**Ocmulgee National Monument, Georgia**

About Your Visit

Ocmulgee National Monument is on the east edge of Macon, Ga., on U.S. 80 east. Main access is from I-75 at int. 16 west, at the north end of Macon. Take either the first or second exit from int. 16 and follow the signs one mile to the park entrance.

A detached area, called Lamer, is located in the swamps three miles below Macon and is not presently open to the public. The park is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended summer hours; closed Dec. 25 and Jan. 1. The park has a small picnic area for use by visitors. The campground is 8 miles west, away of Macon.

The visitor center houses a major archeological museum. An Indian Trading Post in the lower patio of the visitor center is operated by the Creek Indians of Oklahoma. Modern Indian handicrafts and art are offered for sale there. 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 loop, leads to the three largest mounds of the Macon Plateau period and the site of the British Colonial Trading Post. These features may also be approached by a walking trail which connects with the mile-long Okefenokee Nature Trail, where swamp and forest ecology can be observed along Walnut Creek. Living History demonstrations of prehistoric Indian crafts and life are held on the grounds throughout the summer season.

**SAFETY**

Missed steps and deep holes are dangerous. Please use the marked trails.

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, Superintendent's Office, P.O. 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 wisest choice in affairs are other major concerns of America’s recreational resources. Indian and Territorial for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and

**National Park Service**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Cover: Replica of one of the copper sun disks (headdresses) of the ancient Mound Builders. The authentic piece from the site of Etowah is housed in the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. Reproduced from a photograph by Albert E. Kershaw. 

**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 archeologists, the lives of the people who built these mounds and lived in this town from about A.D. 900 to 1100 unfold 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 10,000 years man has sought their livelihood here, where the Ocmulgee River passes from the red clay land of the rolling piedmont 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. The resources here which man could use were varied and plentiful.

"on the east bank of the river lie the famous Ocmulgee fields where any precautionous very wonderful remains of the power and grandeur of the ancients of this part of America, in ruins of a capital town and settlement, as vast artificial hills, terraces, etc. . . ."—The Travels of William Bartram, 1774

Some dart points used by hunters at Ocmulgee about 2,000 years ago. 

Innovation (Woodland Period)

Agriculture, and associated religious beliefs and social customs, changed all this. The impetus for this dramatic economic shift came from Mexico. Agriculture spread rapidly throughout the eastern United States, what is now the eastern United States, arriving at Ocmulgee between 1000 and 900 B.C. Squash and gourds and, somewhat later, corn and beans were planted in moderate amounts. Gardening rather than farming, best describes this initial agriculture. Hunting, fishing, and gathering continued to be very important. People lived together in bigger villages than formerly, although they usually split up into smaller camps for part of the year. The use of pottery increased, and the pots, which were of higher quality than before, were often decorated with intricate designs. Stamped in the damp clay of the vessel before it was fired. More numerous and varied tools and ceremonial objects also came into use.

During this time the custom of burial beneath moundified earthen mounds spread widely through the eastern United States. In some places this burial rite reached elaborate heights, with quantities of ceremonial goods placed with the dead; in part of Georgia, however, the practice was carried on at a simpler level. Burial mounds do occur in this area, but none of them were built by these people within the present extent of Ocmulgee National Monument.
from the Macon about 900 A.D. one such group moved into Wisconsin. Other groups spread along the Ocmulgee region thus became an isolated outpost of Mississippian culture, surrounded (probably at a respectful distance) by the villagers whom the intruders dispossessed.

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. In time, standing alone or in clusters, dotted the area between the settlements and the river. The Macon area was more intricate. Fields replaced gardens, and the way of doing things. In the rich bottomlands they had cultivated over the centuries in the Ocmulgee area, a more complex way of life based on a more intensive use of 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. 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 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.

At several points within the village still another kind of structure was built. These were circular, heartbeat-shaped, and covered with earth. The best preserved of these earth lodges (shown in the drawing in 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 the edge of the natural plateau, and around the walls of the building is a raised clay bench with 47 more seats. In the center of the building is a large sunken firepit. 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. 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. The treaty which divested them of their last lands at Ocmulgee was signed in 1841. 3 years after the settlement of Macon marked the end of one culture and the beginning of another for the Creek people, the Creek came under relentless pressure. By hit or by treaties, their land was signed away in treaties, and the remnants of the Creeks moved westward to the Oklahoma Territory, where their descendents live today. The treaty which divested them of their last lands at Ocmulgee was signed in 1841. 3 years after the settlement of Macon marked the end of one culture and the beginning of another for the Creek people.