

The Site Guide

Okefenokee Swamp, Georgia and Florida.

Location Ware, Charlton and Clinch Counties, Georgia, and Baker County, Florida.

Description Okefenokee Swamp is a huge peat-filled bog about 412,000 acres in area. Except for some fifty islands which total about 25,000 acres, the swamp is usually shallowly flooded. Most of the flooded area is covered by cypress forest or, in places, blackgum and bay forest, with an interspersal or understory principally of red maple, cassina, titi, Ogeechee-lime, hurrah bush, fetter-bush, and smilax. About 60,000 acres of the swamp is open marsh land, known locally as "prairie". The prairies are covered with aquatic and marsh vegetation, principally white water-lily, golden club, chain fern, maidencane, paintroot, bladderwort, and a variety of grasses and sedges. Scattered throughout the prairies are clumps of trees and shrubs called "houses". Open water areas are the prairie lakes and ponds, the water courses and the lakes along the water courses, the eleven-and-a-half-mile Suwannee Canal which was dug in 1891-2 and the borrow pit of the Suwannee River sill which was constructed in 1958. The islands and the uplands on the periphery of the swamp are covered mostly in pine forests. About nine-tenths of this swamp and some 10,000 acres of upland on the periphery of the swamp is in the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

Access There are three principal entrances to Okefenokee Swamp. Okefenokee Swamp Park is on the north side of the swamp thirteen miles southeast of Waycross, Georgia. It may be reached from U.S. Highway 1 about eight miles southeast of Waycross by turning south on State Highway 177. There is a nominal admission charge. Here wildlife exhibits, a boardwalk which extends about a quarter of a mile out into the swamp to an observation tower; regular guided boat tours are available. Deep swamp guided excursions by boat are available by special

request. For information, write or phone: Okefenokee Swamp Park, Waycross, Georgia 31501.

Suwannee Canal Recreation area (also known as Camp Cornelia) is on the east side of the swamp eleven miles southwest of Folkston, Georgia. It may be reached by going south from Folkston on Georgia highway 121 for about eight miles and turning west on the Camp Cornelia road. There is a visitors' center with swamp and wildlife exhibits. Arrangements can be made for guided boat tours the length of the Suwannee Canal. From the canal, boat trips may enter Chesser, Grand, Mizelle and Chase prairies, the swamp's most extensive open marsh areas. Also from Camp Cornelia there is a nature drive extending around the edge of the swamp to Chesser Island. From this drive there are four foot trails leading out into different kinds of pine forest and swamp edge habitats. Also from Chesser Island there is a three-quarter-mile long boardwalk extending out into the swamp to the Seagrove Lake observation tower. For information contact the Concessioner, Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, Folkston, Georgia 31537.



Stephen C. Foster State Park is located out in the swamp at the end of a long narrow peninsula about nineteen miles northwest of Fargo, Georgia. It may be reached by leaving U.S. highway 441 about a mile south of Fargo and turning northeastward on Georgia highway 177. Here boat rentals and guided tours are available. From here Billy's Lake, Minnie's Lake and Big Water are most easily accessible. A trip along the boat trail winding through the cypress forest to Minnie's Lake and Big Water is a never-to-be-forgotten experience. Also from here,

trips can be made from Billy's Lake down the Suwannee River as far as Suwannee River sill. The park has cottages and camp sites for tents, trailers or campers for rent. For information, write or phone Stephen C. Foster State Park, Fargo, Georgia 31631. Besides the regular motor boat trips avail-



able at the three main entrances, canoe trips can be made into some less accessible areas of the refuge after a special permit is procured from the refuge manager. There are seven routes of these canoe trips which are planned to extend from two to six days. For further information about the canoe trips write, phone or contact personally the Refuge Manager, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 117, Waycross, Georgia 31501.

Accommodations. Motels, restaurants, and food markets are available at or near Waycross, Folkston and Fargo. Also Laura Walker State Park which is about ten miles north of Okefenokee Swamp Park on Georgia highway 177 has camp sites available for campers and trailers. Cottages and camp sites for tents, trailers and campers are available on Stephen C. Foster State Park. Three miles east of the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area at the junction of Georgia highway 121 and the Camp Cornelia road is a camp site for trailers and campers.

Birdwatching. The diversified habitat of Okefenokee Swamp is attractive to a wide variety of birds. The prairies are best for observing the wading birds. Here the Sandhill Crane is resident the year around. While herons and ibises may be seen near the swamp lakes and water courses, the prairies are the most likely places. Great, Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Great Blue and Little Blue Herons, Louisiana Herons,

Green Herons, American and Least Bitterns, and White Ibises are common during the summer. All of these are year around residents except the Cattle Egret and the Least Bittern. The Wood Stork is fairly common through the summer and fall and may be seen at times through the winter and spring. The Glossy Ibis occurs rarely in the fall, winter and spring.

There is a heronry in Chesser Prairie where hundreds of waders including Anhingas nest.

There are two colonies on the west side. One is located along the Suwannee River just above the sill, and the other is located just above the sill near Pine Island. The colony along the river is easily accessible by boat, the other not accessible and the birds can be viewed only from a distance.



Photos/ Okefenokee Nat'l Park.

Of the waterfowl, only the Wood Duck is a permanent resident, but a wide variety is present during the late fall, winter and early spring. Blue-winged Teal are common during migration but are rarely seen during the winter. Turkey vultures and black vultures are common. There is a buzzard roost out Suwannee Canal near the Mizelle Prairie. The common hawk of the swamp is the Red-shouldered. Red-tailed hawks and Marsh Hawks may be seen during the fall, winter, and spring. The Osprey nests in the Okefenokee Prairies and may be seen from late winter until early fall. Each summer one or two pairs of Swallow-tailed Kites nest in the vicinity of the Suwannee River sill and, with luck, a visitor may see one. Recently these kites have also been observed on the east side of the swamp along the nature drive between Camp Cornelia and

Chesser Island. The Barred Owl is common in the wooded portions of the swamp and on the periphery of the swamp but it is more often heard than seen. The Great Horned Owl is rare. A few are resident at Okefenokee Swamp Park. The Ground Dove may usually be seen along the nature drive between Camp Cornelia and Chesser Island. The Red-bellied Woodpecker is the commonest woodpecker of the swamp and the peripheral upland. Pileated Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, Red-headed Woodpeckers and flickers are all common throughout the year. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker occurs throughout the year in spots around the periphery of the swamp. There is a nesting community of them on Peckerwood Trail, a foot trail leading off from the Camp

Cornelia-Chesser Island nature drive. Here the nesting trees can be seen and during nesting period the birds can be seen there. Of the passerine birds of special interest, the Prothonotary Warbler is common in the spring, summer and fall along the water courses of the swamp. The Bachman's Sparrow is the only native sparrow that is resident through the summer.

A list of species of birds seen in Okefenokee Swamp can be procured from Refuge Manager, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 117, Waycross, Georgia 31501.

—Eugene Cypert, 1006 Darling Ave., Waycross, Ga. 31501

