

EXODUS 1875

As we come into the month of February, we must take the time to commemorate the Exodus of the Yavapai-Apache, or what is known to other tribes as “The March of Tears”. This is an event in history that proved to be detrimental to the Yavapai Apache people, an event that shows the true greed and ideologies of early western society a mere 151 years ago.

This reading will have several excerpts from “Surviving Conquest A History of the Yavapai Peoples”, by Timothy Braatz, although there are many accounts and readings regarding the Exodus of the Yavapai Apache people. Though, both the Yavapai and Apache were involved in this forced removal and both faced the same atrocities, this reading will be from the Yavapai perspective, though it should be known the Apache were beside them throughout this whole ordeal.

Keep in mind, the removal to San Carlos is one of five marches for the Yavapai people. The Yavapai and Apache had been residing in the Verde Valley since time and immemorial, but were then forced into a reserve in the Verde Valley called the “Rio Verde Reserve”.

In December of 1874 the Office of Indian Affairs, the agency that operated and controlled the reservation system, wanted to make the administration more efficient by reducing the number of reservations. With this theme in mind, they decided to close the Rio Verde Reserve and send the Yavapai and Apache to San Carlos. The Yavapai and Apache have become self-sufficient farmers and were able to produce their own crops in the Rio Verde Reserve. During this time the government had several contractors they worked with that supplied rations and supplies to the natives in the reservations. The self-sufficiency of the Yavapai Apache stood in the way of the contractors being able to operate their businesses, the contractors feared the Natives in the Rio Verde reserve would develop a “marketable surplus”. They then worked hand in hand with the Indian Office and lobbied to have the reserve shut down. The contractors wanted the Natives to be, “relocated to a hotter and drier San Carlos Reservation where farming conditions were less promising.” This would increase the demand for food supplies on the already populated a near 2000 Apache population on the San Carlos Reservation. They did not want us to be self-sufficient, they did not want us to produce our own food nor our own income, and instead they wanted us reliant on them. The Yavapai growing their own crop also became an issue for farmers of the area who wanted the rich soil for their own, therefore the removal of the Yavapai would make way for the settlers to occupy the area and use the natural resources. Promises were broken, as the Yavapai were promised that if they “behaved” they would be allowed to stay on the Rio Verde Reserve indefinitely, they were then promised by General Crook that if they were to leave the Rio Verde Reserve and stay in San Carlos to teach the Apache’s how to farm, they would be allowed to come back home. It was later discovered that General Crook had no authority to make any promises but merely made false promises in the hopes of “a peaceful Exodus”.

When the Yavapai knew they were going to be forced removed, the women wailed throughout the night, groups of others tried to leave for the mountains, but later returned when their leaders beckoned them back. A group of men painted themselves for battle, preparing for events that



A group of men painted themselves for battle, preparing for events that may take place. Lieutenant Schuyler and a surgeon Corbusier who had worked with the Yavapai, pleaded with the Special Commissioner of Indian Affairs L.E. Dudley, a cruel man, to be more rational and humane in the removal of the Yavapai Apache people. The rivers were swollen and high and there was snow at the higher elevations. Schuyler and Corbusier insisted that Dudley take the Yavapai and Apache around the mountains on a safer route, so that they could utilize wagons and horses to carry supplies, food and the elderly.

“Dudley responded by pointing out that the most direct route was over the mountains. There was no road that way, he knew, but the Yavapai’s and Tontos were accustomed to the mountains and that was how he would take them. According to Corbusier, Dudley summarizes his attitude toward the Rio Verde peoples and his position on their removal in one brief sentence;” They are Indians, let the beggars walk.””

A total of 1,476 Yavapai Apache peoples began their forced march on February 27, 1875 in the dead of winter, set to go through freezing rivers and climb mountains for 180 miles. Although this terrain was familiar to the Yavapai, they were not accustomed to traveling in the winter elements with little to nothing. Several Army men traveled with the Yavapai on their journey with a couple of cows and mules hauling food supplies, which would prove to be nowhere near enough for the journey ahead. For nearly a month, the Yavapai and Apache walked through snow, mud, and streams, sometimes even crawling through the elements due to exhaustion but forced to keep going. Dudley drove the Natives constantly through icy conditions, not allowing them to rest, earning the name “Come-Along”. Some of the Calvary men showed compassion to the little ones forced on the journey and allowed them to ride their horses in the tough conditions. All the Yavapai and Apache carried what little they had on their backs, even a man carrying his wife on his back in a basket for the entire journey, later to become a symbol of the Yavapai-Apache Nations determination to survive. The rations ran out after a week, leaving many of the people to succumb to hunger, exhaustion or even being swept away in the crossing of the rivers. Many babies were born on this forced march, 25 of the babies survived, but many did not make it and are buried in the mountains. An excerpt from Maggie Hayes, who survived the journey reads as follows:

“We were many moons on the trip. We had to walk all the way. The soldiers had ponies to ride. There was no road, and very few trails. Many had no moccasins, but those who did gave them to others who needed them more. Even the moccasins wore out on the sharp rocks. Our clothing was torn to rags on the brush and cactus. With bleeding feet, weary in body and sick at heart, many wanted to die. Many did die. Rations were meager. It was winter time. At night we huddled together around campfires to keep warm. We were not allowed to take the time and strength to bury the dead, and who would want to bury the dying? We waded across many streams. The river was running strong when we got to the crossing. We were forced to cross the best way we could. Some of the weaker ones washed away down the river to a watery grave. Those of us who did survive the crossing were like drowned rats than human beings.”

Before 1863, the population of the Yavapai people was over 2,000, after the three-week Exodus ending in mid-March, it would be noted that nearly half the Yavapai population had been eradicated. Due to 12 years of invasion by western society and disease. The Yavapai were now faced with an unfamiliar environment being a minority in new lands amongst new people under a new Indian Agent and system. For nearly 30 years the Yavapai toiled trying to farm in unforgiving soil, often facing famine and the effects of forced western assimilation. For 25 years the Yavapai begged to return home, they refused to accept this unfamiliar territory as home and fought constantly to return home to the Verde Valley.

"We stay at San Carlos, maybe 30 years. After 30 years, the chief, Marshall Pete, told us, "It is time to go home. If we stay longer, the White people are going to move us to Texas, Oklahoma, maybe some place across the ocean." He told us, "I grease my wagon already. If you hear a wagon early in the morning, you get your wagons and follow me." That's what my people, the Yavapai, did. They left San Carlos with their wagons early in the morning...I asked my father, "You have lots of cattle over there in San Carlos. Why would you go away and leave it?" He said, "I left cattle over there. But that cattle ain't worth my homeland. The land isn't going to wear out. I will keep it all my life." And my grandmother said, when she was over there in San Carlos, she sure was thinking of home-always. "Wigidijisawa (Superstition Mountain) and Wigijtassa (Four Peaks), that is in my heart all the time," she said."- Carlos Montezuma.

After so long, the people who were set to guard San Carlos got lax in their duties. The Yavapai took it upon themselves to just leave, they were met with no resistance and started their journeys home to the Verde Valley. The settlers of the Verde Valley requested "Protection" from the return of the Yavapai Apache, but were told the Yavapai Apache posed "no threat" to them. Upon return, the lands have been filled and occupied by settlers flooding the Verde Valley. The Yavapai were forced to become squatters on their own land. The Yavapai Apache peoples persisted in their goals of being self-sufficient and battled to have the rights to their own land, slowly but surely into what our home is today. We now stand tall with several businesses and more federally owned communities.

We are a people of resilience, we have managed to build ourselves up from nothing, even when everyone doubted that a Native would have the capability to do so. As the Yavapai-Apache Nation we need to pay homage to those who gave their lives and fought endlessly for us to have the opportunities we do today. It is our due diligence to our ancestors, to our community and to our future to continue to fight for our sovereignty- as indigenous people, you can achieve this by participating in your culture, knowing your stories and knowing your language. These qualities are what sets us apart from western society, without it, we are no different.

Submitted by:

Marley Juan

Yavapai Culture Manager

M'hanik m'voh (Walk in Beauty)

