



Foundation Document Overview

Ocmulgee National Monument

Georgia



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of OCMULGEE NATIONAL MONUMENT is to preserve, protect, study, and commemorate the site of more than 12,000 years of continuous human habitation by multiple cultures and peoples, and to study and interpret the interconnectedness of those cultures to the landscape of the Ocmulgee Old Fields.



Significance

Significance statements express why Ocmulgee National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Ocmulgee National Monument preserves evidence of one of the longest periods of human habitation at any one site in the national park system. Occupation is illustrated by prehistoric earthen mounds, including the only known spiral mound in the country; a restored ceremonial earth lodge with original clay floor; prehistoric trenches; an early colonial trading post; and Civil War earthworks.
- Ocmulgee National Monument has yielded artifacts from every major period of American Indian history in the Southeast, beginning with the Paleo-Indians and followed by a succession of cultural groups (10,000 BC to the present) who lived at the Ocmulgee Old Fields.
- The investigation and recovery of artifacts and information in the area known as the Ocmulgee Old Fields was instrumental in the development of scientific archeology. The monument and surrounding area is the site of one of the largest archeological investigations in North American history.
- The Ocmulgee Old Fields Project (1933–1941) employed one of the largest numbers of workers on an archeological investigation in the history of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) (more than 800, including an all-female African American crew). The work at this site served as a field school for several archeologists who had an impact on the field of archeology for generations.
- Ocmulgee National Monument possesses one of the largest collections of recovered artifacts (approximately 2.5 million) in the national park system, together with associated maps and other documentation.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Reconstructed Earth Lodge.**
- **Macon Plateau earth mounds.**
- **Lamar Period village and mounds.**
- **Other archeological sites related to the Ocmulgee Old Fields.**
- **Sense of place and sacred ancestral homeland for American Indians.**
- **Creek Indian village and historic British trading post.**
- **Archeological research collection.**



Ocmulgee National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Ocmulgee River and floodplain.**
- **Existing and eligible national register properties (including visitor center, Dunlap House, Civil War earthworks, etc.).**

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Lessons of long and varied history.** This theme focuses on the continuum of history that makes Ocmulgee distinctive. Unlike some parks that emphasize a specific time, date, or lifetime, Ocmulgee spans more than 12,000 years, several societies, and countless individuals, including connections to contemporary Indians. Ocmulgee’s ethnologic evolution serves as a time capsule of native occupation as well as Georgia history.
- **Revelations from the earth.** This theme focuses on the size, scope, and importance of the archeology that revealed so much about Ocmulgee’s inhabitants. The first designated traditional cultural property east of the Mississippi River, Ocmulgee has provided archeologists with opportunities to develop and apply new investigative techniques. This theme opens the door to interpretation of how we know what we know about the past, and specifically invites scrutiny of the huge collection of artifacts found at the site.
- **Multiple meanings – sacred and set apart.** This theme invites audiences to think about Ocmulgee from more than a single point of view. Different groups value Ocmulgee in different ways. It is sacred to Creeks, who consider it the birthplace of their culture. Scholars recognize the spiritual nature of the site but also understand its research and educational potential. Many visitors to the site, including a large number of Macon-area residents, appreciate the site’s pleasant, peaceful surroundings and find it an inviting, natural place to walk.
- **A national treasure.** This theme places Ocmulgee into context as a unit of the national park system. It explores what designation means and how it influences the park, park development, and park management. By interpreting Ocmulgee as a national park, this theme illustrates not only the importance of preservation but also specific strategies of protection. In the process, it reminds audiences that national parks are not only sources of local pride, but national treasures.

Description

Ocmulgee National Monument in Macon, Georgia, is a memorial to more than 12,000 years of human habitation. The site's Mississippian Period earth mounds are the most visible features of occupation, built by the early Mississippian people who lived here from about AD 900 CE to AD 1100. However, groups from all known periods of human occupation have lived here, including Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Woodland, Lamar, and historic Creek people. According to Muscogee (Creek) tradition, the monument, and the wider "Ocmulgee Old Fields" area as a whole, is where their ancestors "first sat down" to farm the floodplain terraces along the Ocmulgee River.

On December 23, 1936 President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the monument after local citizens purchased property along the Ocmulgee River and donated it to the federal government. Expanded in 1941 and 1991, the national monument now encompasses 701 acres in two separate units. The main unit (656 acres) includes a portion of the Macon Plateau. Within the main unit are seven prehistoric mounds, a funeral mound, a reconstructed earth lodge, prehistoric trenches, and numerous archeological features. This unit also includes the site of a colonial (1690) British trading post (which the Creek Indians frequented), the historic Dunlap House, an Art Moderne visitor center, Civil War earthworks, substantial urban green space, six miles of hiking trails, and a picnic area.

The smaller Lamar Mounds unit is located about two and one-half miles southeast of the main unit and lies in the floodplain of the Ocmulgee River. This unit is the type site of the so-called Lamar culture, a Late Mississippian agricultural society. Two large mounds (Mounds A and B) and the site of a palisaded village are present on this 45-acre tract. Mound B is ascended by a spiral ramp—the only such ramp known to exist in the United States.

In the 1930s, the Ocmulgee Old Fields became the site of the largest archeological excavation ever to have occurred in the eastern United States. The information recovered from projects completed between 1933 and 1942 established a standard ceramic and cultural typology in the region and led to the eventual creation of the NPS Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC). The New Deal archeology brought not only much-needed jobs to Middle Georgia, but national attention as well. Strong local support bolstered by the federally funded excavations resulted in the establishment of Ocmulgee National Monument on December 23, 1936.

Today, the park welcomes approximately 120,000 visitors per year. Interpretive programs, exhibits, and artifacts educate visitors about the relationship of people to the land in the area once known as the Ocmulgee Old Fields. Each year culminates with the annual Ocmulgee Indian Celebration, a sharing of Creek culture featuring traditional dancing, singing, storytelling, games, and crafts.

