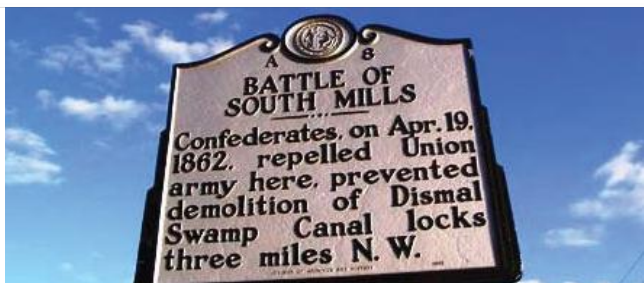


What's in a name? Legend has it, Col. William Byrd, commissioned to survey the state line through the swamp in 1728, is credited in giving the title after experiencing dreadful conditions during their arduous trek through the swamp. Europeans referred to places that water stood as "dismals".



Why is the water so dark? Juniper water or amber colored water is dark and reflective. It is considered very pure, preserved by tannic acids created from the decay of juniper, gum and cypress trees. Think of a tea bag! It is one of the few places in North America still creating peat. Home to assorted insects, reptiles, mammals and plants, it originally encompassed over one million acres. Thousands of acres have been cleared, drained, ditched and cultivated.



Civil War History The Battle of South Mills took place in 1862, with Union troops attempting to destroy the South Mills Lock on the Dismal Swamp Canal, a major route for supplies to Norfolk, VA. Casualties were heavy on both sides, but the Union army retreated and Confederates prevented destruction of the waterway. The Camden County Heritage Museum sheds more light on this story, as well as many other aspects of our history.



Dismal Swamp Canal Col. Byrd may also be the first to propose an inland waterway, connecting the Albemarle Sound to the Chesapeake Bay. An inland route would aid in commerce. It is the oldest operating artificial waterway in the United States, extending 22 miles with a lock on each end. Today it allows recreational vessels a step back in time as an alternate route on the ICW.



African American History Many enslaved people sought refuge in the vastness of the Swamp, seeking higher elevations or islands as a place to hide. Maroon colonies were formed as a society to survive the harsh elements. The National Park Service designated the area as a Network to Freedom Underground Railroad site in 2003.



George Washington would probably be amazed at the progress made since his first venture in taming the swamp. Today, the paths made by loggers and developers are being used to provide a glimpse of the Dismal's valuable secrets. Old logging trails in the Dismal Swamp State Park today offer a variety of options for outdoor fun and education.



The Great Dismal Swamp History

This magnificent area is truly a natural phenomenon. The first recorded encounter with this swamp occurred in 1728 by *Colonel William Byrd II*. *George Washington* himself heard of this area and visited in 1763; having high hopes to ditch, drain, timber and transform the region into fertile farmland. Unfortunately, this task was near impossible, so shares of his property were subsequently passed on to his heirs upon his death. The Great Dismal Swamp played several roles throughout history, providing an impenetrable hiding place for enslaved people and inspiring literary giant's creative works. After years of logging, this expansive area became protected in the 1970's and is considered one of the best outdoor laboratories in the world.

The Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center is a NC DOT Visitor Center managed by Camden County. Staff shares history of the area, hosts recreational boats on the ICW at their 150' dock, and would love to assist in making your visit to North Carolina a treasured memory.



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