



*Explore 17,000 years
of continuous
human habitation*



WHO BUILT THE MOUNDS AND WHY?

As you approach the grass-covered mounds at Ocmulgee (pronounced oak-mull-ghee), can you imagine how they were created? Do you wonder who built them and why? While we still have much to learn, the mounds are connected to a steady presence of cultures on the plateau that began many thousands of years ago.

PALEO-INDIAN PRE-9600 BCE (BEFORE COMMON ERA)

Paleo-Indians cross the continent during the last ice age. They are North America's earliest known culture and the first people to arrive in this region. They use tools (*right*) to hunt large animals, gather local plants, and explore the area.

ARCHAIC 9600-1000 BCE

Archaic people use food sources like shellfish, small game, and seasonal plants. They shape stone into grinding tools and projectile points. They create the atlatl, which extends the range of their stone-tipped spears. Funeral practices, including the use of earth pigments like red ocher in burials, expand.

WOODLAND 1000 BCE-900 CE (COMMON ERA)

Woodland people start to settle in villages. They grow corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers. Their trade networks expand, and their burials become more ritualized. Archaeological evidence may indicate that the Woodland culture assimilated into the Mississippian culture.

Top: View of the ceremonial Earth Lodge

Right: This fluted Clovis point, now missing its tip, once armed the spear of a Paleo-Indian hunter.

COVER—© MARC TOMIK; CLOVIS POINT—NPS



EARLY MISSISSIPPIAN 900-1200

The Mississippians live in large villages and plant extensive crops. They make pottery, baskets, fabrics, and adornments. Flat-topped mounds, burials, and earth lodges suggest they have intricate rituals and social relationships.

LATE MISSISSIPPIAN (LAMAR CULTURE) POST-1350

Parts of the two previous cultures combine into the Lamar culture, named after the site where archeologists first described it. In 1540 the Spanish arrive, bringing conflict and disease while engaging in trade. Traditional ways of life change. Within a hundred years, little remains of the Mississippian culture.

MUSCOGEE NATION 1690-TODAY

In 1690 the Muscogee people build a large town on the Ocmulgee River to take advantage of commerce with a British trading post. They abandon it after colonists defeat them in the Yamasee War. The Muscogee Nation considers this land their ancestral homeland and the site of their first permanent settlement.

WHAT THEY LEFT BEHIND

Imagine the things you have. Which show what your daily life is like? Which show how your society has changed over time or what your culture considers valuable or beautiful? If you could leave something to tell your story to future generations, what would you choose?

Pottery is one of many things that tells us about the lives and cultures of these prehistoric people.

Skillful Woodland potters decorated with complex designs (*top right*). They experimented with materials to strengthen pots for durability and portability.

The early Mississippians made smooth, simple items for everyday needs. Their effigy pots show people, animals, and mythological figures (*bottom right*).

The later Mississippians of the Lamar culture made pottery with flaring sides, concave rims, and bold designs (*middle right*). The complicated stamp pottery is characteristic of the Lamar culture, helping scholars identify other Late Mississippian sites across the Southeast. Much of what we know about the Lamar culture comes from the extraordinary range of pottery uncovered here.

At Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, pottery and more help us imagine 17,000 years of continuous human history on Georgia's Macon Plateau.



Top to bottom:
Swift Creek pottery,
Woodland era;
Lamar complicated
stamp pottery, late
Mississippian era;
frog effigy pot,
early Mississippian
era

POTTERY—NPS



CONNECT TO CULTURES AT OCMULGEE MOUNDS

Lesser Temple Mound

Great Temple Mound

IMAGINE LIFE AT A MISSISSIPPIAN OUTPOST

The Mississippians arrived after a 700-year journey southeast from the Mississippi Valley. Their skillful farming of corn, squash, beans, pumpkins, and tobacco enabled them to settle.

They built a compact town of thatched huts on a bluff overlooking the Ocmulgee River. As their population grew to over a thousand, their complex expanded to include mounds, earth lodges, and burial sites. These structures give us clues about their culture, though many questions remain unanswered.

They leveled ground near the river, then built up earth mounds for public ceremonies. The temple mounds (*above*) were not built to full height all at once but

were raised over the years, perhaps as new leaders came to power.

Like the temple mounds, the Funeral Mound was built in stages (*diagram, right*). Steps up the side led to a building on its flat top, probably where the dead were prepared for burial.

The Earth Lodge (*below*), central to Mississippian life, may have been used as a seasonal temple or a year-round council house. Those who met here may have been political or religious leaders. The Earth Lodge features a ceremonial firepit and a platform shaped like a large bird. The platform seats three while a bench along the wall seats 47.

As early as 1100 CE, the Mississippian town at Ocmulgee was no longer a thriving outpost. During Hernando de Soto's 1540 expedition of the Southeast, Ocmulgee would have already been near ruin. We do not know why the town declined.

As it fell into ruin, the old town site was used by others, like the Lamar culture. Built in the nearby swamps, the Lamar Complex was their only known city. A tall log fence enclosed a courtyard and two mounds, including the Spiral Mound, the last remaining mound of its kind.

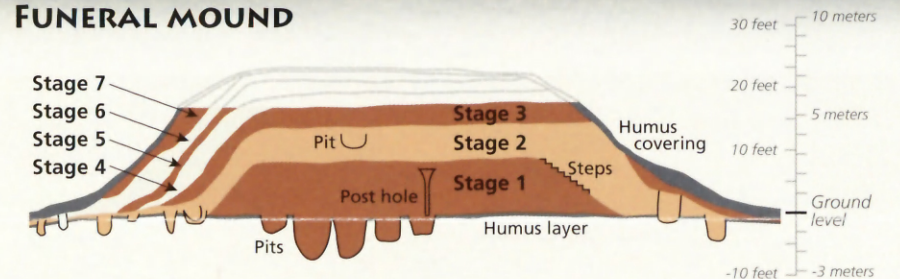
Many questions remain about the fate of the Mississippians, but their mounds suggest a prosperous way of life that remains evident to this day.

While the Mississippian culture is spread all over the Southeast, the mound builders at Ocmulgee become known as the Muscogee.

Established as Ocmulgee National Monument by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 and redesignated Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park in 2019, the park preserves these structures and more.

Many stories connect us to the people of the Macon Plateau. Which will you explore?

FUNERAL MOUND



The Funeral Mound once stood almost 25 feet high. Deep pits extended over eight feet below ground. This profile across the north face reveals the basic

structure archeologists found in the 1930s.

Gray lines show the profile before an 1870s railroad cut removed about seven

feet of material from the mound's top, including some of stages 4, 5, 6, and 7.

EXPLORE THE REMNANTS

Visiting Ocmulgee in the 1770s, naturalist William Bartram wrote about "the wonderful remains of the power and grandeur of the ancients in this part of America." Now, you can visit remnants that connect people past and present. Trails link most features in the park, including:

EARTH LODGE This reconstructed building (*right*) stands on what was the north side of the Mississippian village. The original clay floor, 42 feet in diameter, has been carbon-dated to 1015.

VILLAGE SITE In the Mississippian period many structures stood here along with the Earth Lodge.

CORNFIELD MOUND Originally about eight feet high, this mound was probably a ceremonial building's platform. Archeologists discovered cultivated rows and charred corn cobs beneath the mound, suggesting a cornfield had been there.

PREHISTORIC TRENCHES Two lines of ditches varying in width and depth have been traced around the east side of the village. Some sections, parallel and lined with clay, may have been used as borrow pits for mound construction.

TRADING POST SITE British traders from Charleston, South Carolina, eager to do business with the Muscogee, built a trading post on this site about 1690. Firearms, cloth, and trinkets were traded for furs and deerskins. Excavations have turned up axes, pipes, beads, knives, swords, bullets, flints, pistols, and muskets.

GREAT TEMPLE AND LESSER TEMPLE MOUNDS The Great Temple Mound rises 55 feet and sits on a base that measures 300 feet by 270 feet. The Lesser Temple Mound is similar in form but smaller. Wooden structures, likely used for ceremonies and housing for the elite, once topped both mounds. In 1843 railroad construction partially destroyed the Lesser Temple Mound.

FUNERAL MOUND Over 100 burials have been discovered here. Some had copper and shell ornaments, suggesting high social status, but most had no offerings. In the 1870s a railroad cut removed a large portion of the funeral mound.

National Park Foundation.
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org
©GPO:2025—431-026/84255 Last updated 2021

PLAN YOUR VISIT

The park is on the eastern edge of Macon on US 80 East. From the I-75 exit at I-16 East take the first or second exit from I-16. Follow US 80 East a mile to the park.

The visitor center has a film and archeological museum. Exhibits look at the area's continuous human habitation from 15,000 BCE to the early 1800s, with an emphasis on the Mississippian culture that flourished here from 900 to 1200. History continued here and included removal of Native

Americans, Civil War events, and the largest archeology dig in US history.

The park grounds are open 8 am to 5 pm daily. The visitor center and Earth Lodge are open 9 am to 5 pm daily. The park is closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

ACCESSIBILITY We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. The museum and visitor center are wheelchair-accessible. The film *Mysteries of the Mounds* is cap-



Inside, the Earth Lodge would have looked like this about 1,000 years ago. We know this because a fire preserved evidence of many of its features, giving archeologists a firm basis for its reconstruction.

tioned. For more information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

REGULATIONS Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park.

For firearms regulations check the park website.

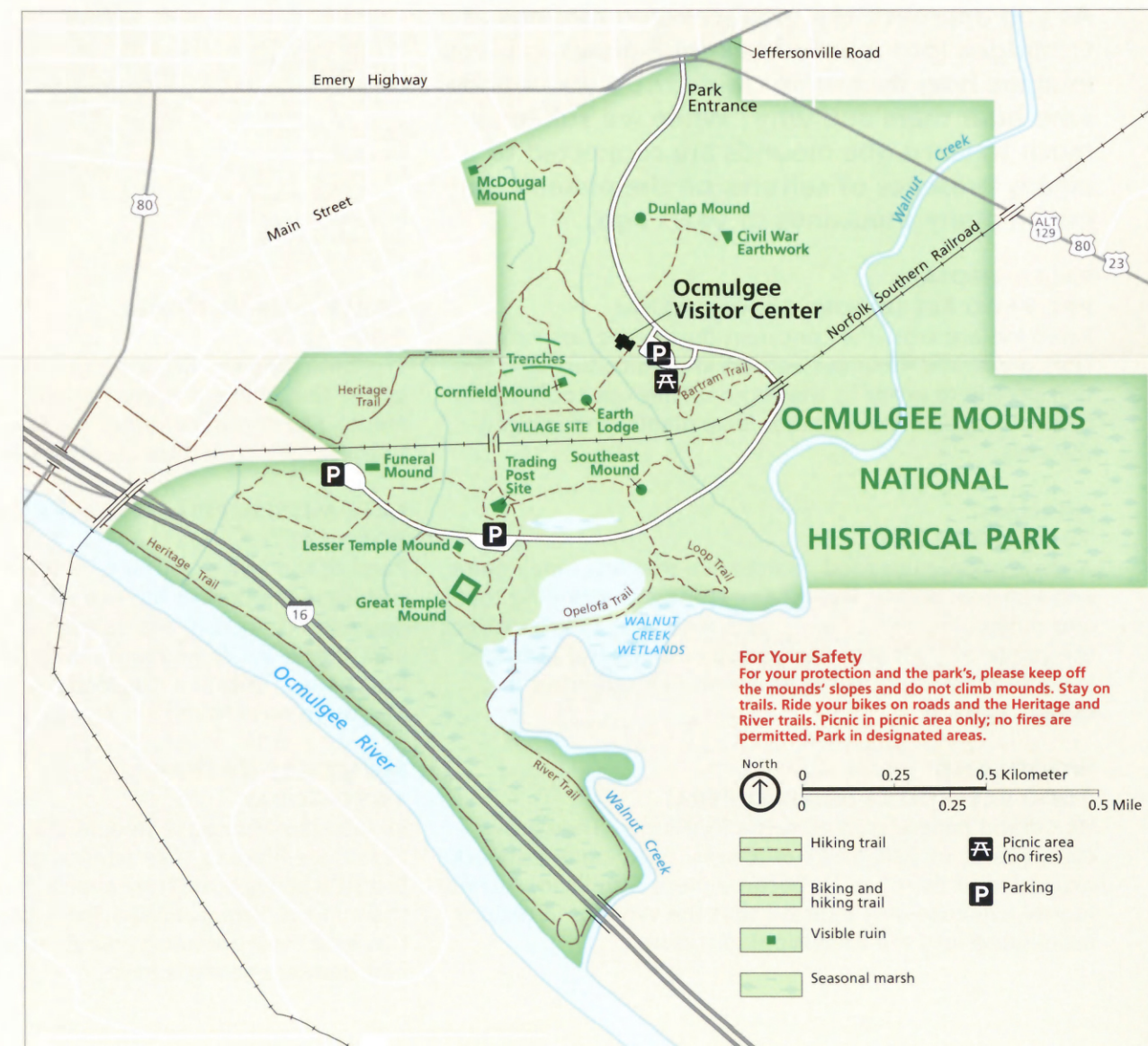
Emergencies call 911

MORE INFORMATION
Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park
1207 Emery Hwy.
Macon, GA 31217
478-752-8257
www.nps.gov/ocmu

Follow us on social media.

Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

ALL IMAGES—NPS / WILLIAM A. BAKE



For Your Safety
For your protection and the park's, please keep off the mounds' slopes and do not climb mounds. Stay on trails. Ride your bikes on roads and the Heritage and River trails. Picnic in picnic area only; no fires are permitted. Park in designated areas.

