

Suwannee River

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Suwannee River	
<i>Ol' Folks At Home</i>	
	
Origin	Fargo, Georgia
Mouth	Suwannee, Florida
Basin countries	United States
Length	266 Miles (426 Kilometers)

The **Suwannee River** (also spelled **Suwanee River**) is a major [river](#) of southern [Georgia](#) and northern [Florida](#) in the [United States](#). It is a wild [blackwater river](#), about 266 miles long.

Geography

The river rises in the [Okefenokee Swamp](#), emerging at [Fargo, Georgia](#). The river then runs southwest into Florida, dropping in elevation through [limestone](#) layers resulting in Florida's only [whitewater](#) rapids. It then turns west near [White Springs, Florida](#), receiving the waters of the [Alapaha](#) and [Withlacoochee Rivers](#), which together drain much of south-central Georgia. It then bends south near [Ellaville](#), then southeast near [Luraville](#), receives the [Santa Fe River](#) from the east just below [Branford](#), then south again to the [Gulf of Mexico](#) near the town of [Suwannee](#).

Suwannee Valley

As the river turns north-northwest near [White Springs, Florida](#), it begins to border the [Suwannee Valley](#) and [Suwannee County](#). This continues to form a "C"-shaped curve as it drops southeast, and south again.

History

At the time of the [Spanish](#) exploration of the area in the [1530s](#), the river banks were inhabited by the [Timucuan](#) people, who named it **Suwani**, meaning "Echo River". In the [18th century](#), [Seminoles](#) lived by the river. The [steamboat Madison](#) operated on the river before the [Civil War](#), and the [sulphur](#) springs at White Springs became popular as a health resort, with 14 hotels in operation in the late [1800s](#).

The Suwannee is not to be confused with the mountaintop town of [Sewanee, Tennessee](#), home of the [University of the South](#). A popular bumper sticker there reads "Sewanee is not a river".

Music

Suwannee River, Florida

This river is the subject of the [Stephen Foster](#) song "[Old Folks at Home](#)", in which he calls it the **Swanee River**. Foster had named the [Pedee River](#) of [South Carolina](#) in his first lyrics, then his brother told him to change it to Swanee because he thought it sounded better.^[*citation needed*] Foster never saw the river he made world famous. [George Gershwin](#)'s song, made popular by [Al Jolson](#), is also spelled "Swanee", and boasts that "the folks up North will see me no more when I get to that Swanee shore".

Both these songs feature strumming [banjos](#) and reminscences of a plantation life more typical of 19th century South Carolina along the Peedee than among the swamps and small farms of the coastal plain of Georgia and Florida.

[Don Ameche](#) stars as Foster in the 1939 fictional [biopic](#) *Swanee River*.

When crossing the river by car today, the sign greeting visitors announces that they are crossing the **Historic Suwannee River**, complete with the first line of [sheet music](#) from the song. "Old Folks at Home" is the [state song](#) of Florida. There is a Foster Museum and Carillon Tower at [Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park](#) at White Springs. The spring itself is called White Sulphur Springs because of its high [sulphur](#) content. Because of a belief in the healing qualities of its waters, the Springs were long popular as a health resort.