

# Sprewell Bluff Slide

June 22

**Distance:** 11 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 560 feet

**Ending Elevation:** 420 feet

## Obstacles/Rapids:

- Mile 2** **Rebel Chute**—At the end of Owens Island. A river-wide shelf blocks the river here with the best opening at river left directly after you pass the end of the island. Look for the downstream V to the right of the large rock extending from the left bank of the river. It's a straight shot though this drop with a big eddy to the left at the end of the waves.
- Mile 3** **Rocky Shoals**—This shoal marks the beginning of the Seven Island complex. The shoal is best approached by keeping to far river right. The current curves into the right bank and then shoots toward the center of the river where there are two or three potential routes across a short shelf.
- Mile 3.5** **Seven Island**—After passing to the right of the first of the Seven Islands below Rocky Shoals cross to river left through shallow but calm shoals above the head of the second major island. A large rock shelf at the top of this second island extends out into the river forcing the water to the far left. The safest route is far river left, but the more fun route is through the large waves at the end of the rock shelf. Look out for partially submerged rocks near the end of the waves. This is a great place to stop and enjoy the water.
- Mile 5** **Surprise Rapid**—A long pool of slack water precedes this fun rapid. The safest route (given enough water) is far river left around the large rock. This route provides a more gradual fall to the pool below. A more interesting route is through a fast-moving channel formed by the two rocks in the middle of the river, and a yet even more interesting route is going from river right to river left over a higher ledge (shallow draft boats only—long canoes are likely to get their tip caught on the ledge and flip once the bow hits the current in the pool below). Don't go far right here; there's not enough water!
- Mile 6** **Ivy Island Rapid**—Just below Ga. 36 and to the left of Ivy Island. Pick your route carefully for a rock-free path!
- Mile 7** **Yellow Jacket Shoals**—When you see a green cabin on river right, you'll have reached the top end of Yellow Jacket Shoals. Downstream you'll see a maze of rock gardens and islands. If water levels are below 7 feet at the Ga. 36 bridge, picking your way through this maze will be tricky. From the green cabin, work your way to the middle of the river through the rock garden. A nice chute runs from river right to river left almost at the center of the river here. Once through this chute, begin working your way downstream and to river left. Your destination is the head of Shelly Island to begin the "sneak" around the backside of the island to avoid Yellow Jacket Shoals, a Class III boat eater. Look for safety paddlers directing you around the island. Once you pass the head of the island, there are several small chutes to run through before reaching our portage spot. Safety boaters will direct you to the take out. At the take out, you'll need to carry your boat about 100 yards downstream around a small but rather technical rapid and then proceed down river. Below Shelly Island the Flint continues its rather precipitous drop to the left of Gibson Island so be prepared for more whitewater. Take your time and enjoy this beautiful section of river.
- Mile 7.5** **Hightower Shoals**—Beyond Yellow Jacket Shoals and Gibson Island is Hightower Shoals. Pick your route carefully. The biggest obstacle here may be shallow water and shoals.

## Restroom Facilities:

**Mile 0** Sprewell Bluff State Park

**Mile 6** Flint River Outdoor Center

**Mile 11** Po Bidy Road

## Points of Interest:

**Mile 0—Sprewell Bluff (Part II)**—It has been some 34 years ago since conservationists and then-Gov. Jimmy Carter put an end to plans to build a dam here, but just like bad movies, dam proposals get remade. Currently, a movement is afoot to revive those dam proposals. U.S. Rep. Nathan Deal (R-Gainesville) drafted legislation this spring that would dam the Flint. This time the perceived need is water supply—not power generation. Deal and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contend that dams on the Flint would relieve pressure on Lake Lanier, Metro Atlanta's main water source on the Chattahoochee. Florida relies heavily upon releases from Lanier to maintain flows in the Apalachicola River and into Apalachicola Bay. The Flint joins the Chattahoochee in far southwest Georgia to form the Apalachicola. In 1971, the Corps estimated the cost of the Sprewell Bluff Dam at \$110 million. Today, the same dam would cost \$563 million, making an old bad idea and even worse new bad idea. If the Sprewell Bluff Dam and others are built on the Flint, the entire 11-mile stretch of beauty you will enjoy on this day will be under acres of water.

**Mile 1.5--Owens Island**—The Old Alabama Stagecoach Road, a well-traveled stagecoach and wagon-freight line between Augusta and Columbus crossed the Flint River here during the 1800s. Two bridges, one on either side of the island, spanned the river, giving rise to the name Double Bridges. A brief Civil War cavalry skirmish took place here on April 17, 1865. The Union's infamous (in the South) Wilson's Raiders, heading through Georgia on a path of destruction after Sherman's March to the Sea, met up with about 50 Confederate cavalrymen there to defend the bridges. The rebels fired a few scattered shots before fleeing. The Raiders rode on to Thomaston where they destroyed three textile factories and a train filled with Confederate stores...all this eight days after Lee's surrender at Appomattox and three days after Lincoln's assassination. Two days after the skirmish at Double Bridges, the Raiders seized another train in Thomaston that had unwittingly arrived from Macon. On that train were newspapers announcing Lee's surrender. Today, on the courthouse square in Thomaston you will find a monument holding a cannon ball that is reportedly the first shot fired at Ft. Sumter at the outbreak of the Civil War.

**Mile 5--Flint River Outdoor Center**—A fixture on the Flint since 1978, FROC is operated by Jim and Margie McDaniel. Along the banks here, you'll find a campground, lodge, convenience store, and canoe outpost. FROC puts thousands of people down the Flint each year. This is also the site of our Pit Stop for the day.

**Mile 7—Shoals Spider Lilies**—Sadly, we are a month too late for the spectacular display of spider lilies from Yellow Jacket Shoals through Hightower Shoals. The shoals spider lily (*Hymenocallis coronaria*) blankets portions of the river here in beautiful mats of showy white blossoms. A state threatened species, the shoals spider lily is found in only 50 locations in Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina...and no where else in the world. Dams on the fall line of other rivers have wiped out these lilies, but here they remain because their habitat remains. Uniquely adapted to this habitat, the lilies' pecan-sized seeds sink, instead of floating, allowing them to sink quickly into a crevices between rocks where they are quite happy to grow and prosper.

**Mile 7—Yellow Jacket Shoals**—The crown jewel of the Flint's whitewater, but we'll be portaging around it. In the two-mile stretch from Ga. 36 to Hightower Shoals, the Flint drops some 70 feet in elevation and more than half of that occurs at Yellow Jacket Shoals. We'll paddle through the upper portion of the shoals and then wind our way around Shelly Island to avoid the biggest drop. A spectacularly beautiful place, it is said to be the only place in Georgia where Spanish moss overlooks a Class III rapid. You can get a view of the rapid at the end of Shelly Island and our portage route.

**Mile 7.5--Big Lazer Creek**—Don't call me "Lazer Creek" This tributary flows through the 5,900-acre Big Lazer Creek Wildlife Management Area and empties into the Flint at Hightower Shoals. Locals call the creek "Liza" or "Lizer" Creek. Maps from the early 1800s show the spelling as Lazer.