

FROM THE ALABAMA TENNESSEE TRAIL OF TEARS COMMEMORATIVE RIDE WEBSITE:

The route we ride on the 3rd Saturday of each September follows the general route that the peoples of the five tribes followed across northern Alabama. The route from Bridgeport to Waterloo has been designated as the Official Trail of Tears Route for this part of their journey because of the strong historical relevance it has to the trail. The tragic story follows.

The Indian Removal Act called for the voluntary removal of all Indians from the eastern United States to the state of Oklahoma. But it provided for the forced removal of those that didn't volunteer. May of 1838 marked the deadline for voluntary Indian removal. The military was prepared to use force and did so under the command of General Winfield Scott. General Scott ordered the round-up and removal of over 17,000 Cherokees who refused to leave. So began the Cherokee "Trail of Tears," one of the darkest episodes in relations between the United States and Native Americans.

The process was swift and brutal. Detachments of soldiers arrived at every Cherokee house and drove men, women, and children out of their homes with only the clothes on their backs. They were placed in concentration camps where conditions were horrendous. Food and supplies were limited and disease was rampant. Many perished.

By late June of 1838, the upper Tennessee River had become too low for navigation due to a drought. The U.S. government hired Wagonmaster J.C.S. Hood to transport 1,070 Native Americans by foot and wagon from Ross's Landing in Chattanooga, Tennessee to what is now Waterloo, Alabama - about 230 miles. Much of the journey followed what is now U.S. Highway 72.

Upon reaching Waterloo, the survivors were in despicable condition. Migration had to be suspended until the river was high enough for navigation. Many died in Waterloo and others escaped into the hills. Many area residents can trace their native American ancestry to those who fled.

As many as 4,000 deaths occurred on this route because of this forced removal of civilized Native Americans from their rightful homes. In the end, members of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole nations suffered the same fate as the Cherokees.

Join us as we honor those from the past who traveled this Trail of Tears. Let us learn from this mistake, accept each other as we are, and walk together in peace.