

Remembering Four Mile Point

The earliest natives followed an abundance of deer to Four Mile Point, once an ancient hunting ground
Remembering Four Mile PointThe Earliest Natives Followed an Abundance of Deer to this Ancient Hunting Ground

By Dave Terry

Today, Sandestin, Mack Bayou and 14 acres of Creek Nation land comprise Four-Mile Point. This little piece of land once was home to a truly remarkable culture and has had a long and adventurous history.

Florida's human history began 12,000 years ago when people first started to inhabit a vast landscape that was very different from what Florida is today. Because the sea level was much lower then, Florida was twice the size it is now. Paleoindian cultures developed and cultivated agriculture, traded with other societies throughout the Southeast and grew into what we now call "tribes";

Spanish exploration began in the early 1500s, bringing Juan Ponce de León to St. Augustine and Hernando de Soto to Tallahassee. The late 1500s attracted the French and English. Between the two periods of Spanish occupation, Florida briefly was ruled by Great Britain.

Between 1400 and 1900 A.D., the Northwest Florida peninsula was host to the Creek Indian tribes who paddled canoes up and down the waterways between the Gulf of Mexico and what is now Georgia. Four Mile Point was a ceremonial center and hunting area, as revealed by the shell middens. These middens, or dumps, were the areas where tribes stayed while hunting deer and other wild game. The Indians knew they could contain animals on the peninsula and considered the area sacred.

"We herded cattle and deer, and even today, the Creek Nation owns 14 acres of land at Mack Bayou," said Ann Tucker, chairwoman of the Muskogee Nation of Florida (a descendant of the historic Creek Nation, which comprised the first Indians in the area). Around 500 years ago, the Creeks occupied nearly all of what is the southeastern United States.

Legend has it that the first natives who met explorers at Four Mile Point thought their horses were deer. The Creek Nation considered deer their most important animal. The fishing was fantastic at Four Mile Point, but the mosquitoes were horrendous. When Spaniard Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca arrived in the 16th century, he discovered what he thought was a tribe of lepers until he realized that the welts and inflamed areas on their skin were the result of mosquitoes and what we now call dog flies or horse flies.

Life was wild by the late 1700s, when the infamous pirate Billy Bowlegs lost his ship near Four Mile Point in Choctawhatchee Bay. Legend has it that Bowlegs' ship was fired at by a federal cutter and consequently lost its mast. The ship went down just off Four Mile Point while purportedly carrying a load of pirate gold and treasure that never has been recovered. The possibility of finding this treasure may have lured the first settlers to the area.

In 1971, an Atlanta developer purchased a large part of Four Mile Point, tamed its wildness and sold it to 13 original purchasers who were excited to use the new 18-hole golf course, 10 tennis courts and the Bayou Village. They surely never could have imagined the changes that were to take place.

"Four Mile Point has changed drastically since the days of my forefathers," said Dan Penton, the present-day traditional chief of the Muskogee Nation of Florida. "With what we know about the ancient deer population in this area, Four Mile Point would have been ideal for (deer) entrapment. But we never took more than we needed."