

THE ANCESTRAL TRAILS

The ancestors of the Seminole people first stepped onto the peninsula of Florida over 12,000 years ago, arriving in the north on foot, and in the south by sea. As they navigated the land, they created an expanding series of trails that became a network for travel and trade. With the shifting nature of the wetlands and the swift growing plant life, the trails required regular use to maintain, and would change over time as needed. Many travelers got around on foot, but in the wetlands canoes allowed for faster and easier transportation. Settlements in the interior were built to accommodate this travel, built on raised earthworks that provided places for docking canoes as well as a foundation for the community's homes.

The trails proved invaluable when the colonizers from Europe arrived. The Spanish forces did not know how to maneuver in the wetlands, and were not able to venture into the Florida interior without heavy losses due to disease and the hazardous environment. This history repeated during the Seminole War, as American forces were confounded and regularly ambushed and outflanked by Seminole movements using the wetlands trails. Following the war, the Seminole remaining in Florida used the trails to carefully avoid American settlers and continue to move freely throughout the region.

For countless generations the trails were a part of Indigenous life in Florida, and they would remain so until the mid-20th century. However, as American settlement continued to spread throughout Florida, the trails became increasingly cut off. Roads, canals, and the draining of the Everglades slowly ate away at the trail network. The Seminole people adapted with the changing times as they always have, but the ancestral trails will always remain a part of the tribe's Florida legacy.



TO LEARN MORE

Visit the Tribal Historic Preservation Office website at stofthpo.com to learn more about the history of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

For more information on the Ancestral Trails and their importance, check out the THPO page at <https://stofthpo.com/the-big-cypress-historic-trail>

