

# Georgia Coast

**G**uale (pronounced *Wallie*) was the name of the coastal Chiefdom and Spanish province lying between the Ogeechee and Altamaha rivers. The native people living there were Muskogean-speaking, their mico (headman) was also named Guale, and their principal town was on Saint Catherines Island. After removing the French threat to Spanish Florida in 1565, Menéndez de Avilés reconnoitered the coast and established garrisons where he could find allies among the native people. In 1568 he invited the Jesuits to establish missions among the friendly tribes and to use their “civilizing” influence to turn the natives into good Spanish subjects and converts to the Catholic faith. Missions strung from Santa Elena (Beaufort) to Saint Augustine served the Christian Indians for almost a hundred years. In the 1660s the Spanish were forced to move their mission towns ever closer to St. Augustine because of a series of attacks by enemy tribes, pirates, and Carolinians. By 1685 all Christian Indians were living south of the St. Marys River. The Yamassees, having only recently sought refuge among the Guale people, had not been fully transformed to the Christian faith. They thought it more expedient to seek the protection of the English and they moved to South Carolina to the place that still bears their name.

Thus this land was left deserted and eventually other Muskogean Indians moved in, most notably the Yamacraws who settled at the first high bluff on the Savannah River. The Eng-

lish wanted to occupy this area as a buffer to protect the valuable colony of South Carolina and in 1721 they built Fort Prince George at the mouth of the Altamaha River. In 1733 Parliament allowed the creation of the Georgia colony between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers. In January 1734 General James Oglethorpe built Fort Frederica on Saint Simons Island which, being just south of the Altamaha River, was located in de facto Spanish territory. In 1735 General James Oglethorpe traveled to England and returned with disenfranchised Scottish Highlanders of the McIntosh clan and settled them on the Altamaha River. They named their community Darien and they proved to be the hardiest Europeans to settle in Georgia. Not only did they survive, they prospered and helped reduce further threat of invasion by leading the attack that led to the defeat of the Spanish force at Bloody Marsh.

In 1754 Congregationalists from Dorchester, South Carolina, founded Midway. They brought with them a strong sense of independence, a distrust of the British government, and a strong ethic of work and prosperity. When Georgia became a Royal Colony and slavery was legalized in 1752 the tidal regions of the rivers were turned into rice plantations. There was an influx of planters and money from South Carolina, creating a period of prosperity and growth for Midway, Sunbury, and Darien.

This region of the Georgia Coast was devastated by General Prevost’s British troops as they marched toward Savannah in



*Shrimp boats at Darien*

1778. They burned Midway Church, plantation homes, and crops they could not carry off. The Lachlan McIntosh home was burned during the British invasion. His crops had been destroyed in 1776 by foraging Continental soldiers and Georgia volunteers and he was forced to move his family to Savannah in September, 1776 because they could not survive the winter on the plantation. After the Revolution, planters returned to the coast and the area became an important rice-growing region, especially in the Altamaha delta.

### *William Bartram's Travels on the Georgia Coast*

William Bartram left Savannah on April 16, 1773, traveled south on the King's Road, now closely followed by US-17, and crossed the Ogeechee River at King's Ferry. He arrived at Sunbury later in the day. He attended service at Midway Church where he heard the Reverend William Piercy preach.<sup>1</sup> The next morning he crossed, not Saint Catherines Sound as he wrote, but more probably a narrow part of Dickinson and Jones creeks where they come near one another. He spent the day on Colonels Island, possibly at the invitation of Benjamin Andrew who owned property there. Bartram mistakenly names Ossabaw as St. Helena Island.

On April 18 Bartram proceeded southward on the King's

<sup>1</sup> The *Report to Dr. John Fothergill* differs from the *Travels* in that Bartram wrote that he attended service at Midway before going to Sunbury.

Road. He stayed with Benjamin Andrew at his rice plantation on Peacock Creek, about a half-mile north of the intersection of US-17 and Barrington Ferry Road. Bartram's route then followed Barrington Ferry Road. Just south of LeConte-Woodmanston, Bartram turned to the east and became lost in either Big Mortar Swamp or Bull Town Swamp. Beyond Jones Road the old Barrington Ferry Road is now incorporated into pine plantations.

At South Newport William stayed with Donald McIntosh Bain during a storm. Bartram continued on to Sapelo Bridge, now Eulonia, where he delivered a letter from Governor Wright to Mr. Baillie. This was probably Robert Baillie who was married to Ann McIntosh, the only sister of the McIntosh boys. Baillie was commander of the garrison at Fort Barrington and became a Tory during the Revolution. Bartram's route was then generally along US-17 to Darien where he was hosted by Lachlan McIntosh and family who lived on Cathead Creek north of Darien. The route from Darien to Fort Barrington is the same today as it was for Bartram. On April 24 or 25 he left Darien following GA-251 (River Road), he kept straight on Cox Road then traveled along the unpaved Barrington Road to Fort Barrington on the banks of the Altamaha River.

William Bartram spent a great deal of time on the Georgia coast during the fall and winter of 1773–1774, the winter of 1774–1775, and most of 1776. In August, 1776 he moved with the McIntosh family to Savannah.

## Sites

**1. Ocean Highway and the Coastal Georgia Land Trust.** In 1736 General James Oglethorpe directed Walter Augustine and a Mr. Tolme to cut a road from Savannah to Darien. The road would facilitate a quick response in case of Spanish attack and encourage settlement. The present US-17 closely follows the original road, occasionally deviating only a few hundred feet from the colonial route. The Atlantic Coastal Highway, US-17, was completed in 1927 and was the first important tourist route to Florida. In Georgia it is known as Ocean Highway. The Coastal Georgia Land Trust is working to establish a collection of cultural and natural trails based along US-17. The goal of this monumental project is to connect Ocean Highway to historic sites and areas of natural and recreational interest with an emphasis on alternative modes of transportation—boating, bicycling, pedestrian, and equestrian. The Bartram Trail will be a major component of the master plan.

**2. Hardwicke** was laid out by Governor Reynolds and was to be the capital of Georgia, hoping to remove the government from his detractors in Savannah. He resigned before anything came of the town.

**3. Fort McAllister State Historic Site** is a well preserved Civil War earthwork

fortification overlooking the tidal portions of the Ogeechee River. The park has a campground, nature trails, and boat ramp on Savage Island. The park is open 7 a.m.–10 p.m. daily, while the historic site is open 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Tuesday–Saturday. To reach the Park from US-17 in Richmond Hill take GA-144 and GA-144 Spur to the end. Admission.

**4. Ossabaw Island Heritage Preserve** is owned by Georgia and held as a preserve for scientific, educational, and natural research. Special permission from the State Department of Natural Resources or the Ossabaw Foundation is required for visitation. Ossabaw Island covers 11,800 acres and has 9.5 miles of beach.

**5. Hall's Knoll.** Although Dr. Lyman Hall owned a plantation just north of Midway he lived in Sunbury. The Knoll is now owned by the Liberty County Historical Society, which had plans to create a nature preserve.

Lyman Hall was born in Connecticut and became a Congregationalist minister. He moved south to Dorchester, South Carolina, then to Midway with other Congregationalists. There he became the most noted physician in the area. Hall was an official member of the Second Continental Congress and an unofficial member of the First Continental Congress and the only representative from Georgia. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. When the British seized Savannah and invaded the countryside, Hall fled to Connecticut with

his family and his home was burned in 1782. He returned when Savannah was released by the British and was elected Governor in 1783. He later lived in Burke County at Shell Bluff above the banks where John and William Bartram discovered fossilized oyster shells.

Hall was buried first at Shell Bluff, then his remains were reinterred in Augusta alongside those of George Walton beneath the Signer's Monument. The original gravestone from Shell Bluff was sent to Wallingford, Connecticut, where Hall was born, and placed in the town cemetery.

**6. Midway** is so named because it is midway between Savannah and Darien. Nearby Medway River is named for the river in England in the district that was home to many of the original Puritans who emigrated to Massachusetts. Midway was founded by Congregationalists, descendants of the Massachusetts Puritans, who had settled at Dorchester, South Carolina, just north of Charleston. When the area around Charleston became overcrowded and the lands diminished in productivity, the community looked to Georgia for a new home. The Midway Society received 40,000 acres of land in 1754 which was organized into St. John's Parish.

In Savannah the Hot Heads of the Revolution tended to be the sons of the colony's wealthy and established society. Not so in Midway where patriotism was more universally embraced. These descendants of the Puritan