Ocmulgee
National Monument
Georgia

About Your Visit

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

The monument is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. dusk. Camping facilities are not available, but there is a small picnic area for use by monument visitors. A campground is located 8 miles away, across Macon.

The visitor center houses a major archeological museum, which tells the Ocmulgee story in varied and plentiful.

The Travels of William Bartram, 1791

Today visitors can still see the "artificial hills" and other evidences of the ancient town which intrigued Bartram when he passed by at the time of the American Revolution. Thanks to the patient research of modern archeology, the lives of the people who built these mounds and lived in this town from about A.D. 900 to 1000 unfolded for visitors on the grounds and in the museum of Ocmulgee National Monument.

Yet even a thousand years ago the Indians who built these mounds did not arrive in a virgin wilderness. They were neither the first nor the last people to occupy this spot.

For more than 16,000 years men have sought their livelihood here, where the Ocmulgee River passes from the red clay land of the rolling plains to the sandy flat lands of the coastal plain. This is an area where diverse habitats meet and blend, causing a richness of plant and animal life. Within a short distance the river has rapids, channels, and ponds. There are wooded bottomlands and swamps, pine woods and deciduous upland forests.

Ocmulgee—was visited year after year.

Along the seacoast and lower reaches of the rivers, the Indians relied more heavily on the resources of the sea. Some of these Indians ventured far up the Ocmulgee River as far as this site. Here they found shellfish and other sea products of the waters. Eventually some of these Indians or their ideas spread up the Ocmulgee River as far as this site. Here they found shellfish and such fish as shad and sturgeon, which they had known from their life on the seacoast. The plants and animals of the land supplemented the bounty of the river. Sometime before 2000 B.C., the people remained hunters and gatherers.

Stone axe points and arrowheads found at Ocmulgee about 1,200 years ago.

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Plateau Period.

from 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. It was probably the last of its kind. As civilization spread more intricate and more complex, and religious ceremonialism became the norm. The population explosion in the heartland of this culture led to expansion and colonization. One large town appeared as far north as Wisconsin. Other groups spread along the Mississippi River. This village contained two temple mounds. At the same time, the Macon Plateau people did not expand their holdings; 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.

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The surrounding peoples, way of life irretrievably altered, now assumed the dominant role in middle Georgia and beyond. Although their settlements and villages were numerous and widespread, they used the old townsite 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.

As early as 1690 an English trading post was operating at Ocmulgee alongside the important Lower Creek Trading Path which crossed the Ocmulgee River here. And from time to time, Spanish and French soldiers, traders and missionaries came into the area. In 1540, new intruders appeared in the Creek country. The expedition of Hernando de Soto crossed parts of Georgia, giving a foretaste of what was to follow. Colonists from Spain, France, and England settled on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and began to thrust inland in what would become a struggle for mastery of the Southeast. The Indian could not escape this impact. Disease, often traveling far in advance of settlement, reduced the ranks. The desire for European trade goods grew to a need as he became enmeshed in the European trade. His way of life was disrupted, he hunted more and farmed less, and he ultimately was drawn into the European power struggle, both as opponent and ally.

The displaced villagers did not lose contact with their former homeland. A short distance down the river from the Macon Plateau area and established a town. A short distance down the river from the first town these newcomers also built a somewhat smaller settlement. It was probably the last of its kind. As civilization spread more intricate and more complex, and religious ceremonialism became the norm. The population explosion in the heartland of this culture led to expansion and colonization. One large town appeared as far north as Wisconsin. Other groups spread along the Mississippi River.

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