

MISSISSIPPIAN

The Mississippian period spans between 1,050 to 410 B.P. At around 1000 B.P., cord-marked pottery of an uncertain cultural affiliation appears at some sites along the eastern rim of the swamp and on Floyds Island, Billys Island, Jones Island, Hickory Hammock, and Mixons Hammock. Sherds are described as resembling either Prairie Cord Marked from north-central Florida, Omulgee Cord Marked from south-central Georgia, or Savannah Cord Marked from northern coastal Georgia. Some sites, however, are interpreted as containing only Savannah phase ceramics such as Savannah Complicated Stamped (Trowell 1998a; Kirkland and Cook 2007).

Compared to some portions of the southeast that saw increasingly intensive Mississippian Period occupations, the Okefenokee Swamp area may be characterized by a decline in utilization of the area based on decreasing frequencies of Mississippian ceramic types compared to earlier Weeden Island types. An alternative explanation for the pattern observed in the region is that the Woodland tradition persisted into the Mississippian Period within the Okefenokee Swamp area (Schnell and Wright 1993:35-36).

Mississippian sites from the eastern portion of the Okefenokee Swamp in areas such as Cowhouse Island and Bugaboo Island contain Lamar pottery associated with the Lamar Mississippian culture that spanned all of Georgia, and portions of Tennessee, South Carolina, Florida, and Alabama, and to a far lesser extent, the Irene culture (Williams and Shapiro 1990; Trowell 1998a). Grit-tempered types including Lamar Plain, Lamar Complicated Stamped, and Lamar Bold Incised identify Lamar ceramic styles (Williams and Thompson 1999). Lamar pottery is commonly found north and northeast of the swamp and is less prevalent to the east, southeast, and south (Trowell 1998a; Kirkland and Cook 2007). The Lamar culture extends through the Protohistoric period. It is a horticultural based society with sites typically associated with major floodplains. Maize, beans, and squash were present as basic food supplies and augmented by local nuts and fruit collections. Deer, box turtle, and turkey were the primary meat, and shellfish have been noted in the Piedmont and River and Valleys (Hally and Rudolph 1986; Wynn 1990).

Irene phase pottery is traditionally associated with the historic Guale Indians living along the coast north of the Satilla River. Irene ceramics have been found in small quantities in the Okefenokee but the Guale groups were likely not heavily utilizing the swamp due to the fact that Timucua groups who made San Pedro pottery occupied the swamp and the region south of the Satilla River (Kirkland and Cook 2007:17).

HISTORIC AMERICAN INDIAN

The Historic American Indian period dates from ca. 410 to 115 B.P. The first documented Europeans to enter the general area were members of the De Soto expedition. De Soto had sailed with Pizarro for Peru and returned to Spain a fabulously rich man. Politically well connected, he was granted the right to conquer Florida by Charles V of Spain, which, at that time, included the project area. De Soto landed near Tampa Bay in A.D. 1539 with 1,000 men and spent the next four years wandering the interior of the southeastern U.S. determined to duplicate his earlier success (Alchian 2012). This invasion brought great grief to every group that was unfortunate enough to have been encountered by De Soto and his men. The Spanish left a path of destruction across the lands they traveled, torturing and murdering indiscriminately as they sought anything of value they could steal from the local inhabitants.

Two Timucuan-speaking chiefdoms, the Ibihica and Oconi, occupied the eastern Okefenokee Swamp and Trail Ridge areas at European contact and both were later assimilated into the Spanish Florida mission system. Spanish records indicate that Oconi was located on an island in or adjacent to Okefenokee Swamp.