

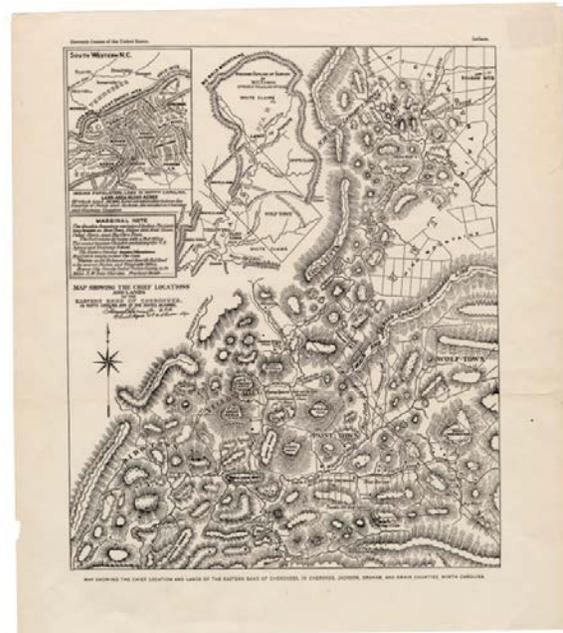


## The Cherokee

The Cherokee are a Southern Iroquoian speaking tribe (consisting of several geographic dialects) and have inhabited the southern Appalachian summit and uplands for thousands of years. The Cherokee homeland is characterized by intersecting mountain chains including the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains and numerous major river systems that emptied into the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Mississippi River. This network of rivers, streams, and smaller drainages provided fertile bottomlands and ready transportation routes. The region contained valleys used for hunting and farming, and extensive chestnut-oak forests.

By the 18th century, the Cherokee lived in autonomous towns in four major areas: Lower, Middle, Valley, and Overhill. The Lower Towns were located the furthest east in South Carolina and were located in a rich riverine environment. The Middle Towns were situated in the mountain valleys between the Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee Rivers of western North Carolina. The Valley Towns were situated in far western North Carolina along

the Valley and Hiwassee Rivers, as well as portions of Georgia. The Overhill Towns were located primarily along the Little Tennessee and Hiwassee Rivers in eastern Tennessee. By the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Cherokee had expanded into northeastern Alabama. Ancestral Cherokee lands also included portions of Virginia, West Virginia, and most of Kentucky as hunting grounds and buffer zones.



Map Showing the Primary Locations and Lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokees, circa 1890.

Cherokee subsistence was dependent on varieties of corn, beans, and squash. Men cleared



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the field by girdling trees and the controlled use of fire; women planted and tended the crops. Both genders harvested. Wild plant foods consisted of cresses and lettuces, wild potatoes, turnips, leeks, pokeweed, mayapples, currants, wild cherries, pawpaws, mulberries, serviceberries, persimmons, and various types of mushrooms such as morels, chanterelles, and oversized hen-of-the-woods. Regrowth from fire-cleared lands produced strawberries, raspberries, elderberries, blackberries, blueberries and huckleberries. Nuts, such as chestnuts, black walnuts, hickory nuts, acorns, hazelnuts, and beechnuts, were gathered. Hunting activities focused on whitetail deer, elk, wood bison, bear, beaver, turtle, opossum, frog, rabbit and woodchuck. Birds, such as geese, ducks, bobwhite quail, passenger pigeons, and turkeys, were also trapped or snared. Riverine food sources included bass, carp, catfish, crappies, drumfish, buffalo fish, pike, sunfish, suckers, trout, eels, garfish, crawfish, mussels, snails, and periwinkles.

Cherokee towns included a ceremonial-political center consisting of a semisubterranean

circular or elevated octagonal structure, an open courtyard surrounded by arbors and benches, and a complex of poles erected for ball games. These centers might also contain residences of priests and other town officials. Household clusters consisted of buildings for eating and sleeping, a separate cookhouse, elevated storage structures, sunken storage pits, hot houses or sweatlodges, and open arbors.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Cherokee recognized seven sacred or mother towns that were the locations of major regional religious ceremonies. Kituwah Mound, located south of Cherokee, North Carolina, is considered the most sacred of the mother towns as this is the birthplace of the Cherokee people and location where the Cherokee first received their sacred fire and sacred laws. The sacred flame of the Cherokee was tended at the Kituwah Mound. During late July or early August, the Green Corn ceremony took place, where the old fire was extinguished and the new fire was ritually prepared. Cherokee traveled hundreds of miles each year to receive fire from the Kituwah Mound hearth. The sacred fires were carried home in specially designed ceramic vessels.



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The Fort Campbell area, including the barrens, were part of the Cherokee hunting grounds under the stewardship of the Overhill Towns. The Overhill Cherokee could reach the barrens in less than 4 or 5 days from their towns in eastern Tennessee.

The area containing Fort Campbell is primarily an upland zone characterized by small creeks and interstream divides with a diversity and abundance of plant and animal resources. Overhill Cherokee relied on these hunting grounds to supplement their diet based on crops grown in the floodplains near their towns.

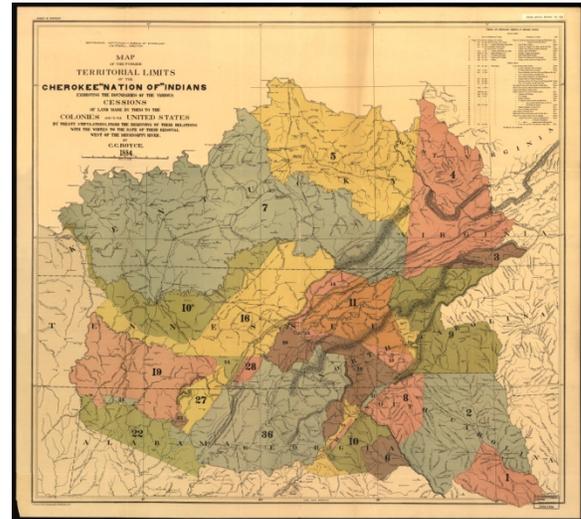
The strong sense of Cherokee stewardship and reliance upon the lands containing the barrens is best illustrated by an impassioned speech made by a prominent Overhill warrior named Tsi-yu-gun-shy-ni, or Dragging Canoe, during land negotiations at Sycamore Shoals in 1775. On March 15, 1775, during the second day of negotiations with the Transylvania Land Company, Dragging Canoe challenged the illegal land cessions agreement; he walked to the center of the treaty grounds and said:

*“Whole Indian Nations have melted away like snowballs in the sun before the white man's advance. They leave scarcely a name of our people except those wrongly recorded by their destroyers. Where are the Delewares? They have been reduced to a mere shadow of their former greatness. We had hoped that the white men would not be willing to travel beyond the mountains. Now that hope is gone. They have passed the mountains, and have settled upon Tsalagi (Cherokee) land. They wish to have that usurpation sanctioned by treaty. When that is gained, the same encroaching spirit will lead them upon other land of the Tsalagi (Cherokees). New cessions will be asked. Finally the whole country, which the Tsalagi (Cherokees) and their fathers have so long occupied, will be demanded, and the remnant of the Ani Yvwiya, The Real People, once so great and formidable, will be compelled to seek refuge in some distant wilderness.*”



*There they will be permitted to stay only a short while, until they again behold the advancing banners of the same greedy host. Not being able to point out any further retreat for the miserable Tsalagi (Cherokees), the extinction of the whole race will be proclaimed. Should we not therefore run all risks, and incur all consequences, rather than to submit to further loss of our country? Such treaties may be alright for men who are too old to hunt or fight. As for me, I have my young warriors about me. We will hold our land. A-WANINSKI, I have spoken."*

Dragging Canoe's speech had such a strong influence on the headmen that they closed the Treaty Council without more talk. However, in the end, the Transylvania Land Company purchased 20 million acres of land from the Cherokee that included the Cumberland River watershed and lands on the Kentucky River (all of eastern and central Kentucky). Their rights to maintain and use their hunting grounds were ceded.



Map Showing the Boundaries of Cessions Made by Cherokee Nation to the Colonies and the United States.

As mandated through various laws and their implementing regulations, consultation and coordination with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, a Federally Recognized Tribe, located in Cherokee, North Carolina, is ongoing to consider impacts on resources and lands they once occupied. The coordination process with Federally Recognized Tribes is considered a government-to-government consultation between the United States government and the sovereign Tribe or Nation. The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians view ongoing government-to-government consultations with the United States government and its federal agencies as another opportunity to strengthening their



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Tribal sovereignty. For more information on the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians: <https://nc-choerokee.com/>



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