

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Natchez Trace Parkway
Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail



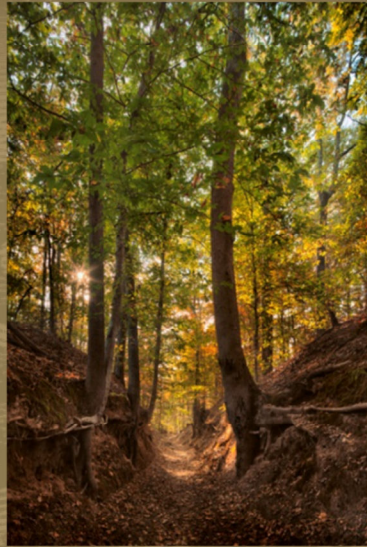
Connecting Chickasaw and Choctaw Students to their Ancestral Homelands

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Natchez Trace Parkway



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Running through Mississippi, through the corner of Alabama, and into middle Tennessee, the Natchez Trace Parkway transects the ancestral homelands of several American Indian tribes. Historically, the three largest tribes were the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez.

New Education Program

- Need: educational resources that could be used by teachers



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The idea for an educational partnership came about when Natchez Trace Parkway staff members were working on expanding the educational materials. As the park educator, I had the educational expertise, but while doing research I quickly realized that the people about whom I was writing could no doubt do a better job telling their own story. Think about untapped people, groups or organizations who know more about some subject relevant to your place of work, than you do? These are your Untapped Resources of Unusual Value (URUV))



I was pretty sure I could get some project funding, so I contacted the three federally recognized tribes: first, the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations of Oklahoma whose ancestors were relocated to OK, during the 1830's Indian Removal. I also contacted the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) whose headquarters is less than an hour from the Natchez Trace Parkway. I only knew one Chickasaw person, and I barely knew her. Nonetheless, I contacted her, and it turned out that she knew the person in charge of Chickasaw education. So she connected with me the Chickasaw educator. Through them, I was given contacts at the Choctaw Nation. For the MBCI, I contacted the Bureau of Indian Education and asked who I should contact here in MS.

The idea was to evoke CHANGE

Include:

- Have American Indian students make educational resources
- Connect the students with their ancestral homeland
- Have their mentors teach them

Role of NATR/NPS

- Identify our educational resource needs
- Provide funding for the students and instructors/mentors
- Post lessons on the NPS website
- Promote the lessons in the “Trace States”



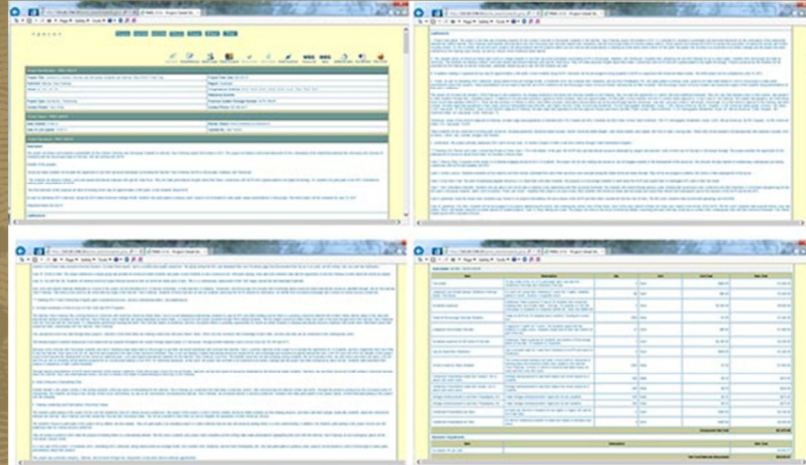
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The idea behind the project was to evoke change in the status quo: from, “the NPS develops lessons from our own research, and tells stories we want to share,” to “include the people who the stories the park themes embrace and have them tell the stories they want to tell about their own heritage”. Question: are you relying on your organization’s knowledge without tapping into external information from your URUV?




Our previous relationships with those tribes had been minimal, and mostly on a legal and resource management level. We did not have a joint educational component. I was hoping for a more personal and interactive relationship. I knew that to interest anyone in change, there has to be a benefit. The benefit to the NPS was obvious, and I hoped the tribes would also see benefit. When I contacted them, all three groups were interested in partnerships so their students could learn about their homelands, and subsequently develop educational resources about their tribes' connections to the Natchez Trace Parkway.

Money??? What Money???



So how does a national park come up with the money to fund travel from Oklahoma to Mississippi for 24 people for 7 to 10 days? We have an internal funding source called the Project Management Information System or PMIS. (Don't worry about reading this slide...I just wanted to show about ¼ of what it looks like.) To sum it up, PMIS is unaffectionately sometimes known as the PMS. We applied in two types of funding categories and after one year of Interpretation and Education funding, we ultimately found that the Youth Program Partnership source was our best bet. Question: What funding and what sources are available to you to engage your URUV, and if you don't know, who can you ask?



Sample Itinerary

Monday 16th Jane Farmer: Natchez, MS: (milepost 0)

- Grand Village of the Natchez Indians
- Natchez National Historical Park Visitor Center
- Emerald Mound

Tuesday 17th Jane Farmer

- Mt Locust, Trail/Sunken Trace, Mangum Mound, Lower Choctaw Boundary milepost 61

Wednesday 18th Dr. Brad Lieb/Jane Farmer : Jackson, MS (Milepost 100)

- Dr. Lieb's: Chickasaw antiquities consultant/movie
- Travel along Trace from Jackson North, the East to Choctaw, MS

Thursday 19th Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI): Philadelphia, MS (off milepost 160)
Moundville Archeological Park, Tuscaloosa, AL Tour Moundville (2 hour drive)

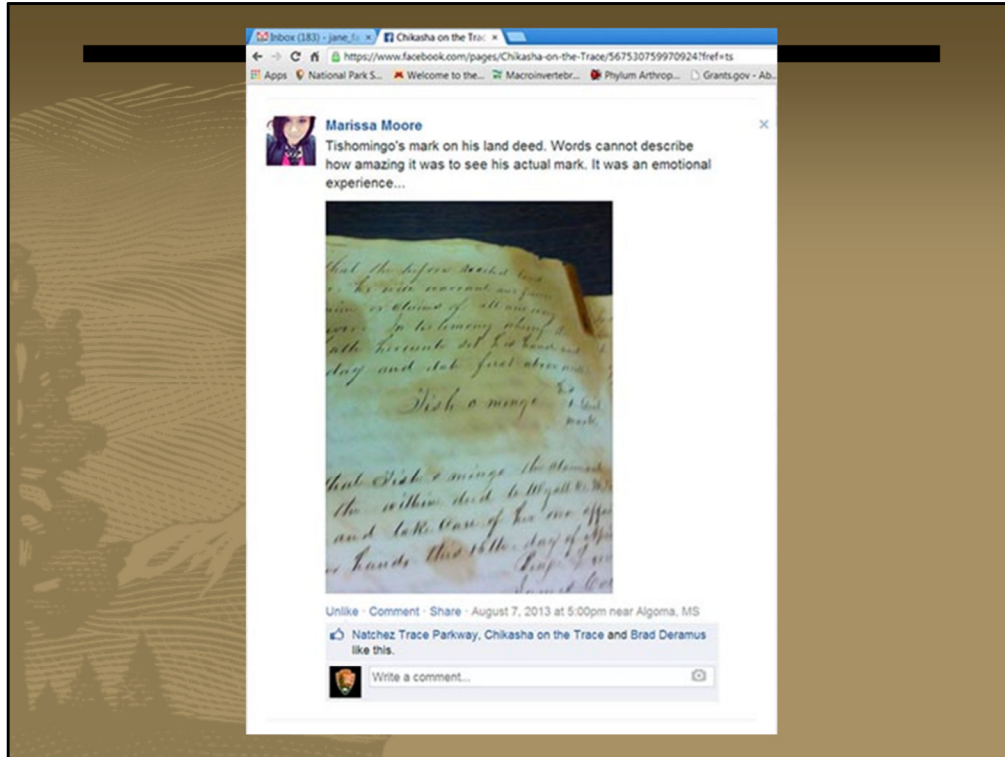
Friday 20th MBCI) in Philadelphia area

- Nanih Waiya/
- Immi Cultural Center Tour
- Cultural Overview
- Social Dancing Presentation

I applied for four straight years and received funding each year. I worked with the tribal-end organizers to develop itineraries for the students. They gave me suggestions as to what they would like the students to see, and I added what I thought would be significant for them to see along the Parkway corridor. They developed tentative itineraries, I reviewed them, and helped work out the timing.



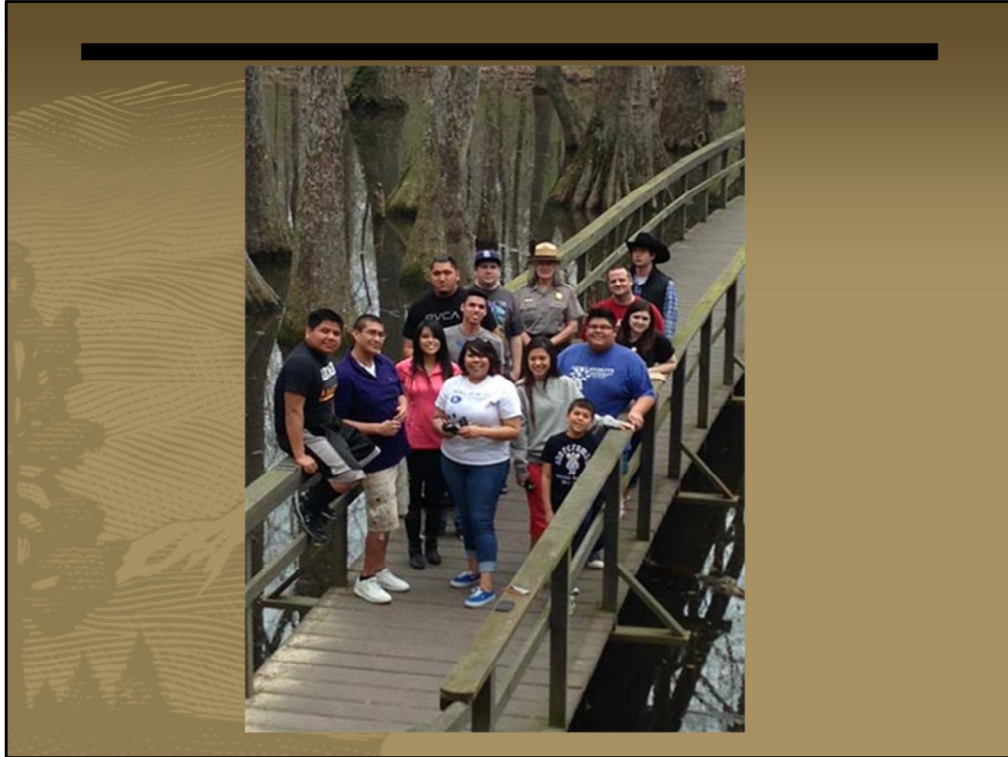
When the first group from the Chickasaw Nation came to visit, locally it was literally front page news. Some local historians invited the students to browse records in their small town collections, where they found additional written and human resources. The Chickasaw students from Oklahoma were embraced by the current residents of their homeland.



The benefits to the students were beyond what was hoped for. On one of these visits, the students discovered the land deed of Tishomingo, who is considered by the Chickasaw people to be one of their last great chiefs from Mississippi. After signing the deed, he set out on the Trail of Tears and died before he made it to Oklahoma. The students were very moved. One of the students posted this photo and comment on their group's Facebook page. "Tishomingo's mark on his land deed. Words cannot describe how amazing it was to see his actual mark. It was an emotional experience...". Another student said that the whole experience affected him spiritually, something he had not anticipated.



The other Oklahoma group was sponsored by the Choctaw Nation and were from Southeastern Oklahoma State University. While all student groups were here in Mississippi, I tried to function more as a guide and resource, rather than an authority. Question: What role can you play with your URUV besides being the authority?



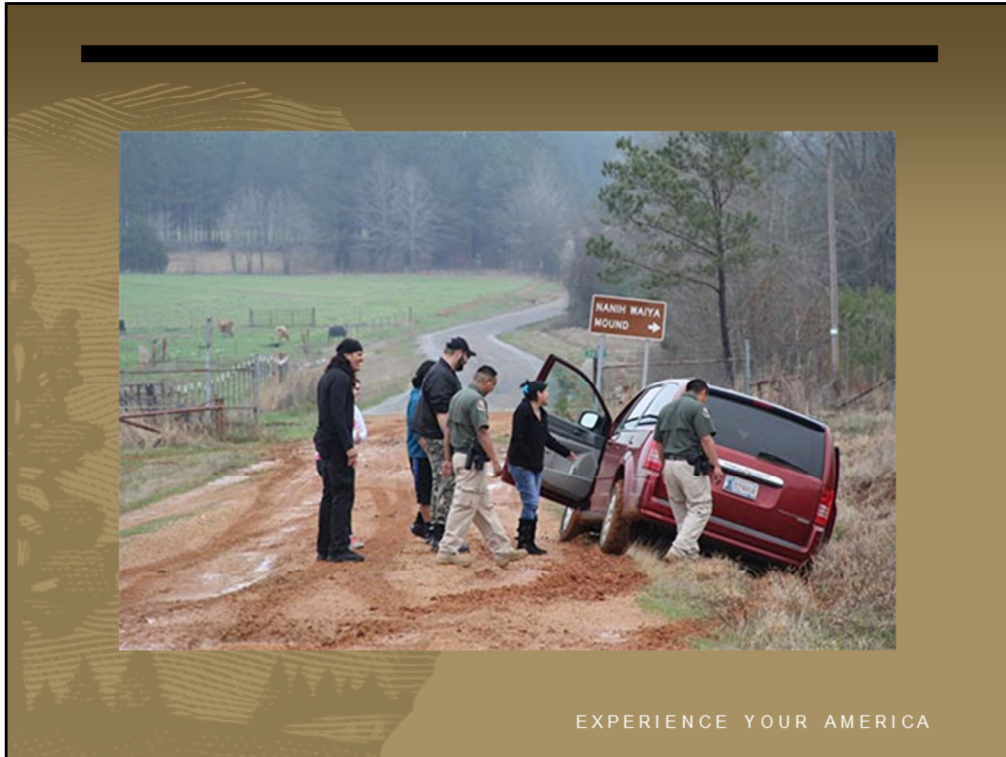
On both of these trips, my goal was to present the students with opportunities that would inspire them to share the stories of their people. Question: How does your goal, work hand in hand with the goal of your URUV?

Lessons Learned

- Partnerships are fluid, not static
- Just because someone has never done something, does not mean that it is a bad idea
- Learn what “paperwork” needs to be in place to carry out the partnership.
 - Cooperative agreements took 50 times longer to develop than anticipated!
- A partnership may end up different than planned, or expected
- Have jointly formulated Plan A
- And backup Plan B and Flexible C

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As on slide: but remember, just because something has never been done, or even if it has been tried before and was not completely successful, does not mean that it is a bad idea. Each day is new, and people and influences change constantly. A “bad” old idea may be today’s great new idea.



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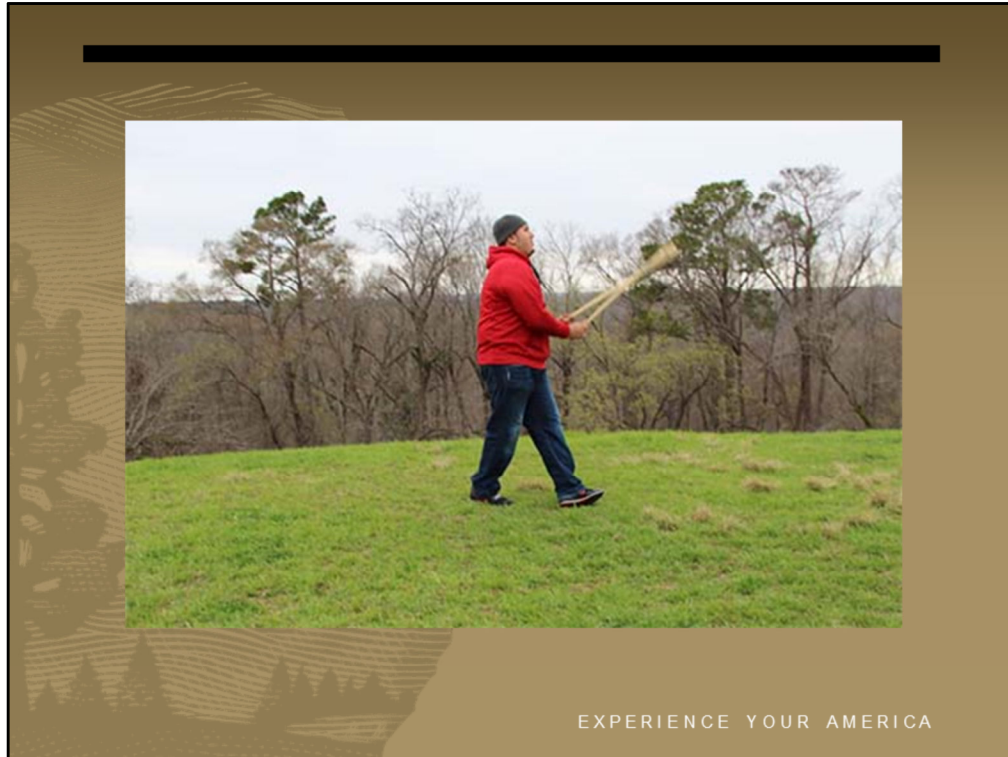
There are liabilities...risks. No matter what you plan, you need to be prepared for the unexpected. Plan B is as critical as Plan A, and Plan C needs to be incredibly flexible!



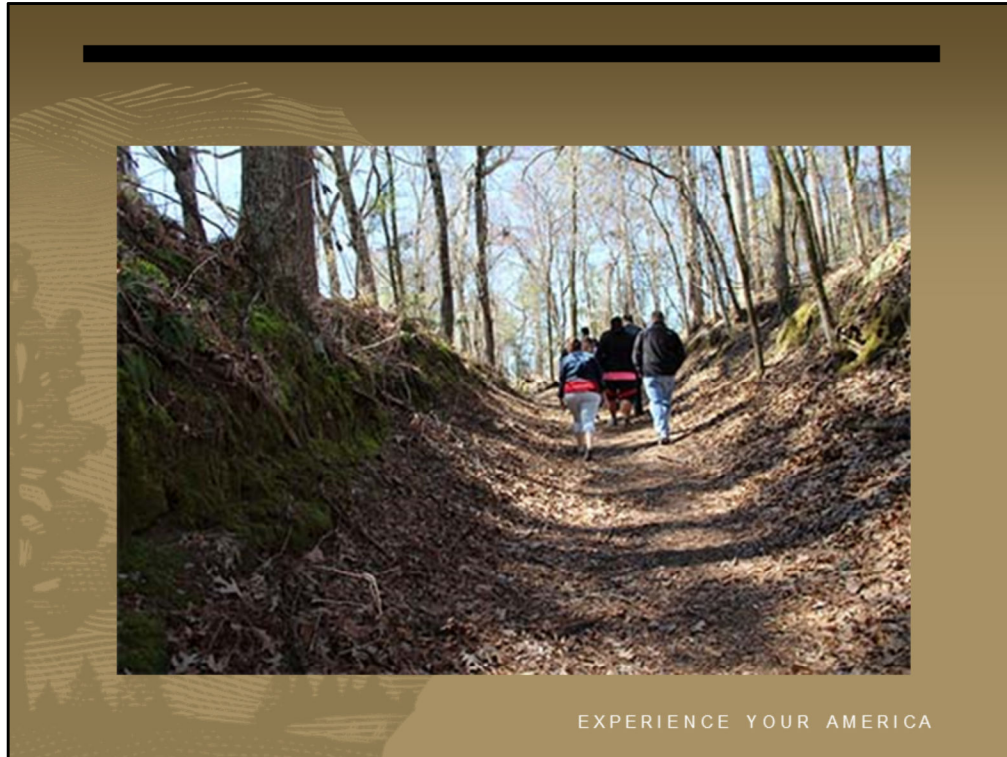
All in all, these experiences have strengthened our relationships with all groups; but not always as planned. For example, our relationship with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is not what I planned, but it is still good. After the first year, it seemed too much for their high school teachers to take on the project. However, they now regularly function as a support group for the Oklahoma Choctaw groups. They did not have a strong relationship with Oklahoma students when we first started. What we ended up with might even be a better relationship than we planned, because rather than them dancing for us, we are now dancing together. Our hope is that the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations from Oklahoma will find this experience valuable enough to continue it with future generations.



We have received some great products. Some of the developed resources are available on our NPS website. They are resources like PowerPoint presentations, reference materials, lesson plans, and other activities. Videos:
<https://www.nps.gov/natr/learn/photosmultimedia/videos.htm> Lesson plans:
<https://www.nps.gov/natr/learn/education/classrooms/curriculummaterials.htm>



Our challenge for the future is maintaining those partnerships. This is the last year for this specific project funding. Building on those relationships, I wrote a new project that would fund one or two summer interns from each tribe. This project is currently under review. I have invited the Oklahoma colleges to display contemporary artwork here at NATR, during American Indian Heritage month. Question: Can you think of ways that NATR might keep nurturing our long distance relationships with the Oklahoma tribes?



Finally, I would like to add that we have had great adventures together. The students collectively enjoyed exploring their ancestral homelands and they were excited about sharing what they learned, AND It has really been rewarding for me personally. Through this project, by blending old traditions and modern technologies, we are sharing the stories of the historic people who lived along the Natchez Trace. Hopefully some of the educational resources the students produced will actively engage audiences around the world. All the planning, writing, and other work has been well worth the building of the partnerships.

Natchez Trace Parkway

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