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Native beauty is revered in the South

Remembering earlier cultures



Billie Swamp Safari, an ecoheritage near Florida's Everglades, gives insights into Seminole customs. Inset: A Cherokee actor prepares for the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills* at Cherokee, N.C.

Courtesy Eastern Band Cherokee Indians

By Brian Jewell

In the Southeast are stories of people and places much older than our own traditions. Though the region is among the most historic in the United States, the arrival of English colonists and Spanish conquistadors was only the beginning of the most recent chapter in the area's human history. For hundreds of years before that — or thousands of years, in some cases — Native American cultures flourished throughout the land.

Today, many of those cultures have all but disappeared, driven to reservations in the West or integrated into modern American civilization. But take a closer look, and you'll find that the heritage of Native Americans is very much alive in the South.

Spend some time visiting Creek, Cherokee or other sites throughout the region, and you'll discover the history of the Southeast's Native American people. You'll also learn about their music, food and culture, and their relationships with the land and with the European societies that have joined them there.

Indian Mounds of Mississippi

As long ago as 100 B.C., native peoples inhabited what is today the state of Mississippi. From A.D. 1000 to 1700, the Mississippian people, for whom Mississippi is named, built a society in the area.

Though these prehistoric groups have long since disappeared, evidence of their civilization remains in the form of numerous mounds throughout the state. Historians estimate that native groups constructed thousands of these mounds, though only a handful remain. Eleven of them can be seen on the Indian Mounds of Mississippi Heritage Trail.

At Nanih Waiya Mound and Village near Philadelphia, a 25-foot-high mound is maintained as a state park. The site was an esteemed religious center for the Choctaw, a group that inhabited the area from around A.D. 1000 to 1600. Pottery shards found in excavations, however, suggest that the mound may have been constructed by a group living in the area around the time of Christ.

The Grand Village of Natchez Indians is one of the most prominent mounds in the state.

"We're the main ceremonial site of

the Natchez Indians," said the site's Sharon Ogden. "Our mounds are ceremonial mounds, not burial mounds."

At the site, visitors can see three platform mounds, as well as an adjacent ceremonial area where the political and religious activities of the Natchez Indians took place. Interpreters have reconstructed a Natchez house at the park, and a museum at the site contains numerous artifacts that have been excavated from the mounds.

www.nps.gov/nr/travel/mounds

Alabama Native American Trail

Numerous Indian nations have lived in what is now Alabama, and sites throughout the state document their cultures and some of the important events that took place there. The Alabama Native American Trail takes travelers to a number of the most important ones.

Near the town of Jackson's Cap, Horseshoe Bend National Military Park commemorates the site of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, an 1814 battle between U.S. military forces and the Creek Indians.

"To me, this is one of the most his-