

# Ocmulgee Mounds

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Interior

Ocmulgee Mounds NHP



## The Five Civilized Tribes

### CHEROKEE - CHICKASAW - CHOCTAW - CREEK - SEMINOLE



"...TO SECURE OURSELVES AND OUR DESCENDANTS THE RIGHTS AND BENEFITS TO WHICH WE ARE ENTITLED..."  
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#### WHO ARE THEY?

From their geographical and historical association with the white man in the South, the Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Seminoles acquired a measure of his culture. Through the influence of their leading men, they had copied some of the customs and institutions of the whites, and four of the tribes modeled their government on those of the States. Because of their progress and achievements, they became known as "The Five Civilized Tribes." Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* – 1977

#### CHEROKEE

The Cherokee Nation, largest of the Five Civilized Tribes of the southeast, is a people of Iroquoian lineage. The Cherokee, who called themselves "Ani'-Yun' wiya" or "Principal People", migrated to the southeast from the Great Lakes Region. They commanded more than 40,000 square miles in the southern Appalachians by 1650 with a population estimated at 22,500. They lived in permanent villages near broad river bottoms suitable for agriculture. They were a single tribe composed of seven clans. Their capital changed from town to town depending upon the

residence of the principle chief. After the American Revolution, they adopted a new course patterned after the newly formed United States government. Development of a syllabary by Sequoyah allowed the Cherokee to publish books and newspapers in their own language. Many became wealthy. Despite the accomplishments, their land was coveted by a tide of white settlers and they were forced to relocate to Oklahoma (The Trail of Tears). A few managed to hide out in the mountains where they were eventually granted a reservation in the vicinity of what is now Cherokee, North Carolina.

#### CREEK

In early historic times, Indians belonging to the Creek Confederacy occupied most of the area now known as Georgia and Alabama. The largest group in this alliance was composed of the people of the Muskogean linguistic group, which included the Muscogee, Hitchiti, and Yamasee. Central to Creek government was the talwa, or town, consisting of a ceremonial and political center with all outlying villages and settlements. Towns were strung out along the rivers of the territory. Their economy was based on a combination of agriculture, hunting and gathering. With the beginning of European

contact and trade, Creek lifestyles began to change dramatically. For years, they served as a buffer between the English colonies at Charleston and Savannah and the Spanish-dominated Florida. After the American Revolution, many Creeks became prosperous farmers; others followed a more traditional way of life. The state of Georgia gradually pushed the Creeks westward. In 1826, Creek leader William McIntosh signed a treaty ceding the last Creek Lands in Georgia in return for land in what would become the state of Oklahoma.

#### CHICKASAW

Chickasaw territory centered on their "old fields" near present day Tupelo, Mississippi; however, they controlled a huge region bounded by the Ohio, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Tombigbee Rivers. One outlying town was located near present day Augusta, Georgia. Their

tribe was a matrilineal society divided into clans and ruled by the "High Minko," known to Europeans as the "King of the Chickasaws." A national advisory council assisted this ruler. The Chickasaws had contact with the French in the Mississippi River valley but established firm trading

CHICKASAW  
(CONTINUED)

ties in the late 1600's with the English traders from South Carolina. They gained renown as the fiercest fighters of the south and were almost constantly engaged in conflicts with the Choctaws, Creeks, Cherokees, and even the Shawnee and Iroquois to the north. The Chickasaws

also battled with French traders on the Mississippi River. They began their westward emigration in 1822, and by 1834 they were gone from the old south. Their tribe is located in what is now the state of Oklahoma.

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CHOCTAW

Tribal legends say this group originated at Nanih Waiya Mound in east central Mississippi. Historically, they centered on this area reaching east into the Tombigbee River lands of Alabama, along the boundary of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Their villages formed the basis of three great districts, each ruled by a chief, which together constituted the Choctaw Nation. Like other southeastern Indians, their society was based on matrilineal clans. They celebrated the "Busk" (Green Corn Ceremony) and held large ball games. They were the most intensive farmers of the south and were noted for their peaceful

character and friendly disposition. Due to the nearby French settlements and trading posts along the lower Mississippi River, the Choctaws were influenced by them and were in a buffer situation during the British-French contest for control in the region until 1763. Later, under British and American domination, they gradually emigrated west of the Mississippi, and by 1834 had located in present day Oklahoma. However, one band of Choctaws managed to remain in their homeland, despite tremendous opposition and hardship. This group currently lives on a reservation near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

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SEMINOLES

The term "seminole" in the Muscogean language means "those who have gone away." Most of the Seminoles were a branch who separated from the Lower Creek settlements in the 1700's. These Muscogee, Hitchiti, and probably, Yamassee and Yuchi people were joined by remnants of the native tribes of Florida who had survived European diseases, the Spanish mission system, and devastating raids by the British and their Indian allies. The Seminole readily accepted other people among them, including adopted whites and runaway slaves from the American colonies. By doing so, many African clothing styles, words and stories

made their way into Seminole life and added a unique flavor to Seminole culture. They were gradually pushed southward by European settlement. Their resistance to treaties forcing the removal of the Seminole from Florida resulted in two major wars. Andrew Jackson terminated the first Seminole War. The last war, led by Osceola, lasted from 1835 until 1842. Some of the Seminole retreated deep into the Everglades region and were never wholly defeated. Others were removed to present-day state of Oklahoma where many still live on lands adjacent to their close relatives of the Muscogee (Creeks).