Traveling Through Lawrenceburg

Today you are walking in the footsteps of the Cherokee and many others who traveled this road, which once served as a main thoroughfare between Lawrenceburg and Waynesboro. The weight of people, wagons, and horses compressed the earth over the years, giving the road its distinctive sunken appearance.

Before the Cherokee traveled on this road in 1838, they passed through the bustling town of Lawrenceburg. As the Cherokee walked through, residents likely peered from their windows or wandered outside their homes and businesses to watch the weary travelers on their journey to Indian Territory.

Completed in 1824, the David Crockett Courthouse stood at the center of Lawrenceburg and was the county's first permanent courthouse. In 1836, the Bell-Davis detachment of Cherokee passed by the building on their journey west.

Chosen as the county seat in 1819, Lawrenceburg was a well-connected crossroads community. The 660 Cherokee led by John Bell traveled the east-west thoroughfare through town on their way to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).
Food For Thought

Take a few moments to think about the variety of food you eat in a given day, week, or month. While traveling to Indian Territory, the government mandated that each Cherokee be provided with a specific amount of food for his or her journey.

The Cherokee who traveled along this road in 1838 ate fresh pork or beef, coffee, and cornmeal each day and were also given some flour and sugar. During their 89-day trek west, their diet changed little. Imagine walking over 700 miles with little more than meat and cornmeal to eat daily.

“The Indians as a whole carry in their countenances every thing but the appearance of happiness. Some carry a downcast dejected look bordering on the appearance of despair...”

– New York Observer, January 26, 1839

While traveling to Indian Territory, items were purchased from farmers and merchants along the way to resupply the Bell detachment.

The U States

To Amos Richardson

1838

5 Novr. For 6 1/2 Bushels corn at 50 cents per bushel $32.50

Received near Lawrenceburg Tenn.
6 Nov. 1838 (Lt.) Edw Dean Dispa Agent
Thirty-two dollars and fifty cents in full of the above account.

$32.50 [Duplicate] Amos Richardson

National Archives and Records Administration
Opposition to Indian Removal

“I believed [the Indian Removal Act] was a wicked, unjust measure, and that I should go against it, let the cost to myself be what it might.”

David Crockett

David Crockett is perhaps best known as a folk hero and iconic frontiersman who was a skilled marksman and hunter. His name now brings to mind images of raccoon skin hats, fringed deerskin jackets, and Kentucky long rifles. Crockett was much more than the legendary frontiersman we think of today. He was also a Tennessee legislator and US congressman who opposed the controversial Indian Removal Act signed in May 1830, a favored policy of President Andrew Jackson that paved the way for the Trail of Tears.

Colleagues warned him that to oppose the Indian Removal Act would be “the unpardonable sin.” Even so, Crockett cast his vote against the act—the only member of Tennessee’s congressional delegation to do so. Afterwards, Crockett said he was “hunted down like a wild varmint [sic]” and attacked in newspapers. Ultimately, he paid the cost for his controversial vote and lost reelection in November 1830.

David Crockett State Park

The David Crockett State Park was dedicated in 1959 in honor of one of Tennessee’s most famous native sons. David Crockett had close ties to the Lawrenceburg area. In the brief time he lived here (1817-1821), he served as a justice of the peace, was colonel of the Fifty-seventh Militia Regiment of Lawrence County, and served as a Lawrenceburg town commissioner. The park includes the original sites of Crockett’s gristmill, powder mill, and a distillery along the bank of Shoal Creek, which were all washed away in a flood in 1821.
The Journey Continues

Here you end your journey on the Bell Route of the Trail of Tears in David Crockett State Park, but for the Cherokee in 1838, the journey continued two more long months. From here, they headed west to Memphis and Little Rock before disbanding at the Vineyard Post Office in present-day Evansville, Arkansas, on January 7, 1839. With the new year came a new life for the Cherokee as they began rebuilding their homes and communities in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).

“'I have concluded that we had better pursue the route by Memphis, provided the people themselves are willing to do so.'”

—Lieutenant Edward Deas, with the Bell detachment, October 22, 1838