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Review of *The Cherokee Trail of Tears* Essay by Duane King

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Cherokee Trail of Tears. Essay by Duane King. Photography by David G. Fitzgerald. Foreword by Principal Chief Chadwick Smith. Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Books, 2007. 128 pp. Photographs, map, notes, index. \$27.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Although the Cherokees were among a great number of Indian nations from all over the eastern half of the United States to be forced from their homeland by the 1830 Removal Act,

in the popular imagination the term "Trail of Tears" refers to the exodus from their homes in present-day North Carolina, Tennessee, northern Alabama, and Georgia. In the decade before passage of the Removal Act, the Cherokees took defensive action, organizing their government along the lines of the American republic, and embracing some of the trappings of white civilization. However, this strategy failed; the Cherokees were left to follow the Muscogee (Creeks), Choctaws, and Chickasaws on their journeys to Indian Territory.

The authors limit their topic by focusing on what they call "forced removal," centering their story on the seventeen detachments that began their travels from June to October of 1838, especially those controlled by Chief John Ross. The main sections of the book are organized as itinerary narratives, tracing the movements of the separate detachments on the various water, land, and combined routes. This methodology is effective, allowing the authors to attend to the special circumstances of each group and to include portions of what commentaries survive. Three appendices provide helpful data on details of the detachments.

The images here are superb. David G. Fitzgerald, ably assisted by his wife Mari, visited many of the sites along the various routes documenting them with his camera. The Cherokee parties moved at a pace of between four and fifteen miles per day, so Fitzgerald was not able to photograph even a majority of the stopping places. Although much has changed in the 170 years since the Cherokees removed themselves, he does allow the reader a glimpse of the landscapes the Indians experienced. In addition, image placement is thoughtfully done, and the photographs complement the text well.

Unfortunately, the authors choose to ignore the circumstances of the Removal Treaty, members of the Treaty Party, and the groups leaving for the West before 1838. Information on these important aspects of Cherokee Removal perhaps would have contributed more to an understanding of this most traumatic episode in the life of the Nation than the accusations of "holocaust" and "ethnic cleansing." Instead

of a discussion on the various estimates of casualties, more emphasis could have been placed on the story of Cherokee survival, resiliency, and uncommon valor in the face of the frontal attack on its nationhood.

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