

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 in the 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. It has 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 (A.D. 1835). 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.

By A.D. 1600, archaeological evidence indicates that most of the large Mississippian civic-ceremonial centers either were abandoned or had suffered substantial declines in population. The populations of these centers apparently dispersed into smaller villages, hamlets, and farmsteads. The scattered tribal units encountered by the earliest explorers probably bore little resemblance to the highly integrated cultural systems of the Mississippian peoples.

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. Ibihica, on the other hand, was comprised of five towns likely located on Trail Ridge. Missions of San Lorenzo de Ibihica and Santiago de Oconi were established at these towns by the 1620s and remained in operation until 1656 when Spanish soldiers imprisoned the chief of Oconi and burned both towns (Weisman et al. 1998; Kirkland and Cook 2007:18).

Spanish artifacts have been recovered from a previous survey of the Trail Ridge area of the Okefenokee at the Martha Dowling North site (9CR34). The artifacts, including a fragment of San Luis Blue on White majolica, which is often associated with activities of friars, suggest the presence of a mission in the immediate area. After the evacuation of the missions in the late 1600s, the Okefenokee Swamp appears to have been void of permanent settlements until a Creek chief named Hopoithle Tustunnuggee Thlucco