

Limestone Limbo – Paddle Georgia 2009

June 22 – Coosawattee & Oostanaula Rivers

Distance: 9.5 miles

Starting Elevation: 679

Ending Elevation: 640

Obstacles/Rapids: There is one sizeable, but still Class I, rapid on this section of river and you can see it from the launch site. It sits right below the Old US 411 and Seaboard railroad bridges. You can avoid it all together by carrying your boat along the road beneath the bridges and launch below the rapid. There are also strainers or log jams located at miles 3, 5, 6 and 8; these obstacles are indicated on your map. Depending on water levels, these strainers may or may not be problematic. If you do find yourself caught up in one, don't panic. When making contact with partially submerged trees, lean into, not away from the obstacle. Stabilize your boat and then work your way to an appropriate passage. Give the boat in front of you time to clear before proceeding into the strainer. During some scouting trips, the strainer at Mile 6 was a cross river obstacle that forced us to get out of our boats and pull them over the top of the logs. If this is the case, behave in true Paddle Georgia Navy fashion. If you are able to offer assistance to your fellow paddlers, please do so! A note on the dam: releases from Carters Dam are tempered by the re-regulation reservoir so that dangerous and rapid rises in river levels do not occur in this stretch.

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Corps of Engineers Pit Toilets at Re-regulation Dam
Mile 4 Porta Toilet at Riverview Organic Farm Irrigation Ramp
Mile 9.5 Porta Toilet at Coosawattee Foundation and "The Island"

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Re-regulation Dam and Old Place of the Coosa—Beneath the water and within the soil at the bottom of the re-regulation reservoir are layers and layers of history that tell the story of great civilizations that rose and fell at this unique geographic location where the Blue Ridge and Ridge and Valley collide. Natural historians will tell you that the best place to view wildlife is where two distinct habitats meet. For instance, deer will forage where forest meets field and birds will hunt where water meets land. Human historians tell similar stories at this site. The two distinct land forms in close proximity meant a more diverse "grocery store" for the area's original inhabitants and the rich bottomlands fed by mountain-born soil and sediment delivered by the Coosawattee and Talking Rock Creek provided some of the most productive agricultural land to be found. Thus, civilization thrived here. Archaeological digs conducted at the site prior to the construction of the dam show human occupation from 10,000 BC to the historic Cherokee communities of the 19th century.

These same digs, coupled with other academic research, show that the area around the confluence of Talking Rock and the Coosawattee was the site of the capital of the province of Coosa—a very large and powerful chiefdom visited by multiple Spanish expeditions during the 16th century. Hernando DeSoto spent more than a month here in 1560 and a part of the Tristan de Luna expedition spent about six months here in 1560. The natives they encountered were not, however, ancestors of the Cherokees. Instead, these people had ancestral ties to the Creeks. Ravished by disease brought by the Europeans, the Creek civilization died here and the site was abandoned, only to be claimed by the Cherokee. When the Cherokee settled the area they named it "Coosawattee"—a nod to the earlier occupants of whom they were familiar: Coosawattee means "old place of the Coosa."

Mile 0—Carter's Quarters—When the Cherokee moved out, the Europeans moved in, and like the Cherokees they took advantage of the rich soil at the head of the river valley where the Coosawattee and Talking Rock meet. Among the area's best known inhabitants of the 1800s was Farrish Carter for whom the dam is named. During the 1830s, as the Cherokee were forced from their land, Carter purchased some 15,000 acres in the area. In 1850, he used 403 slaves to work fields of wheat, rye, oats, corn, tobacco, peas, beans, potatoes, rice and cotton. He worked the same fertile land that brought inhabitants to the area 10,000 years earlier and before long, the local expression "thick as Carter's oats" was born. Carter amassed a fortune not only in farming, but also in steamboats, banks, ferries, factories, mills and marble quarries across the Southeast. The richness of the land and the influence of Carter (he was among the wealthiest men in Georgia) no doubt provided the impetus for the Corps of Engineer's efforts to improve navigation of the Oostanaula and Coosawattee rivers from Rome to Carter's Quarters in the 1870s. As hard as it is to believe as you paddle the river now, there was a time when steamboats plied up this river to transport Carters' harvests. Interestingly, when the Carters moved to the area, they took over the home of Judge John Martin, the treasurer of the Cherokee Nation, who fled west with his family in 1836 ahead of the "Trail of Tears." In addition to the dam, Farrish Carter also lends his name to the City of Cartersville in Bartow County.

Mile 1—Limestone Bluffs—Your first encounter with these new rock forms, unseen up river where Blue Ridge geology holds sway. You'll see more and more of these as we move down river to Rome.

Mile 3—Native American Fish Weir—This weir is located near the mouth of Rock Spring Creek and is visible in low water.

Mile 4—Riverview Organic Farm—Riverview Farms is the largest certified organic farm in Georgia with some 200 acres under cultivation along the Coosawattee. The farm is also a poster child for the sustainable agriculture movement. The farm was initially purchased by Carter and Beverly Swancy in 1975. Through the 1980s-90s, the Swanceys realized that they were being forced to choose between two unpleasant options—adopt the consolidated agri-business model which meant growing more food for less money or "selling the farm." That's when their son, Wes, and his wife Charlotte, former chemistry majors, returned to the farm and planted ten acres of organic tomatoes. The experiment was so successful that over time, the Swanceys converted more and more fields to organic production. While average farmers receive just 20 percent of a crop's retail value, the Swanceys sell directly to consumers and restaurants, allowing them to recoup more on their investment in the land. The farm earned its organic certification in 2000 and today they raise a variety of vegetable crops as well as Berkshire pork and grass-fed beef.

Mile 5.5—White Graves Church—This church sited on a high ridge to the south of the river is believed to have gotten its name from a circa-1800 cemetery where "white" settlers were buried. The Cherokee reportedly called it the place of "White Graves"

Mile 6.5—Riverbend Landing—At river left along the waterline here look for a partially (or wholly) submerged log structure. This is the site of a former riverboat landing built by Luke Mitchell in the 1800s. Mitchell was a riverboat captain on the Coosa system and built a home here in the late 1800s. He also built numerous other landings along the Coosawattee. The land beyond the river is also an important archaeological site. An engraved copper plate was found here that represents the announcement of the birth of Christ, but the characters are wearing Aztec clothing. It is believed that the artifact was created in Mexico but wound up in North Georgia via the Tristan de Luna expedition which originated in Mexico in 1560. The plate was likely a cover to a book such as a Bible.

Mile 9.5—"The Island"/Coosawattee Foundation —Our take out site is yet another archaeological site. This one is owned and operated by Calhoun native and archaeologist, Jim Langford. Excavations here show occupation from 800 to 1600 AD, and if you are interested, Jim will be on hand to explain how archaeologists read the dirt and decipher clues about past civilizations. Based on historic research and digs at the site, we know that the village located here was one of the principal villages of the capital Coosa located upstream. Spanish iron has been found at the site, suggesting that the Desoto and de Luna expeditions visited here. The Coosawattee Foundation is a non-profit organization founded by Langford to educate the public about the region's historic resources and preserve the region's significant archaeological and historic sites.