

# The Cherokee

The Cherokee were a large tribe living in the Tennessee area until 1938. There are two main theories of how the Cherokee came to be in the southeastern US- one is that they have been there for thousands of years, the other says that they migrated south from the Great Lakes region. The Cherokee prospered in the Appalachian region, where they had dealings with settlers, and later, with the United States. The first major contact with the Cherokee was made during the 17<sup>t</sup> century, and their connections with the European settlers and the United States continued to grow over the next 200 years.

The Cherokee were one of the five civilized tribes in the United States, meaning that they were viewed as more civilized or even 'European' in some aspects. This did not protect the Cherokee from the Trail of Tears. Throughout their contact with Europeans and the United States, many treaties were made in order to help protect the Cherokee and their ancestral lands.

They were forcibly removed from their home lands and sent to new territory in Oklahoma. Many Cherokee died on this trek west. The trail is remembered as 'the place where they cried'. The trail led from Tennessee to new territory set aside for the Cherokee in Oklahoma.

One the remaining Cherokee made it to Oklahoma, Principal Chief John Ross returned to Washington DC to continue to advocate for the Cherokee, which he did until his death. Even with an advocate like Ross, the Cherokee were not permitted to return to their lands in the southeast, instead they had to remain in Oklahoma, where a large population of the Cherokee still live today.

## Numbers

Over 16,000 Cherokee were sent on the Trail of Tears. On this 800 mile forced march, it is estimated that over 4,000 people died before reaching Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

Today, there are over 300,000 members of the Cherokee Nation living in the United States.

## Leadership

Before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, each of the tribes making up the Cherokee Nation would have their own leaders and council. In 1794, the first National Council was established, which created

officers who would be over the whole Nation as opposed to a small section. This allowed the Cherokee to have a centralized government.

**Civilized Tribes**- The 5 civilized tribes were the Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw. These tribes were considered civilized by Europeans and settlers because of their advances in agriculture, government, language, their permanent villages and settlements, and technological and cultural practices shared with the settlers.

**John Ross** (1790-1866)- Principal Chief of the Cherokee during the Trail of Tears. He traveled back to Washington DC to continue advocating for the Cherokee after their forced removal.

**Beloved Woman**- woman (or women) in the Cherokee Nation who were able to sit on tribal councils and help make decisions for the tribe. These women had done something (fought in a battle, perhaps) to help the Cherokee Nation and were well respected.

**Treaty of Tellico**- signed in 1798, also called *The Treaty with the Cherokee*. The treaty was made for several reasons, including justice for the Cherokee. It maintained there would be perpetual peace between the Cherokee and the United States.

**Andrew Jackson**- an American soldier and politician who became the 7th president in 1829, he was the President who enacted the Indian Removal Act

**Trail of Tears**- forced relocation of the Cherokee people from their homeland in the southeast to new territory in Oklahoma that was enacted between 1838 and 1839.

**Indian Removal Act**- was signed by Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830; it allowed for the United States to negotiate with the southeastern Native Americans for their removal from their homelands to new land west of the Mississippi River.

**Treaty of New Echota**- also called the Ocoee Steal, signed in 1835, ceded Cherokee land in the Southeast in exchange for compensation. It was not approved by the Cherokee National Council or signed by Principal Chief John Ross.

**Indian Territory**- tracts of land set aside in the west by the government of the United States for the relocation of Native Americans from their ancestral homelands.

**Blythe's Ferry**- Located in Tennessee, this served as a gathering point for the Trail of Tears, it crossed the Tennessee River.

**Fort Cass**- A fort located on the Hiwassee River in Tennessee where internment camps for the Cherokee embarking on the Trail of Tears were located. This could be called the starting point of the Trail.

**Sequoyah**- (c1170-1843) a Cherokee silversmith who invented Cherokee syllabary and made it possible to read and write in Cherokee.

**Syllabary**- set of written symbols that represent the syllables that make up words.

## Cherokee Legends & Culture

Legends have become a part of many cultures. Native American culture is ripe with myths and legends denoting all sorts of things, from creation to how to live a better life. The Cherokee, who lived in this area prior to 1838, had many legends that explained their world.

**Culture**- A set of customs, traditions, and values of a society or community.

**Legend**- A folklore narrative containing human actions believed by the storyteller and listeners to have taken place during human history. They are neither fully believed or totally disbelieved.

**Myth**- a story, especially concerning the early history of people, that typically involves supernatural beings or events.

**Cherokee**- Native American tribe that historically lived in the Southeast United States (TN, GA) and were relocated to Oklahoma.

**State**- place occupying a definite territory with borders and a government

**Region**- part of a country having definable characteristics but not necessarily a fixed border.

## Legends

### **The Legend of the Milky Way**

Long ago when the world was young, there were not many stars in the sky. In those days, the people depended on corn for their food. Dried corn could be made into cornmeal by placing it in a large hollowed stump and pounding it with a long wooden pestle. The cornmeal was stored in large baskets. During the inter, the meal could be made into bread and mush. One morning, an old man and his wife went to their storage basket for some cornmeal. They discovered that someone or something had gotten into the cornmeal during the night. This upset them very much, for no one in a Cherokee village stole from someone else. Then they noticed that the cornmeal was scattered all over the ground. In the middle of the spilled meal were giant dog prints. These prints were so large that the elderly couple knew it could be no ordinary dog. They immediately alerted the village. It was decided that this must be a spirit dog from another world. The people did not want the dog coming to the village, so they decided to scare him away so that he would never return. They gathered their drums and tortoiseshell rattles and his around the area where the cornmeal was kept. Late at night, they heard a strange sound and looked up to see a giant dog coming down from the sky. It landed near the basket and began to eat huge mouthfuls

of cornmeal. Suddenly, the people jumped up and began shaking their rattles and beating their drums. The giant dog began running down the path, and the people chased him, making as much noise as they could. The dog ran to the top of a hill and jumped into the sky, with cornmeal spilling out of his mouth. The giant dog ran across the sky until he was out of sight, but the cornmeal that fell from his mouth lit up the sky and became stars. The Cherokee call this pattern of stars “gi li’ ut sun stan un’ li (gil-lee-oot-soon stan-unh-yee) or the place where the dog ran. And that is how the Milky Way came to be.

Adapted from: Native American Legends

<https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/HowTheMilkyWayCameToBe-Cherokee.html>

### **The First Strawberries**

In the beginning of the world, *ga lv la di e hi* created First Man and First Woman. Together they built a lodge at the edge of a dense forest. They were very happy together; but as all humans do at times, they began to argue. Finally, First Woman became so angry she said she was leaving and never coming back. At that moment First Man really didn't care. First Woman started walking eastward down the path through the forest. She never looked back.

As the day grew later, First Man began to worry. At last, he started down the same path in search of his wife. The Sun looked down on First Man and took pity on him. The Sun asked First Man if he was still angry with First Woman. First Man said he was not angry anymore. The Sun asked if he would like to have First Woman back. First Man readily agreed he did.

The Sun found First Woman still angrily walking down the path. So to entice her to stop, the Sun caused to grow beneath her feet lovely blueberries. The blueberries were large and ripe. First Woman was still so angry she paid no attention but kept walking down the path toward the West. Further down the path the Sun caused to grow some luscious blackberries. The blackberries were dark and very plump. First Woman looked neither left nor right but kept walking down the path toward the West. The Sun tried once again to entice First Woman to stop. Luscious raspberries grew beneath her feet. First Woman never looked down but kept walking down the path toward the West. Finally, to attract First Woman's attention, the Sun caused to grow a plant that had never grown on the earth before. The plant covered the ground in front of First Woman.

Suddenly she became aware of a fragrance she had never known. Stopping she looked down at her feet. Growing in the path was a plant with shiny green leaves, lovely white flowers with the largest most luscious red berries she had ever seen. First Woman stopped to pick one.

Hmmm...she had never tasted anything quite like it! It was so sweet! It was utterly delicious! As First Woman ate the strawberry, the anger she felt began to fade away. She thought again of her husband and how they had parted in anger. She missed him and wanted to return home. First Woman began to gather some of the berries. When she had all she could carry, she turned toward the East and started back down the path. Soon she met First Man. Together they shared the berries, and then hand in hand, they walked back to their lodge. The Cherokee word for

strawberry is *ani*. The rich bottomlands of the old Cherokee country were noted for their abundance of strawberries and other wild fruits. Even today, strawberries are often kept in Cherokee homes. They remind us not to argue and are a symbol of good luck.

The First Strawberries

<http://www.powersource.com/cocinc/articles/strwbry.htm>

### **Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun**

In the beginning, there was only blackness, and nobody could see anything. People kept bumping into each other and groping blindly. They said: "What this world needs is light." Fox said he knew some people on the other side of the world who had plenty of light, but they were too greedy to share it with others. Possum said he would be glad to steal a little of it. "I have a bushy tail," he said. "I can hide the light inside all that fur." Then he set out for the other side of the world. There he found the sun hanging in a tree and lighting everything up. He sneaked over to the sun, picked out a tiny piece of light, and stuffed it into his tail. But the light was hot and burned all the fur off. The people discovered his theft and took back the light, and ever since, Possum's tail has been bald.

"Let me try," said Buzzard. "I know better than to hide a piece of stolen light in my tail. I'll put it on my head." He flew to the other side of the world and, diving straight into the sun, seized it with his claws. He put it on his head, but it burned his head feathers off. The people grabbed the sun away from him, and ever since that time Buzzard's head has remained bald. Grandmother Spider said, "Let me try!" First she made a thick-walled pot out of clay. Next she spun a web reaching all the way to the other side of the world. She was so small that none of the people there noticed her coming. Quickly Grandmother Spider snatched up the sun, put it in the bowl of clay, and scrambled back home along one of the strands of her web. Now her side of the world had light, and everyone rejoiced. Spider Woman brought not only the sun to the Cherokee, but fire with it. And besides that, she taught the Cherokee people the art of pottery making.

Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun

<http://www.angelfire.com/ca/Indian/GrandmotherSpider.html>