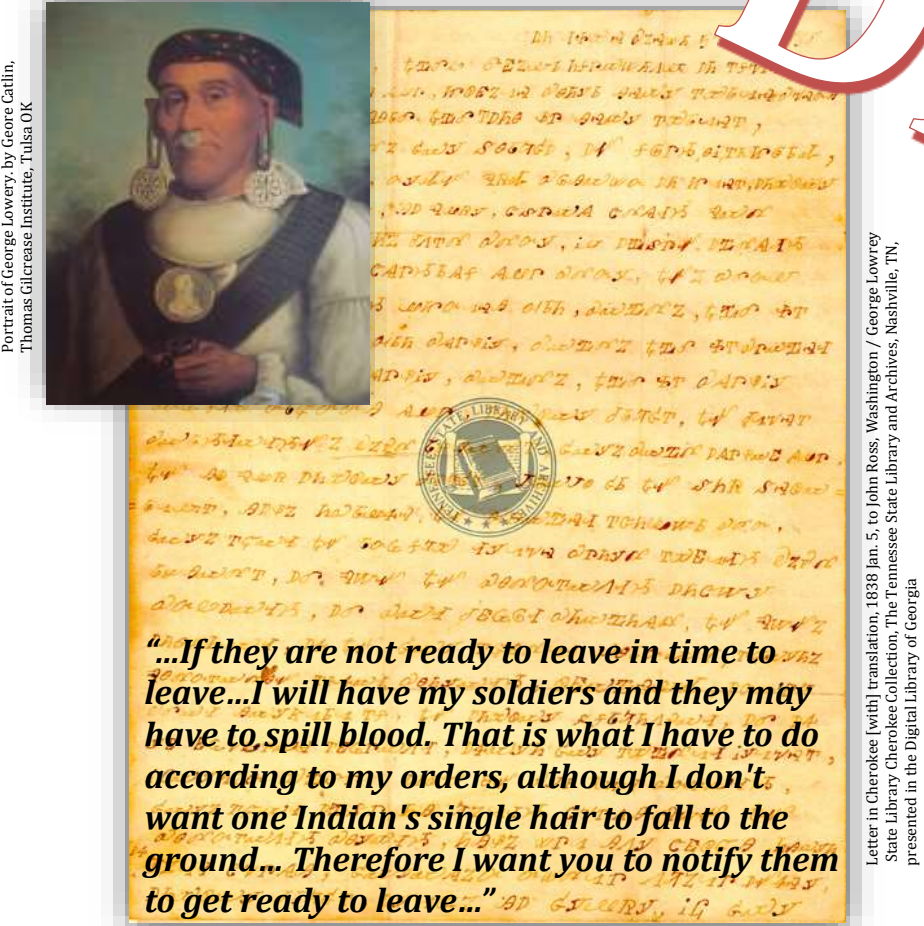


The Benge Detachment

In 1838 the United States government forcibly removed thousands of Cherokee people from their homelands in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Northern Carolina. The harrowing journey to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, claimed the lives of hundreds of Cherokee. Of the thirteen detachments of Cherokee mobilized, the Benge Detachment traveled a distinct route separate from others through southern Missouri. This route is named after John Benge, the prominent Cherokee official leading the detachment.



George Lowery (1770-1852) Assistant Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, recounts warning from US military officials, September 1838

The government allotment for each Cherokee person of \$66.24 for 80 days of travel was not adequate. The Benge detachment traveled for 106 days, one of the quickest detachments moving across land. In contrast, the Hicks detachment following the Northern Route trekked for 189 days.

The Benge Detachment included Cherokee from all social standings; upper-class landowners, lower-class farmers, and 144 slaves.

Benge Route in Missouri

The Benge Detachment took 10 days crossing over the Mississippi River into Missouri at Iron Banks, KY through icy conditions. The Missouri landscape that greeted the Cherokee was inhospitable, both swampy and harsh.

The Benge Detachment followed existing roads for the majority of their sojourn through rugged terrain. Official "State Roads" in Missouri were maintained by citizens who lived adjacent to them. For early travelers like the Cherokee, the roads may or may not have been marked or even cleared of trees and debris.

...the first camp encountered by the Benge Detachment was nothing more than a cluster of several log buildings and offered little rest to the weary travelers. The Cherokee were met with suspicion by local residents along the Trail of Tears.

Although the people of the Benge Detachment faced rough conditions on their journey, the detachment had one of the lowest number of deaths among the detachments. The Benge Detachment traveled over 160 miles through the state of Missouri in approximately 12 days before crossing into Arkansas

Why did John Benge and his detachment travel a route so different from other detachments?

Scholars are still unsure of the factors that determined the Benge Route, since there are no first-hand Cherokee accounts of the Benge emigration. There is speculation that the slave-owning members of the detachment were trying to avoid the free state of Illinois. It is also possible that some members had family in the Southern Missouri area.



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Benge Route Today



Archaeological survey, Mark Twain National Forest 2012

In Spring of 2011, the Mark Twain National Forest and several volunteers and partners surveyed the areas most likely to contain traces of the Benge Route.



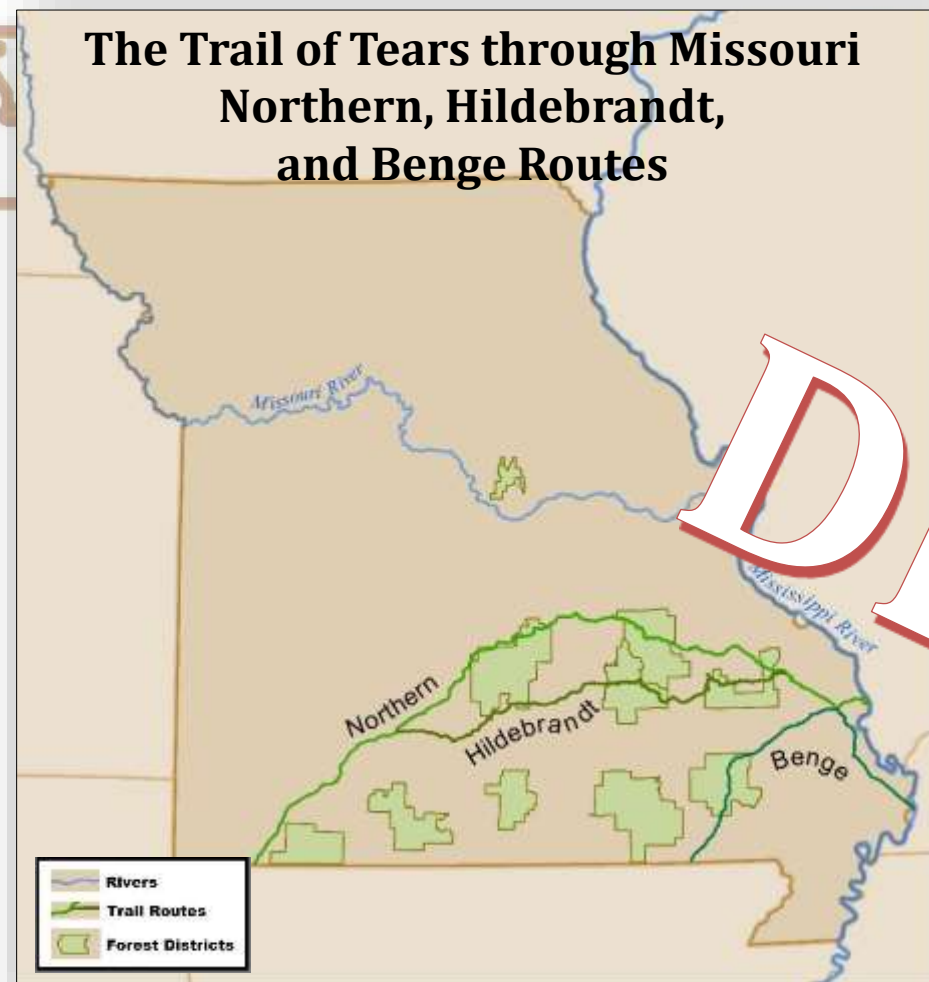
Archaeological survey, Mark Twain National Forest 2012

While some segments have been lost due to erosion, logging, and other modern activity, many segments are intact and undisturbed, like those shown here and below. Archaeological fieldwork uncovered 94 portions of Benge Route segments through the Mark Twain National Forest.



Archaeological survey, Mark Twain National Forest 2012

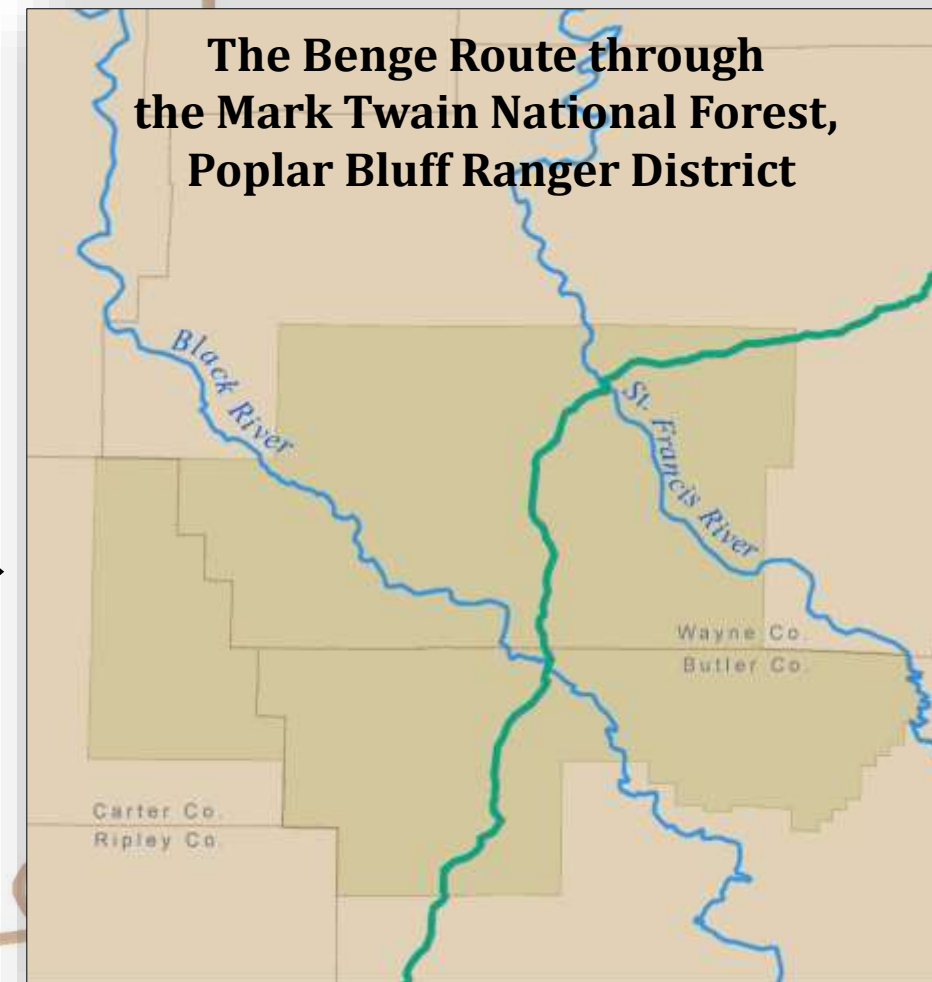
Many segments of the Benge Route were also used in later historic events. Civil War troops traveled these roads just a few decades after the Trail of Tears.



Trail of Tears Benge Route



Mark Twain National Forest



January 11, 1839
The Benge Detachment disbands
in Indian Territory

October 3, 1838
John Benge and his
detachment embark
from Fort Payne,
Alabama

November 25, 1838
Benge Detachment crosses
Mississippi River at Iron Banks,
KY into Missouri; passes through
Benton, Missouri

December 1, 1838
Arrives in Jackson, county
seat and village of some size

December 8-9, 1838
Benge Detachment crosses
Current River at Hick's
Ferry into Arkansas

January 11, 1839
Detachment disbands near
Woodhall Farms in Indian
Territory(Oklahoma)

October 3, 1838
The Benge Detachment embarks
from Fort Payne, Alabama

October 1838

November 1838

December 1838

January 1839

February 1839

Timeline of the Benge Detachment