

Yuchi Homeland (*S'atsole yudjiha*) -- Trade & Trails & Maps (Ongoing Research Effort -- Progress Report)

There are many maps that show where the Yuchi lived. Some show them here, some show them there, some say the Yuchi moved around a lot, while others place them firmly in Tennessee. Ultimately all these perspectives are right and all are also wrong...

The Yuchi were both mobile and stabile, as they were involved in commerce and trade. While like most Indigenous Americans their villages were moved from time to time, they were spread out along the trail system throughout the Southeast. The European idea of borders and territory was not a part of their thinking. At its heart, the Greencorn/moundbuilding culture that the Yuchi priests spread is the idea of tolerance and peace. The concepts of the ball game (little brother of war), counting coup, the pipe ceremony and piping, white towns and greencorn amnesty, are all cultural elements aimed at establishing peace. At least as important as warriors in this society were the emissaries of peace and trade. To administer this religio-political structure the Yuchi villages were spread out along the major trade trails in and among the villages of the other tribes. While it is true that these "roundtowns" were palisaded against hostilities, the melting pot of cultures likely enjoyed a far greater peace than Europe of the same period (the Middle Ages).

So as you look at these maps that place this tribe here, and that tribe there, you must remember that it is mostly a fiction based in a certain snapshot of time, or someone's best guess from limited knowledge, and all colored by the Dominant Culture's need to define territories with well-defined borders. Instead of looking at this Indigenous Culture with the usual biases, try visualizing a vibrant, multiethnic melting pot with a shared culture and vigorous trade connections sharing the region in relative peace -- you will get a much clearer picture than has most often been portrayed in the literature.

The Yuchi then lived throughout the Southeast and had villages spread up and down the commerce trails. Over time as more peoples moved into the region the Yuchi sought to bring them into the political mix. There is strong evidence that the Ani-Kutani were doing just this with the Cherokee who were the last to join this Great Indigenous Nation, just as European Contact threw a wrench into the works. While it is true that this peaceful Nation (the **First United States of this Land**) did not extend into the Great Lakes region and the Iroquois peoples, it did cover most of the Southeastern portion of continental North America. While Archaeologists have called it the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex, the Yuchi called it the ***Tsotanewaeno yudaha*** (Sacred Brotherhood of the pipe). It included a host of tribes, Siouian, Algonquin, Muscogean, as well as the Cherokee and a host of peoples whose origins will never be known (like the Timacua).

Evidence of the Yuchi can still be seen in the fossil words (names) of Yuchean etymology that are spread across the Southeastern landscape. From Tybee Island ("salt" in Yuchi) on the Georgia coast to Yazoo (leaf) in Mississippi on the Natchez Trail, and from the Euchee Valley of the Florida Pan Handle, up the Great Valley through Tennessee, these names are scattered as living traces of the Yuchi's presence. They reveal still by their locations along the ancient trail system the importance of trade and the role of the Yuchi in this great pre-Columbian Culture. A culture nearly lost to history by neglect and deprecation.

So where do we place the Yuchi on the map? (See Yuchi Area of Influence map). They were definitely centered in the Eastern and middle parts of Tennessee and the surrounding region in protohistoric times. In earlier times they have oral traditions linking themselves to Cahokia and the Ohio Valley. They maintain traditional friendships with the Eastern Siouian, Lenape, Shawnee, and Creek peoples. Many Yuchi became Creek, Cherokee and Shawnees at the great disease holocaust. At the population collapse from this holocaust, the region became sparsely populated and was often shown on early colonial maps as uninhabited. But why would such a fertile region be truly uninhabited? The many people with obvious Indian heritage today living in this region counter such convenient Dominant Culture claims with respect to aboriginal abandonment of this region.

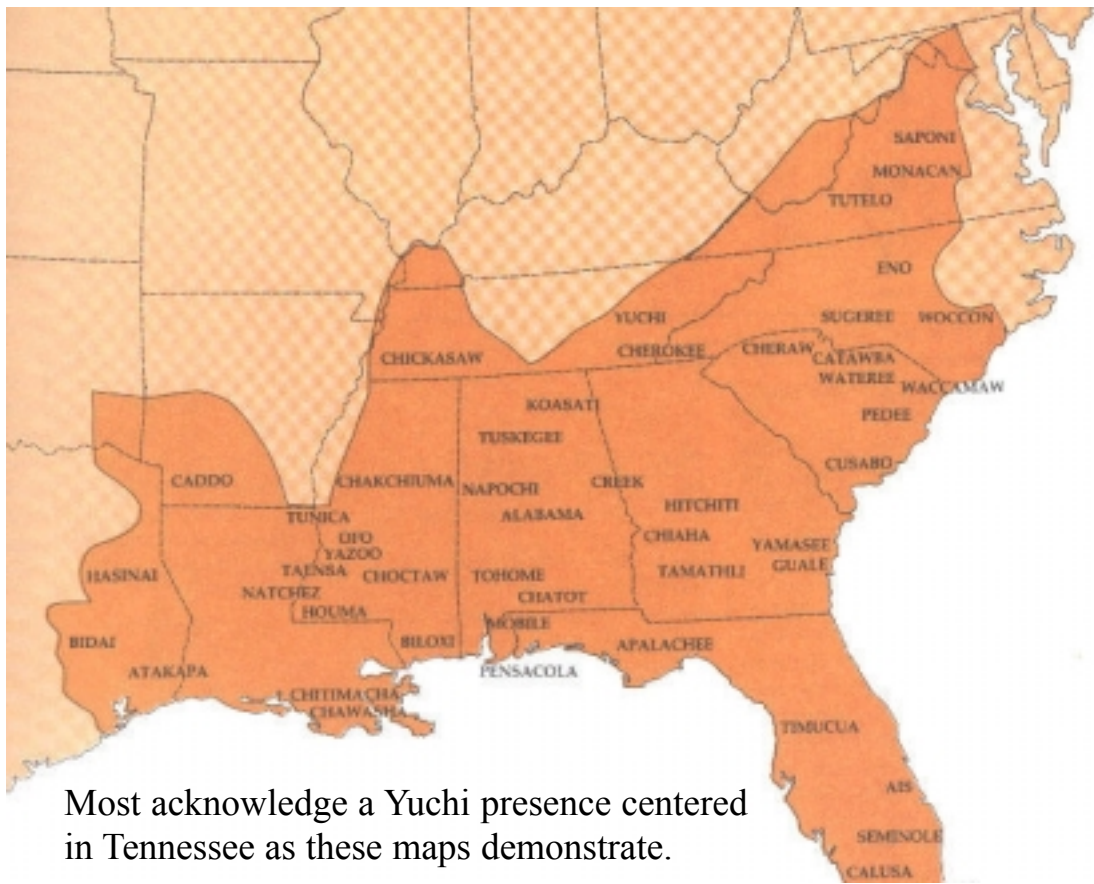
Trade and Commerce along the Trail System.

Both Tanner and Meyer have published important works on the trail systems that in many cases have become our highways today. These trails were not created by the Indigenous people, but were appropriated as an existing system that was created by the MegaFauna of the Pleistocene Era as they migrated across the land. It can clearly be seen that these trails most often lead from one Salt source to another, as salt is of vital importance to creatures who consume mostly vegetable matter. As Indigenous peoples became agriculturists instead of hunters, they too needed to supplement their diets with salt. Agriculture then gave rise to the need to trade in this vital material. The trails were ready made between the sources of this material. Such trade soon gave rise to trade in other commodities. The Yuchi being among the earliest agriculturist in the Southeast quickly took control of the trade, and the culture. Not only does this cover the evidence logically, but it is spelled out in Yuchi oral traditions and imprinted into the structure of the Yuchean language.

The Yuchi claim to have come into the Southeast by island-hopping. Their oral traditions further state that they brought pottery skills, and corn and tobacco agriculture into the Southeast, as well as moundbuilding traditions. The oral traditions say they found only the Old Ones (Lenape) here when they arrived, and that they soon met the Siouian peoples, followed by the Shawnee, and later came the many Creek peoples, and finally they were joined by Cherokee. The Yuchi became close allies to the Siouian peoples and later the Timacua, Shawnee and Koasati. While the Yuchi were widely respected and sometimes feared, their numbers required political alliances, as populations grew in the Southeast.

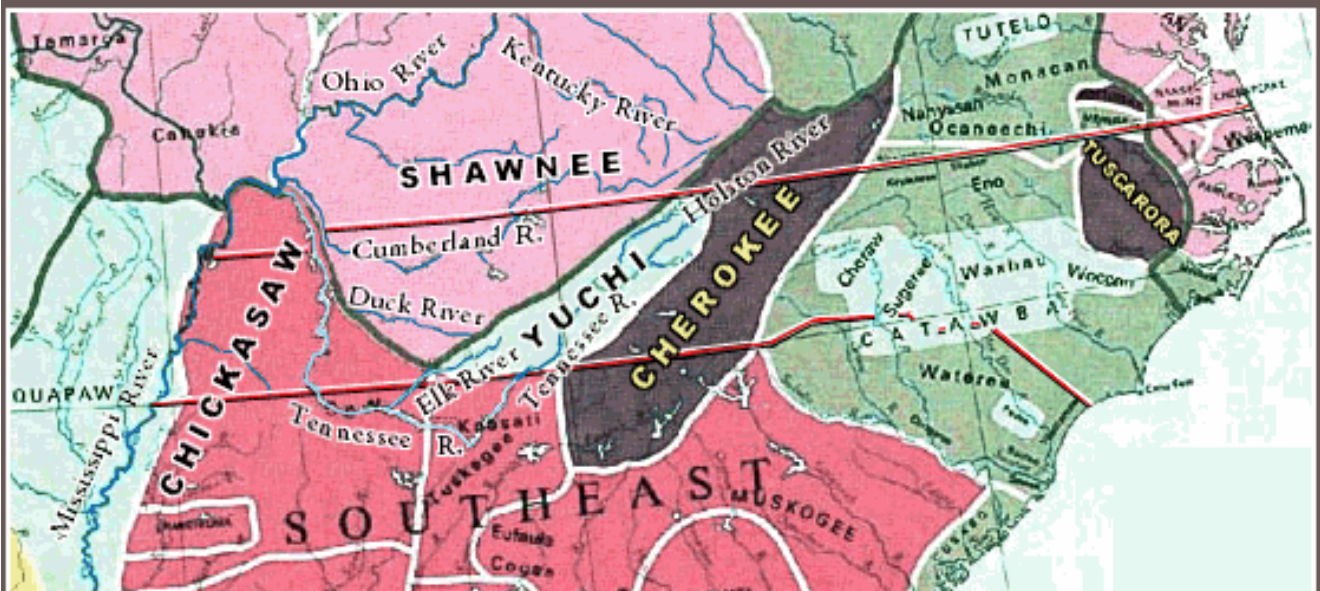
The most prodigious source of Salt in the Southeast other than the ocean is at Saltville, Virginia, followed more distantly by French Lick (Nashville). Both these sources seem to have been controlled for a long duration by the Yuchi. Saltville is on the main North-South trail -- often called the Great Warriors Path. Nashville is on Tollenteeskee's trail later known as the Emory Road or Great Stage Route. These two trails are the original cross roads of America (Now paralleled by Interstates 40 and 75/81). In addition to the trade of the vital commodity of salt, the Yuchi mined native copper in the Ducktown Basin, Mica in the Spruce Pine area, and harvested shells on the Gulf Coast, and too a robust trade in ideas and religious precepts kept this in the realm of being what we would call a nation-state today.

The importance of trade and trails coupled with its nature as a much more cosmopolitan melting pot, and a culture that has been sold far short of being a real civilization, leave a very fertile ground for a more balanced research and interpretation of not only the Yuchi, but the interaction of all the peoples of the Southeast. While the Yuchi were certainly significant players in this high culture it involved a great diversity of peoples, in what was likely a far more sophisticated society than has hetherto been considered. It is certainly clear in the shared creative elements that are now so prized by the grave robbers (both illicit and officially sanctioned) that this was a far more cohesive and unified culture than has been credited. And while some may see the Yuchi in their staunch pride and noble attitudes as arrogantly jingoistic in their oral traditions, I would say the evidence strongly points to the Children of the Sun rightly being at the very heart of this lofty civilization that has for too long been down played.



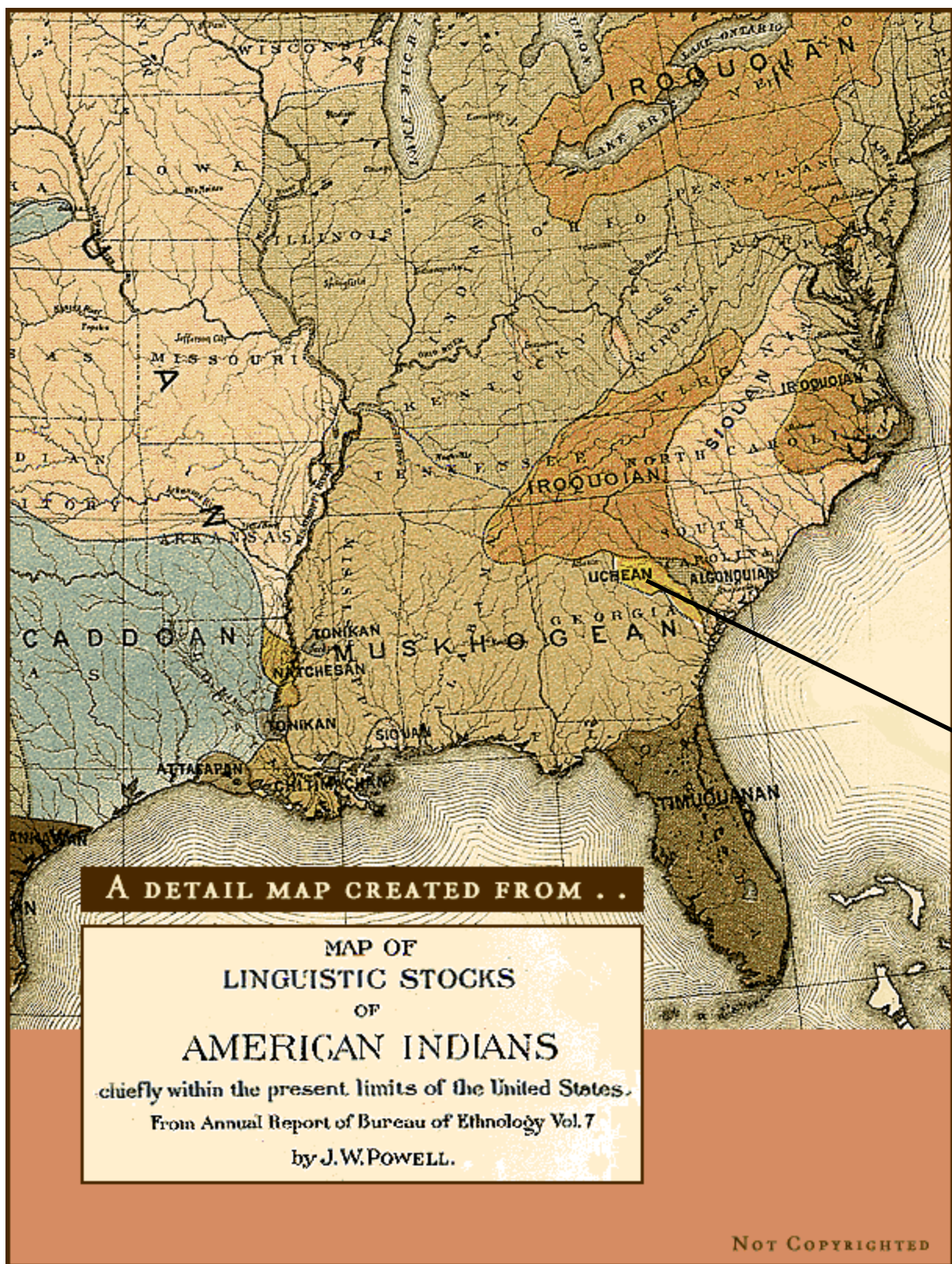
Most acknowledge a Yuchi presence centered in Tennessee as these maps demonstrate.

The Aboriginal People of Tennessee and Surrounding Areas

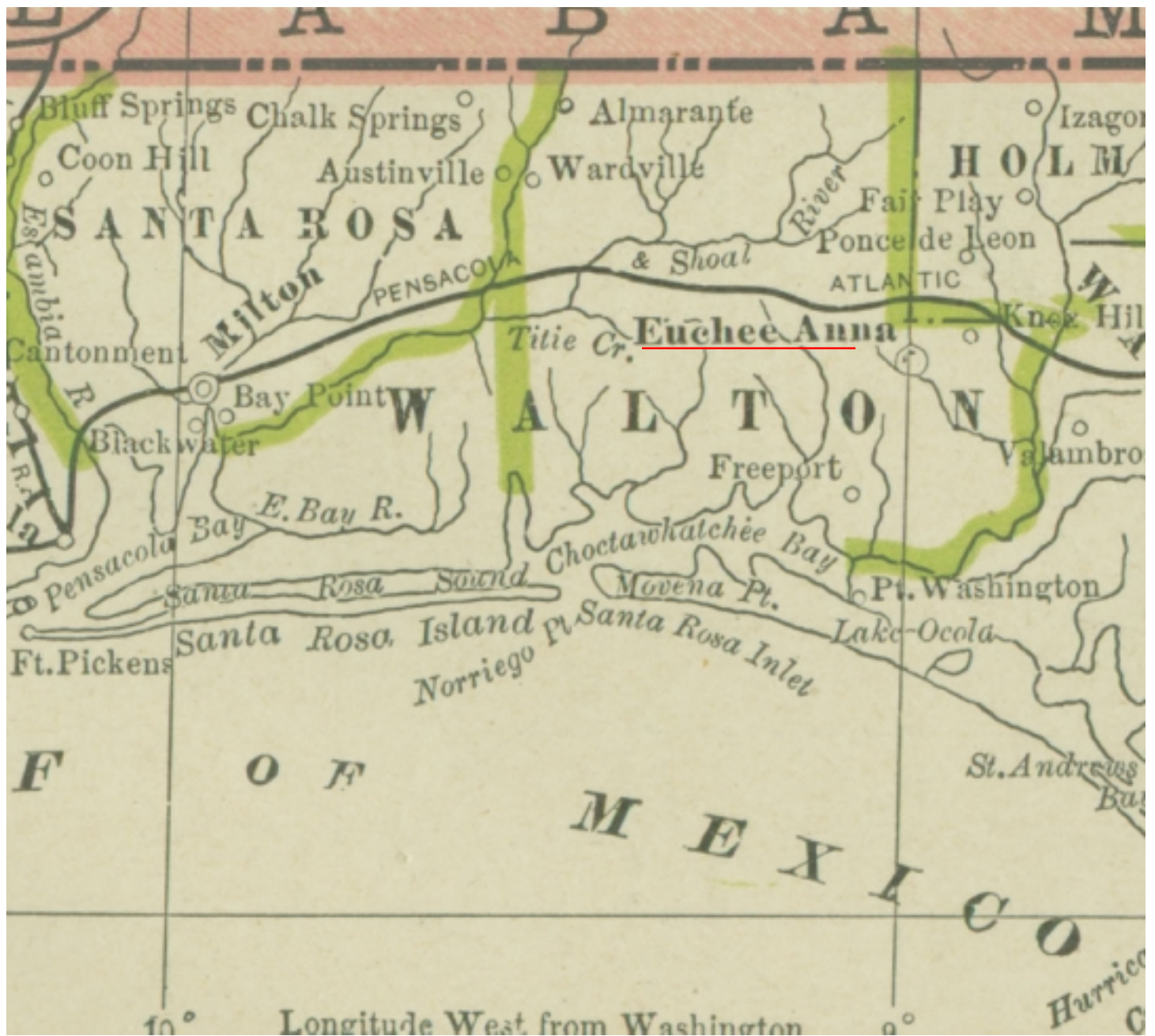


A Detail Map (section) Taken From:
Early American Indian Tribes, Cultural Areas, and Linguistic Stocks
 by
William C. Sturtevant
Smithsonian Institution
 1966

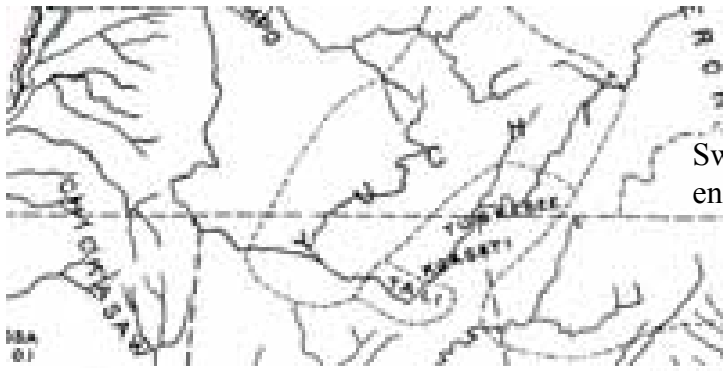
(Enhanced for clarity, with additions)



Powell placed the Yuchi along the Savannah River (Charleston Trail) and Tybee Island where a group of Yuchi villages at Silver Bluff and Mount Pleasant have been excavated.

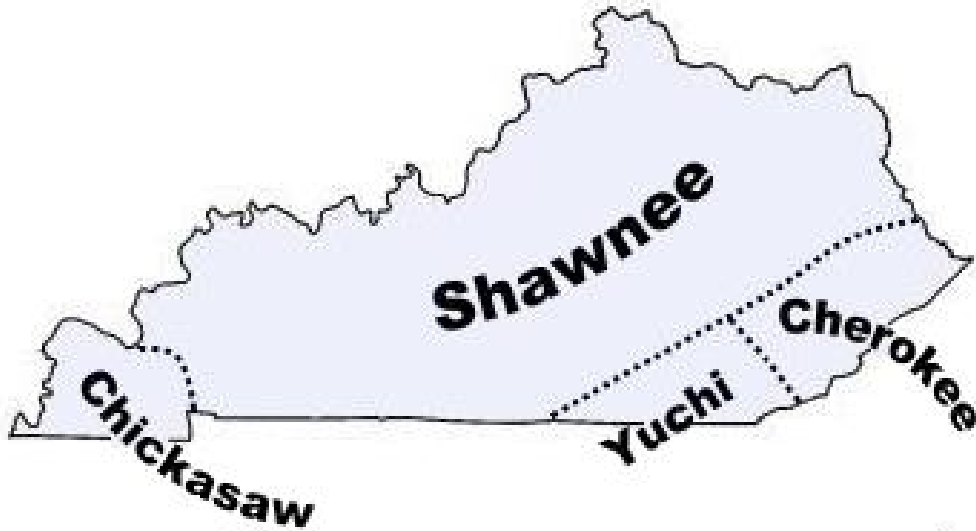


The Eucheanna Valley in the Florida Panhandle--a.k.a. Eucheanna

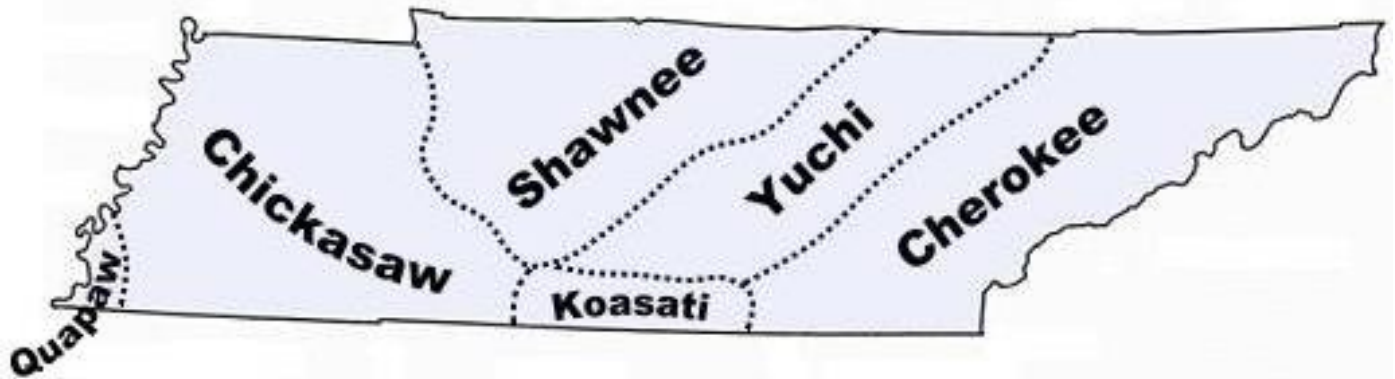
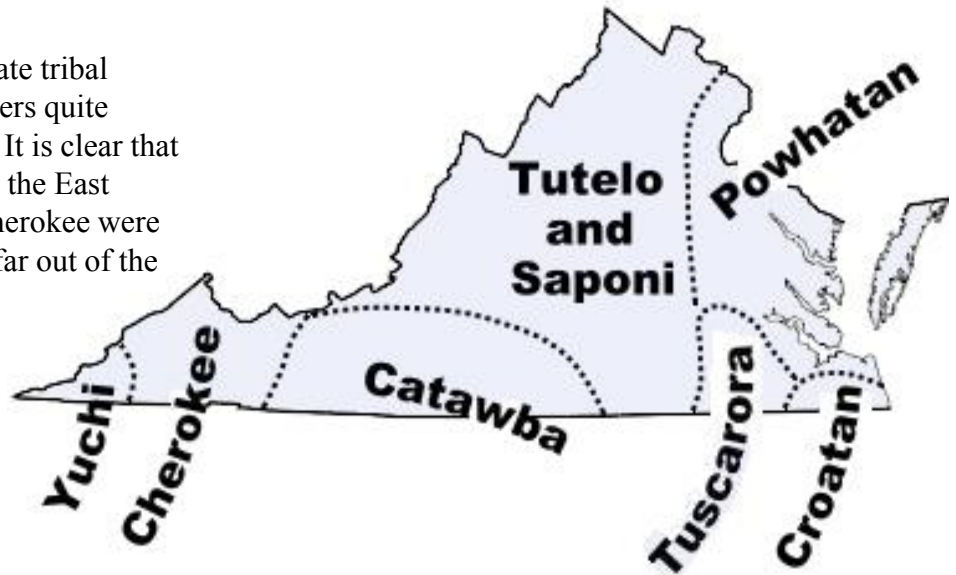


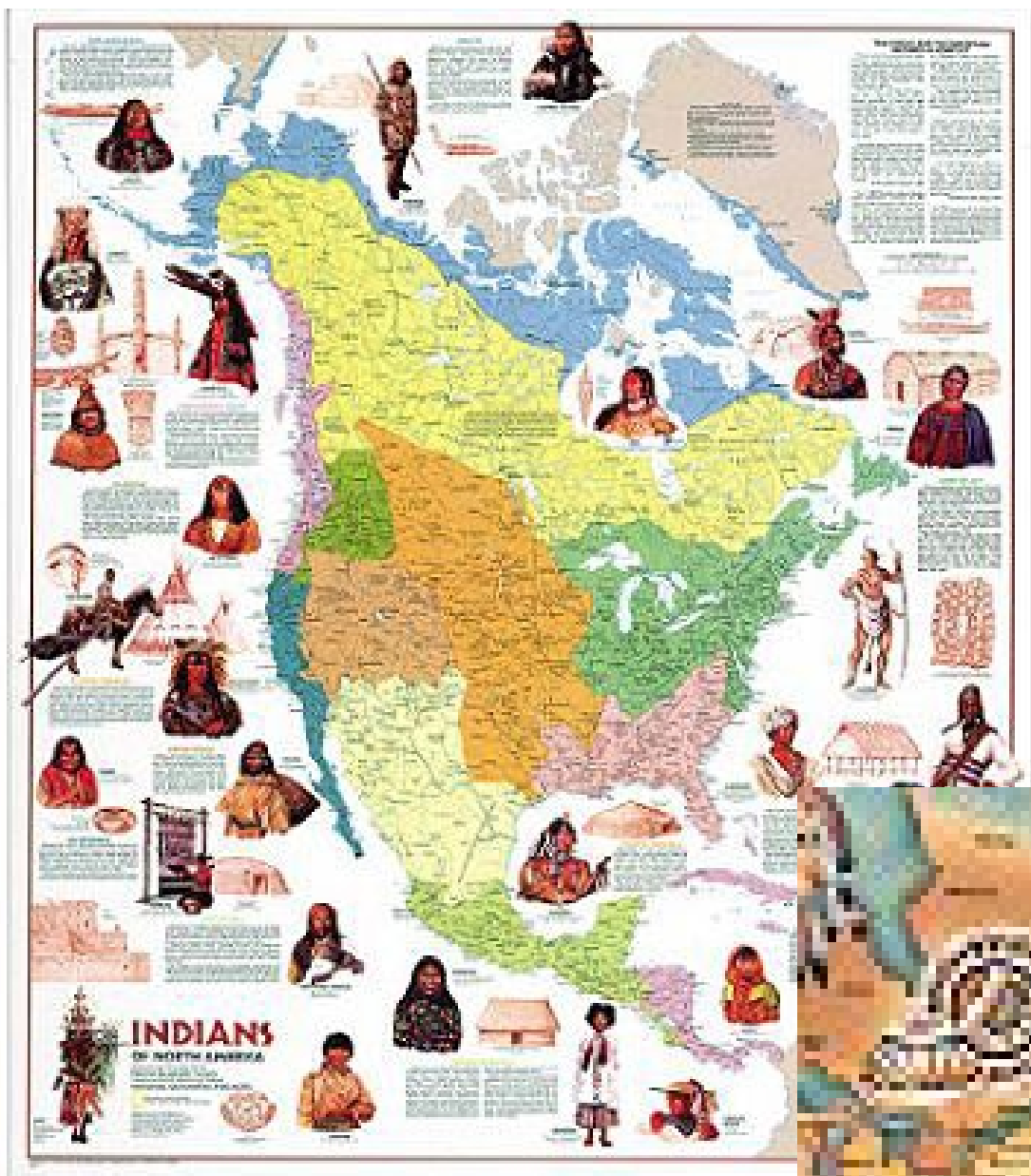
A small portion of Swanton Map of the SE

Swanton placed them all around the Southeast and encouraged many to see them as a mobile people.



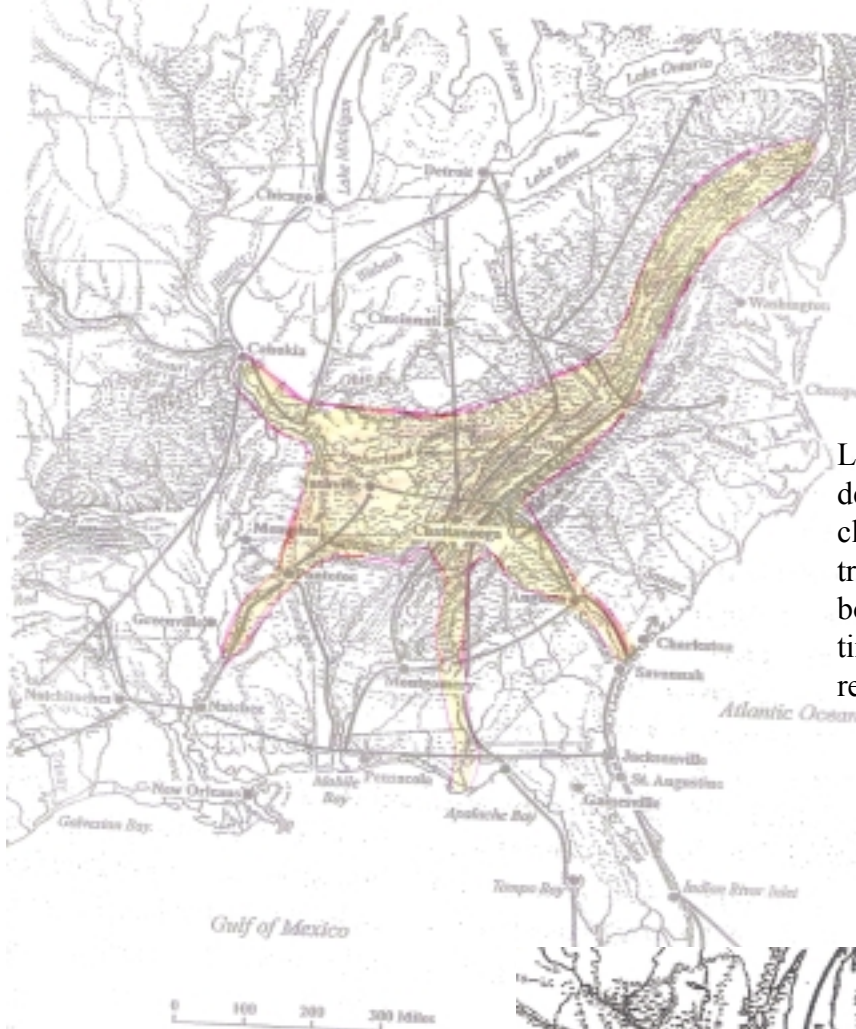
While these maps show the late tribal locations with nebulous borders quite consistent with most reports, It is clear that the Yuchi and Koasati shared the East Tennessee Region and the Cherokee were unlikely to have moved that far out of the Carolina Mountains.





National Geographic also agrees that the Yuchi were centered on Tennessee, but this popular publication places them on the Savannah. They of course were in all these locations.

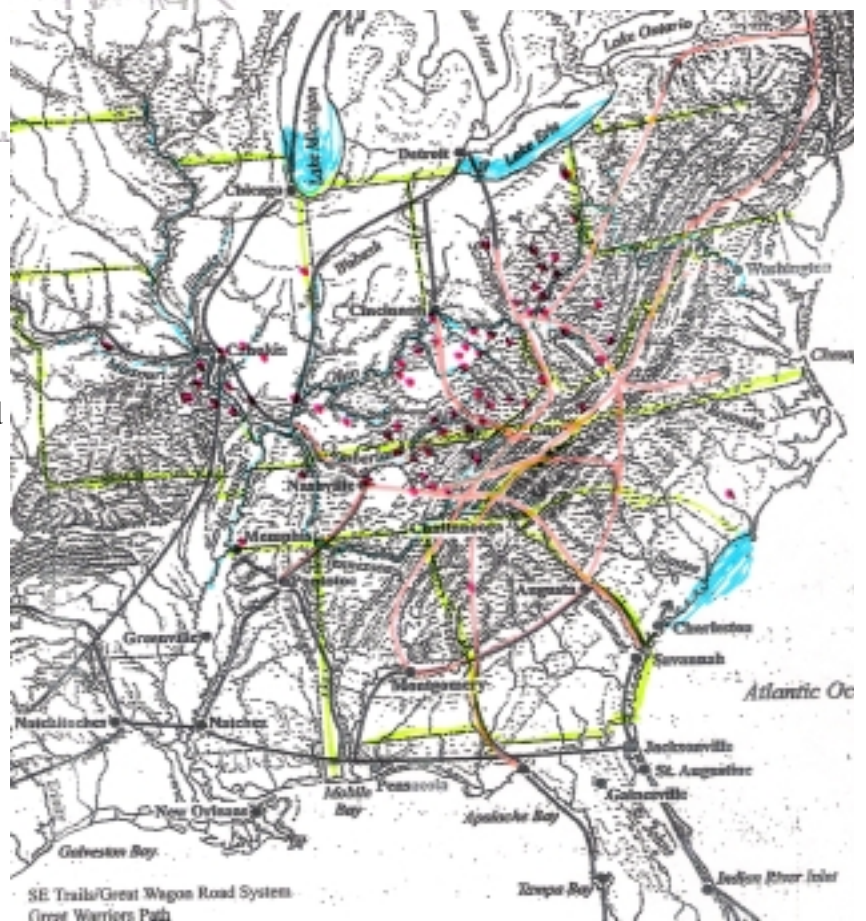
Yuchi Area of Influence



Linguistic and archaeological evidence places the Yuchi in this region -- clearly stretched out along the major trails -- there were of course no real boundaries, and the area changed over time -- but this would be the core region.

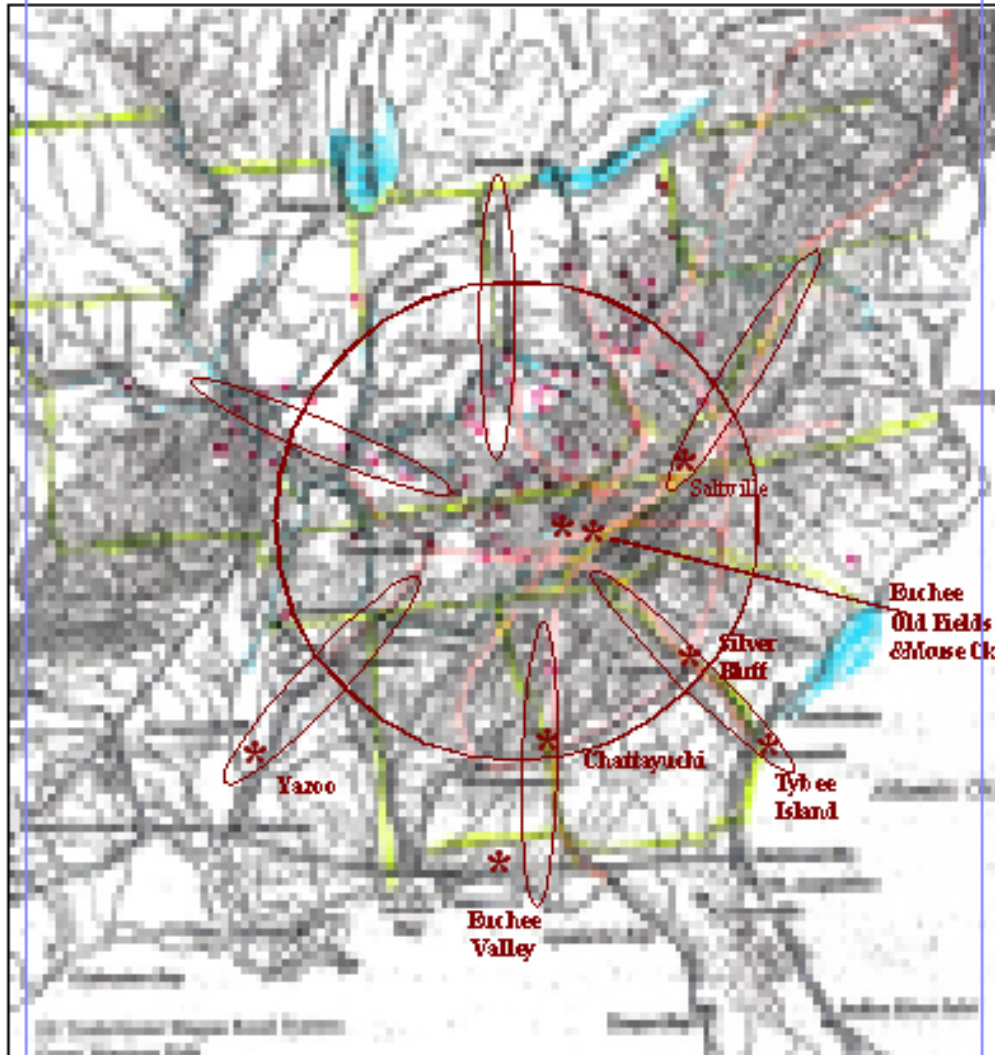
Figure 1. Communications network of the colonial South

Major trails delineated (after Tanner) and Major Salt sources (red dots) demonstrate how the trails so oft lead to the salt sources.



Protohistoric Commerce: Salt & Trade in The Heartland

DKH2009R2



Salines & Trails & Yuchi Places +

Notice how even today these few historically well-preserved Yuchean place names are located directly on the trade trails throughout the Southeast.