



GEORGIA CORAL

Yes, there is coral in Georgia, agatized fossil coral, located in extreme Southern Georgia at the Withlacoochee River here in Lowndes County.

“Coral is the outside skeleton of tiny ocean animals called polyps, which live in colonies attached to hard underwater surfaces. When alive, polyps combine their own carbon dioxide with the lime in warm sea-water to form a limestone-like hard surface, or coral. Agatized fossil coral occurs when silica-rich groundwater percolates through the fossil coral and, over time, replaces the limy corals with a form of quartz known as chalcedony. This long process (20 to 30 million years) results in the formation of a “pseudomorph,” meaning that one mineral has replaced another without having lost its original form.

Agatized fossil coral can exhibit a wide range of natural colors, ranging from white and pink to brown, gray, black, yellow, and red. Different trace minerals in the agate create the colors. Agatized coral is found in three main Florida locations: Tampa Bay, the Econfinia River, and the Withlacoochee/Suwannee riverbeds; and in Georgia, the Withlacoochee riverbed and banks. It is Florida’s state stone, so designated in 1979.” *(from Rockhounding Florida)*



Withlacoochee River, Lowndes County, Agatized Coral

The corals pictured on pages 2 and 3 in this newsletter are in the Lowndes County Historical Society Museum collection. They were obtained from Apalachee Minerals in Tallahassee, Florida, with all sourced as Withlacoochee River Lowndes County. The separate photographs on page 3 are of the same coral formation, one taken with standard lighting and the other with fluorescent.

The Lowndes County Historical Museum is not an active collector of agatized corals but has specimens to exhibit as they are a surprising and interesting part of Lowndes County natural history.





The article below (Museum ACQ # 2009-010-029) is from the extensive Helen Carter Schroer Collection in the museum archives. The society, founded in 1967, began active archiving of clippings in 1971. Without these preserved and donated personal collections we would not have informative articles such as the one below. The 'Funny Looking Rocks' ended up being ancient agatized coral. I-75 was still new and not completed to Atlanta. Carroll Scruggs was wanting to show something "original and native to Georgia" to the many northern tourists stopping at Howard Johnson Motel. This article is the earliest publicly published record of "Georgia Coral" in our museum archives.

The Valdosta Daily Times, Tues., Feb. 8, 1966 (7)



LOWNDES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM
VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

Scruggs Poses With Piece of Agatized Coral: Fossils Estimated 17 Million Years Old —Times Staff Photo

'Funny Looking Rocks'

Let's Go Hunt Fossils

By TIMES STAFF WRITER

If you look long enough and in the right places you can find fossils in this area that date back 17 million years.

That's the estimated age of some found in the Withlacoochee River at Rocky Ford by motel operator Carroll Scruggs.

Scruggs said he had known there were some "funny looking rocks" around Rocky Ford for 20 years, but he thought it was petrified wood.

What he thought was petrified wood has been identified

as agatized coral and its age placed at 17 million years by state geologists.

He got interested in the fossils when digging limestone rocks from the river to decorate the grounds of his motel, Howard Johnson's. Scruggs said he used the native limestone to provide the motel grounds with something "original and native to Georgia."

In getting the limestone, Scruggs also noticed the other kinds of rock.

To satisfy his curiosity, he

sent samples of what he thought was petrified wood to the state geology department in Atlanta.

That's when he found out the Withlacoochee River contained agatized coral, a link to this area's prehistoric past when it was part of the sea.

A business has been developed at Tampa making jewelry from fossil coral. Officials of the Tampa firm claim that is the only area where fossil coral can be found.

Scruggs said he has told the company the ancient coral is

company the ancient coral is also found in this area.

He has no intention, however, of getting in the jewelry business, although he says some of the native fossils might be made into cufflinks or a similar favor for the chamber of commerce to give visiting dignitaries.

Scruggs says he has suggested this to the chamber, but "we'll have to find out the cost first."



Above left: David F. Johnson and Frank S. Johnson showing Withlacoochee River coral at Valdosta’s Maker’s Market. **Above right:** Frank Johnson at the museum explaining various aspects of agatized coral. David is a Master Flintknapper. Frank is a lifelong student and teacher on the subject. He provided the museum the 11 page guide he author/compiled in 1997, “Agatized Coral in Lowndes County, Georgia.” Below is an example of jewelry he and others crafted from the corals. Frank and his wife Jean are members of the Lowndes County Historical Society.

agagem

A PRODUCT OF MOTHER NATURE
FROM LOWNDES COUNTY, GEORGIA

LOWNDES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM
VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

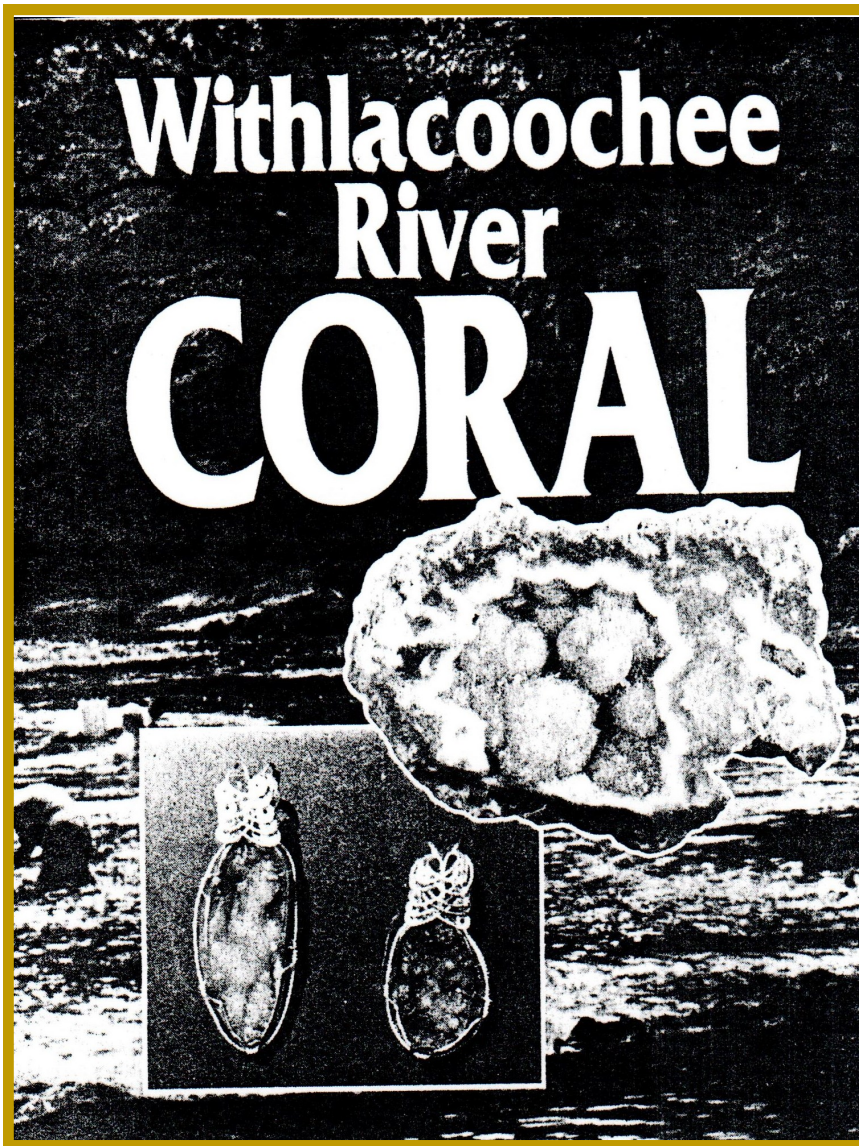
AGAGEM STORY

The gems appearing on this bracelet were formed by precipitation of ground water seeping through the existing coral deposits which grew in the warm, shallow seas covering South Georgia millions of years ago.

The seepage carries with it various colors of silica commonly known as agate or chalcedony and replaces the coral skeletal molecules with a beautiful and hard structure true to its original form.

This phenomenon of nature happened approximately 20 million years ago during the Tertiary Period of the Cenezoic Era.

LOWNDES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM
VALDOSTA, GEORGIA



Frank Johnson, *photo page 5*, recently provided the museum archives a copy of the article, *left*, *Withlacoochee River Coral* by Betty M. James from the August 1993 issue of **Rock and Gem** magazine. This article gives scientific information but also lets one understand the protocols of organized collecting on private property. It also covers the differences, at least at that time, between Lowndes County and Brooks County considering harvesting coral. The coral is not mined as it is on the surface. Buffalo, NY residents were among the collectors.

Below and opposite right: Collecting Coral

Earlier this decade we at the museum decided we would chase down the stories of “Glowing Rocks” in the Withlacoochee River. The museum would need samples to exhibit. Probably the first specific information we found in 2012 was from this forum post, *below*, it in 2011. We could not currently find it to give “David” more specific credits. The “digforcrystals” website is associated with The Mineral Gallery, 155 Mill Road, McDonough, GA 30253, it inside Peachtree Antique Center. Email to rodney@digforcrystals.com.

“On Thursday December 30, 2010 I was pretty ambitious and drove to Valdosta, GA to the Withlacoochee River. I've wanted to go for some time but the timing really has to be right. You need a relatively warm day, plenty of time and you need the river to be at extreme low flows for a period of time to be able to see the coral along the bottom. Usually by the end of November the river is way up but this year there has been an extended dry spell in this part of Georgia which worked well for me.

I was not expecting there to be so much coral or to be so big. I tried to pick one up off the bottom the size of a beach ball but had to let it go when I realized it was sinking my boat. I would say I needed a bigger boat but in many places there isn't enough water to float one especially with much of a load. I had planned on paddling 2.8 miles downstream but made it less than one. I came across a large sand bar covered in agatized coral and spend most of my time collecting there. I also realized that if I went below this area I wouldn't be able to get the boat back upstream without some serious effort. I had to get out and wade about 100 feet at the last section before the boat ramp so that I could pull the boat up through the shallows and current.

The coral pieces on the bar were highly polished from the sand and current. There were a large number of unbroken heads as well as in the surrounding water. Many of the specimens were of poor quality but a large number were well agatized with some having the hollow geode sections. It appears that the coral is contained in the sandy banks of the river and are released into the stream as the banks erode during high flow periods.”

From forum post on digforcrystals.net, dated Jan. 5, 2011 by user David.



Among several Withlacoochee photos posted by blogger David is the **above** Coral Head and the **below** Coral Sandbar. The lower photo gives the summer paddler a winter perspective of the river.



MUSEUM CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Officers and Executive Committee

President, Patsy Giles; 1st Vice President, T. Davy Shelton; 2nd Vice President, Martha N. Gibson; Secretary, Sally S. Kurrie; Treasurer, John R. Bennett; Past President, Ex Officio, Julie Smith; Anita Shelton

The Museum Calendar of Events is included in the standard printed issues of the newsletter

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Circa 1944: The Log House

The earliest confirmation we have found in the museum of citizenry being aware of coral fossils in and on the Withlacoochee River is the booklet of historical remembrances "Loch Laurel 1897-1997." It was compiled by the late Morris Smith, a life long historical society member, who donated a copy to the museum, ACQ #2009-81. The daughter Anne, in the *The Log House* article, was near deaf but an active Valdosta High student. She died tragically in the Winecoff Hotel fire. Eight other Valdosta coeds, Youth Assembly delegates, were to be at Winecoff Hotel that night but there had been a mix-up in reservations. We have a society newsletter on our LCHS website that includes this tragedy— see Newsletters: July, August, September 2011.

YESTERDAY & TODAY

Newsletter of
Lowndes County Historical Society

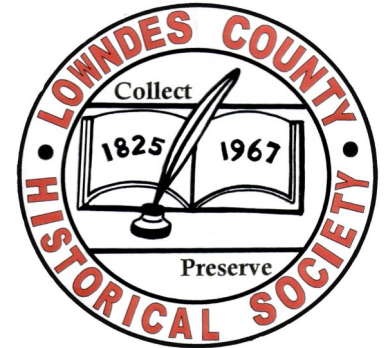
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The Log House: In about 1944, during World War 11, Frank and Lena Smith started on a new house, a rustic summer house, located next to the Big House. They had one daughter, Anne, and as she was growing up, they wanted to use the lake more. Construction lasted about a year. Frank took some workmen and cut cypress trees in nearby ponds, then stripped off the bark, and used them for building logs. Rocks from the Withlachoochee River were brought in for the fireplaces. Some of these rocks are coral and have several rare fossils imbedded in them. When finished, the house was a wonderful addition to the lake, with spacious rooms and wide porches.

Not long after the house was complete, a tragedy struck. Anne died in the Winecoff Hotel fire in Atlanta, in December, 1947. Frank and Lena were heavy with grief; still, they were brave enough to carry on, and did use the house for themselves and their guests for a number of years.

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