

## TRAILS OF TEARS

*“Walk on, and don’t look back.”*

**T**HERE ARE TWO NARRATIVES ABOUT THE UPROOTING OF SOME 4,000 western Oregon Indians in 1856. With few exceptions, federal officials and other non-Indians wrote clinical and matter-of-fact, even cold, accounts of severe weather, starvation, illness, and death. The Indian narrative is very different, a white-hot description of ordeals, including beatings, rapes, and killings, that were inhumane in the extreme. That narrative is alive today. In virtually every family, twenty-first-century Siletz people tell stories handed down by ancestors of the brutal removals.

The physical ordeals were coupled with the sadness of being forced out of their ancestral homelands. Shortly after removal, J. Ross Browne visited the Siletz Reservation and reported to the secretary of the Interior. He included verbatim accounts of talks with several tribal leaders. “For my own part my heart is sick,” said Tyee John. “Here the mountains are covered with great forests. It is hard to get through them. We have no game; we are sick at heart. . . . I will consent to live here one year more; after that I must go home. . . . I am unable to go to war, but I want to go home to my country.” Takelma Tyee George asked why “we should be removed so far from our native country. . . . to us it is a great evil. If we could even be on the borders of our native land, where we could sometimes see it, we would be satisfied. . . . My heart is not bad; it is sick. . . . We are sad now; we pine for our native county. Let us go back to our homes, and our hearts will be bright again like the sun.” The Tututni tyee, Jim, agreed. “I think we have been here long enough. We came from the mouth of the Rogue river. There we had plenty of fish. It is a good country. We

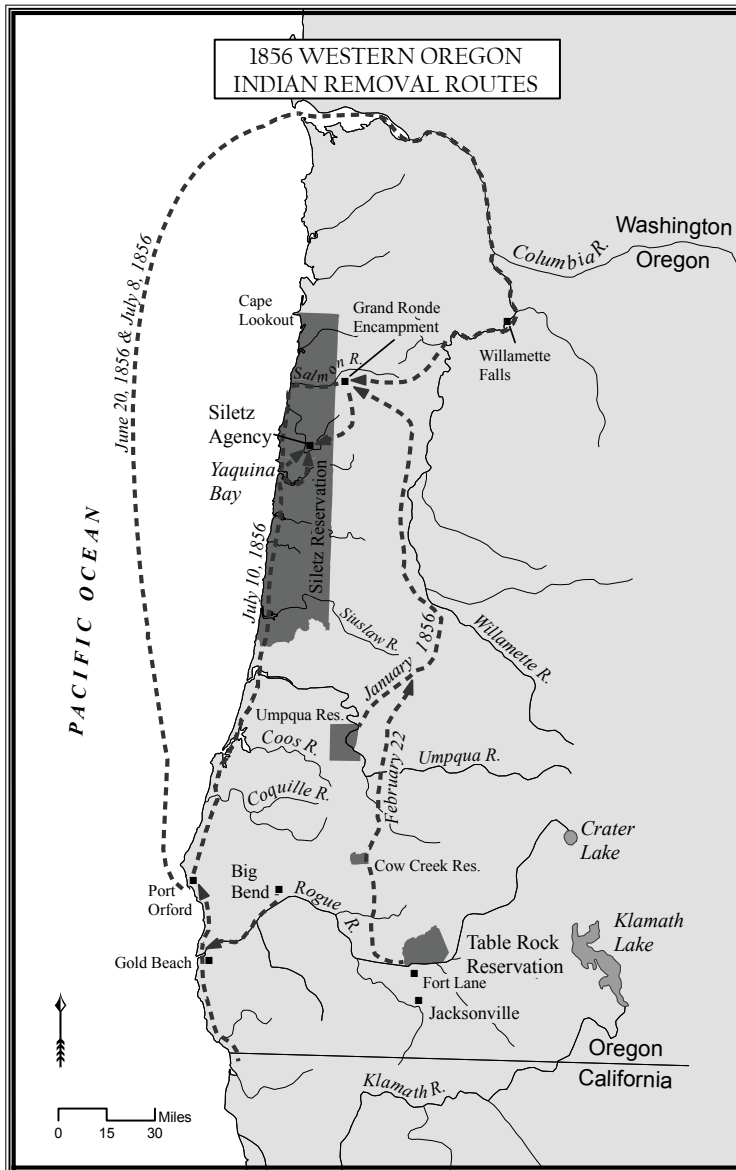
want to go back to our old fishing and hunting grounds. What George said is our heart.”

More than a century later, the wound was still open. In emotional testimony, Pauline Bell Ricks told Congress in 1976 of her grandmother, Ki-Ya-Na-Ha, “who lived in the beautiful Rogue River Valley. . . . She was happy there, the soil was rich, she had a home, canoe, and food in abundance, she remembered a lot of happy times there.” But then came removal:

When they [got] to Siletz, she told of how hungry, how tired and weary, and yes how heart sick, for here they were on the most rugged part of the coast. Lands were not clear, the climate was different, it was like going to a foreign country. She remembered a lot of people dying from many different kinds of diseases unknown to her. Probably chicken pox, tuberculosis, she didn't know. For she always believed most of them died of depression, heartbreak, and mis-treatment.

The displacement of the twenty western Oregon tribes took several shapes. More than 1,400 people endured harrowing shipments by sea. Some groups had to march fifty miles by land. Two agonizing overland marches encompassed more than 250 miles. All of the removals inflicted incalculable physical and psychological injuries on the people. One distinguishing aspect of the Oregon experience was the lay of the land: the steep, tangled terrain and strong rivers made the marches especially wearing and treacherous.

The first removals to the Siletz Reservation took place in the winter of 1856: Kalapuyas and Molalas from their villages in the Willamette Valley; Umpquas from their temporary reservation in the Umpqua Valley; and Takelmas, Athapaskans, and Shastas in a cavalcade from the Table Rock reserve on the Upper Rogue River. Two journeys, mostly by sea, followed in June and July, from Port Orford to Grand Ronde. Later in July was the overland trek from Port Orford to the Siletz Reservation. These removals from Port Orford were preceded, for most of the Indians, by round-ups at Big Bend or other points on the Rogue and marches to Port Orford. There was also a “voluntary” removal, when members of tribes to the north—the Tillamooks, Clatsops, and Chinooks—were eligible for residence and enrollment at Siletz, but were not forced to go. And finally, there was a removal that stretched out twenty years or more. Some families and individuals initially eluded the government and remained in their aboriginal territories. Others escaped from the reservation. Over the years, federal agents and contractors tracked down, and some-



times shot and killed, these resisters, whose only crime was love of homeland.



Joel Palmer, driven by treaties that provided for temporary reservations and then moves to permanent ones and by the policy of confederating many tribes together, began planning for the removal of western Oregon tribes as soon as he became Oregon Indian commissioner in 1853. Then, the massacre at

Little Butte Creek in October 1855 and the tribes' campaign of revenge triggered emergency action. The Indians on the Table Rock reserve faced daily peril unless and until they were transported out of southern Oregon. Palmer notified Commissioner Manypenny of his plans and requested a military escort. Although he had no doubt that a rapid exodus had to be carried out, he lamented that the basest attitudes of the white citizenry made it necessary:

The future will prove that this war has been forced upon these Indians against their will; and that too, by a set of lawless vagabonds for pecuniary and political objects and sanctioned by a numerous population [volunteers seeking pay for their service] who regard the treasury of the United States a legitimate subject of plunder.

The Indians in that district have been driven to desperation by acts of cruelty against their people. Treaties have been violated and acts of barbarity committed by those claiming to be citizens that would disgrace the most barbarous nations of the earth, and if none but those who perpetrated such acts were to be affected by this war, we might look upon it with indifference. But unhappily this is not the case.

The Siletz Reservation was not yet ready to receive the arrivals. Homes and agency buildings promised in the treaties had not yet been constructed. In addition, while the Indians would be marched north from Table Rock on the California-Oregon Trail to the Willamette Valley, no road had yet been built to connect the valley with Siletz. Palmer decided to have the government purchase several homesteads from settlers on the South Fork of the Yamhill, a tributary of the Willamette River, to serve as an encampment, or staging area, until the tribes from Table Rock could be moved to Siletz. Palmer also envisioned making the encampment a permanent extension of the Siletz Reservation, where the Willamette Valley tribes could settle. In 1857, by presidential executive order, it became a separate reservation, the Grand Ronde.

War or no war, George Ambrose, the agent at Table Rock, was not enthusiastic about Palmer's proposal for immediate removal of the Rogue River Indians. Taken aback by the hurry-up attitude, Ambrose's reply in December laid bare some of the realities of removal in the dead of winter:

Winter with all its severity has fully set in, snow is several inches deep on the ground at the time of my writing and falling fastly yet. From all appearances it may be very deep before night. I regard it as almost impossible to

remove the Indians at this time for several reasons. First the unusual severity of the winter at this early season. Secondly, they are destitute of winter clothing not having received their annuities but very few of them have either shoes or stockings, many of them are sick. . . .

. . . I do assure you a trip to the Willamette at this inclement season of the year could not be accomplished without a vast deal of suffering among them. Again it will be impossible to move them without an escort which cannot be obtained for two or three weeks to come.

Capt. Smith of Fort Lane with all of his disposable force is now engaged with those hostile bands of Indians near sixty miles distant from here from which he will not be disengaged for several weeks. Mr. Metcalfe who has just travelled over the road, also entertains the opinion that it would be worse than folly to endeavor to remove them without an escort.

Hence we will not be able to start so early as you expect; necessity compels that humanity would require a delay at least until comfortable preparation can be made for their accommodation.

Two months later, on February 22, 1856, close to 400 Indians set out on their daunting removal journey, led by Ambrose and troop escort. The procession moved along the California-Oregon (or Applegate) Trail, the wagon road that roughly followed today's Interstate 5, from the soon-to-be-abandoned Table Rock Reservation to the Willamette Valley. The frigid weather had relented somewhat since Ambrose's plea to Palmer; the cold nights left frost in the morning but no snow. The wagon road, however, which wound through steep, up-and-down terrain, was rough to begin with and received plenty of rain. Ambrose kept the assemblage moving—an average of eight miles a day—but the going was slow, slobby, and fatiguing.

While Ambrose finally secured shoes and blankets for the marchers, the conditions remained deplorable. "Our teams now numbered eight which I feel will not be sufficient. Thirty four Indians are disabled from traveling by reason of sickness aside from the aged & infirm, who will as a matter of course have to be hauled." The great majority, healthy or not, were forced to walk. As the trip dragged on, the number of sick people increased.

The Indians, and Ambrose as well, were "in constant alarm" that the Jacksonville crowd would raid the entourage. Timcolean Love from Jacksonville dogged the group during the early days as the march moved down the narrow canyons through present-day Grants Pass toward Wolf Creek. On the fifth day, near Jumpoff-Joe Creek, Love rode up and shot and killed an Indian man,

sending shock waves through the group. Ambrose sent a message to Captain Smith at Fort Lane for help; Smith ordered Love arrested and turned over to civil authorities for prosecution.

After three weeks, they reached the level, open space of the Willamette Valley. The weather lifted and although the wagon road was muddy, travel on the flatland was much easier. As had been the case throughout the journey, ferries on the relatively well-traveled California-Oregon Trail took them across the rivers and streams. Still, while the dangers of Jacksonville lay behind them, their fears of mayhem could not have been much allayed. War tensions were at their height and the “extermination” sentiment had spread throughout western Oregon. Finally, after thirty-three days and a forced march of 263 miles, the Takelma, Athapaskan, and Shasta people reached the temporary encampment at Grand Ronde. The journey had taken the lives of eight Indians.

The Rogue River people joined 500 Umpqua, Molala, and Kalapuya tribal members at the Grand Ronde encampment in Polk County. Even before the removal began, Ambrose had heard from a resident of the county: “I will not be surprised if every Indian brought in . . . is immediately killed. . . . The people of Polk have become so excited about it they held a meeting at our Court house to day & passed resolutions disapprobating like course, and the people of the country are determined the Rogue River Indians shall not settle in our midst or on our boundary.”

The Kalapuyas at the encampment had lived on the floor of the Willamette Valley and the Molalas in the Cascade foothills on the eastern side of the valley. Their journeys were shorter than the Rogue Rivers’ and on a more level landscape. The Umpquas, facing difficult terrain and bad weather, vehemently objected to any removal from their reservation in the Umpqua Valley. Joel Palmer, concerned for their safety if they remained, spent three days urging them to leave, without success, but John Flett, the Canadian Native who had served as interpreter at the Umpqua treaty negotiations, finally gained their consent after all-night meetings with the principal tyees.

The Umpquas were force-marched in January away from their homelands of millennia, in what Hubert Howe Bancroft called a “heavy storm of rain and snow.” Their ordeal lasted nearly a month, and they lost four people to sickness and one to murder. Once at the encampment, their misery continued. Joseph Jeffers, Joel Palmer’s hired hand, wrote that many contracted the flu “to the extent that it makes humanity shudder . . . and those that are sick suffer with the cold at night a nuff to kill them . . . the suffering of these people haunts me day and night.”



The largest removals to the Siletz Reservation came from the southern Oregon Coast. Port Orford was often described as the launching point, and it is true that ocean steamers did depart from that port and overland marches were organized there. But for most Indians, their long journeys began earlier—and still farther away from Siletz—when they were rounded up from battlegrounds and homes after the Rogue River War. A main departure point was Big Bend.

By trail, the Big Bend of the Rogue River lay about fifty miles from the river's mouth. This is the wild, gashed country where the last battle of the war was fought. Travel on the sheer canyon sides and across the many gorges and tributary streams was slow and arduous “owing to the nature of the Country,” as Joel Palmer put it. It took soldiers five difficult days to march groups of Indians from Big Bend to the mouth of the Rogue.

In late May 1856, on the final day of the Battle of Big Bend, Captain Auger and his troops had decisively turned the tide in the Americans' favor, sending the Indian warriors into retreat to the surrounding forests. Palmer and others promptly sent out word to the Indian camps that they should come in to Big Bend peaceably and surrender. Then they would be marched to the mouth of the Rogue and north to Port Orford and the Coast Reservation far beyond.

For the tribes, the long, last stage of the war became a community affair. They had no choice. The extermination-minded miners would have had a field day with their rifles and nooses if Indian families had stayed behind in their villages near the Upper Rogue River when the warriors established their tactical positions in the remote country downriver. So the women and children moved down the wild Rogue with Tyees John, George, and Lympy and other tyees and their soldiers.

Captain E. O. C. Ord, one of the officers assigned to oversee the encampment at Big Bend and transport Indians to the Coast, wrote empathetic diary entries of western Oregon removal. He recounted how Indians, hundreds in all, gradually straggled into the camp day after day. By June 7, many of the Indian men, probably feeling release from war, played games and sang and danced. The Indian women, though, continued to unleash their despair at the loss of lives and homeland: “A few yards off from under the crowd of brush huts and low blanket tents issues the never-ending melancholy wail of the squaws in mourning.” On June 8, Captain Ord wrote:



4 men 9 squaws and some children came limping and crying (these squaws) into camp . . . poor devils—the decrepid and half-blind old women are a melancholy sight to see—to think of collecting such people for a long journey through an unknown land—no wonder the men fight so desperately to remain—after they have driven all the white settlers too out of it—it almost makes me shed tears to listen to them wailing as they totter along—one old woman bringing up the rear, her nakedness barely covered with a few tatters—and barely able to walk—they had been a long time getting here and many of them have lost all they had by the capsizing of the canoe. Some others were near drowning—the girl was on the back of a man who was swimming ashore with her—he had a boy, too—the girl was washed off—canoe smashed as it went over the rapids.

Captain Ord led 100 Indians down the river from Big Bend. It was a hard, tedious hike, tough on the elderly and, the captain acknowledged, tiring for him as well. One child died and another was born. At Oak Flat at the mouth of the Illinois River, the procession met with some 600 Indians in a temporary camp overseen by Captain Auger.

Continuing on, Ord found an encampment of about 165 Indians on the ocean shore at Gold Beach. This was a layover point for the three-day, thirty-mile leg up the Coast to Port Orford. Indians were steadily coming in—some by canoe, some by mule, most on foot—from the Chetco and Pistol rivers to the south as well as the Rogue. By mid-June, the rush was on to get the Indians to Port Orford to meet an ocean steamer for transport north. Captain Ord described how the steamer schedule and the need to get Indians away from the local volunteers—“vols”—created pressure to keep weary people moving:

Indn women packing the mules—thick set sturdy packers—they are—land party stopd—said twas too rough & the packing women were tired & the old were sick & one old man was dead & they would go on to Mollout but I sent Drysdale and Foster over to em, to say the vols were coming & they must push on—which they did suddenly—but it was a sorry sight to see—fat & lean staggering along—the old too tottering under heavy burdens.

With Indians and soldiers filing in, for a period of six weeks or so Port Orford became one of the busiest places on the West Coast. By June 11, some 1,100 Indians had been marched in, while several hundred troops kept watch. The number grew, for about 1,700 Natives would be moved north over the



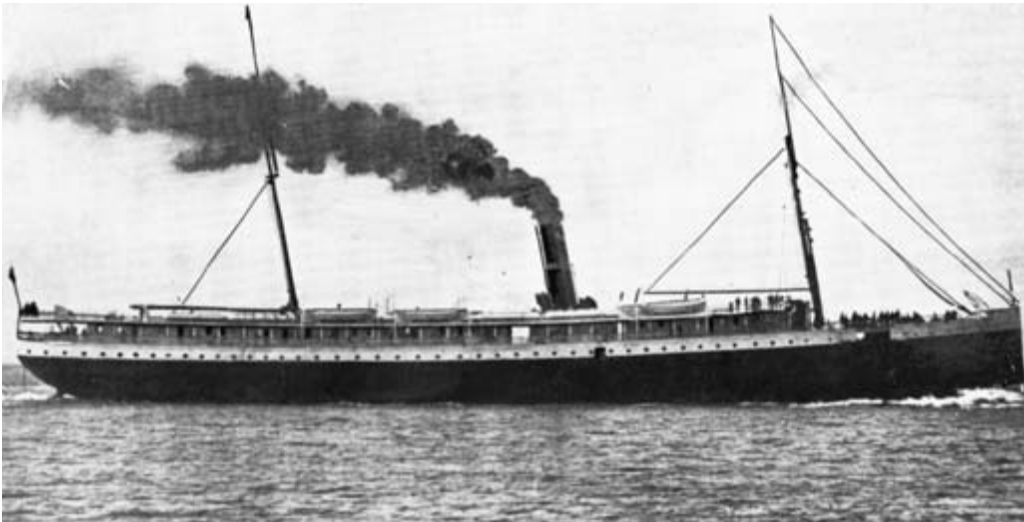
course of the next month. Tensions ran high among both Indians and the local citizenry. Many white Oregonians were out for blood, and by June of 1856 the tribes, who had relinquished their weapons, were defenseless.

The federal representatives, whether soldiers or Indian Affairs officials, made no mention of the troops killing any Indians to keep order, but the accounts handed down by Indians being removed tell a different story. The removal was not optional and the military meant to enforce it. After reaching Siletz, no Indians would be allowed to leave the reservation without written permission from the agent. Violators would be shot by the military or civilian contractors. Coquelle Thompson recalled that “when some [Indians] refused to go [to the new locations,] the soldiers were summoned and they were forced and in many instances killed in front of their loved ones to show that the government meant business. What was the poor Indian to do but go?” Ki-Ya-Na-Ha, grandmother of Pauline Bell Ricks, “began to cry for she saw her people gathered up like herds of sheep. Some families were even broken up, maybe a mother in one bunch and her children in another bunch. Many fled to the mountains, for they did not want to leave their home. But they were hunted down by the white soldiers and shot. They learned very quickly that if they wanted to live they dared not protest.”

The steamship *Columbia* arrived at Port Orford about two in the morning of June 20 and anchored a few hundred yards offshore. The goliath was 200 feet long and sported bright lights and a tall smokestack. Few of the Indian people had ever seen, much less ridden on, such a vessel.

If the *Columbia* were not intimidating enough, the Indians were terrified of the troops, with whom they had clashed in pitched battle just a few weeks before. Rumors spread that the army planned to throw them overboard once the steamship got out to sea. The undertaking had the feel of finality: the Indians had been ordered to leave their belongings behind and bring only what they could carry; for many, that meant whatever they could stuff into a medium-sized traditional basket. Some, but surely not all, were assuaged by the assurances of a safe voyage by Palmer, whom they trusted in an arm’s-length way. He promised to accompany them on the trip, and he did.

Getting more than 700 Indians out to the *Columbia* was no easy matter. Port Orford was a port but not a harbor; the headlands to the north gave some protection from the winds and heavy seas, but there was no enclosed harbor and, with no docks, the *Columbia* had anchored in open water. The Indians’ cedar canoes took some people to the schooner, but most waded out through the cold, low waves. The boarding was rushed and chaotic. Lillie Butler’s



The steamship *Columbia* in 1856 transported southwest Oregon Indians, in two desperately overcrowded trips of 700 people each, to the Willamette Valley and the new reservation. In 1858, the *Columbia* carried Tyee John and his son, Adam, from Vancouver on the Columbia River to military prison in California. *Courtesy of Oregon Historical Society, no. bco01739.*

grandparents (Tututni and Chetco) “took only as much as they could carry and kept leaving behind stuff as they were marched to Port Orford. When they waded out to the boat they lost all their belongings.” Coquelle Thompson sorrowfully described this sharp dividing line between the long-held ways and an unknown future: “We left behind many fine canoes, homes, tanned hides, and other belongings found in an Indian colony at that time. We were all heart sick.”

Belching black smoke, the *Columbia* rumbled away from Port Orford on June 20 with its load of 710 Indian people and their military overseers. As Coquelle Thompson explained, dread and seasickness plagued the people: “It was our first night at sea, many of the Indians got seasick—some tried to jump overboard and swim back. It was an awful night; many were sick and could not eat.” With the vessel severely overcrowded—the *Columbia*’s average passenger load was 100—most people had to stay on deck in the turbulent weather. Historian Terence O’Donnell painted the scene:

It turned out to be a terrible voyage. The seas were rough, and the . . . Indians, accustomed to the calm of estuary waters, were terrified by the giant, break-

ing swells. And more than terrified, for all succumbed to seasickness, made worse by their being crowded into the limited quarters of the little ship. Also, blankets and apparel were in short supply, and so, exposed on the decks, they suffered the assaults of wind and spray and the driving rains. [The passengers were] jostling one another for space on the crowded decks, flung this way and that by the heavy seas, cowering in the cold and in terror of the tempest, and finally their retching sickness soiling everything—it must have seemed to them the coming of a foul death. Such were the conditions in which “the monarchs of the woods” departed their land.

This was a far quicker journey, though, than the marches that preceded it and the exhausting overland trip that other Indians would take the next month. The steamer, making good time despite the turbulent sea, reached the mouth of the Columbia River the second day. Now, on the calm river waters, the passengers felt some relief. Not only were the rough seas gone, but the Natives could see that they really were going to the Willamette country, as



Coquelle Thompson Sr. was the son of Coast Treaty signer Washington Tom. A principal Athapaskan language consultant for many linguists and a Siletz tribal leader in many capacities over his long life, he is the subject of *Coquelle Thompson, Athapaskan Witness* by Lionel Youst and William R. Seaburg. He is pictured here in Siletz in about 1940. *Courtesy of The Oregonian.*

Palmer had told them. As Coquille Thompson recalled, “Now everybody is glad. They had been scared they take somewhere else.”

After reaching Portland on June 23, the troops transferred the Indians to a smaller river ship for passage up the Columbia River to Willamette Falls. From there they used even smaller craft to reach Dayton and a camp where Palmer’s farm was located. Now the idea was to march the Indians to the layover camp at Grand Ronde and, with the wagon road now mostly constructed, on to the Coast Reservation, a total of about fifty miles. Palmer hired Courtney Walker, a former fur trader and missionary, to lead the procession and ordered teams of oxen for the aged and the infirm. The others hiked. The group, with a troop escort, headed out from Dayton on July 14.

It was quite a scene when the entourage reached Grand Ronde, where there were already some 1,500 Willamette Valley, Umpqua, and Upper Rogue River Indians. With the arrival of the south Coast group, the total swelled to well over 2,000, making it the largest population center in Oregon (Portland, Salem, and Jacksonville all had populations under 1,500 at the time). During this stopover, Coquille Thompson witnessed an event, as reported to George Maxwell of the *Oregon Journal*, that impressed on him ever more how this new life would be different:

While detained at Fort Yamhill [located within the Grand Ronde encampment] this Indian boy received his first lesson in the white man’s humanity when he witnessed the hanging of a Rogue River Indian who had endeavored to incite an insurrection among his tribesmen. Troops summoned all Indians to the scene of the grewsome affair and now, after 80 years, Coquille Thompson has vivid remembrance of the garroted Rogue swinging from the gibbet days after the execution. The affair was staged to impress and discourage other Indians inclined toward rebellion.

There was no fully common experience, no single story, for the thousands of removed western Oregon Indians. The faces at the Grand Ronde gathering surely reflected that. Many endured serious physical injuries and disease, for the European germs continued to exact their tolls. Others—including women and children who had witnessed the brutal battles on the Rogue—suffered from what we now know as post-traumatic stress disorder. Sadness must have shown everywhere.

There were other emotions as well. The Upper Rogue River tribes had been split: many people had gone down the Rogue in combat and then come north

by steamer; others had remained at Table Rock and marched the California-Oregon Trail with George Ambrose. They must have been energized by this reuniting at the western edge of the Willamette Valley, bringing each other up to date on family deaths and births, reminiscing about former times. Some looked forward to fitting in with the Americans and gaining benefits from the newcomers' society. Others—Ki-Ya-Na-Ha and Coquelle Thompson seem to have been of this mind—felt resignation and, as well, a determination to make their new lives fruitful, and were optimistic about it. And with so many tribes coming together for the first time, new friendships and rivalries may have sprung up with young men—as was the case on the meadow at Big Bend a few days after the defeat in the war's last battle—breaking into games, probably *koho*. Elders would have looked on, smiling through the heartbreak.

The entourage that came north on the steamship and their military escort then proceeded west to the mouth of the Salmon River and, on July 23, 1856, became the first arrivals to the Coast Reservation. They were joined a few days later by most of the 729 Indians on the second *Columbia* voyage, which departed Port Orford on July 8 and followed the same Portland–Dayton–Grand Ronde route. This camp on the ample south bank of the Salmon, with proud Cascade Head rising across the river, certainly presented a welcome interlude for the weary travelers. It was not home, but it was the same Oregon Coast, wind-swept, magnificent, and giving. Coquelle Thompson, even as a young boy, rejoiced in the mussels, juicy and creamy, just like he knew them farther south.

Although some would stay in this area at the north end of the reservation, there were no homes or other structures at Salmon River and it would be temporary for most of the uprooted Indians. Removal was playing out fast, and the army and Indian office couldn't keep up with it. Even as the second group of *Columbia* relocates was arriving, Joel Palmer was further south on the Coast finalizing his decision on the best location for the government's operations. Finding many prairies and good timber along a stretch of the middle Siletz River and especially impressed by a 1,500-acre prairie—perfect, he thought, for agency facilities, a fort, and homes—near but safely above the north bank of the river, Palmer decided on what is now the town of Siletz as the site of the new reservation's headquarters. For people at the Salmon River, yet another locale lay two tough days away.



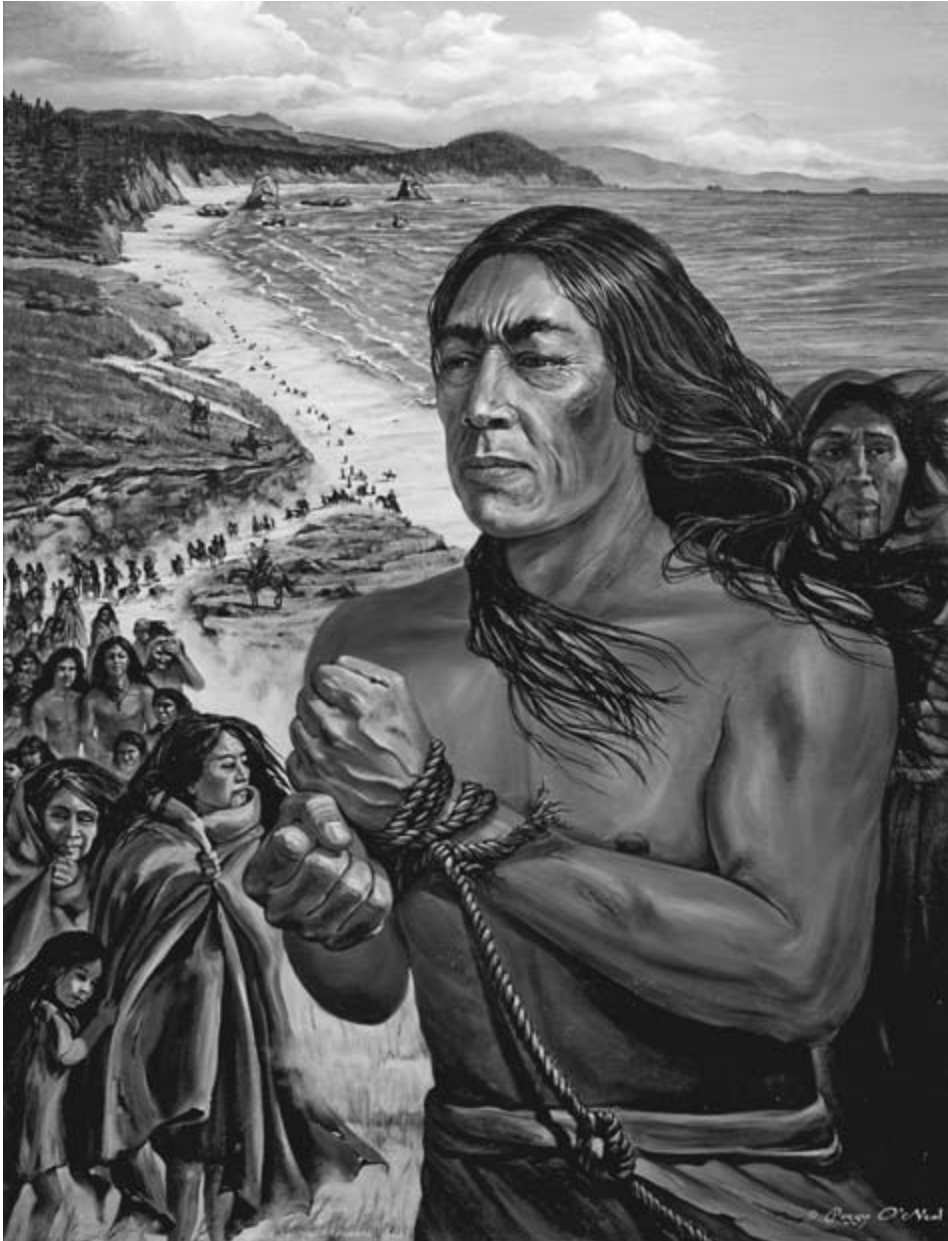


The mouth of the Salmon River, where the first group of Indians from southern Oregon arrived on the reservation in July 1856. Cascade Head lies to the north. *Photograph courtesy of Duncan Berry.*

The next removal, the grinding overland march north from Port Orford to Siletz, holds a central place in Siletz history. Perhaps more than any single event, it symbolizes the Siletz tribal experience. Sometimes called the “Death March,” it encapsulates all the horrors over all the years since white people came. It also stands as a monument to the valor of the ancestors and their will to survive. “Batter us as you will,” they announced through their intrepid actions, “we shall endure.” The image perseveres today through public display as well as in the minds of the people: on a prominent wall of the first floor of the tribal office building in Siletz, a painting depicts the long line of ancestors trudging in pain and defiance up a demanding slope on a narrow trail rising above the beach and rock below, leaving behind beloved old places and heading toward uncertain new ones.

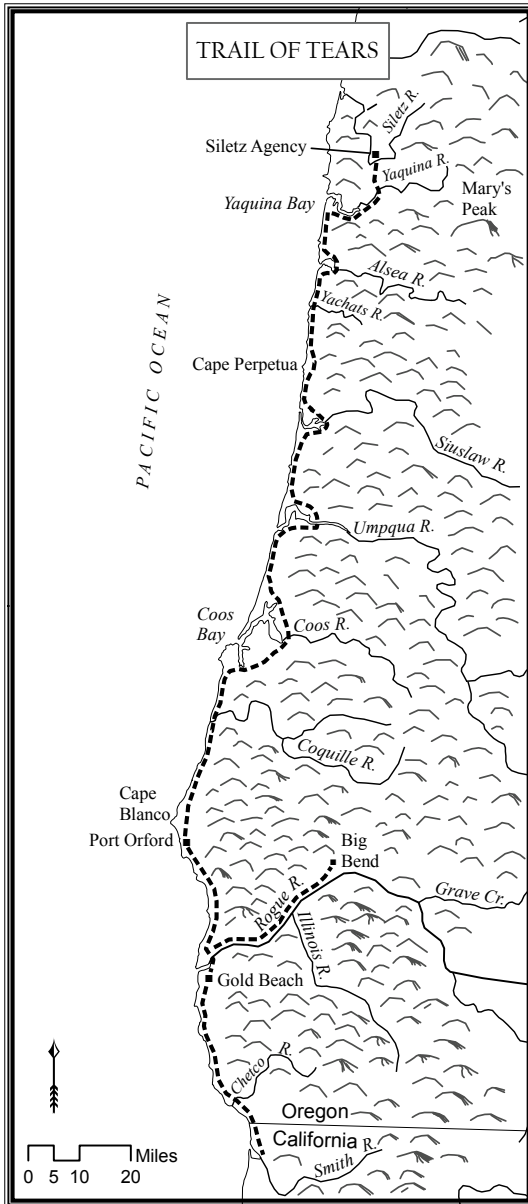
When Tye John ended the war by surrendering at Rinehart Creek on July 2, troops took him and his 225 followers north to Port Orford. John reached that harbor before the second *Columbia* voyage, but Palmer and the military





Peggy O'Neal's rendering, *Ahnkuttie Tillicums (Ancestors)*, of Tye John's band being marched north into Port Orford under military escort, after his surrender on Reinhart Creek. The acrylic is a tribute to *Ahnkuttie Tillicums*—"The ancestors of the People." © Peggy O'Neal 1996. No portion of this image may be reproduced without the written consent of the artist.





decided that he and most of his people would go to the reservation on foot. It was a form of punishment. Tyee John—“the famous Old John and his band, the terror of Southern Oregon”—had been all the talk in the journals and correspondence before and after the surrender. While Captain Smith had agreed that John and his men would not be prosecuted for their wartime actions and, while everyone had a healthy respect for his abilities, the military—and Palmer as well—resented the costs of the conflict and the leader of the opposition. As a result, even though the steamship had been used precisely because it was much cheaper and quicker than the grueling, one-month onshore trek, the Americans were determined to send John by land. They did allow some women, children, and elders in John’s band to go by sea and the sick and wounded remained in Port Orford. Several resisters

from the Chetco and Pistol rivers also were consigned to march. Coquille Thompson’s father, an Upper Coquille tyee, marched and perhaps tyees from other tribes did as well.

This throng set out from Port Orford on July 10, 1856. In addition to infants, 125 Indian men, women, and children were accompanied by no fewer than 90 troops under the command of Major John Reynolds to keep order and prevent escapes. With the terrain far too rough for wagons, they brought 200 mules,

160 to be used as pack animals. Although game and seafood (especially mussels) were readily available, the primary fare was cows: Coquelle Thompson related that “people who came overland had to drive cattle. Every time they camp they kill one beef. That made enough so each person get one piece.”

The distance from Port Orford to Siletz by today’s road system is 161 miles but in the mid-1850s it was likely 200 miles or more. There were neither bridges nor road-cuts back then and the route confronted five substantial bays at the mouths of the Coos, Umpqua, Siuslaw, Alsea, and Yaquina. Crossing the large rivers and the dozens of good-sized streams brought fatigue, delay, and danger. Palmer acknowledged this in his early planning for removal: “The number of Indians . . . the numerous streams to cross on the route and the difficulty in transporting the requisite supplies most necessarily, cause great delay.” At numerous spots, the old Indian trails (which is what the caravan was following) left low ground to twist up and around coastal mountains, ridges, and drop-offs. Even on flat land, the rains created bogs, marshes, and small lakes. The areas of open beach, including the fifty-mile stretch of dunes north of Coos Bay, allowed mostly unimpeded passage but hiking on sand is physically draining. Even with the troops pushing hard, the group could make only six or seven miles a day, making the trip an ordeal of about a month.

There are no known journals or field reports written by soldiers on this march, but Siletz people handed down numerous accounts. Terry Russell is one of many tribal members who grew up hearing stories about the rivers: “The people had to swim the rivers on the march north. People died along the way and the survivors couldn’t stop and bury them. Instead, they were forced to keep walking. Women had to swim the rivers and had their babies swept from their arms.” Pauline Bell Ricks related the experience of her grandmother:

Our trail of tears began. Ki-Ya-Na-Ha was not one of the ones that rode on the ship or a wagon, for she remembers walking most of the way. She told of women being abused, misused, and even kicked around by the white soldiers, especially if a mother tried to protect her young daughters. If men came to the rescue of their families, they were badly beaten and in some cases shot, and left, for they were not allowed to stop and bury any one that died along the way. She also remembered little children being kicked around if they fell too far behind.

Agnes Pilgrim, Takelma, received accounts of the removal from three different relatives who made the overland journey to Siletz: “The terrain was



Lucy Dick, pictured here in her beloved Chetco homeland, ca. 1939. *Photograph courtesy of Jeanette Giddings, great-granddaughter of Lucy Dick.*

harsh and our young were trained to watch out for the elders. When the elders stopped or fell, the kids went back, but the guards beat them.”

Lucy Dick was a full-blooded Chetco, born in the early 1840s in a large village at the mouth of the Chetco River, who made the long walk to Siletz. Years later, she and her husband, Chetco Dick, received permission from the agent and returned to her former home. Living to nearly 100 years, she became a respected citizen of the town of Harbor, assisting in the births of numerous children. Lucy never forgot the march north, for she heard the gunshot that killed her father. When she began to turn around, her mother told her: “No. Walk on, and don’t look back.”

The Siletz ancestors reached Yaquina Bay in late July. From there, it took three more days to hike inland through the forest and over the low divide between the Yaquina and Siletz watersheds to reach the 1,500-acre prairie above the Siletz River. With well over a thousand people coming down from the Salmon River and across from Grand Ronde, the removal was nearing

completion. The unsettling fact that the Coast Reservation was not remotely ready to receive such a large, exhausted, and often sick or injured population is a matter to which we will return.



The fourth category of removal involves the fewest number of Indian people and varied fundamentally in that it was voluntary. In Joel Palmer's crusade for a Coast treaty in the summer of 1855, Yaquina Bay was the site of the first of five councils. The assembled tribal leaders from the north Coast signed away their ancestral lands, from the Salmon River to the Columbia. As with the southern Oregon tribes, the original idea was to relocate the northern coastal tribes on the new reservation. But there were no forced marches for the Clatsop, Chinook, and Tillamook tribes.

It was a matter of politics. On the south Coast, in the mining camps of southern Oregon, and in the Willamette Valley, the American population was adamant: they had warred with the tribes, wanted no more of it, and insisted on removal. In the far northwest part of the state, the settlers viewed the Indians as good workers, willing to labor at rail splitting and farming—at, not incidentally, low wages. There had been scattered conflicts but no wars, and the whites did not expect any in the future.

Part of the calmer relations with the northern tribes traces to measles, smallpox, and other diseases. With the whites coming to the Lower Columbia so early and often, the epidemics hit those tribes especially hard, killing so many people that the combined population of Chinooks, Clatsops, and Tillamooks plummeted from an estimated 6,300 before contact with Europeans to just 431. When Palmer met with them in council in 1855, only 41 representatives came.

Spared compulsory dislocation, these families made their individual decisions. Some went down to the Siletz Reservation, where they were entitled to be enrolled. Other Chinook and Clatsop families became members on the Grand Ronde Reservation or the Quinault, Shoalwater Bay, and Chehalis reservations in Washington. Still others simply stayed in their homes on the Lower Columbia and northern Oregon Coast.



The final form of removal involved a problem that, as the federal govern-

ment came to learn, was inevitable as the United States carried out removals in other parts of the country, including the Southeast, where the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole Indians were moved to Oklahoma in the Trail of Tears, a term often applied to the Siletz. In its various removal programs—the Seminoles from the nearly impenetrable Florida swamps to the Navajos from their redrock canyon hideouts to western Oregon Indians from their deep forests—the United States came up against Indian people who hid out and refused to go or who escaped and returned to their homelands. In Oregon, as elsewhere, federal agents sternly insisted that everyone relocate and that no one leave the reservation. To the United States, the rounding up of the resisters amounted to a mop-up operation; to the resisters, it meant a profound violation of personal freedom. Federal policy acquired an even sharper edge with the removal of Joel Palmer from office on August 15, 1856, just as relocatees were streaming into the reservation. Commissioner Manypenny, facing ever-increasing political pressure from Oregon, had no choice but to dismiss the superintendent: Palmer's policies had offended just about every American in Oregon as being too pro-Indian and, to boot, he had failed to be a sufficiently loyal Democrat, committing the sin of making his hires based on merit rather than party. Rounding up recalcitrant Indians would have to proceed without Palmer's moderating influence.

Soon after the initial waves of removals, reports came in that numbers of Indians still had not moved and (subject to the usual questions as to who started what) that some of them were committing raids and killings. Absalom Hedges, the superintendent for Oregon, retained William Tichenor of Port Orford as a special agent, or "bounty hunter," to track down south Coast Indians. No friend of the Natives, Tichenor had captained the *Sea Gull*, which had moored in the Port Orford harbor in 1851 and whose crew had discharged the cannon that killed and wounded dozens of Indians at Battle Rock. In his most controversial incident involving removals, in May 1858 Tichenor ordered nineteen Chetco and Pistol rivers Indians shot and killed when they attempted to escape during their march to the reservation. He claimed that they had committed crimes and "were the most desperate and murderous of all the Indians on the coast." In examining the incident, James Nesmith, by then superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon, carefully avoided the question of whether "shoot to kill" was official policy for those who tried to escape removal. He delicately concluded that "in relation to the conduct of special Agent Tichenor while in charge of those Indians, various reports have reached this office. If his own representations, and that of certain others are

to be relied upon as correct the Indians were killed in attempting to escape from his custody which I consider as sufficient justification for his firing upon them.”

Tichenor and his men apparently brought in several hundred Indians. He sent eighty-five north from Port Orford on the *Columbia* in November 1856 for the third and last removal voyage on that vessel. The exact numbers are unknown, but other special agents and soldiers were also active in rounding up resisters.

With the place-based peoples of Siletz enduring such a violent rupture of their connection with place, people longed to return home and the early decades were rife with attempted escapes. Given the heavy Indian Affairs and military presence—Indian agents, bounty hunters, and the forts at Siletz, Fort Hoskins to the east, and Fort Umpqua to the south—any such thoughts were fraught with danger. In April of 1857, Lieutenant Philip Sheridan learned that several tyees at Siletz were planning an escape. “I . . . told them the consequences of such a step,” he wrote, “and that they would have to regard the Seletz as their future home, and that they must not only abandon all intention of leaving but would have to stop talking about it.” The fear that gripped them, and the risks of returning home, are reflected in Ki-Ya-Na-Ha’s story of her sister’s experience:

She made up her mind that she would go back to the Rogue River and live out her days there. She was very unhappy in Siletz so she left and went back to the Rogue River to die. This is exactly what happened, she made it there, but her sister’s happiness was short lived, for the story goes she was shot one day for crossing the river in a canoe. But in later years, Ki-Ya-Na-Ha was told her sister was attacked by three white soldiers, and again the same old story. But by then she knew the words, raped and murdered and thrown into the river. Ki-Ya-Na-Ha never really knew the truth of her sister’s fate, for her body was never found.

Some did make it back. One woman was protected by a sympathetic white family who, when the soldiers came by, hid her in their flour barrel. Another, Lucy Smith, recalled eluding the military as a little girl:

The last time they came after Inds. to Chetco it was I who ran away. I was 3 years old. The officers already had me + my mother, and we were being led away when she suddenly said: I have forgotten my sewing materials. As

she said this I dove into the brush + my mother after me. They never got us. We remained at Gold Beach. And that was the last time that officials ever attempted to carry back Inds. to Siletz—they never came again.

Many ancestors remembered swimming the rivers, both on the way north and sometimes going back home. Amelia Van Pelt, a Chetco who married Tom Van Pelt, a non-Indian, had such an experience. Although Indian women married to white men were allowed to remain, Amelia was taken to Siletz while Tom was in the army and away from home. Siletz tribal member Sally Engstrom records that, upon return from duty, Tom went straight to the reservation to recover Amelia and their child, Charles. He “walked all the way to Siletz and all the way back—had to swim the rivers in between, holding the baby above the water, as they swam.”



For everyone, the removal era shattered their experience of living Native cultural lives, of being tribal Indians. The people in the north escaped a forced removal, but the germs had taken nearly their whole tribes. The women who avoided removal through marriage to non-Indians could try to raise children with a sense of Indian values, but those families were mostly isolated from fellow tribal members. Somehow, in a few pockets in the remote Cow Creek watershed and in the wild Rogue and Chetco country, Indians hid out from their pursuers, but they were forced to live as fugitives. Some Coos and coastal Umpquas stalled removal to Siletz by living at the temporary encampment near Fort Umpqua; later, many of them would find ways to live in towns in their aboriginal territory rather than be forced to move to Siletz. But they had no land. As for Siletz, spectacular though the reservation was as a physical place, living conditions were severe at best and the federal enforcers had a mission to deny them their culture. Their hearts were sick for their ancestral homes.

Removal was yet another assault, stifling what western Oregon Indians had lived for and believed in. The Native seeds of culture and sovereignty were there, but they lay deep underground, buried and choked by layers of actions by the new people. And many more layers were still to come.