

Bob Benge

Bob Benge (c. 1762-1794), also known as "Captain Benge" or "The Bench" to frontiersmen, was one of the most feared Cherokee leaders on the frontier during the Chickamauga wars.

Early life

Born in the Overhill Cherokee town of Toqua, he was the redheaded mixed-blood son of a Scots-Irish trader named John Benge, who lived fulltime among the Cherokee. Upon the move of Dragging Canoe and his party to the southwest in 1777, John Benge moved the family (including Bob's sister Lucy) to a new home in Running Water, one of the Chickamauga towns. Soon "Captain Bench" and his half-brother The Tail and cousin Tahlonteeskee joined with their uncle John Watts in the Chickamauga wars. The available sources strongly imply, but do not prove, that young Benge and his sister Lucy were also half-siblings with George Guess, better known as Sequoyah. Both Sequoyah and Benge were great-nephews of Old Tassel and Doublehead. Under the Cherokee clan system, maternal uncle-nephew connections were very strong. During the Cherokee Removal of 1838, the fourth wagon train of a thousand Cherokees from Alabama was conducted by Captain John Benge, son of the Chickamauga warrior.

Exploits as a warrior

Living at Running Water enabled him to meet and operate with the Shawnee band of Chiksika and his brother Tecumseh, with which he most often went on raids and forays during the time they were at Running Water. Afterwards he often operated with the mixed group of warriors led by Doublehead out of Coldwater Town at the head of Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River. Among his exploits was saving the population of the town of Ustally in 1788 which John Sevier had slated for destruction. His raids carried him as far north as the Ohio River, as far northwest as deep southwestern Virginia, all over East Tennessee, and even occasionally southeast into Georgia and South Carolina. These included a joint raid between his party and that of Doublehead into the Kentucky hunting grounds where they killed and ceremonially ate two woodsmen in imitation of the terror tactics of the Iroquois during the Beaver Wars.

The Brown family

Benge was at Running Water Town when word came that an agreement had been reached with John Sevier for an exchange of hostages which specifically mentioned the Brown family taken in 1788 as they reached Nickajack passing through the Five Lower Towns on the Tennessee River. Only three of the surviving members remained among the Cherokee, the other three having been sent to the Muscogee.

Joseph Brown and his sister Polly were brought immediately to Running Water, but when runners were sent to Crow Town to retrieve Jane, their youngest sister, her owner refused to surrender her. Bob Benge mounted his horse and hefted his famous axe, saying, "I will bring the girl, or the owner's head". The next morning he returned with Jane. The three were later handed over to Sevier at Coosawattee.

Cavett's Station

He came to a parting of the ways with his former close ally, Doublehead, over the incident at Cavett's Station during Watts' invasion with Cherokee and Muscogee warriors of the Holston River settlements aimed at White's Fort in 1793. There, Benge negotiated the surrender of the garrison and its defenders with the promise of safe passage; Doublehead and his band violated the parole by immediately attacking and killing them all, men, women, and children, indiscriminately, as soon as they were outside the small fort, over the pleas of Benge, John Watts, and James Vann. Benge never operated with Doublehead after this incident, which also began the bitter animosity

between Doublehead and Vann that had a good deal to do with the division that remained between the Upper and Lower Towns after the end of the wars in 1794.

Death

He was killed 6 April 1794 in an ambush in Washington County, Virginia during an extended raid deep into enemy-held territory while escorting prisoners captured from a settlement earlier in the day back to the Lower Towns. The militia took his scalp and sent it to the Governor of Virginia, Henry Lee III, who in turn sent it to President George Washington.

Sources

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Article Sources and Contributors

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