Ocmulgee National Monument

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**About Your Visit**

Ocmulgee National Monument is on the east edge of Macon, Ga., on U.S. 80 east. The detached Lotame area in the river swamps 3 miles below Macon, Ga., is not presently open to the public.

The monument is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Picnicking and camping facilities are not available, but a city picnic ground is located a mile away.

The visitor center houses a major archeological museum, which tells the Ocmulgee story in exhibits. Tours of the Earthlodge, a restored ceremonial building with an original floor 1,000 years old, leave from the museum. The Temple Mound drive, a half-mile long, leads to the three largest mounds of the prehistoric period and the site of the British colonial trading post. These features may also be reached by a walking trail.

**Administration**

Ocmulgee National Monument, established in 1936, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 4186, Macon, GA 31208, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the widest choice in using all our resources so that each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

**For Sale**


**Cover:**

Replica of one of the copper sun disks found in the Funeral Area of Ocmulgee about 2,000 years ago.
The Intruders (Macon Plateau Period)

While this relatively simple village life continued over the centuries in the Ocmulgee area, a more complex way of life based on a more intensive and efficient corn agriculture crystallized in the central Mississippi Valley. Fields replaced garden plots, and villages grew large enough to be called towns. Arm and crafts became more specialized, society more complex, and religious ceremonialism more intricate.

The population explosion in the heartland of this Mississippian culture led to expansion and colonization. One large town appeared as far north as Wisconsin. Other groups spread along the Tennessee River and into the Southeast, and about 900 A.D. one such group moved into the Macon area and established a town. A short distance down the river from the first town these newcomers also built a somewhat smaller settlement. The people of this town, standing alone or in clusters, dotted the area between the settlements and the river. The Macon region thus became an isolated outpost of Mississippian culture. Over the next 200 years (probably at a respectful distance) by the villagers whom the newcomers encountered.

The Mississippian culture brought with them their own way of doing things. In the rich bottomlands they planted row crops to corn, tobacco, and pumpkins; and on the bluff above the river they raised beans and squash. Within the town of some 500 to 1,000 people, the Indians raised rectangular houses; their walls were built of stone and plastered with clay, and the whole was covered by a thatched roof.

At the end of town near the river they laid out an area which served as a combination religious center and public square. By cutting away the edges of the natural plateau, they created a large terrace and began the construction of their temple mounds. The mounds were not built all at once, but were enlarged and elevated at intervals over the years. Ramps led up the sides of the mounds, providing access to the flat tops where ceremonial buildings were erected. These temple mounds were larger than the houses but built in much of the same manner.

At several points within the village the people built platforms, and the remains of these buildings were covered with earth. The best preserved of these earth lodges (shown in the drawing on the opposite column) has been reconstructed. It is entered through a long tunnel. Opposite the door is a raised clay platform shaped like a ceremonial bird. There are three seats at each end of the platform and around the wall of the building is a raised clay bench with 47 more seats. In the center of the building is a large sunken fireplace. The 50 or so individuals who used this temple were probably the town's religious and political leaders whose decisions affected the lives of the entire community.

Although the previous inhabitants built no burial mounds at Ocmulgee, these people did construct one at the western edge of the town and buried at least some of their dead there. In design, the mound differed from the rounded shapes of earlier times, having the flat-topped appearance of the temple mounds, with a set of steps leading up the side. The elaborate nature of the objects in some of the graves indicates that these buried there were of high rank.

Resurgence (Lamar Period)

The displaced villagers did not lose contact with the intruders, and over the years adopted some of their more advanced agricultural practices and the religion that went with them, including the use of temple mounds. At the same time, the Macon Plateau people did not abandon their way of life; they began to adopt some of the ways of their predecessors. Finally their civilization entered a period of decline. The reason for their dis­appearance from the Macon Plateau around A.D. 1100 is unknown, but after that time the town and the mounds fell into disuse and ruin.

The surrounding peoples, their way of life irrevocably altered, now assumed the dominant role in middle Georgia and beyond. Although their settlements and villages were numerous and widespread, they used the old riverine on the Macon Plateau only occasionally. One of their major centers, however, was the Lamar site, only about 3 miles away in the swamps along the Ocmulgee River. This village contained two temple mounds and was surrounded by a stockade.

At least some of these people were the direct ancestors of the Creek Indians who held most of Georgia and parts of Alabama in early historic times, and who were to play a vital role in the last pages of the Indian story in the East.

Historic Contact (Creek Period)

As early as 1650 an English trading post was operating at Ocmulgee alongside the important Lower Creek Trading Path which crossed the Ocmulgee River here. And in 1736 the Indian warriors joined Col. James Moore here to launch an attack against the Spanish mission settlements of northwest Florida in 1703. A few years later the Creeks rose up in turn against the intruders, but were defeated and forced to withdraw seaward to the Flint and Choctawhatchee Rivers and into Alabama, although from time to time some of them returned to the Ocmulgee. With the birth of the United States and the expansion of its people, the Creek came under relentless pressure. By 1800 their lands were signed away in treaties, and the remnants of the Creeks were removed to the Oklahoma Territory, where their descendents live today. The treaty which divided them of their last lands at Ocmulgee was signed in 1833. By 1840 the site of Macon marked the arrival of yet another culture near the ancient Ocmulgee Fields.