trash pit.**

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### *Associated Site - The Rock Roe Landing*

The Rock Roe Landing is a significant site associated with the Trail of Tears directly across the Rock Roe Bayou from the White River NWR boundary. This site is included in this study due to its proximity to the refuge and its potential for interpretation. The Rock Roe Landing figured prominently in the removal of both the Choctaw and the Creek Nations. In 1832, John T. Fulton, the Assistant Agent for the Choctaw Removal, decided that transporting the Choctaw via steamboat up the White River to the Rock Roe landing would be the most efficient method of moving the tribe west. Fulton was convinced this was a better route than using the unfinished and often flooded Military Road. Rock Roe (also spelled Roc Roe) was located six miles below the ferry crossing on the White River and at the mouth of the Rock Roe Bayou. Rock Roe was located on a bluff some 50' above the bayou and river. In October and November of 1832, some 4,600 Choctaws left Mississippi and traveled both by water and overland to Rock Roe. Choctaw Chief David Folsom and about 600 persons departed on the steamboat *Reindeer* on November 1<sup>st</sup> and arrived at Rock Roe a few days later. Folsom and his party would camp at Rock Roe until November 12<sup>th</sup> while waiting for an overland group to join them. Cholera broke out among the Choctaw while they traveled to Rock Roe and anywhere from eight to a dozen members of the tribe are known to have died and been buried at the landing. Another large contingent of some 2,000 Choctaws arrived at Rock Roe on November 21<sup>st</sup> and camped at this location before heading west.

During the summer of 1836, the U.S. Army captured more than 14,500 Creeks in Alabama and began to send them west under military escort. Approximately 2,500 of these Creeks were considered hostile and were transported on steamboats to Rock Roe where they landed on July 29<sup>th</sup>. The Creeks camped at Rock Roe for eight days while they took on supplies and organized into groups going west under military escort. The Creeks departed Rock Roe on August 8<sup>th</sup> and traveled on the Military Road to Little Rock and on to Fort Gibson. Most of the remaining Creeks rounded up by the U.S. Army were marched from Alabama to Memphis where they were divided into various groups to travel by water and land. Thousands of these Creeks were transported via steamboat to Rock Roe in November. A report in the *Arkansas Gazette* on November 22<sup>nd</sup> stated that "This is the third party of Indians which have passed our town within two or three weeks, for the west. About 15,000 of the tribe are now traversing the State, from east to west – making an almost continuous line from Rock Roe, to our western boundary."<sup>130</sup> A final party of Creeks used the Rock Roe landing and the Military Road in November of 1837.

Although there was at least one plat recorded to create a community at Rock Roe, this site was never more than a small collection of buildings and a cemetery in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. No description of Rock Roe from the time period of the Trail of Tears has been located. A post office at Rock Roe was established on October 6, 1838 with John Evans as postmaster, but this office was discontinued on May 6, 1839.<sup>131</sup> The landing was a regular stopping point by the late 1830s for a U.S. Mail packet steamboat which ascended from the mouth of the White River. Passengers would disembark at Rock Roe and board stagecoaches which would take them on to Little Rock via the Military Road. One of these passengers, Emily Mason, wrote a description of Rock Roe in 1844 which was later published in the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*.

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<sup>130</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, November 22, 1836

<sup>131</sup> English, *Pages From the Past Revisited*, 10.



I had fixed up my curls expecting to astonish the Rockroe beaux – guess my consternation to see no homes and no people! They told us the Hotel! was about half a mile back in the woods. On we trudged till we came to a log cabin – with a log kitchen and stable – which formed the entire town of Rockroe! There were only three rooms in this Hotel!<sup>132</sup>

An article in the *Arkansas Banner* on January 1, 1845 differed somewhat from the Mason description and stated that at Rock Roe was an “excellent public house kept by Doct. Murry where passengers sleep and lodge and take the stage for Little Rock early next morning...”<sup>133</sup> With the exception of this stagecoach “hotel” no other building or community descriptions have been identified. In her history of Monroe County, Jo Claire English describes Rock Roe as “... probably never more than a boat landing but it was well known and one of the earliest White River landings.”<sup>134</sup>



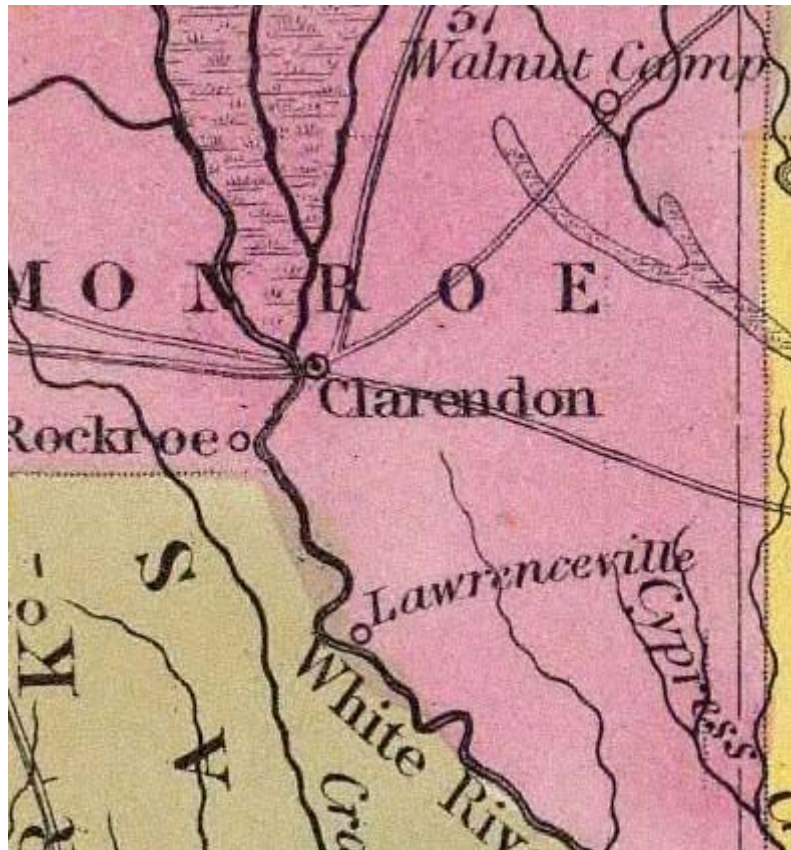
**Figure 37:** The Sidney Morse Map of Arkansas in 1845 shows Rock Roe with roads connecting with the Military Road south of Clarendon (David Rumsey Map Collection).

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<sup>132</sup> Francis J. Scully, “Across Arkansas in 1844.” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Spring, 1954, 36.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>134</sup> English, *Pages From the Past Revisited*, 10.



**Figure 38:** The Samuel Mitchell Map of Arkansas in 1846 shows the Rock Roe Landing south of Clarendon (David Rumsey Map Collection).

In addition to being a steamboat landing, Rock Roe became the site of a well known ferry. In 1849, Sarah Lemmons was granted a license to operate a ferry at the Rock Roe Bayou. In 1852 she married W.T.O. Harris and in 1853, Harris is listed as the ferry operator. The Harris family owned a large amount of land and the “Harris Place” was located on the east side of the White River.<sup>135</sup> The Harris family operated the ferry until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when it became a state operated toll ferry. A highway led from Clarendon down the east bank of the White River to a crossing opposite the mouth of the Rock Roe Bayou. This road was known as part of State Highway No. 1 and remained in use until the construction of the highway bridge at Clarendon in 1931. After 1931, the ferry was discontinued. The 1935 Clarendon USGS quad map shows two buildings remaining at Rock Roe (Figure 39), however, these are not shown on the 1936 county highway map (Figure 40).

Today, no buildings or structures exist at the Rock Roe site. However, there is a large cemetery used by residents of Aberdeen and the surrounding area. This cemetery has approximately 155 marked graves with the oldest dating to 1849.<sup>136</sup> The Choctaw and Chickasaw used this level ground above the ferry landing as campsites during their emigration. While they camped here at least eight Choctaw died of cholera and were

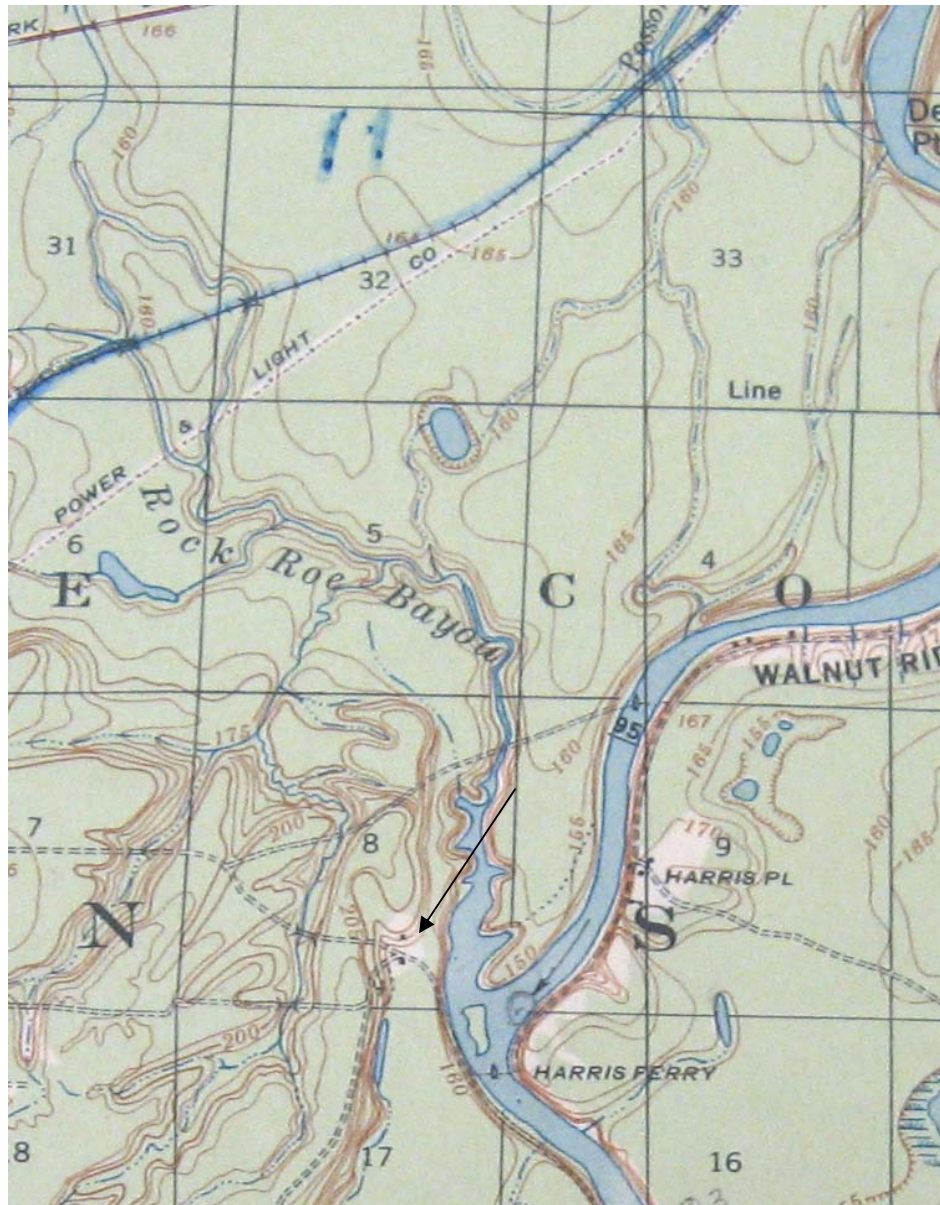
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<sup>135</sup> English, *Pages From the Past Revisited*, 40.

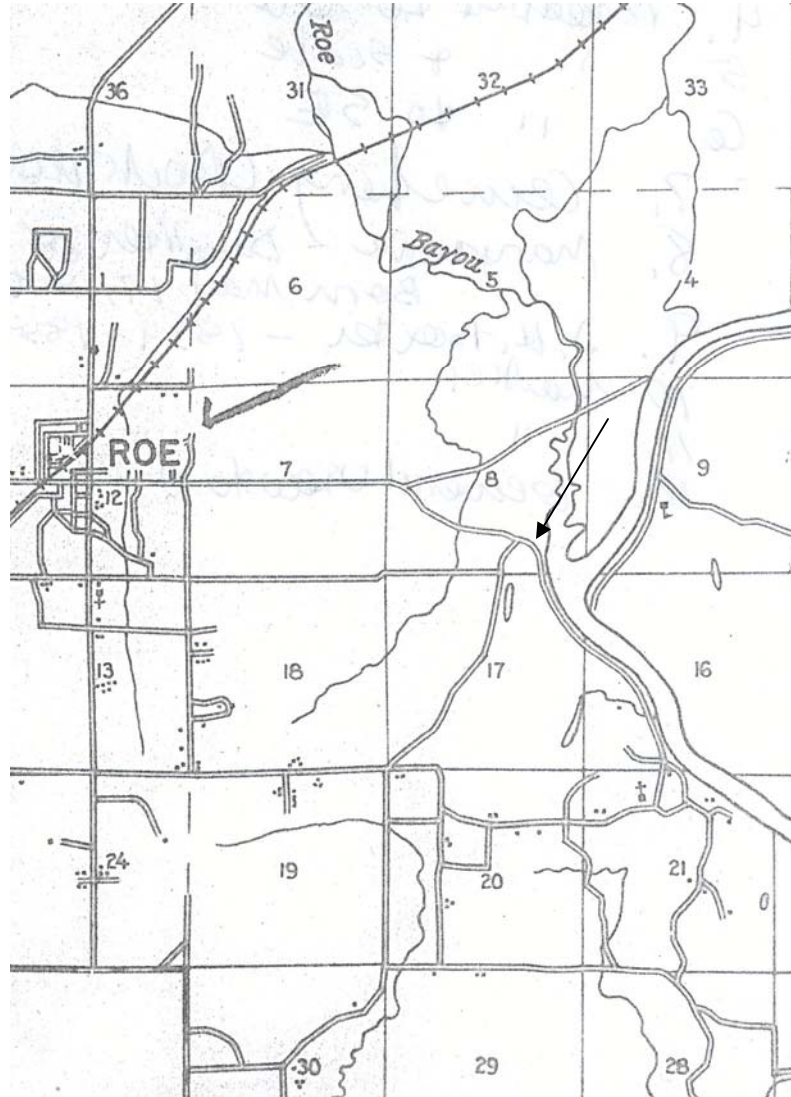
<sup>136</sup> Lloyd and Flora M. Turner, *Cemeteries of Monroe County, Arkansas*, (Brinkley, Arkansas: Private Printing, 1994), 105-108.



buried in the general vicinity. It is possible, though speculative, that the cemetery has its origins in the Choctaw burials. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this cemetery was known as the Harris Cemetery but it is now known as the Roc Roe Cemetery.



**Figure 39:** The Clarendon USGS quad map of 1935 shows the Harris Ferry and the road leading to Rock Roe. Two buildings are shown on the lower slopes of the bluff below the site of the cemetery. Neither of these buildings remains extant. No roadbeds are shown extending north to tie in with the old alignment of the Military Road.



**Figure 40:** The 1936 Monroe County Highway Map shows a road leading to the Rock Roe Landing but no buildings are illustrated in the vicinity.

*The Rock Roe Landing – National Register Eligibility*

The Rock Roe Landing site was included in this study since it is directly adjacent to the boundary of the White River NWR. In addition, several historic maps such as the Sidney Morse Map of 1845 (Figure 37) and the White River & Vicinity Map of 1864 (Figure 31) show a connecting road leading from the White River ferry through the bottoms to Rock Roe. The Morse map also shows a road leading from Rock Roe northwest to tie in with the Military Road west of the Rock Roe Bayou. This suggests the possibility that during the Trail of Tears, the Choctaws and Creeks may have traversed sections of property now within the boundary of the White River NWR. As previously discussed, ferry landings may be significant under criterion A for the role they played in the transportation of the various tribes to the Indian Territory. Under criterion D, these sites have the potential to yield information important to our understanding of the Trail of Tears.

Currently on private land, the Rock Roe Ferry and Landing appears to meet the criteria for listing on the National Register for its significance in the Trail of Tears. From 1832 to 1837, thousands of Choctaws and Creeks were transported to the landing and camped on the adjacent bluff before traveling west on the Military Road. As a result, this site is one of the most significant ferry landings associated with the Trail of Tears in Arkansas. The property consists of the landing site itself and a well preserved section of roadbed leading from the landing up to the top of the bluff. The landing site does not appear to have been significantly changed from its historic location in the 1830s (Figure 41). Maps show relative consistency in the shoreline from the 1830s to the present. The roadbed is sunken from the adjacent topography by up to ten to fifteen feet and provides a distinct sense of time and place as a 19<sup>th</sup> century roadbed (Figure 43). There are no buildings or structures remaining at the landing site or adjacent to the roadbed leading to the bluff. The Rock Roe site meets all of the criteria of integrity of location, design, materials, setting, feeling and association.



**Figure 41:** Rock Roe Landing site on the Rock Roe Bayou, view southeast towards the White River.





**Figure 42:** View of the Rock Roe Landing towards the east. The property of the White River NWR is directly across the Rock Roe Bayou .



**Figure 43:** View of the roadbed leading from Rock Roe Landing up the adjacent bluff, view to the west.



While the Rock Roe Landing site appears to meet National Register criteria, there does not appear to be any historic roadbeds connecting the landing with the Military Road. Connecting roads are shown on several maps of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century but by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century these are no longer illustrated. The 1935 Clarendon USGS map does not show any roadbeds which lead north along the ridgeline or through the bottoms which connect with the alignment of the Military Road (Figure 39). Local historians Jo Claire English and Burton Moore also did not know of the existence of any such roads.<sup>137</sup> Based on this evidence it appears that these roadbeds of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century had limited usage and were abandoned by the turn of the century.

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<sup>137</sup> Jo Claire English and Burton Moore, Personal Interviews, Clarendon, Arkansas, 30 November 2006.

## V. SUMMARY

This study was begun in October of 2006 and research and field survey was completed in June of 2007. The purpose of the study was to identify any properties known to have associations with the Trail of Tears at the Tennessee, Wheeler and White River National Wildlife Refuges and recommend possible approaches for interpretation. The result of this research and analysis is as follows:

### **Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge**

No direct association with the Trail of Tears was identified with the Tennessee NWR. The Tennessee River was used to transport detachments of the Chickasaw, Creek and Cherokee tribes via steamboat from Alabama north through the refuge. Many of these detachments departed from the landing at Waterloo, Alabama and traveled along the Tennessee River over a two day period to Paducah and the Ohio River. From the available records, none of these steamboats stopped along the river in Tennessee for overnight camping. No campsites or gravesites associated with the Trail of Tears appear to be within the boundaries of the Tennessee NWR. Recommended interpretive efforts for the Trail of Tears in the Tennessee NWR include the creation of an exhibit at the refuge headquarters in Paris, Tennessee and the erection of a wayside exhibit at Cuba Landing marina or a similar accessible location directly on the river. Such exhibits should discuss the history of the Trail of Tears and the role of the Tennessee River in transporting the tribes to the west.

### **Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge**

The Wheeler NWR does not have any associations with the emigration of the Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole tribes. However, three of the Water Route detachments of the emigrating Cherokee traveled through the refuge on the Tennessee River in 1838 and 1839. Two of these detachments, those led by Lt. Edward Deas and Lt. R.H.K. Whitely, are known to have camped on the banks of the river and their approximate location can be identified. The third detachment led by Lt. John Drew passed through the refuge but no known campsites or other association with the refuge property is known. The Lt. Edward Deas Detachment of approximately 500 Cherokee camped within the refuge boundary on June 8, 1838 approximately six miles above Decatur. This location would be just east of where Limestone Creek empties into the Tennessee River. Only the approximate location of this campsite is known and there are no accounts which identify which side of the river was utilized. The detachment of approximately 1,000 Cherokee led by Lt. R.H.K. Whitely camped on the north side of the river two miles above Decatur on June 20, 1838.

The impoundment of the Tennessee River in 1936 drastically altered the shoreline and inundated almost all of the property corresponding with Deas' and Whitely's campsite description. These broad bands of farmland next to the river are now underwater and the landscape has been so fragmented that the original shoreline and adjacent fields are no longer intact. Because of these changes to the landscape, the campsites associated with the Lt. Edward Deas and Lt. R.H.K. Whitely detachments do not possess sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria.

Recommended interpretive efforts include the creation of an exhibit at the refuge headquarters and visitor center at Decatur. Such an exhibit would detail the association of the refuge with the Cherokee removal of 1838 and feature historical information as well as maps showing the location of the campsites. Although outside of the refuge boundary, the Wheeler NWR is encouraged to work in association with the City of Decatur to fund and erect a wayside exhibit at Point Mallard Park. This city-owned park is on the south side of the Tennessee River and almost directly across from the Whitely campsite location. Such an exhibit should include an emphasis on the Whitely detachment due to its proximity to the park.



**Figure 44:** The visitor's centers at the three refuges should create exhibits on the Trail of Tears. The Wheeler NWR visitor center shown here has several attractive spaces for such a display.



**Figure 45:** This exhibit on Native American history at the Wheeler NWR visitor center is an excellent model for the type of display recommended for the Trail of Tears exhibits.

### White River National Wildlife Refuge

Within the boundary of the White River NWR is the west bank ferry landing, the Rock Roe Bayou crossing, and approximately 3.5 miles of the roadbed of the Military Road. The west bank ferry landing was altered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when a railroad bridge was constructed at the site. This construction resulted in the alteration of the landing site as well as the addition of a significant visual change to the landscape. Due to the loss of integrity at this site, the ferry landing does not meet National Register criteria. The approximate location of the Military Road can be followed through the bottoms area between the White River and the Rock Roe Bayou. However, the erosion and seasonal flooding occurring in the bottoms since 1838 has removed almost all traces of the roadbed. While there remains some indentations and embankments indicative of a historic roadbed, there is insufficient continuity and overall lack of distance and profile for the Military Road in the White River NWR to meet National Register criteria.

The Rock Roe Bayou crossing within the White River NWR is readily identifiable due to the presence of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century wood bridge pilings which remain visible in the bayou. During the 1830s, a ferry was used at this crossing and at least one toll bridge was also constructed in these years and used during Indian Removal. The Rock Roe Bayou ferry and bridge site evokes a sense of time and place from the era of the Trail of Tears and retains sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria within this context.

Recommended interpretation efforts include the creation of an exhibit on the Trail of Tears at the refuge headquarters and visitor's center at St. Charles, Arkansas. The White River NWR is also encouraged to work with the Arkansas Department of Transportation to create a pull-off and wayside exhibit on the proposed new US Highway 79 Bridge at its crossing of the Rock Roe Bayou. The existing bridge was built in 1931 and is scheduled to be replaced with a new bridge within the next decade. As the bridge is designed, the opportunity exists to create an overlook or parking area at the bayou with one or more wayside exhibits with information on the history and significance of the Military Road and the crossings of the White River and Rock Roe Bayou.



**Figure 46:** The erection of a wayside exhibit at this location next to the Rock Roe Bayou Bridge site is recommended.



**Figure 47: Representative example of an appropriate wayside exhibit design for Trail of Tears markers.**

Presently, a dirt road leads from US Highway 79 down to the bayou and along the west bank adjacent to the bridge site. This road is primarily used by four-wheel vehicles due to its rutted condition and the seasonal flooding that often takes place. The refuge should consider improving this road or transforming it into a walking trail to lead visitors from a parking area adjacent to the highway to the Rock Roe Bridge site. A wayside exhibit or marker at the site would provide information on the history and significance of the Rock Roe Bayou crossing and its role during the Trail of Tears. The design of such an exhibit would be a challenge due to the flooding along the bayou but the installation of such an exhibit should be considered.

As part of identification and interpretation efforts, a National Register nomination for the Rock Roe Bayou crossing should be prepared under the direction of the Regional Historic Preservation Officer with the participation of the White River NWR. The National Park Service and the Trail of Tears Association should also be contacted about adding the Rock Roe Bayou crossing as a Trail of Tears Certified Site. Through these efforts the significance of this site would be more fully documented. The crossing would also be added to the official list of Trail of Tears' sites that are recognized by the National Park Service. Other possible identification and interpretive efforts to consider would be an archaeological survey of the crossing to identify any possible artifacts dating to the removal period.

Another important site just outside of the White River NWR boundary is the Rock Roe landing. This steamboat landing was on the west bank of the White River at the mouth of the Rock Roe Bayou. The landing played an important role in the removal of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Creek tribes in the 1830s and the site meets National Register criteria. This landing is directly across the bayou from the boundary of the refuge and interpretation efforts undertaken by the White River NWR should also include information on the history and significance of this site.

The Tennessee River, Wheeler, and White River NWRs all had associations with the Trail of Tears of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The associations with the Tennessee River NWR were transitory and no National Register-eligible properties have been identified. The Wheeler NWR contains two known campsites associated with the

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Cherokee removal of 1838. Both of these campsites were impacted by the impoundment of the Tennessee River in the 1930s and do not retain sufficient integrity of site, feeling and association to meet National Register criteria. At the White River NWR is the historic location of the Military Road and the crossings of the White River and Rock Roe Bayou. Within the boundary of the refuge the Rock Roe Bayou Bridge site retains sufficient integrity to meet National Register criteria. At all three refuges the opportunity exists for the creation of exhibits and installation of markers and interpretive materials to inform visitors and employees of the significance and remaining landscape features of the Trail of Tears.

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