



OKLAHOMA: NATIVE AMERICA

OPPOSITE LEFT: Blackfoot artist Cha' Tullis' metal sculpture of Indians on their horses stands atop Standpipe Hill in the Osage town of Hominy, where other outdoor sculptures and murals depicting native life are local attractions.

Driving through Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in the heart of Oklahoma's Osage Nation Reservation, I pass miles and miles of green, rolling hills. Rounding a corner, I stop the car to watch a small herd of buffalo. A cow catches sight of me, noses her calf, and the herd slowly turns away. Rangers at the 38,000-acre preserve introduced 300 buffalo in 1993 and now have a herd of 2,700.

BY MAUREEN LITTLEJOHN



THE RED EARTH MUSEUM

PROMOTES NATIVE ARTS AND CULTURES THROUGH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, THE MUSEUM AND THE RED EARTH NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL FESTIVAL, HELD EVERY JUNE. ERIC OESCH, RED EARTH'S COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, TELLS ME THAT MORE THAN 1,200 NATIVE AMERICAN ARTISTS AND DANCERS GATHER FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO PERFORM AND TO SELL THEIR ART.

OPPOSITE PAGE: *As Long As the Waters Flow*, a statue by Allan Houser, stands in front of the Oklahoma State capital building and is a reference to President Andrew Jackson's vow to Native Americans that they shall own their land as long as the grass grows and the rivers run. It was a promise that the instigator of the Trail of Tears did not keep. (See "The Enigma of Thomas Jefferson," p. 54.)

TOP RIGHT: The Kiowa Black Leggings Society honors people who are serving or have served in the military. The Kiowa Indian City USA Cultural Center is located near Anadarko, Okla.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Native pottery display at the Red Earth Museum in Oklahoma City. The museum hosts the 23rd annual Red Earth American Indian Cultural Festival, June 5-7, 2009.

The state's official tourism slogan is "Oklahoma Native America." The moniker was adopted because 39 federally recognized tribes have their headquarters in the state. Moreover, many Oklahomans are descendants of the original 67 tribes who were forced to relocate there in the federal government's Indian removals of the mid 1800s. Prior to becoming a state in 1907, Oklahoma was designated Indian Territory by the U.S. government. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by President Andrew Jackson, directed the U. S. Army to organize a mass exodus of northern tribes from east of the Mississippi, among them the Shawnee, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sauk and Foxes, and from the south the Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Seminole and Cherokee (known as the Five Civilized Tribes – because of their adoption of Western customs, and in the case of the Cherokee, written language). Some went peacefully; others were forced. The removal of almost 60,000 members of the southern nations was known as the "Trail of Tears" since so many perished during and after the brutal marches.

I head first to Oklahoma City where The Red Earth Museum promotes Native arts and cultures through educational programs, the museum and the Red Earth Native American Cultural Festival, held every June. Eric Oesch, Red Earth's communications director, tells me that more than 1,200 Native American artists and dancers gather from across the country to perform and to sell their art.

Strolling through the museum, housed in the Science Museum Oklahoma building, I stop at an exhibit of 24 paintings of Chickasaw Nation elders by Mike Larsen (Chickasaw). Larsen is also responsible for the striking 26-foot-wide mural in the Oklahoma State Capitol rotunda of five Native prima ballerinas born in Oklahoma: Yvonne Chouteau (Cherokee), Marjorie Tallchief (Osage), Maria Tallchief (Osage), Rosella Hightower (Choctaw) and Moscelyne Larkin (Peoria/Shawnee).



Heading northeast, I drive to the Osage Nation Reservation along Highway 60, also known as the Osage Heritage Trail Byway. The Osage Tribal Museum in Pawhuska opened in 1938, making it the oldest continually operating tribal museum in the United States. Today it has a collection of 6,000 objects including regalia, artifacts, photos and art.

"The Osage tribe was the richest tribe in the world in the 1920s due to mineral rights and the oil that was discovered on their property," Jim Gray (Osage), the principal elected chief, tells me. He explains that the Osage were originally from the Branson, Mo., area. The Indian removal program relocated them to Kansas, but they sold that land to the United States government and bought what is today's reservation in Oklahoma. "In the 1920s, 10 percent of the world's oil supply came from here," says Gray. He points to a black-and-white photo of a large elm tree with dozens of men standing beneath it. "Oil barons such as John Paul Getty came here to bid for drilling rights," he continues. On my way into the museum, I noticed a plaque on the spot where the elm had stood before it succumbed to Dutch elm disease.

The oil prosperity brought dangerous times as many Osage were preyed upon between 1920 and 1925. "Swindlers would marry an Osage and murder them to inherit the oil rights. My great-grandfather Henry Roan brought in the FBI before he was shot by some of the culprits on Federal Trust property. They arrested the guilty individuals," says Gray.

The Osage have faced difficult challenges. The population, says Gray, dwindled from 20,000 in 1804 to 1,000 in 1872 after the forced march to Kansas. "We were almost wiped out. We have had to redefine ourselves culturally." One way they did this was to adopt practices from other tribes including I'N-Lon-Schka dances from the Ponca and Kaw. "Usually we have them the first weekend of June in Gray Horse,

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Pawhuska and Hominy,” says Gray. The P’N-Lon-Schka dances, explains Gray, are done for “unity, healing and spiritual strength.”

Caroline Hogan (Osage), who was helping out in the town’s tourism office, tells me annual events include the National Indian Taco Competition in May and the Osage Nation Film Festival in September. She takes me to the Greek-revival Constantine Theater where the film festival is held. It was built in the 1880s as a hotel and then remodeled into a theater in 1911. Hogan tells me, “[Famed opera singer Enrico] Caruso once sang here.” Past screenings included *The FBI* with Jimmy Stewart, based on the Osage murders of the 1920s, new documentaries by Osage filmmakers, and the movies of Ben Johnson Jr., an Osage actor who was in many John Wayne pictures.

The town’s Immaculate Conception Church is a must-see says Hogan. We enter the gothic-style brick church that was built in 1915, and she points out the stained glass window depicting tribal members with Christopher Columbus.

Next stop on the Osage Heritage Trail is Ponca City and the Standing Bear Museum and Education Center. Inside the round, red

stone structure, which opened in 2007, a rotunda is dedicated to the area’s six tribes – Kaw, Osage, Otoe-Missouria, Pawnee, Ponca and Tonkawa. Each has its own display case of artifacts and regalia. Outside, a path takes me to the tribal viewing courts. The stories of the six tribes are etched on large granite slabs, and fiberglass cases house photos of chiefs and contemporary members. There’s a space with granite slabs describing styles of dance. This is where the Standing Bear Powwow is held every September.

Further along the path, stands a 22-foot-high bronze statue of Standing Bear by Oreland C. Joe (Ute-Navajo). The center’s executive director, T.L. Walker tells me the story of Standing Bear, a Ponca chief.

The Ponca’s traditional home was in Nebraska and in 1878 the government forced them to walk to Indian Territory. Many died, including Standing Bear’s daughter Prairie Flower. Once they arrived, his 12-year-old son died. The boy had asked his father to bury him in the land of his grandfathers, so Standing Bear took his body and started the 500-mile walk back to Nebraska with 29 other Ponca members. The group was arrested for leaving Indian Territory without permission

and a trial ensued. At that time, Walker tells me, there was a question of whether or not an Indian could be deemed a “person” within the meaning of the law and even gain access to the U. S. Courts.

“At the end of his testimony, Standing Bear held out his hand to the judge and said, ‘My hand is not the color of yours, but if I pierce it I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be the same color as your. I am a man. The same God made us both,’” says Walker. Standing Bear won his case.

“He was the first American civil rights leader. It was a landmark case, and impacted United States sovereign issues and tribal law. When he died in 1908, Standing Bear was buried in Nebraska in an unmarked grave. In 1990, the Northern Poncas regained federal recognition and they are still trying to relearn their culture,” she says.

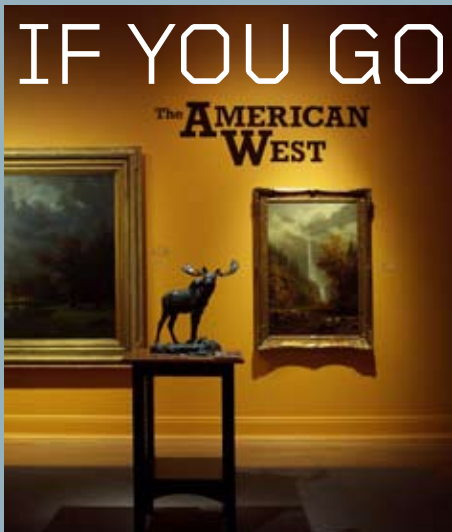
The trip for me was a living testimony to the difficulty, hopes and accomplishments of the Native peoples in Oklahoma. It taught me that the state is Native America, indeed. ✿

Maureen Littlejohn is a frequent contributor to *American Indian* magazine and has just completed a masters thesis on Aboriginal tourism.



ABOVE: Amidst oil wells, bison – or buffalo – roam in the rolling prairie grasslands. The mighty animals, which once numbered upwards of 30 million head, have been reintroduced to the Tallgrass Prairie Reserve.

“AT THE END OF HIS TESTIMONY, STANDING BEAR HELD OUT HIS HAND TO THE JUDGE AND SAID, ‘MY HAND IS NOT THE COLOR OF YOURS, BUT IF I PIERCE IT I SHALL FEEL PAIN. IF YOU PIERCE YOUR HAND, YOU ALSO FEEL PAIN. THE BLOOD THAT WILL FLOW FROM MINE WILL BE THE SAME COLOR AS YOURS. I AM A MAN. THE SAME GOD MADE US BOTH.”



PHOTOS: GILCREASE MUSEUM

TULSA

Gilcrease Museum

A comprehensive collection of American Indian and Western art, it features extensive exhibits on America's prehistory, settlement and expansion. Guided tours daily at 2 p.m. Osage Restaurant. (918) 596-2787
www.gilcrease.org

Lyon's Indian Store

Since 1916 the store has offered the largest selection of Native goods in Tulsa, including silver and turquoise jewelry, moccasins, art, rugs, pottery, Pendleton blankets and craft supplies. (918) 582-6372

PONCA CITY

Standing Bear Museum, Education Center and Native American Memorial Park

The museum features artifacts, artwork and educational material. Outside is a 22-foot-high bronze sculpture of Ponca Chief Standing Bear by Oreland C. Joe, plaques that honor the six tribes around Ponca City (Osage, Pawnee, Otoe-Missouria, Kaw, Tonkawa and Ponca) and two miles of walking trails. (580) 762-1514
www.standingbearpark.com

PAWHUSKA

Osage County Historical Society Museum

The collection is housed in an old Santa Fe Railroad depot and along with exhibits on Osage heritage, offers pioneer, western, oil industry and Boy Scout displays. (918) 287-9119
www.osagecohistoricalmuseum.com

PARK HILL

Cherokee Heritage Center

Dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Cherokee history and culture, the center features an ancient village, a rural village, Trail of Tears exhibit, Cherokee National Museum, a family research center and heritage tours. Activities include song, dance and traditional arts and crafts classes, plus competitive shows such as the Trail of Tears Art Show and Sale. (918) 456-6007
www.cherokeeheritage.org

CLINTON

Mohawk Lodge Indian Store

The first trading post in Indian Territory, the store opened in 1892 as a supply and beading house for Cheyenne women to make and sell their creations. It was moved to its present location on Route 66 in 1940. Authentic crafts are still available for sale and the store also has on display a collection of historic photographs, regalia and artifacts. (580) 323-2360

NORMAN

Jacobson House Native Art Center

Oscar Jacobson mentored the internationally renowned Kiowa Five American Indian artists in 1926, ushering in the Native American Art Movement. The center, Jacobson's former residence, presents performances, exhibits and education events. (405) 366-1667
www.jacobsonhouse.com

MUSKOGEE

Five Civilized Tribes Museum

Housed in the 1875 Union Agency, built by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, this museum preserves the culture and history of the Five Civilized Tribes; Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole. It hosts four major art shows and offers lectures, workshops and a gift shop. (918) 683-1701
www.fivetribes.org

OKLAHOMA CITY

Red Earth Museum

Run by the region's premier organization for advancing the understanding of Native traditional and contemporary culture and arts, the museum holds more than 1,400 artifacts including pottery, basketry, textiles and the Deupree Cradleboard Collection. It also holds traveling exhibits. (405) 427-5228
www.redearth.org

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

From fine art, pop culture and firearms to Native objects, historical cowboy gear, shopping and dining, the museum tells America's story as it unfolds across the West. A 4,000-square-foot Native American

Gallery covers spiritual, social, economic and cultural history of Native peoples in the West. The Silberman Gallery of Native American Art rotates a collection of 2,500 paintings, drawings and cultural objects. (405) 478-2250
www.nationalcowboymuseum.org

CHEYENNE

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

This is the site of Lt. Col. Custer's 1868 attack on the Southern Cheyenne village of Peace Chief Black Kettle. A new visitor center features exhibits, a bookstore and material about the battle. (580) 497-2742
www.nps.gov/waba

SALLISAW

Sequoyah's Cabin

This National Historic Landmark was built by Sequoyah shortly after he moved to Oklahoma in 1829. Sequoyah, originally from Tennessee, developed a working syllabary that enabled the entire Cherokee Nation to become literate. (918) 775-2413
www.ok-history.org

WEWOKA

Seminole Nation Museum

Artifacts, historic images and interpretive exhibits tell the story of the Seminole people who made their home in this area for more than a century. Visitors are invited to explore the art gallery, arts and crafts center and a comprehensive research library. (405) 257-5580
www.theseminolenationmuseum.org