

# Juliette Jitterbug

June 24

**Distance:** 14 miles

**Starting Elevation/Coordinates:** 352 feet/N33 09.568 W83 49.398

**Ending Elevation/Coordinates:** 320 feet/N32 59.625 W83 43.505

**Obstacles/Rapids:** Numerous shoals, but with one exception (Dames Ferry Rapid), they are small and easily navigated.

- Mile 4.5** **Juliette Dam**—A lowhead dam that plunges about 30 feet to the river bed below the dam, this obstacle can be very dangerous in high water when the river flows over the crest of the structure. We will take out well upstream of the dam and portage our boats via boat trailer to the base of the dam.
- Mile 7.5** **Fish Camp Rapid**—A small shoal and ledge, you'll notice a grassy field and fish camp on river right that overlooks this picturesque spot. An island splits the river here. The best route is to the left of the island through the center channel. A wide sandbar below the ledge makes for a nice spot to rest.
- Mile 12.5** **Dames Ferry Rapid Class I Option**—Just below the Ga. 18 bridge, the river widens into a matrix of islands with many possible routes. The Class I option is to stay left of the island closest to river left. Here the river descends over a very shallow series of shoals. The availability of deep channel routes will determine the best path through this rapid. Expect to get out of your boat and drag it in some places.
- Dames Ferry Rapid Class II Option**—Those running this rapid must wear protective head gear. The Class II option involves a 4-5-foot drop over a pair of ledges located to the right of the second island from river left. The drop is significant but straight with no turns necessary and empties into a calm pool. Look for safety boaters to show you the best route. The most difficult part of the rapid may be working through the shallow shoals above the drop and getting your boat lined up properly for the descent. **Warning:** Avoid the route between the first and second islands from river left, as well as the route on far river right.

**Restroom Facilities:**

- Mile 0** Ga. Hwy. 83
- Mile 4** Juliette Boat Ramp
- Mile 11** Falling Creek Trailhead (0.25 mile from river)
- Mile 14** Popes Ferry

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 1—River Otters**—While on a scouting trip, we spotted a river otter here at Tyler Island. Keep your eyes peeled. That's not to say you won't find these critters elsewhere. A typical otter will range over 50 miles of its home river during the year. They are most active from late evening through early morning. Otters eat mostly fish, but also dine on crayfish, mussels and amphibians, growing to a weight of up to 25 pounds. Of course, they are known for their playfulness. If you could swim 7 miles an hour and run up to 18 mph, you'd be playful too.

**Mile 2.5—Towaliga River**—Pronounced "Tow-aleega" or "Tye-lye'gee." This river begins in Henry County and flows through Spalding, Butts and Monroe counties. Historians disagree on the meaning of the Native American name. Some say it means "sumac place," but others suggest the name comes from the Muskogean word Towelaggie which means "roasted scalps" or "scalp place," the river being a spot where Native Americans war parties paused to dry scalps...and a word on scalping: While scalping originated with Native American tribes, the practice of taking the scalp as proof of an enemy's demise was quickly adopted by American colonists. In fact, colonial governments soon began offering bounties for Native American scalps. The largest known Native American villages in Butts County were located at the confluence of the Towaliga and Ocmulgee.

**Mile 4.5—Juliette**—Juliette is best known as the set for the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes* starring Kathy Bates and Jessica Tandy, and indeed, the movie is largely responsible for the revival of the small town. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, water from the Ocmulgee captured by the dam powered a grist mill (in Juliette) and cotton mill (across the river in East Juliette) but today, the economy of Juliette relies primarily on tourism. Despite the trappings of tourism, McCracken Street and the buildings surrounding it will make you feel like you've stepped into the early 1900s, and yes, you can get fried green tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café. The large four-story concrete structure that looms over the river and the dam is the former Juliette Milling Company grist mill. The building was constructed in 1927, and at that time it was the world's largest water-powered grist mill. The original grist mill and dam dates to the late 1800s. The mill operated under the Martha White name until 1957. The bridge that will carry us across the river here was completed in 1971, replacing the original bridge which was built by the milling company in 1907. Had we been here at that time, we would have paid a five cent fee for walking the bridge and a 10 cent fee for taking a car or wagon across.

**Mile 10—Georgia Power Plant Scherer Intake**—Here Georgia Power withdraws water from the Ocmulgee River and pumps it to Lake Juliette, a reservoir formed by a dam on Rum Creek built to serve Plant Scherer. One of the largest coal-fired power plants in the country, Plant Scherer burns about 11 million tons of coal each year, turning water into steam to turn electric turbines. Of course, water from the Ocmulgee is essential in this effort, turning the steam back to water to repeat the electric generating process. Each of the plant's 540-foot-tall cooling towers can circulate 268,000 gallons of water a minute, losing about 8,000 gallons through evaporation. The plumes of white clouds you see emanating from these towers are actually steam that once ran as water in the Ocmulgee River and Rum Creek. The importance of water to our state's supply of electricity cannot be understated. It is why Georgia Power is the biggest user of water in the state.

**Mile 11—Falling Creek/Jarrell Plantation/Hitchiti Research Forest**—This picturesque creek drains much of the Oconee National Forest to the northeast of the Ocmulgee. A trail runs upstream along it to a porta-toilet and a shuttle to the Hitchiti Research Forest and Jarrell Plantation shuttle tour (pre-registered participants only!). The Hitchiti Research Forest is a portion of the Oconee National Forest that is managed to improve habitat for the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker—so named because of the red-spot that crowns its black head. Like most of us, the red-cockaded is particular about where it raises its young, preferring to build its nesting cavities in aging pines infected with a wood-decaying fungus. Few southern pines get this fungus before they reach 80 to 90 years old. You'll find some of the red-cockaded's former habitat at the Jarrell Plantation State Historic Site where many of the original buildings were built from pine cut from the land surrounding the plantation home. At the outbreak of the Civil War, John Jarrell used 39 slaves to farm the 600-acre plantation. A visit to the site is a window into 19<sup>th</sup> century living in Middle Georgia.

**Mile 12.5—Dame's Ferry & Rapid**—This is the site of one of the earliest river ferries in Middle Georgia. In 1810, George and John Dame built the first ferry here, connecting Creek Indian lands west of the Ocmulgee to the Georgia coast. A ferry operated on this site until 1962 when the current bridge made it obsolete. In 1964, the ferry was moved to the Flint River in Macon County and there, it became famous as the last operating ferry in Georgia. The rebar you see extending from the river bottom above the rapid is likely remnants of this operation.

**Mile 14—Pope's Ferry**—In 1819, the Dames got some competition when Cullen Pope began operating a ferry at today's take out site. These pioneers hastened the arrival of European settlers on the frontier, leading to the State of Georgia acquiring all Creek lands in Georgia at the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825.