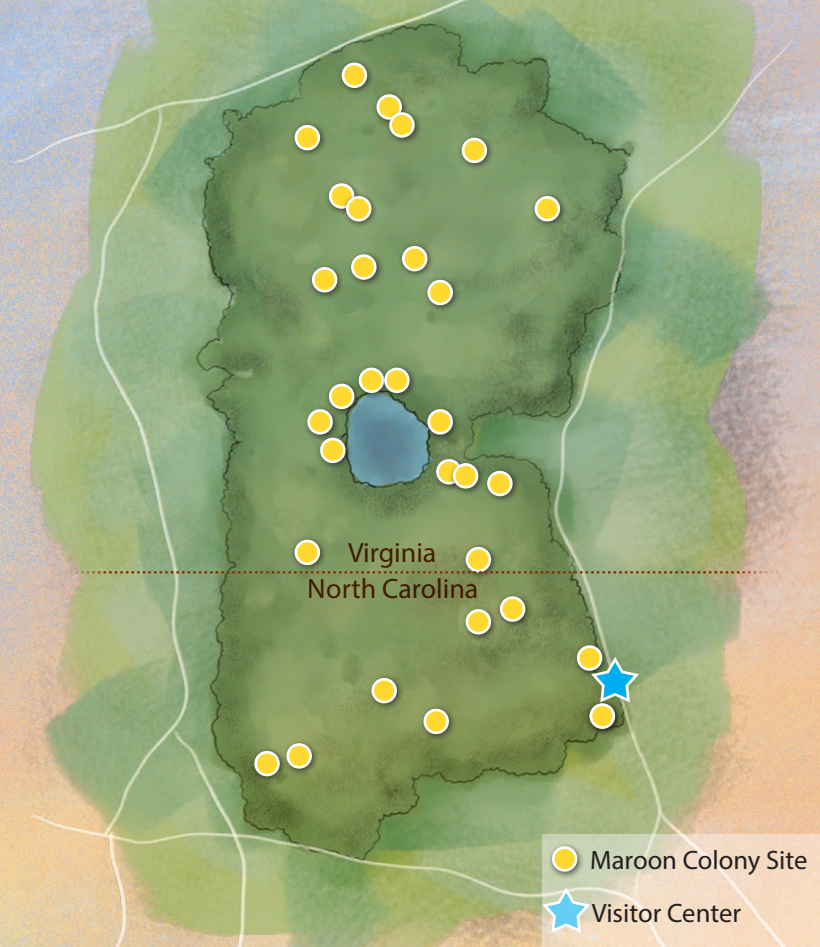


# Where Were the Maroons?

The maroons established colonies throughout the Great Dismal Swamp. Together, they created a network of trade and cooperation that helped the colonies survive. Though only one maroon colony site has been found so far, researchers have identified many other potential sites.



One important factor for picking a site to settle a colony is elevation. It is essential to find land raised above the waters of the swamp. These raised areas are called **mesic islands**.

Can you find a mesic island? Why would this be a better place to live than other parts of the swamp?

**TRACK** your hike at  
[kidsinparks.com](http://kidsinparks.com)  
and get **FREE** prizes!

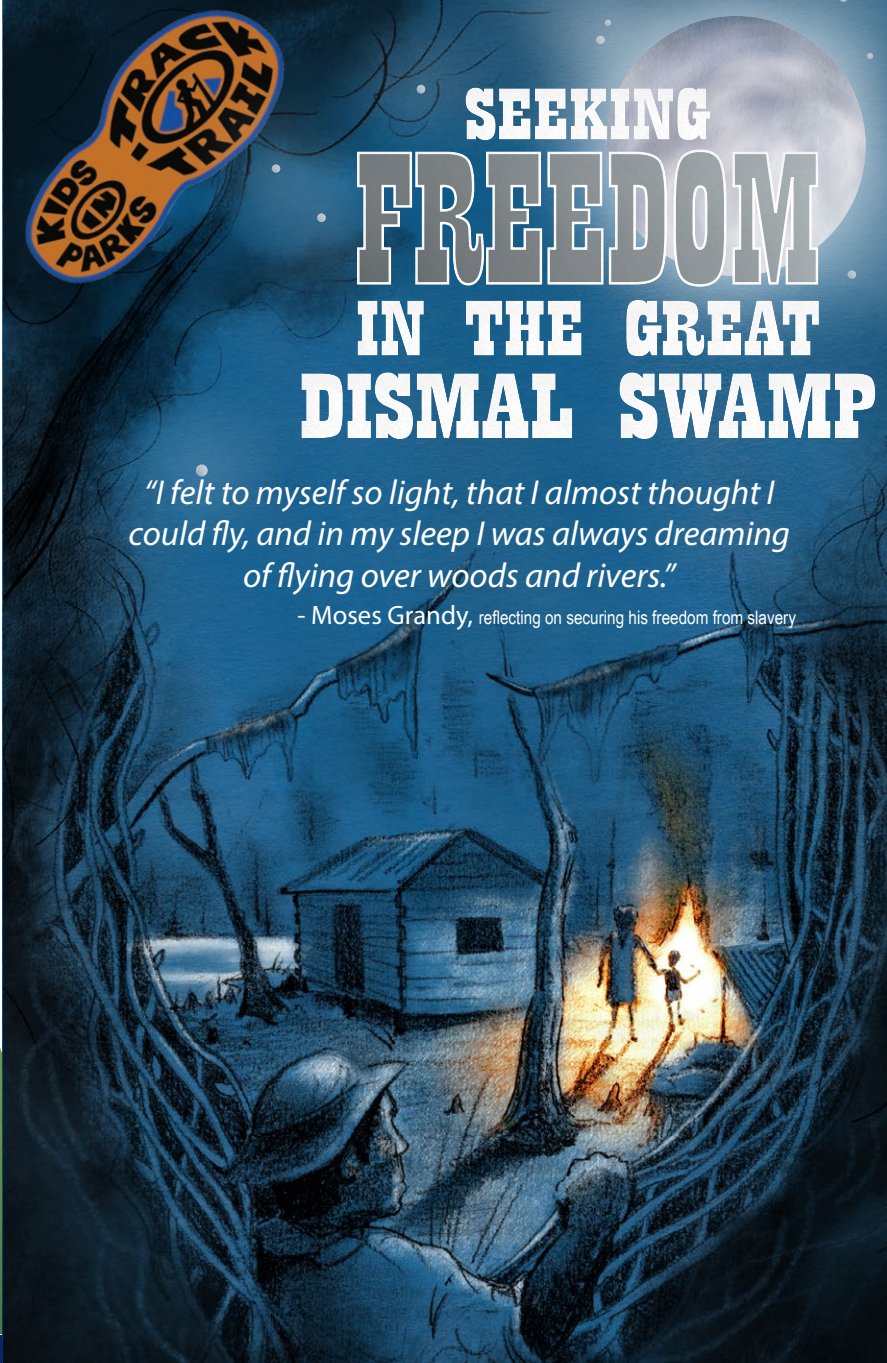




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By the mid-1800s, four million people in the United States were living in enslavement. The Dismal Swamp was a safe haven for many people who were escaping slavery in the South. Discover how freedom seekers were able to make a life in the Swamp.



# FINDING FREEDOM IN THE SWAMP

Many of the enslaved people that built the Dismal Swamp Canal became familiar with the Swamp. Some of them escaped into the wilderness. They formed communities called “maroon colonies”. The maroons built shelters on areas of higher ground in the swamp. Dismal Swamp was probably home to the largest maroon colony in the United States. Life was difficult in the swamp, but it was a place that freedom seekers could live free with their family.

## DANGEROUS ROAD TO FREEDOM

The journey to freedom was filled with uncertainty. Even after escaping to the swamp, safety was never guaranteed. Not only did they have to brave the dangers of the wilderness, but freedom seekers were always in fear of being found. Bounty hunters rode horses and used dogs to track them. Avoiding detection in the swamp was critical for the maroons to preserve their freedom.



### How would you move undetected through the wilderness?

1. Be quiet by not talking.
2. Walk carefully to avoid snapping twigs or crunching leaves.
3. Stop every few steps and listen for others.
4. If you see or hear a person or animal, slowly crouch down.  
(Because walking on the soil can be dangerous, please stay on the boardwalk.)

## WHY LIVE IN THE SWAMP?

The Swamp is a tough place for humans to live. It is nearly impossible to travel in some areas because the peat soil can be up to 15 feet deep. This kept most people out. Even “slave catchers” avoided the swamp because of its many myths. Legends of poisonous vapors, ghosts, balls of snakes, swamp creatures, and even an evil spirit called the Swamp Witch kept people from searching here.



This made it a perfect place to avoid detection and live in freedom. A hard life and lack of comfort was a price the maroon colonists were willing to pay for freedom. In the swamp they were able to raise families, farm, and make their own choices.

## SURVIVING IN THE SWAMP

### Shelter

Bald cypress and Atlantic white cedar trees were used to build shelters in the swamp since they have wood that does not rot easily. **Can you find these tree species?**

☐ **Bald Cypress** (*Taxodium distichum*)

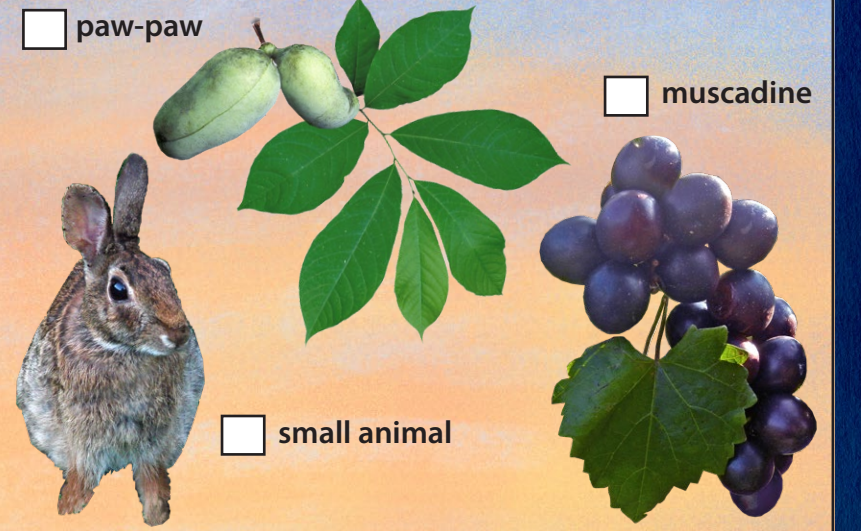


☐ **Atlantic White Cedar** (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*)



### Food & Water

The maroon colonists ate small game and native fruits, such as paw-paws and grapes. Can you find some of the foods that they depended on for survival? (*Many plants have poisonous look-alikes. Please do not collect or eat any of the plants along the trail.*)



### Communication Between Colonies

The maroons also likely farmed crops like rice and grain using tools left behind by Native Americans. They also traded with neighboring maroon islands in the swamp.