

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

Before contact with European settlers, the Cherokee people lived and flourished in the mountains of North Carolina.

The Cherokee also lived in northern Georgia, South Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and the Alabama hills. Within the mountains they usually built villages around rivers, where land was the most fertile.



Many Cherokee were members of a clan. Cherokee clans were matrilineal (descended from the mother) and often members of the same clan lived in separate villages. People were forbidden to marry within their clan, so when a man and a woman married, the man would become a member of his wife's clan.

Within each clan there were smaller tribes, each of which elected a war chief and a peacetime chief. The peacetime chief was the leader during times of peace, and the war chief made decisions during times of war. Members of different clans lived among each other. There were seven Cherokee clans, each represented by a supernatural ancestor.

- People of the **Bird Clan** were keepers of birds and sacred feathers and may have been messengers between people on earth and the Creator. They were skilled at trapping and hunting birds with blowguns.
- The **Paint Clan** were healers and medicine men. During a healing ritual, they would "paint" the red-colored medicine onto a patient.
- Members of the **Deer Clan** were keepers and hunters of deer. They were swift runners and messengers.
- Many war chiefs came from the largest clan, the **Wolf Clan**. The members were protectors and hunters of the wolves.
- People of the oldest clan, the **Blue Clan**, made special medicine from a blue plant to keep children well.
- Members of the **Long Hair Clan** wore their hair in elaborate hairstyles. Known for being peaceful, the peace chiefs would come from this clan. They also adopted many people who did not come from a clan into theirs.
- People of the **Wild Potato Clan** were keepers of the land. They gathered wild potatoes, which were a staple food for the Cherokee.

History

The Cherokee are descended from the Iroquoian Indians that migrated from the northeast. The Cherokee people can trace their heritage in the North Carolina mountains to at least 1000 years. There is some evidence they could have been in the area for around 3000 years, and there is archaeological evidence that the Cherokee first became a tribe after the Ice Age, over 10,000 years ago.

The Cherokee people first settled into the southeastern mountains because the land was rich with natural resources. There are around 800 native edible and medicinal plants in the southern Appalachians.

At the time the region was also populated by buffalo, elk, deer, and other useful animals. The Cherokee used animal skins for clothing, and used plant and earth materials to construct housing, kitchen utensils, and hunting tools. The Cherokee people depended upon crops like corn, beans, and gourds.

A Great People

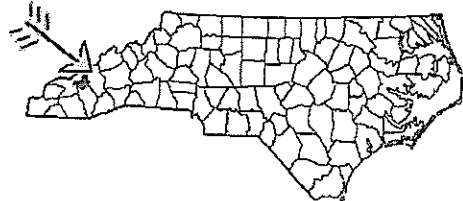
In the 1800's the Cherokee faced challenges, but were able to adapt to the fast-paced society around them. The Cherokee Nation was founded to keep the Cherokee people united.



In 1809, **Sequoyah** worked to establish a written language, which led to most Cherokee learning to read and write in this language by 1823. In 1828 a newspaper was founded, called the *Cherokee Phoenix*, that was printed only in the Cherokee language.

The Separation

These gains would eventually be taken away from the Cherokee with Andrew Jackson's **Indian Removal Act of 1830**, which called for Indians to be moved from the Southeast to the West. European Americans wanted all the land east of the Mississippi clear of Native Americans so they could settle and mine for gold and other valuable minerals in the Appalachians.



The Act was intended to allow the President to negotiate with tribes like the Cherokee to trade eastern land for western land.

To get the tribes to move, President Jackson initially promised the Indians that out west, they could be autonomous (self-governing). Later, deceit, bribery, and even intimidation were used to get tribal leaders to sign treaties.

After several years of resistance, which included the tribe winning a Supreme Court case to remain on their land, President Jackson sent American troops to force 17,000 Cherokee to Oklahoma. In 1838, thousands of Native American people began their journeys west along the **Trail of Tears**. Over 4,000 Cherokee died along the way from sickness and disease.



Over 1,000 Cherokee, however, managed to escape and hide out in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina.

There was a small group of Cherokee people, referred to as the **Oconaluftee Indians**, who did not consider themselves a part of the Cherokee Nation, as they excluded themselves from Cherokee Nation territory. These Oconaluftee Indians were hired by the government to look for Cherokees hiding in the mountains.

Among the hiding Cherokee Nation Indians was **Tsali**, a brave Cherokee who inspired other Native people to stay in the mountains. After Tsali gave himself up to authorities, and with the help of attorney **William H. Thomas**, the United States government agreed to establish a 56,000-acre section of land called the **Qualla Boundary Indian Reservation**. The people of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation now live there.

Modern Cherokee

Because of the Cherokee people's removal from the East, there are separate "bands" of Cherokee. The largest band of Cherokee is the Cherokee Nation, with headquarters in Oklahoma. This is where most people of the Cherokee bloodline call home. There are over 250,000 Cherokee Nation members.



The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians is located in Oklahoma, and is gradually becoming part of the Cherokee Nation. This band was founded to retain Cherokee tradition and culture amidst a time when the United States government wanted to erase their heritage. In the early 1900s the Keetoowah Nighthawk Society formed, meeting in secret places to work to preserve the ceremonies and beliefs of their families.

Stomp Dance Ceremony

The Cherokee people traditionally practice a stomp dance that is and was used as a symbol of fellowship among themselves and spirituality with the Creator. The stomp dance ceremony was an important event for the Cherokee village for hundreds of years.

They usually begin the ceremony early in the morning, when a great bonfire is built and lit with flint and stone. At sunrise, the men commune together and the women prepare the traditional foods. Later, elders speak and hold sermons, and afterward they play stickball.



In the evening the sermons recommence. The subject of these sermons usually has to do with unconditional love for one another.

Each clan member takes seven puffs from a ceremonial pipe. The seven puffs represent the seven Cherokee clans. Still later, the elders, chief, and doctors hold a private meeting where they invite special guests and clan members to take part in viewing the first stomp dance of the evening. And then upon the second dance all members are invited.

No drugs or alcohol is allowed during the ceremony, as it is a deeply spiritual time.

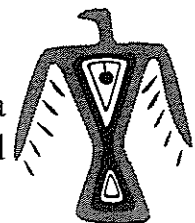
Dancers wear rattles that were traditionally made from old turtle shells filled with pebbles. In modern times they use bells and other metal rattles. There are head dancers, who are much more experienced, and their apprentices.

Spirituality



Cherokee spirituality is based on a Creator and spirits that inhabit the Sun, Moon, and stars. The Cherokee deeply respect and honor the spirits of all animals. Certain animals are revered more than others. The eagle was one of these animals, and only a few warriors who earned it were allowed to wear the feathers.

Similar to other North American Indians, the Cherokee worship a thunder god. One of their thunder gods, Tsul 'Kalu, is a hunter and looks like a deer. Tsul 'Kalu is called to during hunting rituals.



Eastern Band of Cherokee Review

Answer the following:

1. The Cherokee Indians usually built villages around _____, where the land was most _____.
 - a. lakes, dry
 - b. rivers, unfertile
 - c. rivers, fertile
 - d. lakes, rocky
2. True or false: Cherokee clans were descended from the mother.
3. Each tribe within the Cherokee had two chiefs. What was each chief's function or job?
4. True or false: There are eight Cherokee clans.
5. The Cherokee people are of _____ descent.
 - a. Iroquois
 - b. Catawba
 - c. Sioux
 - d. Sappony
6. Why did the Cherokee people settle into the southeastern mountain region?
7. Who is Sequoyah? Why is he important to the Cherokee people?
8. The Oconaluftee Indians were a small group of Cherokee people who were hired by the _____ to hunt for hiding _____ Indians.
 - a. government, Catawba
 - b. Iroquois, Cherokee
 - c. Cherokee, government
 - d. government, Cherokee
9. During a stomp dance ceremony, no _____ or _____ is allowed.
10. The Cherokee people deeply respect and honor animal spirits. What is one of the most revered animals to the Cherokee people?