

**THE BIG STORY**



General Floyd leads units of the Georgia Militia into battle with anti-US Creek Indians in Alabama, November 1813, during the Creek War. Researchers have located the sites of some of the main clashes in this little-known conflict, which divided the Creek nation and dragged in American forces

## Uncovering America's other civil war

**David Keys** reveals why the Creek War of 1813–14 – a bitter conflict that exemplified the USA's fraught relationship with North America's Indian tribes – could finally get the recognition it deserves

**H**ISTORIANS AND archaeologists have joined forces to unlock the secrets of America's little-known *other* civil war – a bitter conflict between pro and anti-US factions in one of America's most famous Indian tribes.

The war broke out 200 years ago, in early 1813, between two key political groups in the Creek

Indian nation, and raged at the same time that Britain was fighting America in the so-called War of 1812. Indeed, in some senses, it formed part of that wider struggle – as the British encouraged the Indian forces combatting the Americans.

Now a group of researchers is trying to locate the sites of the conflict's long-forgotten, yet

fierce, battles and other engagements. This research is historically important because the Creek War reflected deep and often poorly appreciated internal political divisions within Indian tribes across much of America.

So far, the researchers – from two Alabama universities (Auburn and South Alabama) – have identified the exact locations or

approximate areas where five of the key military actions took place.

The researchers have also succeeded, for the first time, in pinpointing the site of one of the sacred wartime headquarters of the anti-US wing of the Creek nation.

Known as Holy Ground, this small fortified town was used by



Indian religious prophets to try to create, albeit unsuccessfully, a supernatural defensive barrier through which their enemies could not pass. The sacred settlement was captured by the US army after it intervened in the war against the anti-American faction of the Creeks.

After pinpointing the site, archaeologists found Creek sacred pottery, decorated with cosmic images that are still reflected in traditional Creek ritual dances today. They also discovered one of the vicious iron spikes that Creek warriors attached to their war clubs. It was these lethal red-painted wood and metal clubs that gave the anti-US Creek faction its name – the ‘Red Sticks’.

The excavations at Holy Ground have unearthed evidence of the American attack, including musket shot fired by US regular troops, and rifle shot discharged by Mississippi state militiamen. Other finds include everything from knives, axes and padlocks to domestic hearths, metal arrowheads and imported English Staffordshire pottery.

The historians and archaeologists have also found the approximate location of an American fort that was besieged by the Red Sticks in the war, and the site of an important river skirmish. Fort Siquefield – north of modern Mobile, Alabama – functioned as a crucial refuge for white settlers and pro-American Creeks, while the so-called ‘canoe battle’ saw US troops and Red Stick Creek warriors fighting to the death in the middle of the Alabama river.

The Creek War claimed the lives of some 2,000 native Americans, around 10 per cent of the Creek population. It was triggered by what appears to have been a combination of man-made and natural events.

Like many other Indian tribes in the early 19th century, the Creeks – who traditionally inhabited the south-eastern corner of modern America – were



A small brass arrowhead found at a settlement of the anti-US Creek forces. Weapons like these were often made by melting down items such as European brass kettles

## ARCHAEOLOGY

# The small town with a big history

**TOWNS THROUGHOUT** Britain could have much longer histories than their residents suspect, if the exciting results from a recent archaeological excavation at a typical small town is anything to go by.

The excavation at Ware in Hertfordshire over the past four years has revealed evidence for human settlement and activity in the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods.

“The Ware dig shows the rest of the country what an archaeological investigation in a small town can achieve. It shows just how much lies hidden beneath our feet,” says Bob Zeepvat, manager of the unit which has been carrying out the

excavation – Archaeological Services & Consultancy, based in the south Midlands.

The investigations have unearthed dozens of Neolithic tools, Bronze Age burials, an Iron Age roundhouse, a Romano-British industrial complex and evidence of Anglo-Saxon food consumption.

The Neolithic finds include knives, axes and scrapers. From the Bronze Age, the archaeologists have found four cremation burials inside an earlier monumental grave.

Of particular interest to scholars of Roman Britain are the pottery kilns, brick-earth and gravel quarries, cereal-grinding equipment, wells, the remains of



A blue enamel and copper alloy piece of jewellery in the shape of a cockerel found during the dig at Ware, c200 AD

the floors of probable workshops – and the tiny bones of six newly born children who were buried in a group.

From Anglo-Saxon times come animal bones, suggesting that locals were enjoying meals of carp and goose.

“Many small towns like Ware almost certainly have similar long and impressive stories to tell – but never get the opportunity to launch such large-scale excavations,” said Bob Zeepvat. **II** David Keys

coming under increased economic pressure from white settlers, whose farms were seriously disrupting Indian hunting grounds.

Some Creeks – especially in the western Georgia area – adapted by becoming private farmers, and sometimes slave-owning plantation proprietors.

However, other Creeks – primarily those in what is now eastern Alabama – disapproved of private land ownership. They wanted all tribal land to continue as communal property so that their traditional hunting economy could survive.

Then in late 1811 and early 1812, four massive earthquakes hit the south-eastern USA. Wreaking havoc over an area

of 50,000 square miles, they remain the most powerful seismic events to hit that part of the North American continent in recorded history.

It’s likely that some Creek Indian religious leaders linked the unprecedented earthquakes to the equally unwelcome political phenomena of the time – increasing pressure exerted on their way of life by European

execute their guilty compatriots themselves.

The anti-American religious revivalist wing of the Creek nation was so incensed by the executions that it attacked plantations and properties owned by the tribal leadership, sparking a civil war. By October, US forces were intervening – and, for the rest of the conflict, pro-leadership Creek warriors fought alongside US

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settlers and the adoption of their customs by many Creeks.

Soon, a number of Creek religious leaders were urging their people to return to their traditional culture and to resist the white advance.

This led a group of Creek religious revivalists to kill two white settler families in February 1813. The US demanded that the Creek leadership hand over the culprits but Creek chiefs chose to

troops against the Red Sticks.

The conflict ended in 1814 with victory for the US forces and its Creek allies. However, the two weren’t to remain partners for long. Following the conflict, the US annexed 80 per cent of Creek hunting grounds – from friend and foe alike. Then, some 20 years later, it evicted the remaining Creeks from their remnant territories and forced them to migrate west to Oklahoma. **II**