



LIFE ALONG THE WITHLACOOCHEE

ADAPTING TO LIFE IN THE COVE

Necessities of Life

Before the Seminole were forced to move to the Cove, they were farmers and ranchers who lived in sturdy log homes and based their wealth on large herds of cattle and extensive crops. Unlike the upland forests, open prairies and farmland they left behind, they had to start life over in the untamed swamps, wetlands and longleaf pine forests of the Cove.



© Guy Labree

The Best Way to Travel

In a land covered with lakes, rivers and swamplands, the best way to travel was by boat. Dugout canoes were fashioned from large, carefully selected cypress trees. After a tree was felled, it was hollowed out and shaped using fire and an axe or adze. The Seminole are still highly skilled in the art of making and using dugout canoes. A well-made canoe can last for years and become a prized family possession.



© Guy Labree



© Guy Labree

Living Off the Land

Once settled here in the Cove, the Seminole lived in log cabins and thatched huts called "chickees." They survived on wild game, fish and native fruits and vegetables as they cleared land for crops and cattle. They made wise use of all parts of animals they hunted, using leather for clothing, bone for tools and feathers for ornamentation. In time of war, or when their crops failed because of drought or freezing temperatures, the Seminole relied heavily on wild, native plants for food. Many of these plants still grow here today!



Saw Palmetto
Serenoa repens

Creamy white blossoms form in late spring and are followed by green fruit. When they turn purple-black they are ripe enough to eat.



Prickly Pear Cactus
Cylindropuntia spp.

Late summer blossoms last for several weeks, but each flower only lasts for a day. Flowers, yellow or orange to red are followed by one to three inch berries that can be eaten after the spines are removed.



Muscadine Grape
Vitis rotundifolia

Tiny clusters of white flowers form in summer and are followed by berries, which range from bronze to dark purple to black when ripe.

Blacks Among the Seminole

Hundreds of African Americans lived among the Seminole. Some had escaped from white masters or were born into the tribe, while others were purchased by the Seminole. They worked as farmers, interpreters, hunters and warriors, and some became prominent leaders. Over the years they developed a culture that was a blend of African, Seminole and American customs.

A RICH CULTURE AND DIVERSE SOCIETY

A Nation of Tradition and Ceremony

The Seminole Nation was made up of various tribes with a common cultural background who lived throughout Florida. Children were born into their mother's clan and husbands traditionally lived in their wife's clan village. Daily life varied from village to village, but common spiritual ceremonies brought tribesmen and their families together each year. In late summer, the Seminole gathered for the Green Corn Ceremony, which is still practiced today. This was a time of gratitude for abundance, purification rites and the peaceful settling of tribal disputes.



© Guy Labree

Image Courtesy of the Florida Museum of Natural History

During the four-day Green Corn Ceremony, the Seminole people engage in stomp dancing, traditional storytelling and lively stickball games.

Feeling the Pressure

Although the Seminole and their white neighbors maintained a fragile peace for more than ten years, the call for Indian removal never died out. In 1830, at the urging of President Andrew Jackson, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, which called for Indians in the southeastern United States to be removed to land in what is now Oklahoma. The Seminole and their black allies were faced with a choice: move to a hostile new land or fight for their homes. Many chose to stay and fight.



© Guy Labree