



WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER, GEORGIA AND FLORIDA

Most of the agatized corals available on the market today are from the Withlacoochee River near the Georgia-Florida state line in Lowndes County, Georgia, and Madison and Hamilton counties, Florida. These corals are often mislabeled as coming from the Tampa area, but their appearance is quite different. Note the partial silicification of corallites. These were once solid coral heads, of which only the outer portions were silicified with detailed replacements of individual corallites. The interiors of the geodes were dissolved away before or during silicification. Solid, silicified corals are also common in the area but they are seldom collected or displayed. Withlacoochee River corals crop out from the Miocene, lower Hawthorn Group in Georgia. Most of the corals available today came from the outcrop area. In the past, these corals were common in gravel bars in the river in Florida.

BALLAST POINT AREA OF TAMPA, HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, FLORIDA

The most famous agatized corals from Florida came from a community known as Ballast Point in Tampa. The corals were discovered in the 1840s, and numerous explorers and scientists published descriptions of the many beautiful fossils from limestone and ancient soils exposed on the shores of Hillsborough Bay, the northeastern arm of Tampa Bay. Today, localities to collect these corals are limited. The land areas, where the brightly colored geodes were found, are fully developed, so the only opportunities to collect are normally construction areas. Examples, usually with black to honey brown, can occasionally be found offshore in the bay. The best fossils from Ballast Point are true geodes. They are casts of corals and other fossils that formed in molds where the calcite or aragonite fossil hard parts had once existed in limestone. The calcite or aragonite was dissolved away after the limestone became lithified. Silica rich ground water entered the fossil shaped voids and layers of common opal, chalcedony, and quartz were deposited.

NUTALL RISE AREA, AUCILLA RIVER, JEFFERSON COUNTY, FLORIDA

The Nutall Rise area, along the Aucilla River in southern Jefferson County, Florida, is known for its fossil casts that are fortification agates. Fortification agates contain distinctive banding that resembles the walls of a fort. Silicified fossils from the area include agatized coral and silicified echinoids, gastropods, and other fossils. Many of the agatized corals show indistinct evidence of the original coral and some may be in-filled voids related to karst dissolution of limestone.

ECONFINA RIVER AREA, TAYLOR COUNTY, FLORIDA

Agatized coral finds were made in the early 1970s from near-surface outcrops of Suwannee Limestone near the mouth of the Econfina River. Specimens from this area are generally found as tubular-shaped geodes; however, exterior coralloid structures are not well-preserved. Many of these agatized corals retain a central channel running the length of the fossil which has been subsequently replaced by chalcedony, exposing a long central "finger" when these specimens are sliced lengthwise. Smaller, better-preserved marine fossils are also found in this deposit, including agatized gastropods, bivalves, echinoids, and even a silicified crab claw.

