

## **Mapping My Ancestors Footsteps: Historical GIS and the Trail of Tears**

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My ancestors walked the northern route of the Trail of Tears. It is my desire to know precisely where they walked. A lot of research and documentation has already been uncovered by members of the Tennessee Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association. Their research enabled me to know roughly the location my ancestors walked, however many gaps and uncertainties still exist. In May of 2008 I began a historical geographic information system (GIS) project to more accurately map the northern route of the Trail of Tears through Tennessee. I used scanned historic topographic maps and georeferenced them in order to overlay them onto modern digital raster graphics (DRG) and aerial photos. I was then able to use archive documentation to identify and locate old road beds across present-day terrain. I digitized the old road beds and used scanned hand-drawn historic maps to evaluate and support my claims. Some areas of the trail require fieldwork in order to precisely locate old road beds. I am currently identifying such areas and will visit them this winter to map them using GPS. I am also planning additional archive research in order to more precisely map these still-uncertain areas. My end goal for this project is to create an interactive map. Through such a use of GIS, history can become a shared experience. Viewers will be able to see historic information, terrain and elevation changes, and fully experience the northern route of the Trail of Tears through Tennessee.