

Armuchee Allemande – Paddle Georgia 2009

June 25 – Coosawattee & Oostanaula Rivers

Distance: 17 miles

Starting Elevation: 600

Ending Elevation: 580

Obstacles/Rapids: There are several small shoals in this section, but the winding course is dominated by flatwater.

Restroom Facilities:
Mile 0 Porta Toilet at Ga. 156 Boat Ramp
Mile 6 Porta Toilet at Reeves Station Road. Follow the path up the bank at river left to the road. The toilet will be set along the right of way.
Mile 17 Porta Toilet at Ga. 140

Points of Interest:

Mile 4—Horn Mountain—To the west of the river here sits 1,428-foot Horn Mountain, part of the 24,849-acre Johns Mountain Wildlife Management Area—a portion of the Chattahoochee National Forest in Northwest Georgia. This is the southern end of this long ridge which runs from here north to Tunnel Hill, Georgia. These long, low ridges are typical of Northwest Georgia's Ridge and Valley region. Further downstream, the river will provide views of Turkey Mountain and Johns Mountain.

Mile 5—Georgia Cumberland Academy—Located on the east bank of the river on 510 acres, the Georgia-Cumberland Academy (GCA) is a Seventh-day Adventist Christian school that offers classes to boarding and day students and uses its campus and the Oostanaula River as a learning laboratory. GCA is part of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system which currently has more than 1 million students attending some 6,000 schools in more than 100 countries. Since its founding in 1965, the school has served more than 7,000 students.

Mile 6—Shoal & Island at Reeves Station Road—Just below Reeves Station Road is a small rock island and shoal. The road is also the site of our pit stop for the day on river left. Nearby is the community of Reeves Station. In the 1800s when the railroad was constructed through the area, Osborne Reeves, a local landowner granted the railway a right-of-way through his property on condition that a depot and wood depository be established there and be named "Reeves". Wood filling stations were especially desirable assets at the time as the trains were fueled on wood and that is why this area today is called Reeves Station.

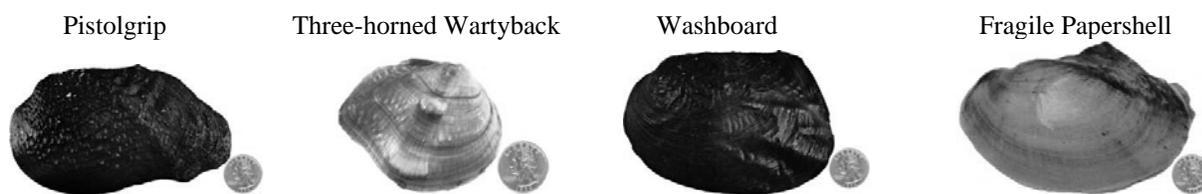
Mile 9—Wing Dam—You'll find these odd rock structures throughout this stretch of river. Usually they jut out from the bank at a nearly 90-degree angle. They date to the 1870s when the Corps of Engineers undertook the mission of improving navigation of the river to Carter's Quarters on the Coosawattee. The dams acted to constrict the flow of the river and create a deeper channel for the passage of steamboats. Nearly 140 years later, they still stand.

Mile 9—Wartyback Mussels and Others—Since joining the Coosawattee below Carters Dam, you've likely encountered some mussels. There are 27 different native species of mussels in the Upper Coosa River Basin, and the Oostanaula and Coosawattee rivers have been designated as critical habitat for nine federally protected mussel species. Mussels are critical to healthy river systems because they clean our water. They sit on the river bottom year round, filtering water through their bodies, sequestering nutrients and pumping out purer water. Prior to their decimation by dams, water pollution and overharvesting, mussels were so abundant on the Oostanaula, locals say that you couldn't set foot in the river without stepping on one. Today, you have to search long and hard to find them.

Their life cycle is nothing short of a miracle. Young mussels actually spend part of their youth attached to the gills of a host fish. Adult mussels use "lures" (fleshy extensions) to attract host fish and release their eggs to the water when the fish come to inspect the lure. The eggs develop into young mussels on the fish and when the time is right, drop off to the river bottom to grow into adult mussels. Thus, if fish populations decline, mussel populations do as well. In some instances, certain mussel species depend upon one specific host fish species.

Since the 1800s, mussels have had tremendous commercial value—not as a food, but as adornments for our clothes and necks. In the early 1800s mussels were hunted and destroyed by the millions as divers searched for illusive freshwater pearls. Later these same mussels were harvested for use in making buttons, but the button industry declined rapidly after 1930 in response to overexploitation and the dwindling supply of marketable shells. Today, mussels are harvested for use in making "cultured pearls." Once harvested, plugs are drilled from these shells, rounded and then inserted into marine pearl oysters which lay on the nacre to produce the shiny pearls. Unfortunately, hand harvesting of native mussels from Georgia rivers is still permitted April 1 to August 31.

A few of the more common mussels you'll find in these waters are:



Photos shown in relation to U.S. 25 cent coin.

Pistolgrip—a fist-sized, heavy-shelled species that fits in your hand not unlike a pistol; the **Washboard**—a large, heavy-shelled, multi-ridged species that can grow to the size of a dinner plate; the **Three-horned Wartyback**—a small, heavy-shelled species with conspicuous lumps on its shell and the **Fragile Papershell**—a yellow colored species with a brittle shell and iridescent inner coating.

Mile 12.5—Island & Bluffs—More of the Oostanaula's unique bluffs. Homes sit atop these overlooking the river.

Mile 13.5—Interrupted Rocksnail—This snail was thought to be extinct—like 36 other snails that once inhabited the Coosa River Basin—but in 1997, one was found by a U.S. Fish & Wildlife biologist in the Oostanaula. Since then, biologists have been engaged in an effort to find and propagate this aquatic snail. In 2004, biologists released more than 3,000 snails in the Coosa River below Jordan Dam in an effort to reestablish a native population. Rocksnails, like mussels, help keep our rivers clean, feeding off algae on rocks. They also become food for a host of other critters such as ducks, fish and turtles.

Mile 15—Georgia Rock Cress—Yet another rare species of the Oostanaula River, Georgia Rock Cress, as the name implies grows on the rocky bluffs overlooking the Oostanaula River like the one on river left. In the early spring (March/April), rock cress' inconspicuous white blooms appear on hillside and rock bluffs. Rock cress is included on Georgia's list of threatened species.

Mile 17—Lake Sturgeon—At the Ga. 140 Boat Ramp, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) personnel will be on hand to show off lake sturgeon. DNR is in the midst of a multi-year re-introduction effort of the lake sturgeon—a species that once inhabited the Coosa Basin, but was lost due to overfishing, dams and poor water quality. Since December 2002, DNR has released more than 85,000 fingerlings into the Coosa system. Studies show that survival rates have been better than expected and that initial growth has been good. Sturgeon of more than 40 inches long weighing 15 pounds have been caught. These long-lived, prehistoric-looking fish are prized for their roe and flesh, but don't run get your rod and reel. The re-introduction program will take years and it will be decades before a large enough population exists to allow harvest.