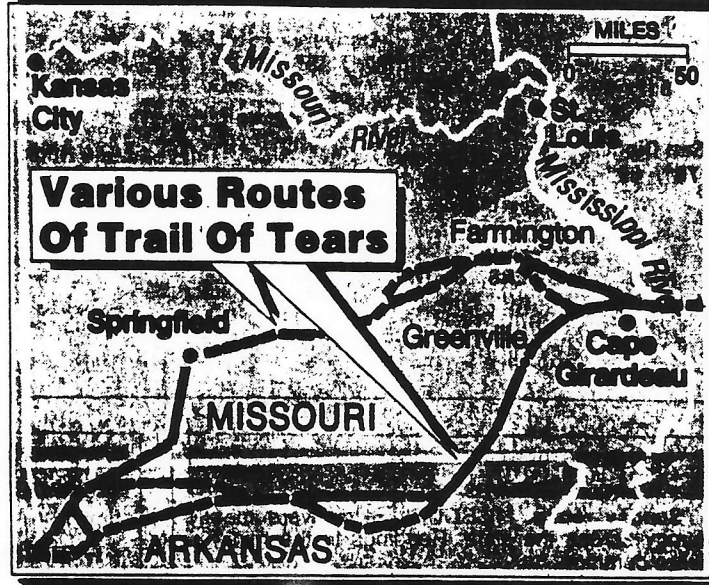


Trail Of Tears



Post-Dispatch Map by Tom Borgman

No Tears

Retracing Of Cherokee Trail Eased By 'Brown Whiskey'

By Kathryn S. Love

Post-Dispatch Special Correspondent

WINONA, Mo. — The nine-month odyssey of a journalist who vowed to walk the 1,200-mile Trail of Tears had turned into a Trial of Travail by the time it ended last week in Tahlequah, Okla.

James Dykes, part-Cherokee, part-Scot, placed a hand on the grave of Cherokee Chief John Ross and declared, "The trail stops here."

Dykes is a reporter and columnist for the Knoxville Journal and

the Atlanta Constitution.

The trail — the actual step-by-step weary-step part, anyway — ended somewhat farther east for Dykes. He developed foot problems that required surgery, so part of the journey had to be made by pickup.

Dykes retraced the path the Cherokees took in their forced migration from Georgia to Indian Territory in Oklahoma almost 150 years ago. He stopped briefly last week in Winona, in southern Missouri, to eat at the Rusty Nail Res-

See TRAIL, Page 6

Trail

From page one

taurant and recall his ordeal.

"Hell, I'm 52 years old. I like brown whiskey and Pall Mall cigarettes," Dykes said. He laces his speech, like his columns, with expletives and frequent references to the "emergency liquid rations" he carried with him on the trail.

Had he made the journey along with his Cherokee brethren, Dykes said flatly, "I'd be dead."

Before Dykes' foot gave out and other health problems developed, he had hiked across Tennessee and part of Kentucky. He followed the Trail of Tears by asking local residents where the Indians — 13 wagon trains of them — had crossed.

Dykes found that people he met along the way could accurately plot the Indians' path.

In some cases, the Trail of Tears remains visible in the ruts of wagon wheels. In other places, such as Highway 30 in Tennessee, the trail has been paved. And in yet other places, Dykes said, the path was so tortuously steep and obscure that "I felt like Ralph Nader's description of a Corvair — unsafe at any speed."

Dykes left Rattlesnake Springs, Ga., the point of the Indians' departure in 1838, on Dec. 20. He slept in barns, sheds and abandoned cabins. Along the way he exchanged his backpack for a golf cart. As he traveled, he mapped the path, taped interviews with residents and made notes for regular dispatches to his newspapers.

He found that it was hard to travel alone — at least in the Midwest. Some people wanted to go along to show him the way. Still others offered to drive him.

"I always accepted," Dykes said.

While the wilderness yielded unexpected comforts, the so-called civilized environment of Nashville, Tenn., distressed Dykes most.

"I was at my loneliest point trudging through 6 inches of frozen slush along the interstate. There were used car lots, gas stations, mobile home sales places all around me, and I could feel the eyes of people peering out at me from their secure little fortresses, wondering what in hell this idiot with the golf cart was doing walking down the highway," he said.

In Nashville, Dykes took advantage of a friend's apartment to wait out the bad weather.

"I felt like I was within the Cherokee tradition. They had bad weather and had to stop, too. And what did the

men do then? They got drunk. So did I."

Among the farmers Dykes met when he returned to the trail were descendants of those who had made the Cherokee migration.

Tom Morgan of Morgan Springs, Tenn., had a great-great-uncle who refused to be a wagon driver for the march because of the mistreatment he had witnessed on an earlier forced migration. Morgan heard the story from aunts who cried when they related it because the old man had always cried when he recalled the story.

Dykes also met Carlos Lewis, a house mover from Guthrie, Ky., who is the great-great-grandson of a Cherokee left behind with a white family because he and his twin brother had fallen sick. The boys' parents had intended to return for them after reaching Oklahoma. But the father and mother died en route.

In all, 4,000 Indians died on the march.

"Not all of them on the trail, though," Dykes pointed out. "They spent the first summer — about 12,000 of them — crowded into a concentration camp. A lot died before they even set out."

But Dykes has little sympathy for those who romanticize the Cherokees' migration.

"America makes wonderful myths. We have this image of Indians stumbling through the snow at rifle point, and a lot of that is accurate. But you have to remember that the Cherokees did their share of killing, too."

In the late 1700s, Cherokees wiped out the settlement of a rival tribe near what is now Charleston, W. Va., Dykes said. Later, the Cherokees became farmers and merchants, and established schools, newspapers, and laws in an effort to improve their claims to the land.

But according to Dykes, the gold strike in Georgia in the early 1830s and the presidency of Andrew Jackson sealed the Cherokees' fate as victims of the white man's "Manifest Destiny."

The Trail of Tears entered Missouri just north of Cape Girardeau. Various trails led westward. In some Ozark regions, traces of the path are visible. The graves of the Indian migrants often became established burial plots for white settlers. The National Park Service intends eventually to mark the routes by making the Trail of Tears a National Historic Trail.

Dykes compared his sojourn to a Cherokee raiding party: "I didn't hardly come back with enough scalps to make it worthwhile."

But he added that he partly accomplished what he set out to do.

"I met people. I talked to people. They told me their stories."

Kills Independence Man

Atified the pilot as Gary Gibler, 31.

The patrol said the crash had occurred as the gyrocopter came out of a tight turn, made a near vertical dive and crashed on airport property.

Gibler was pronounced dead at the scene by the Clay County coroner.