

Aucilla River

GPS Coordinates:
 83° 58.769' W ~ 30° 6.985' N

The Aucilla River forms north of Thomasville, Georgia, and meanders some 75 miles to the Gulf of Mexico. About five miles of the river flow through the eastern portion of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. The drainage basin covers nearly 750 square miles. The exact meaning of the word 'Aucilla' is lost but it is one of the oldest place names in Florida.



Photo by John Kunkel Small (Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida)

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge History Trail

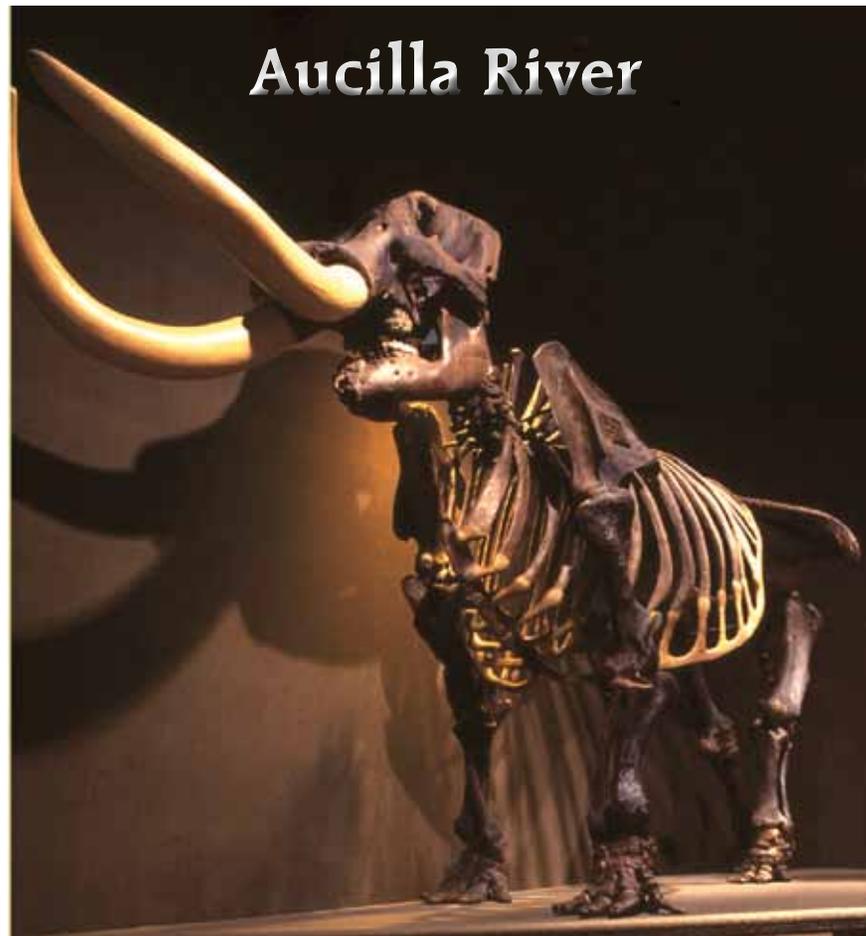
1	Wakulla Beach: site of Wakulla Beach Hotel and West Goose Creek Seineyard	84° 15.703' W	30° 6.316' N	4	Mounds Station: site of Shell Mounds and Naval Stores	84° 9.869' W	30° 5.282' N
2	Plum Orchard: site of Port Leon	84° 8.892' W	30° 9.099' N	5	St. Marks Lighthouse: site of Lighthouse, Ft. Williams, and Spanish Hole/Shipwreck	84° 10.955' W	30° 4.658' N
3	East River: site of CCC and Salt Works	84° 8.710' W	30° 7.797' N	6	Mandalay: site of Aucilla River	83° 58.769' W	30° 6.985' N



In the Paleo-Indian Period (13,000 – 7,900 BC), the climate of this region was much cooler, sea levels were lower, and more land mass was above water. The region's karst foundation of water-soluble limestone was pocked with sinkholes and catch basins. As the climate changed and the sea level rose, the limestone aquifer filled with fresh water. Springs bubbled up from the sinkholes. Gradually, rivers such as the St. Marks and Aucilla carved their channels to the Gulf. Camps where people had lived and places where animals had been captured and butchered were covered by water.

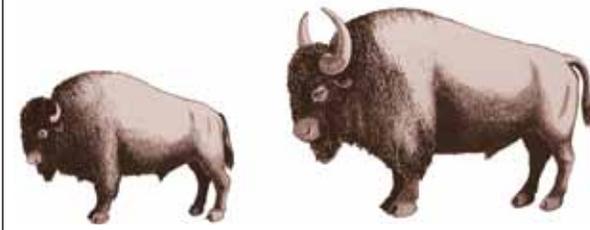
For many decades, curious searchers have found tools and bones in the river beds. The Aucilla River has been little disturbed and is particularly rich in artifacts, which have been preserved for thousands of years because of the lack of oxygen under the water. The river has yielded tools and seeds, as well as bones from extinct mastodons, sloths, Pleistocene horses, and bison. Growth rings on mastodon tusks indicate that the animals may have migrated to follow a reliable food supply. These artifacts provide a glimpse into how the human populations lived and what types of plants they ate or used for other purposes.

Mammoths and mastodons once lived in Florida. Mammoths were larger than mastodons, but the primary difference was in what they ate. Like a modern elephant's tooth, a mammoth's tooth is almost flat with slightly raised ridges like the sole of a running shoe and shows that mammoths were grazers



Mastodon skeleton (Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida)

Below: The massive Bison antiquus (right) was nearly a foot taller and may have been a full ton heavier than the modern bison, Bison bison (left), which can weigh up to about 2,000 pounds. (Drawing by Hal Story, courtesy of Texas Beyond History.net, Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, The University of Texas at Austin)



of the grasslands. The mastodon's teeth have conical shapes that are more suited to grinding leaves and tender twigs of a forested habitat. This is one clue that indicates the area around the Aucilla was forested when those animals lived there.



The mastodon's tooth was adapted to grinding small tree branches. (Courtesy Florida Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Archaeological Research)

The Aucilla River is a historically and culturally significant watercourse, beautiful and mysterious. Just off Highway 98, about a mile west of the turn-off to the refuge boat ramp, is a smaller county-maintained boat launch area perfect for beginning a canoe or kayak trip upstream or downstream. There are a few houses along the river, but a float along this stretch is generally quiet and pleasant.

The St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc., with a matching grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, produced the signs and brochures for the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge History Trail. The association is a 501(c)(3) organization that supports educational, environmental, and biological programs of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Visit www.stmarksrefuge.org for more information. 9/2010