

# Cherokee

The Trail of Tears occupies a special place in Native American history. Many tribes have similar incidents from their history, as this book shows. Yet this event involving the Cherokees has come to symbolize the land cessions and relocations of all Indian peoples, just as Wounded Knee, involving the Sioux, has come to represent the numerous massacres of Indian innocents (see "Sioux").

Yet before we further discuss the Trail of Tears, we'll take a look at the Cherokee (pronounced CHAIR-uh-key) language and culture and other important events in their history.

When Europeans first arrived in North America, the Cherokees occupied a large expanse of territory in the Southeast. Their homeland included mountains and valleys in the southern part of the Appalachian chain. The Cherokees had villages in the Great Smoky Mountains of western North Carolina and the Blue Ridge of western Virginia, as well as in the Great Valley of eastern Tennessee. They also lived in the Appalachian high country of South Carolina and Georgia, and as far south as northern Alabama.

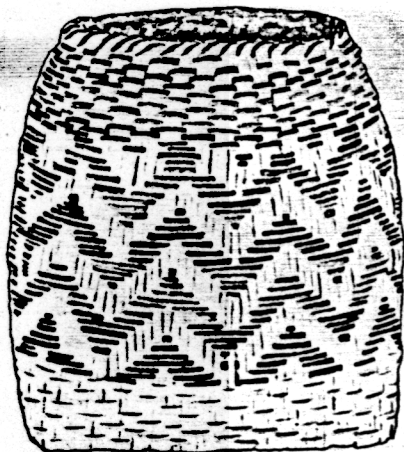
In Indian studies, this region of North America is classified within the Southeast Culture Area (see

lines to catch different kinds of fish. Another method included poisoning an area of water to bring the unconscious fish to the surface.

The Cherokees were also skilled hunters. They hunted large animals, such as deer and bear, with bows and arrows. To get close to the deer, they wore entire deerskins, antlers and all, and used deer calls to lure the animals to them. The Cherokees hunted smaller game, such as raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, and turkeys, with blowguns made from the hollowed-out stems of cane plants. Through these long tubes, the hunters blew small wood-and-feather darts with deadly accuracy from as far away as 60 feet.

The products of the hunt were also used for clothing. In warm weather, Cherokee men dressed in buckskin breechcloths and women in buckskin skirts. In cold weather, men wore buckskin shirts, leggings, and moccasins; women wore buckskin capes. Other capes, made from turkey and eagle feathers along with strips of bark, were used by Cherokee headmen for ceremonial purposes. Their leaders also wore feather headdresses on special occasions.

Ceremonies took place inside circular and domed council houses or domed seven-sided temples. The temples were usually located on top of flat-topped mounds in the central village plaza, a custom inherited from the earlier Temple Mound Builders of the Southeast (see "Mound Builders").



Cherokee river cane basket

"Southeast Indians"). The Cherokees spoke dialects of the Iroquoian language, the southernmost people to do so. Their ancestral relatives, the Iroquois, lived in the Northeast Culture Area (see "Iroquois").

The Cherokee name for themselves in Iroquoian was *Ani-yun-wiya*, meaning "real people." The name *Cherokee* was probably given to them by the neighboring Creeks—*tciloki* in its original form, meaning "people of the different speech."

## Lifeways

The Cherokees placed their villages along rivers and streams, where they farmed the rich black soil. Their crops included corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, sunflowers, and tobacco. They grew three different kinds of corn, or maize—one to roast, one to boil, and a third to grind into flour for cornbread. The Cherokees also took advantage of the wild plant foods in their homeland, including edible roots, crab apples, berries, persimmons, cherries, grapes, hickory nuts, walnuts, and chestnuts.

The rivers and streams also provided food for the Cherokees. They used spears, traps, and hooks and

Cherokee families, like other people of the Southeast, usually had two houses—a large summer home and a smaller winter home. The summer houses, rectangular in shape with peaked roofs, had pole frameworks, cane and clay walls, and bark or thatch roofs. The winter houses, which doubled as sweathouses, were placed over a pit with a cone-shaped roof of poles and earth. Cherokee villages were usually surrounded with walls of vertical logs or palisades, for protection from hostile tribes.

The Cherokees practiced a variety of crafts, including plaited basketwork and stamped pottery. They also carved, out of wood and gourds, *Booger* masks, representing evil spirits. And they shaped stone pipes into animal figures, attached to wooden stems.



Cherokee Booger mask. The term *booger*, from which *bogeyman* comes, is African in origin, taken by the Cherokees from the native language of black slaves.

Among the many Cherokee agricultural, hunting, and healing rituals, the most important was the Green Corn Ceremony. This annual celebration, shared by other tribes of the Southeast, took place at the time of the ripening of the last corn crop (see "Creek").