

Ocmulgee Mounds

National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior

Ocmulgee Mounds NHP



The British Trading Post



SPANISH INFLUENCE IN THE SOUTHEAST

In the 1930s, archeologists discovered the remains of a large British Trading Post at Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park located beside present-day Macon, Georgia. The trading post sat on high ground overlooking the Ocmulgee River and directly beside a long established Indian trading path. Muscogee (Creek) Indians of today consider this site - with its mounds, trenches, and earth lodge - to be their ancestral homeland.

During the 16th century, the Spanish explored the southeast and established a permanent colony at St. Augustine in 1565. Spanish influence spread with the establishment of coastal missions and inland missions around present-day Tallahassee, Florida, and up the Chattahoochee River near the fall-line. The Indians were forced to practice Christian rituals and to provide corn and cattle for the Spanish treasure fleets that assembled at St. Augustine for the return trip to Spain.

BRITISH INFLUENCE IN THE SOUTHEAST

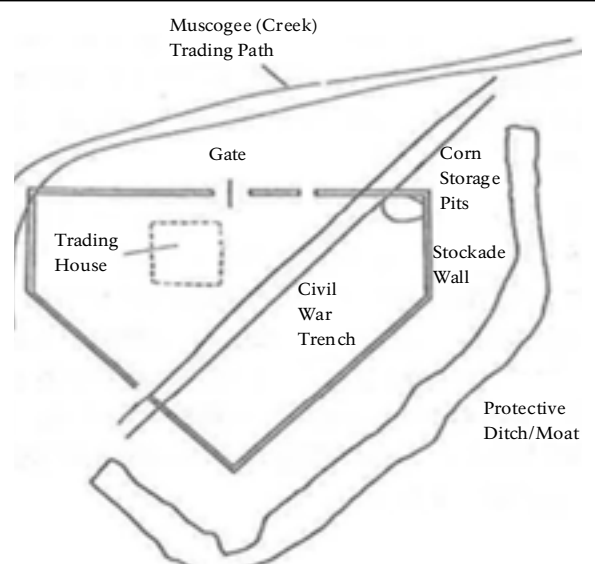
In 1670, the British established a colony at Charles Town (Charleston) and began a long conflict with the Spanish for control of the southeastern Indians. British traders reached the Chattahoochee River around 1685 and soon began a productive business. The Indians preferred British trade items over Spanish because British manufactured goods were superior to the Spanish, their trade prices lower, and their demands upon the Indian culture less. With aid from the Creek Indians, the British eluded Spanish attempts at their capture. In retaliation, Indians loyal to the

Spanish and a few Spanish troops burned several Indian towns and accompanying fields along the River.

Over a dozen towns who refused to submit to Spanish abuse relocated eastward to the Ocmulgee River. This move placed them closer to the British and further away from the Spanish. Archeological evidence indicates that a British post was established at Ocmulgee in 1690; however, the only documental evidence about the traders is one letter written by James Lucas from "Oakmulgas" in 1710.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE TRADING POST

Records of colonial trading companies suggest that the local Indians assisted in the construction of the trading post, which consisted of a five-sided stockade and two interior buildings. There were several contemporary Indian houses located around this stockade, but there is no way of telling if the trading post was an addition to a town or if the town grew around the post. The longest wall paralleled the ancient Indian trading path and had two openings, probably gates. The smallest 'gate' was five feet in length and possibly used for pedestrian traffic. The length of the second 'gate' suggests use for the pack horses loaded with incoming trading goods and outgoing deer skins.



(BLUEPRINT OF THE BRITISH TRADING POST)

CONSTRUCTION OF THE TRADING POST (CONTINUED)

The presence of the stockade indicates a concern over attack and maybe theft of goods. Most trading posts of this era had a building for trading, including merchandise storage and a warehouse for storing the deer skins prior to shipment. Excavations revealed Indian construction techniques (wattle and daub) consistent

with the practice of using Indian labor. The smaller building was approximately 11 x 11 feet and adjacent to the largest entrance. A second structure was in the southwestern area of the stockade and measured 15 x 25 feet. There is no certainty as to the residency of the several traders.

TRADE INTERACTIONS

European trade goods rapidly replaced traditional Indian crafts and practices. Instead of being self-sufficient with an environmentally-based economy, the people soon became dependent upon goods manufactured in faraway places. Indians acquired guns to replace bows and arrows, and metal axes and knives displaced stone implements. Woven garments were preferred over treated skins. Men spent more of their time in the woods killing deer than in the town attending to traditional affairs. Between 1699 and

1715, an average of 54,000 deer skins were shipped from the southeast through Charles Town. Exchange rates around 1716 were: 35 deer skins for a gun, 30 for a coat of broadcloth with lace, 16 for a duffel blanket, 3 for a hatchet, 1 for a knife, 5 for an axe, and 3 for a narrow hoe. Gun parts were the most numerous trade items found during excavations at Ocmulgee. A single small, round silver coin made during the reign of Spanish King Phillip II (1556-98) was also found with hundreds of other European artifacts.

CONFLICT WITH THE EUROPEANS

In 1703, Colonel James Moore and fifty South Carolinian volunteers rendezvoused with about 1,000 Creek Indian warriors at the Ocmulgee Trading Post. This force decimated the Spanish missions in the Tallahassee area and even attacked St. Augustine. Thirteen Indian towns with missions were destroyed, and Spanish priests and soldiers were killed, along with hundreds of Spanish-dominated Indians. The Creeks sold captured Indians as slaves at Charles Town in retaliation for the earlier loss of their own homes along the Chattahoochee River. This successful military action was pivotal in weakening Spanish control in the southeast and opened Georgia for British settlement.

By 1715, the British had over one hundred traders operating out of Charles Town. Goods were sold on credit and the Indians found themselves unable to produce enough deer skins to compensate for their European-manufactured items. Some traders, reacting to London-based capitalist demands for payment, sold Indian women and children into Caribbean sugar plantation slavery. This soon led to the Yamasee War. The war spread into the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the Ocmulgee Post was burned. No one knows the fate of the Traders. The "Ocmulgee Old Fields" were largely abandoned by the Indians who returned to their former lands along the Chattahoochee River.

EXCAVATION

Excavations began at the trading post in August of 1935 under the direction of Dr. A.R. Kelly and continued through October of 1936. A second survey was conducted in 1940. Depression-era laborers were sponsored through the Civil Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Explorations started with four parallel trenches, each thirty inches wide, eventually totaling 3,500 feet. Work continued until a five-sided stockade and several building sites were totally exposed. A Civil War trench extended completely across the entire site. Three sides of the post were surrounded by a shallow, dry moat.

Numerous artifacts and outlines of small building sites reflected several cultural eras that existed before, and probably after, the post was destroyed. Historic articles collected included gun parts, flints, musket balls, glass jar shreds, beads, kaolin pipes,



(ARCHAEOLOGISTS AT THE TRADING POST SITE)

axes, hoes, knives, a sword, ornamental bells, and copper bracelets. Examples of these articles are on display in the museum at Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park.