Native Peoples

Remembering the Past

This is how one survivor from the Trail of Tears described it: "Long time we travel on way to new land. People feel bad when they leave old nation. Women cry and make sad wails. Children cry and many men cry, and all look sad like when friends die, but they say nothing and just put heads down and keep on go towards West. Many days pass and people die very much. We bury close by Trail." (From the *Daily Oklahoman*, April 7, 1929)

Trail of Tears

The Trail of Tears describes a period in American history when many Native people were removed by force from their homes in the eastern part of the United States. Made to march hundreds of miles to a new Indian Territory, they suffered from disease, starvation, and cruelty at the hands of some of the government soldiers. At the end of his peoples' journey west, a Choctaw chief told a newspaper reporter that the journey had been "a trail of tears and death."

"The sufferings of the Cherokees were awful. … I have known as many as twenty-two of them to die in one night of **pneumonia** due to ill treatment, cold, and exposure."

John G. Burnett, U.S. soldier and interpreter from the Trail of Tears

♦ *The Trail of Tears was not one actual trail but different, unmarked paths through rough and wild areas of land, bodies of water, and swamplands.*

pneumonia: a disease of the lungs