

Cherokee path crossing on 12 Mile River in Pickens County was located behind this dam, now a popular kayak access point near Six Mile.

EXPLORE THE CHEROKEE

By Charles Sowell

The Cherokee Trail will take you to places you've never been and through country that hasn't been inhabited in centuries, according to Dennis Chastain, who will present a sense-of-place talk at the Gathering on Appalachian Life (GOAL) on Saturday, Feb. 28, from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

It is part of a two-part series of events put on by the Young Appalachian Musicians group and also features musical events on Jan. 24 at the Pickens High School Auditorium from 10:30 a.m. until 7 p.m.

The lecture event will be based at Pickens Community Center, also known as the Pickens Senior Center, in Pickens and will also feature talks by Tom Cloer and Dot Jackson.

HOW TO GET THERE:

Take state Route 11 to Walhalla and turn right on state Route 28. Follow 28 into the mountains and turn right on Chattooga Ridge Road at Mountain Rest. Follow it to a four-way stop sign and turn right on Earl's Ford Road. Follow it all the way to the parking area at the end and then follow the trail to the river.

There will also be a country lunch at the event and the fee will be $5. The event will cost $15 for the lectures if you sign up before Feb. 1 and $20 afterward.

Chastain has explored the trail from the start at Fort Loudon near Maryville, Tenn., to King Street in downtown Charleston. It is about 400 miles long and most of it runs through South Carolina, according to Chastain.

One of the noticeable sections of the trail crosses the Chattooga River at Earl's Ford, said Chastain. The trail runs along the right-hand side of the foot trail that runs from the parking area at the end of Earl's Ford Road to the river at its intersection with Warwoman Creek.

The Cherokee Trail is unmistakable here and is as wide as a modern-day roadbed, one that is sunken about six or seven feet from the surrounding terrain.

This is because the slope is steep as it runs down to the river and has been greatly eroded over time, according to Chastain. Where the trail runs over more level ground it is only sunken about 18 inches.

In the early colonial days, the Cherokees were a power in the region and could have at any time destroyed the colony, according to Chastain. That changed as time went on, but was true during almost all of the British days.

But they were more interested in trade and for decades carried deer hides by hand down to Charleston to trade with the English. In 1699, more than 64,000 hides came through Charleston, and the number expanded greatly in the 1700s and the Cherokee started taking part.

The Indians converted to using horses to carry their hides in the middle 1700s, according to Chastain and eventually started using wagons. They also moved the trail to trade with the English after the Chickasaw moved

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into the Augusta, Ga., area and started robbing them.

From the Augusta area, the trail moved east and started wafting down to the Charleston area by paralleling the Santee River.

Indeed, the trail played a crucial role in warfare across the region – at one time hauling cannon through the backcountry for defense at various posts and even crossing the Chattooga at Warwoman Creek on their way to Tennessee.

Both Indians and colonists used the trail for travel and there were several massacres along its length.

For more information on the events, contact Betty McDaniel at 864-878-4257, or e-mail the website at www.yamupstate.com.