

## A Trail of Tears: Fort Butler near Murphy, North Carolina



### Map of Cherokee Removal

Fort Butler, originally named Camp Huntington, was located on a hill overlooking the Hiwassee River and was used as the headquarters of the U. S. Army charged with overseeing the affairs of the Cherokee Nation. During the Trail of Tears, it was this military deployment which forced the Cherokees further West. From here, the Cherokees were marched to Fort Cass and then into Indian Territory. After the Treaty of New Echota, during July of 1836 a force of Tennessee volunteer militia under the command of John E. Wool were sent from Tennessee.

One month later the camp was abandoned, to be reoccupied about a year later and renamed Fort Butler. Its strategic location over the Hiwassee River led to the towns of the tribes which were located in the valleys.

By 1838, after the deadline had passed for their removal and it was obvious that the Cherokees refused to leave their lands, the army prepared for a forced removal. Thus, the barracks, offices, shops, kitchens and other

buildings were enlarged. During May of 1838, General Abraham Eustis took command. He had just left the Seminole War in Florida. The same month, the Cherokee removal from Georgia began.

Reports of abusive treatment of prisoners caused General Winfield Scott stationed at Fort Cass to suspend operations until early June. Because the army expected violent resistance in the most densely populated regions of the Cherokees, General Scott traveled to Fort Butler to personally direct the roundup of June 12, 1838. More than 3,000 Cherokee prisoners from western North Carolina and northern Georgia passed through Fort Butler that summer en route to Fort Cass, Tennessee where they would endure a long imprisonment.

The stories of the removal of the Cherokees has been spun many times. Perhaps there was a happy ending when the Dawes Commission (of 1903) decided to deed Oklahoma land to those who could prove a lineage to the Cherokees.

Over 32,000 applications were received in Washington, D. C., and although it is interesting reading them, only those relatives who could discover their ancestors on previous Indian Rolls were found entitled to the land.