

Georgia's Seven Wonders



Okefenokee Swamp (below) is the largest swamp in North America. Cypress trees (above) are known for their "knees," which help anchor them in unstable ground.

If you have taken a world history class, you may remember reading about the "Seven Wonders of the World," which included the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Great Pyramid, and the Colossus of Rhodes. But what you might not realize is that our state also has its own "seven natural wonders."

As you know, climate affects the natural features of a state over the centuries. Winds and water have eroded and shaped the state's **topography** (physical features such as mountains or plateaus). Among the many natural features of Georgia's topography, seven have been designated as natural wonders: the Okefenokee Swamp, Tallulah Gorge, Radium Springs, Warm Springs, Stone Mountain, Providence Canyon, and Amicalola Falls.

The **Okefenokee Swamp**, which was once part of the Atlantic Ocean floor, received its name from the Indian word *o-wa-qua-phenoga*, which means "land



of the trembling earth.” The Okefenokee is filled with a shallow “black water” stained by the tannic acid of decaying vegetation. The swamp covers a half million acres (about seven hundred square miles) and is located in the Outer Coastal Plain near Waycross and Folkston. This primitive wetland is home to hundreds of species of plants, animals, and reptiles, many of whom are endangered. Throughout the area are about seventy “piney woods” islands, once home to Seminole Indians and settled by pioneer Georgians in the 1850s.

If you visit, you will enter a world of giant, 80-foot cypress trees draped with moss overhanging dark, murky waters filled with alligators, herons, egrets, and cranes. The swamp is also home to Georgia’s native black bears—and the comic strip character “Pogo.” So, if you like snakes, turtles, armadillos, otters, birds, deer, alligators, and frogs, take a guided trip on a tour boat and enjoy the sights and sounds. Oh, make sure you say hello to 15-foot, 900-pound “Oscar,” the alligator.

Tallulah Gorge, located on U.S. 441, spans the border between Habersham and Rabun counties. One of the most spectacular gorges in the eastern United States, Tallulah Gorge is 3 miles long and nearly 1,200 feet deep. The hard granite walls form steep cliffs. The roar of the waters that cut the gorge could once be heard for miles and led to the nickname the “Niagara Falls of the South.” Today the Tallulah River is silent because it was dammed to provide hydroelectric power for Atlanta’s continuing growth. Because of the dam, you can now vacation on manmade Lake Rabun or Lake Burton.

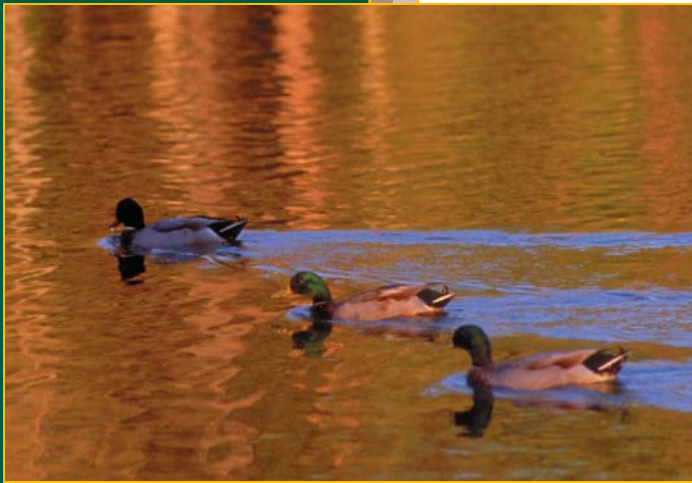
Tallulah Gorge reached national prominence several times. In 1886, “Professor Leon” tightwalked across the gorge; 84 years later, Karl Wallenda repeated that walk. Wallenda stopped twice in crossing the falls to stand on his head.

Today, visitors are returning to the area to enjoy the many displays at the Jane Hurt Yarn Interpretive Center or to shop for handmade mountain handi-crafts. Those who like hiking or mountain climbing can request special permission to practice those skills on the gorge.

Radium Springs, located near Albany in Lee County, is another of Georgia’s wonders. First opened in 1927 as a resort casino, the springs feature sapphire-blue water flowing through a crystalline pool. Indians believed that this water had healing powers. Today, Radium Springs has largely dried



Above: Spectacular vistas into Tallulah Gorge have drawn millions of visitors to this state park over the years.



Top: Franklin D. Roosevelt built this six-room cottage in Warm Springs. It later came to be called the “Little White House.” **Above:** FDR State Park in Warm Springs is one of the most beautiful of the state’s parks.

up due to drought and algae. But there are fourteen other “blue holes” and caves hundreds of feet below Albany courtesy of the Flint River. They provide the city with clear, purified 68° water.

Radium Springs is no longer in operation although there is interest in converting it to a state park. And there has been some interest in restoring the former casino. What do you think?

Another site close to Radium Springs is an area of sand dunes. If you look closely, you may find sharks’ teeth in the sand. Why? Many geologists believe that this area was the northern edge of the Gulf of Mexico millions of years ago. That is a wonder in itself.

In Meriwether County, near Pine Mountain, is one of Georgia’s most famous natural wonders—**Warm Springs**. The warm mineral springs flow from the hillsides of Pine Mountain. The temperature of the pools of mineral springs average 88°, and the springs flow at a rate of 914 gallons a minute. The Creek and Iroquois Indians brought their sick and wounded to the springs to be “healed,” much like those who visited Radium Springs.

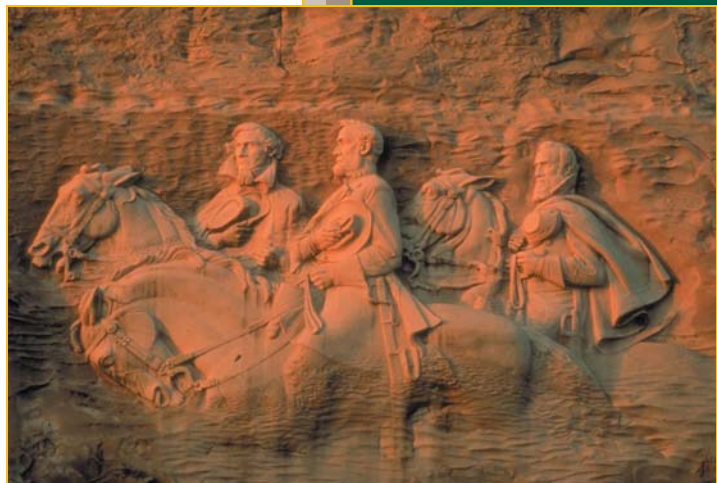
Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun also visited the springs, but it was in 1924 that the area gained fame. Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited Warm Springs as treatment for his polio. The four-term president made so many trips to the



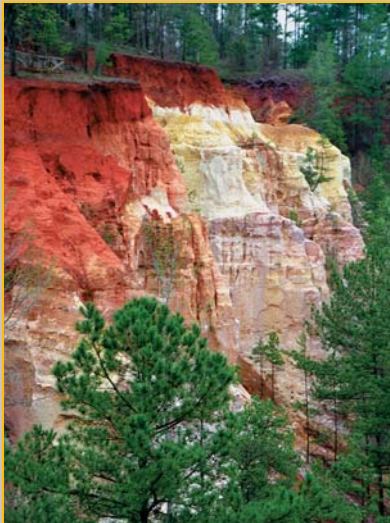
healing springs that he built a comfortable but small home there in 1932. It eventually became known as the “Little White House.” Today, the springs are part of a state rehabilitation center and are, along with nearby Callaway Gardens, a popular resort attraction.

Probably the best known of Georgia’s seven wonders is **Stone Mountain** near Atlanta. This solid granite mountain rises 750 feet above the Georgia Piedmont and is 1,683 feet above sea level. It began to form over 300 million years ago when molten magma was pushed into existing rock about 10 miles below the surface. The surrounding rock layers eroded slowly, and the granite mass was uncovered about 15 million years ago. The 25-million-square-foot, 583-acre rock was a sacred place for the Creek Indians who settled the area.

Stone Mountain may be best known for its Confederate Memorial Carving, which is the largest raised sculpture in the world. The carving is more than 400 feet above the ground, measures 90 by 190 feet, and is recessed 42 feet into the mountain. The figures are as tall as a 90-foot building. The carving dates to 1912 when the United Daughters of the Confederacy acquired the north face of the mountain for a Civil War monument. The carving depicts Confederate President Jefferson Davis, General Robert E. Lee, and



Top: Stone Mountain was once described as “very high, shining when the sun set like a fire.” **Above:** The Confederate Memorial Carving is larger than a football field.



Visitors to Providence Canyon (above and below) are amazed at the breathtaking colors exposed in the canyon walls.

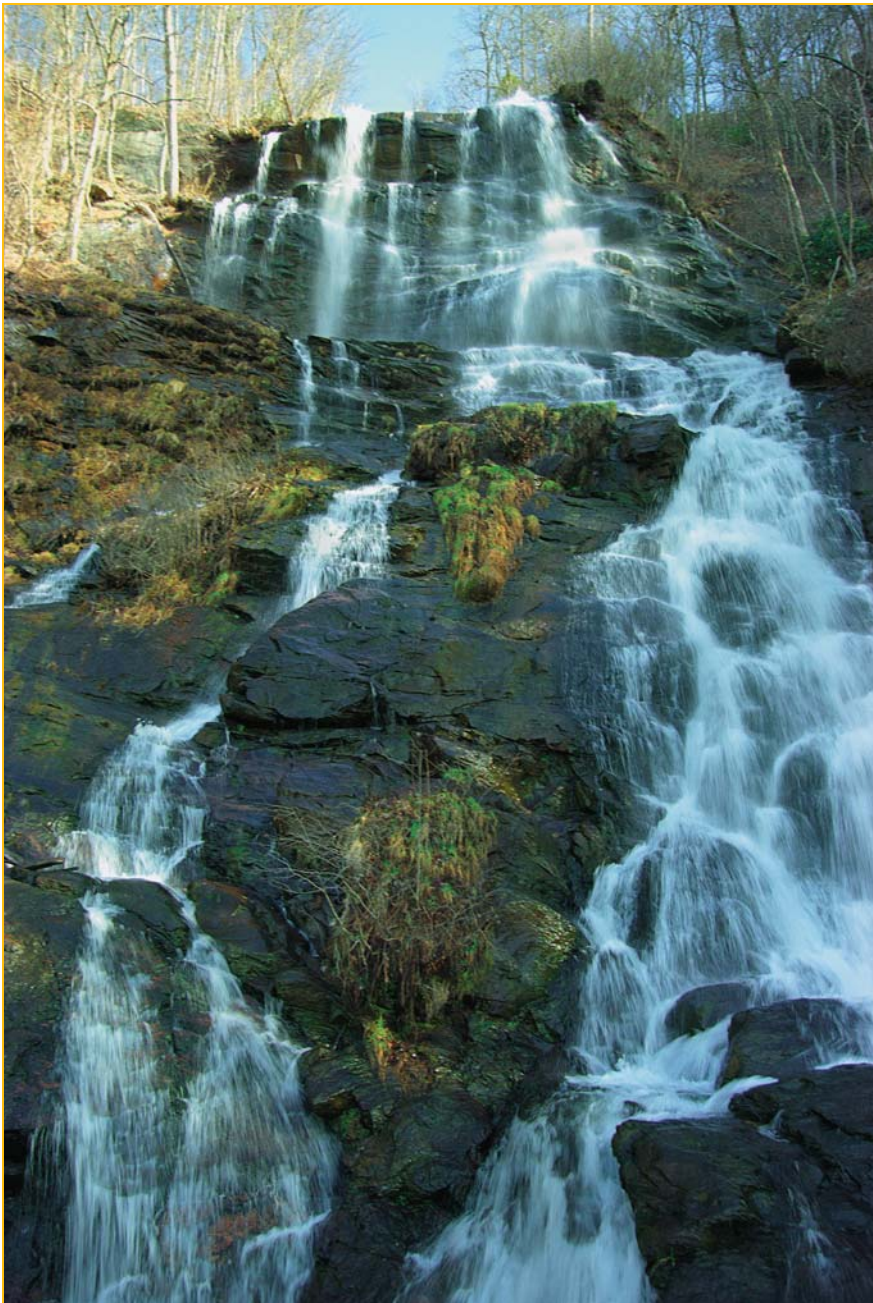
Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. It was begun by sculptor Gutzon Borgium (who went on to carve Mount Rushmore). Fifty-eight years and several other sculptors later the carving was completed.

Today, millions of visitors travel to the park each year to enjoy the lake, museums, and recreational facilities, to learn about unusual clams and fairy shrimp that lie in crater pools on the top of the mountain, or to see rare plants and flowers. During summer nights, the park comes alive with the magic of a laser light show unlike any in the world.

Providence Canyon near Lumpkin is Georgia’s “Little Grand Canyon.” This 1,108-acre state park contains sixteen canyons that have eroded 150 feet deep. The winding gullies display multicolored rock levels of tan, white, buff, pink, red, salmon, orange, and lavender hues (shades of color). The bottoms of the canyons are an ancient ocean floor where fossils exist. Some of the canyons are over a half-mile long and 300 feet across. The canyons were caused by the erosion that resulted when settlers cleared trees to farm the land in the mid-1800s. The farmers grew cotton in the same soil year after year without giving the soil time to rest and rejuvenate. Soon, the land was stripped of all vegetation. Then erosion—the enemy of all farmers—began to creep into a ditch that started out only about 5 feet deep. Eventually the canyons were created.

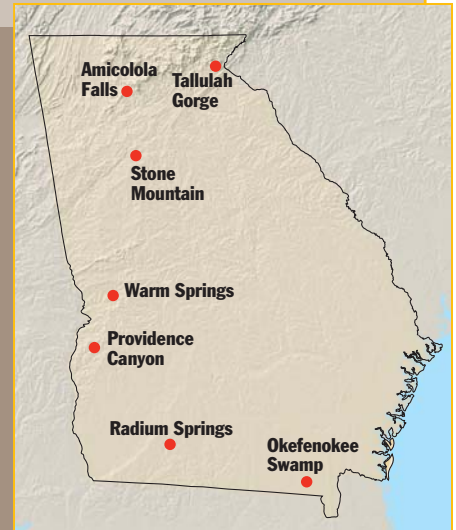
Today, trees and plants run throughout the state-operated park with seven miles of hiking trails. You can also wander through and explore the canyons.





The last of Georgia's seven natural wonders is **Amicalola Falls** near Dawsonville. It is located high in the watershed of a ridge known as Amicalola Mountain. In the Cherokee language, *Amicalola* means "tumbling water." A river runs along the western slope until it tumbles off. The falls provide an incredible 729-foot cascade of water, which drains into the Etowah River further south.

Amicalola is the southern end of the great Appalachian Mountain chain. The falls are just a few miles from the Southern Terminus Access Trail for the Appalachian Trail. Occasionally, you might see hikers leaving that point to begin their walk to Maine. Now, that's a hike! Can you guess the number of miles they must travel? Check it out.



Map 13 Georgia's Seven Wonders

Map Skill: Which of Georgia's seven natural wonders is closest to where you live?

Left: Amicalola Falls is the highest waterfall east of the Mississippi.