

Tower View Point

Observation Tower History

Today our observation tower stands 90 feet tall and is the tallest viewing point over Georgia's Natural Wonder. This tower was constructed in 1964 and replaced a wooden tower sixty feet in height. The tannic acid conditions in the Okefenokee Swamp cause a unique chemical reaction with the steel which has resulted in frequent and costly maintenance to this structure. In 1999 this tower was closed due to the lack of funds needed to repair and restore it for public use. In 2007 during the big monster fire, this tower was used by firefighters daily to evaluate and develop a plan of action to steer the fire around the Park. The tower was saved but over 1200 feet of boardwalk leading to the tower was lost. In 2009 Structural Contractors Inc. was hired to fully restore our tower. Replacement of all the stringers & steps along with 3 coats of primer and paint, has our tower back open and ready for guests to safely view our enchanted wilderness from the top. Beginning in 2010 a limited number of guests with advance reservations will board a boat for an adventure of a lifetime. The round trip will take 2 hours and will include an exit from the boat onto 600 feet of newly constructed boardwalk that joins Mirror Lake to Skull Lake with a connection to the Tower. This is the only way to access the Tower, making this 2-hour tour a unique experience. We hope this complimentary Interpretative Guide will make your adventure safe and informative.



If you don't make it to the top the view never changes...

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Carnivorous Plants*
- *Skull Lake*
- *Boardwalk*
- *Observation Tower*
- *Signs of past Fire*
- *Cypress Trees & Knees*
- *Alligators*
- *Mirror Lake*

I think I can!....I think I can!

The climb to the top of our Observation Tower is not for everyone. Small children under the age of 12 and anyone who is not in good physical shape should not attempt to climb the 102 steps. Many will say: I think I can...I think I can; but at some point the body might say No I can't...No I can't. There are benches at the base of the Tower and midway point for rest and relaxation.

Ample time will be allowed for each person to safely climb on their own, at their own risk and at their own pace to the top of our 90 foot observation tower. Once you are safely at the top and have caught your breath... make a wish and toll the Okefenokee Tower Bell once to symbolize the climb...accomplished. Please only one wish and one ring per person.

Alligators and other Swamp Critters

The female alligator builds a large nest in an open area near the water. It is usually 5 to 6 feet across and 2 to 3 feet high. She lays 30 to 60 eggs and covers them with leaves, muck, moss and other vegetation. She splashes the mound with water and the sun heats the damp vegetation. As the vegetation decays it gives off heat and serves as an incubator for the eggs. If the nest temperature is 90 degrees or above they will be male and with temperatures between 86 and 90 degrees there will be a mixture of both sexes. It takes 60 to 90 days for the eggs to hatch and the baby alligators immediately start making a clucking sound. The mother hears the clucking and uncovers her newly hatched alligators. When hatched, the young alligators are about 6 inches long. They grow about 12 inches a year for the first 6 or 7 years. A full grown alligator may reach 12 to 15 feet in length and weigh 700 pounds. The Okefenokee Swamp is a Wildlife Refuge and few places in America can offer as varied and extensive wildlife...234 species of birds, 50 species of mammals, 64 species of reptiles, 37 species of amphibians, 39 kinds of fish and 621 species of plants.



It takes 60 to 90 days for eggs to hatch.

Cypress Trees & Knees

The most common tree in the Swamp is the Cypress. Cypress is a deciduous tree, dropping it's needles in the winter; in the spring they will come back out. It is also a conifer or cone-bearing tree. There are only 2 deciduous conifers in North America; cypress in the south and Tamarack or Larch in the north. The Hebard Cypress Company had an enormous impact on the swamp and the area. Timber was harvested from 1909 to 1927 and during that time 420 million board feet of mostly virgin cypress was removed from the Okefenokee Swamp. The Charles Hebard and Sons Lumber Company of Philadelphia purchased 295,555 acres of the swamp which included the area once owned by the Suwannee Canal Company. They began operations in 1909 and grew to be a tremendous business for that area. They employed, at the mill and in the swamp, close to 2,000 men.

Cypress knees are on sale in our Gift Shop...if you are interested in a unique souvenir.

Fire and the Okefenokee Swamp

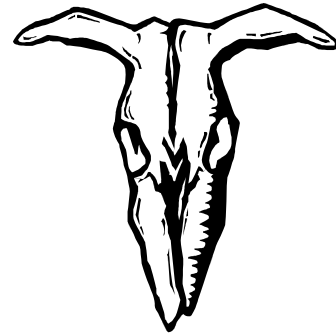
Fire is a necessary part of the swamp's life cycle. If there are no fires, eventually there will be no swamp. The prairies of the swamp have masses of peat and aquatic plants in them. Over time, these will become thick enough to support plants, eventually trees will grow on them, and these wetlands will become dry woodlands. Fire temporarily stops this natural plant cycle. There have been numerous fires in the Okefenokee and over the years several have been classified as major fires. These occur during times of extreme drought when the water is low and the vegetation is dry and parched. Lightning is the cause of most swamp fires and during the summer months electrical storms are very common in the area. The most recent of these great fires was in 2007. It was actually two fires that joined together. One started on the mainland near Waycross when a broken power line ignited the drought- parched underbrush. The second was caused by a lightning strike deep in the swamp. This monster fire raged for six weeks and burned 600,000 acres, which is almost the size of the state of Rhode Island, and it became the largest fire in Georgia's history.



Fire fighters helped save our Park buildings in 2007.

The Legend of Skull Lake

Legend has persisted over many decades that Skull Lake was regarded as a sacred spot by many Indian tribes who inhabited the hundreds of square miles of the Okefenokee Swamp. Here, surrounding a small, placid body of water, was the “Land of the Trembling Earth.” The Aborigines, representing the many tribes of the great Creek Indian Nation, believed that the trembling earth had magical powers and was directly associated with the Great Spirit. These simple people believed that the mere immersion of one’s body in the waters of the Skull Lake would restore health. It was custom, after ceremonial festivities such as the Feast of the New Moon, the Green Corn Dance and others, to offer an animal sacrifice after which the skull of the animal would be removed to a central charnel house where it remained until the skull became bleached. The skull was then removed and placed on a tree, bush or sapling bordering Skull Lake. Hence, the origination of its name.



Today Skull Lake is a re-creation of the past.

Spanish - Moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*)

Spanish-moss is a fibrous, perennial, epiphytic herb. It hangs from trees in long, thick masses that may reach 20 feet in length. The leaves are grayish-green, narrowly linear, and up to 2 inches long. The plant appears filamentous with numerous branches and is covered with silvery-gray scales.

The flowers are tiny, inconspicuous blooms of pale greenish-blue.

They form in the axils of the leaves and may give off a light fragrance at night. Tiny capsules develop after the flowers and eventually split open to release seeds. Spanish-moss grows well in partial shade. It prefers moist environments but can survive well in dry habitats too. It most commonly adopts oak or cypress trees as hosts but may be found on other species.

*An excellent example
of Spanish– moss can
be viewed at the
midway level of the
tower.*

Further than the eye can see...

We are providing binoculars on loan to everyone who climbs the tower. You will be able to enjoy views further than the eye can see. At the top of the tower, pay close attention to the compass directional orientation (N ~ S ~ E ~ W) that is posted for your use and enjoyment. Please take care of our binoculars and turn them back into your guide when you are back down.



*Complimentary Binoculars
Available*

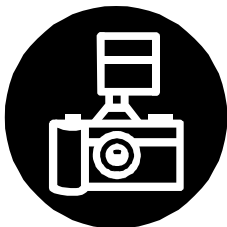
NOTES:

Okefenokee Swamp Park

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GUIDE'S NAME

We're on the web!
okeswamp.com



*Okefenokee Swamp Park, Inc. is a non-profit organization that
was established in 1946.*

*Our operations and upkeep are generated from
our ticket /tour revenue and gift shop sales.*

We receive no local , state and / or federal funding.

Thank you for your support!

I Survived the Okefenokee Tower Adventure

Okefenokee Swamp Park is open 361 days per year and our average temperature is 68 degrees. We have some cold days and some hot days depending on the season. Here is a list of things that you might want to consider bringing along on your two (2) hour adventure.

- Loose / comfortable fitting clothes
- Comfortable supportive shoes
- Light to heavy jacket depending on the season
- Poncho- (sorry no umbrellas)
- Insect repellent- (yellow fly season parts of May & June)
- Sun Screen
- Sun glasses
- Hat or sun visor
- Drinking Water
- Light Snack
- Binoculars (we have some loaners for you)
- Camera
- Pencil and paper for notes



Come prepared for the adventure

Important Reminder: There will be NO RESTROOM for 2 hours!

Many of the above items are on sale in our Gift Shop. In an effort to minimize the impact on this valuable natural resource and to keep the area clean and green, we ask that if you pack it in ...you pack it out.

THANKS!