

# Amicalola River Indian Corridor

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## Introduction

The headwaters of the Amicalola River begin in the NW corner of Dawson County on the boundary of Dawson and Gilmer Counties in Georgia. North of Wildcat Campground in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildcat Tract Wildlife Management Area, the river is referred to as the Amicalola Creek. After being joined by Wildcat Creek in the campground, the stream is now fully a river which flows eastward for several miles before making a sharp turn to the SSE. The river flows in that direction for the rest of Dawson County until it joins the Etowah River. From the point where the river begins its turn to the SSE until just past where the Amicalola reaches the Etowah River, there were seven known Indian villages and possibly more that have not yet been found.

Historical data on this area of Dawson County only mentions the Cherokee who lived in villages along the Etowah River on the south end of Dawson before the river flows into Forsyth and Cherokee Counties. However, the villages along the Amicalola River were not Cherokee or Muskogee Creek who had occupied this area before the Cherokee. They were Apalachee, Okmulgee and Late Mississippian.

John Reed Swanton wrote his classical report for the Smithsonian Institute, Bureau of Ethnology in 1922 entitled *Early History of the Creek Indians and their Neighbors*. In his report he provided a detail account of each tribe that was associated with or was somewhat involved with the Muskogee Creek Confederacy. Swanton places the Apalachee north of Apalachee Bay in western Florida. He cites numerous references by the Spanish showing villages locations in western FL. He does mention that some of the Apalachee were in SC and fought in the Yamassee War of 1715. What is missing from Swanton's report is the fact the Apalachee had a major number of villages on the Amicalola River a long-ways from western FL. They had been there for over a hundred years from the 1650's to the late 1770's. These Apalachee Indians are believed to have traveled to SC in 1715 to join with the Yamassee in the war against the colonists.

The Okmulgee villages were associated with the Hitchiti. It was thought that they only lived near the Okmulgee and Chattahoochee Rivers. What a village was doing in Dawson County is anyone guess.

In 1939, Robert Wauchope, a professor of archaeology and anthropology at the University of Georgia studied the Amicalola corridor and determined there were a number of Apalachee Indian village located along the river. He made notes of his finds but did very little research on the sites at that time as his interested were elsewhere.

Robert Wauchope published a book on some of his work in northern GA in 1966 many years after he had done his initial research. He noted in his book that things had changed a lot in the 27 years since her had done his research. This book, *Archaeological Survey of Northern Georgia a Test of*

*Some Cultural Hypotheses. Number 21 in Memoirs of the Society of American Archaeology. American Antiquity, Volume 32, Number 5, Part 2,* contains some of his findings. For the Amicalola River area he stated that some of the Indian sites had rock walls or rock cairns but none of them were found to exist today. Wauchope noted he found a 3,000 year old town site at the Edge of the World Rapids on the west side of the river. The only site found there was the Apalachee village dating to the mid 1600's. The only mound that has been found in the Amicalola valley is located about four miles north of the End of the World Rapids near the old town of Juno, GA. It is estimated to be only a thousand years old.

From what little information is contained in Robert Wauchope notes, we began to research the river corridor and discovered three Apalachee village sites, three late Mississippian sites and one Okmulgee village site.

### **Late Mississippian Villages**

The smallest Mississippian village was located on the Amicalola River near the junction of Afton and Goshen Church road in northern Dawson County. This is where the Amicalola River begins to make its turn to the SSE. This village was determined to be small with approximately 12 families. They arrived in this location around 1450 and remained here for a period of almost 200 hundred years until about 1650. There was a principle Late Mississippian village located on the Amicalola River less than one mile to the southeast. This is where all of the Late Mississippians traveled to for ceremonies, council meeting and festivals.

The principle village was located on a bend in the river. It is estimated that around 40 families lived in this village site. At this location, the town would have all the common cultural features such as a Council meeting site, a Ceremonial Healing site, a Ceremonial Burial site and a Dance Grounds. The Ceremonial Healing site would be located directly over upwelling earth energy to provide enhanced healing along with medicine provided by a medicine man or woman. The Ceremonial Burial site was used for burial ceremonies for the tribal elite such as the Chief, the Medicine person, spouses of the chief and medicine person and beloved elders. Most tribes had annual festivals such as the Green Corn Dance and others. All tribal members would travel to the principle town for these ceremonials and festivals that carried on for a week or more.

To the southeast of the principle Late Mississippian village, another Late Mississippian village was located on Cochran Creek, a tributary of the Amicalola River. This village was built around an earthen mound. The Late Mississippian village was dated from 1450 – 1650. It had about 40 families living in that location. The earthen mound is believed to have been constructed in the Middle Mississippian time frame around 1050 to 1200. No access to this site has been granted so no archaeological evidence has been collected to confirm the date of mound construction.

Exactly why the Late Mississippians left the Amicalola River area in the mid-1600's is not known. However, it is believed these tribal people followed a custom similar to the Pueblo Indians in that they planted a sacred tree at their principle village sites over upwelling earth energies. When the sacred tree died, they usually moved away from the site. The Late Mississippians are believed to have planted a Black Oak tree at the principle village. These trees can live for around 200 years but some in CA have survived for as long as 500 years.

## **Apalachee Indian Villages**

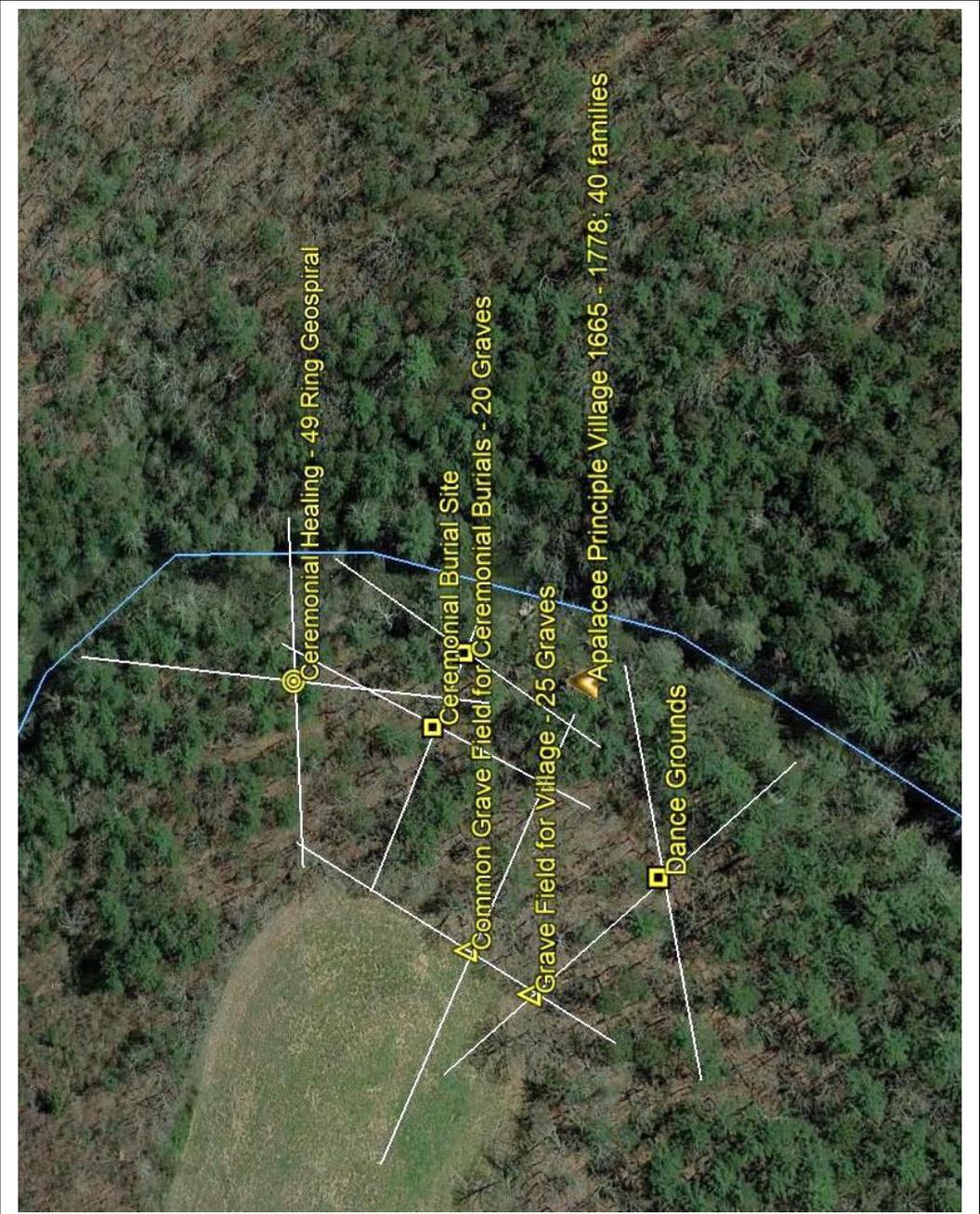
One and a half miles SSE of the principle Late Mississippian village where the Amicalola makes a 180-degree bend to form a peninsula of land, was the principle village of the Apalachee Indians. Like all principle villages, it had the common features of upwelling earth energies at its Council site, Dance Grounds, Ceremonial Healing site and Ceremonial Burial sites. Through years of research of principle villages sites for many tribes throughout the US, it has been determined that every tribe had to have one of more elders or specialists who could find the village sites to support their customarily common cultural features. These sites are very unusual in that they have a lot of upwelling energy located closely together. The Apalachee village site was located right along the river where it makes its 180-degree bend and below a relatively flat field above the site that offered some protection from enemy tribes. A Google Earth diagram of the tribal site with its common cultural features and associated earth energies is shown at the end of this report.

As can be seen in the graphic, the village had all four of the common cultural features. Of special note is the Ceremonial Healing site. This site not only had upwelling earth energy but also had a 49-Ring Geospiral. Geospirals are believed to provide a larger amount of healing energy so this healing site would have been a powerful place. Also, of note, are the two common grave fields located on the hill above the village site. One site was a grave field for the elite graves and the other for the more common tribal people. Like the principle Late Mississippian village site, this Apalachee village would be the location for all associated villages to come for ceremonies, festivals and council meetings. The principle village was estimated to have about 40 families.

Two other Apalachee villages were located near the principle village. One was located near where the Steel Bridge Road crosses over the Amicalola River and the other one was a little further south located on the west side of the river across from the End of the World Rapids. Both of these villages were small having about 15-18 families. Each of these villages had a common grave field for burial of the village people. At the village located near the Steel Bridge, one grave was found off by itself. It was determined to be a small boy of age ten years old who was dearly loved by the village people. It is believed he may have been the Chief's son. He is buried directly over an energy line which was a common practice of tribal people.

## **Okmulgee Tribal Village**

On Kelly Bridge Road right where it crosses over the Etowah River at the south end of Dawson County, a single small Okmulgee village was located near the canoe take-out ramp. No other Okmulgee villages were determined to be nearby this village or related to it. How this village got here is unknown as these tribal people were most often found around the Macon Georgia area. The village was very small with an estimated 12 families and was located at this area for about twelve years from 1811 to 1823.



**Principle Apalachee Village**