

SOUTHEASTERN LIMIT OF FAGUS GRANDIFOLIA

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The American beech, *Fagus grandifolia* Ehrh., occurs throughout eastern North America from eastern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan to Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, south to eastern Texas and western Florida (Little, 1953; Fowells, 1965). It reaches its southeastern limit in a series of isolated populations in Columbia County and northern Alachua County, Florida, as noted by Kurz & Godfrey (1962). These isolated stands have now been found to be somewhat more extensive than previously believed, and without exception to be in a state of rapid decline. The source of a recent erroneous extension of range into central peninsular Florida has been traced.

American beech apparently is entirely absent from the lower Coastal Plain of southeastern Georgia (Duncan, 1950). It is common in southwestern Georgia and in the panhandle of Florida west of Leon County, but is again lacking in the low, pine flatwoods fringing the Florida Gulf Coast. East of Leon County beech seemingly does not occur for approximately 70 miles, to within a short distance of Lake City, Columbia County.

The absence of an otherwise widespread species in the area between Leon and Columbia counties is a frequent feature of plant and animal distribution in Florida. This area, bordered to the east by the Suwannee River and containing toward the west the much smaller Aucilla River, was occupied during Pleistocene interglacials by an embayment of the Gulf of Mexico (MacNeil, 1950). At times of maximum inundation this embayment extended across southeastern Georgia, isolating peninsular Florida from the mainland by the "Suwannee Strait."

The disjunct populations of American beech in Columbia and Alachua counties are all south and east of this long-

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