

Alabama, John Cherokee

1. John Cherokee was an Indian man -
Alabama, John Cherokee!
He run away every time he can,
Alabama, John Cherokee!

Way hay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Way hay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!

2. Shipped him aboard a Yankee ship,
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Cherokee gave them all the slip.
Alabama, John Cherokee!

3. They catch'd him again and they chain'd
him tight,
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Kept him in a hole without any light.
Alabama, John Cherokee!

4. Gave him nothing to eat or drink
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Cherokee's bones began for to clink
Alabama, John Cherokee!

5. Gave him nothing to drink or eat
Alabama, John Cherokee!
He just gone dead at the boss's feet
Alabama, John Cherokee!

6. Cherokee's ghost is often seen
Alabama, John Cherokee!
?? his bones, all wet and green
Alabama, John Cherokee!

Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!

Break of dawn he goes below
Alabama, John Cherokee!
That's when the cocks begin to crow.
Alabama, John Cherokee!

Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!
Way ay yah! [hitch]
Alabama, John Cherokee!

Listen to [The Young 'Uns](#) sing their lively version at <https://youtu.be/iws-SHkf3dU>

Notes:

A halyard shanty

Other names: Alabama, Alabama John Cherokee, John Cherokee,

Stan Hugill, 1994, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*:

This is a typical work song dating back to the days of Negro slavery either in the West Indies or the Southern States. Harding said it was in fairly common use among coloured crowds in the old West Indian Traders.

He said it was a **hauling song**, and it certainly has a good rhythm in the refrains for two short drags, but Captain Robinson, who gives a slightly different version, (in *The Bellman*, Minneapolis, 1917) states that it was used at the **capstan**.

It probably was introduced to seamen by way of the cotton hoosiers of Mobile.

The "indian man" is quite possibly a man from the West Indies.



The American Cyclopædia: *Drawing of a Cherokee man standing*, 1879
(via [Wikimedia Commons](#))