

Reservoir Reel – Paddle Georgia 2010

June 23 –Broad & Savannah Rivers

Distance: 7 miles

Starting Elevation: 340 feet

Ending Elevation: 340 feet

Obstacles:

There are no obstacles...except for getting lost on the lake! From the launch site, bear right and go under the Ga. 79 Bridge. Generally, stay on the south/west side of the lake. The day's take out is not easily visible from the main body of the lake. Once you pass the point of Bobby Brown State Park, stay to the southwest shore so that you don't miss the take out located where Fishing Creek meets the Savannah. Caution: Blindly following the paddler in front of you may get you lost. Consult your map regularly.

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0 Restrooms at Broad River Campground

Mile 3 Restrooms at Bobby Brown State Park Camping Area

Mile 7 Porta Toilet at Hester's Ferry Camground

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Beaver Lodge/Activity—Opposite the launch site on the north bank of the Broad you'll likely see signs of beaver activity, including one lodge (as of most recent scouting). Aside from being dam builders like humans, beavers also have a very strong family structure, mating for life and dwelling in family units of 10 to 12 individuals. Kits stay at home for two years, helping with chores such as dam repair or, in their second year, grooming new kits. By their third year, the young beavers get the boot from mom and dad and go off to form their own family. Beavers are vegetarians feeding on leaves, twigs and bark. If you run across their scat, you'll discover it has the consistency of sawdust. Beavers were almost eliminated from Georgia by the 1930s due to over harvesting for pelts. In the 1940s, Georgia embarked on a re-stocking program that has brought back beaver populations (though not to pre-colonial levels). Today, there is no closed season on beavers in Georgia so they may be trapped and hunted year round.

Mile 2—Bobby Brown State Park—A victim of budget cuts to Georgia's State Parks and Historic sites, Bobby Brown is now operated by staff out of nearby Elijah Clark State Park and the campgrounds are all self-registration. Georgia's Department of Natural Resources had its budget cut by 40 percent in 2009, forcing some state parks to reduce hours and staff. All told, 90 positions were eliminated at state parks and historic sites. Maintenance of the parks also remains an issue. DNR estimates that it needs \$158 million to address capital improvements at parks.

Mile 4—Confluence of the Broad & Savannah and the Historic Town of Petersburg—The spit of land on river left that is the Bobby Brown State Park marks the confluence of the Broad and Savannah rivers. Submerged beneath Clarks Hill Lake are some of the remains of Petersburg, which in the early 1800s, was Georgia's third largest city behind Savannah and Augusta. Petersburg was a tobacco inspection and trading center that was connected to Augusta via "Petersburg Boats"—long narrow pole boats capable of hauling ten tons of goods through the Savannah's shoals. A traveler to the area around 1800 complimented the settlement for its sophistication—despite an abundance of liquor shops and the occasional game of pool: "Petersburg was quite an active, busy, commercial little town. It was situated in the fork of the Savannah and Broad Rivers, and contained some eight or ten stores, with the usual supplement of grog (liquor) shops, and the very unusual supplement of a billiard-table. Notwithstanding these last, the citizens of the place were generally remarkable for their refinement, respectability, intelligence and hospitality. The dwelling houses far outnumbered the stores and shops." One assumes the billiard table was not manufactured in Petersburg and thus was poled up river in one of the Petersburg boats. Petersburg boats remained in operation on the Savannah well after the Civil War, but the town of Petersburg was short-lived. Changing modes of transportation and the lure of land to the west spelled its demise. The town dwindled and by the mid 1800s, the town post office was closed.

Mile 4—Richard Russell Dam—Paddle around the peninsula of Bobby Brown State Park into the mainstem of the Savannah and you can catch a glimpse of Richard Russell Dam, located about four miles up river. The dam is 200 feet high and holds back a 165-foot wall of water. Richard Russell was the last Corps of Engineers dam built in Georgia. Construction began in 1974 and the lake reached full pool in 1984. Hydroelectricity is generated at the dam which also aids in flood control and water supply, according to the Corps. Hartwell Dam is located 30 miles upstream; Clarks Hill Dam is 33 miles downstream.

Mile 4.5—Bluff—Prior to construction of Clarks Hill Dam, this impressive bluff must have looked out over the mighty Savannah and served as a sentinel for the town of Petersburg. Today, it provides spectacular views of the lake from its pinnacle. Be warned, however, the climb to the top is not for the faint of heart. Opposite the bluff is the Corps' Mt. Carmel Park and just down lake on the South Carolina bank is Sumter National Forest.

Mile 5 Clarks Hill Reservoir—With 1200 miles of shoreline and 71,000 acres of water, Clarks Hill is considered the second largest artificial lake east of the Mississippi River (behind Kentucky Lake on the Tennessee River). It was built primarily at the behest of Augustans tired of cleaning up after periodic floods. City leaders lobbied the Corps of Engineers, congressional leaders and ultimately President Roosevelt to secure passage of legislation calling on dam studies for the Savannah. The Augustans, rather than focusing on flood control, wisely sold the dam idea as a "multi-use" project. The Corps broke ground on the project in 1946 and completed the project in 1954 at a cost of \$78 million...\$43 million more than the original projected cost. These cost overruns might have dampened enthusiasm for the Corps' 10 other proposed dams on the Savannah and its tributaries upstream of the Clarks Hill project. Ultimately, only two (Richard Russell & Hartwell) were built on the Savannah. Two dams proposed for the Broad and four dams proposed on the Chattooga were never built. Today, the Chattooga is protected as a National Wild and Scenic River and the Broad and Anthony Shoals remains untouched.

Mile 6 Striped Bass—The story of the striped bass is a lesson in the folly or (depending on your perspective) the ingenuity and adaptability of humankind. Clarks Hill Lake is recognized as a premiere striped bass fishery, but the fishery is artificial, created by an aggressive stocking campaign by state fish hatcheries. Striped bass are anadromous fish that spend their adult lives in saltwater and migrate up Atlantic & Gulf Coast rivers to spawn. Before dams were built on the Savannah, that's exactly what they did, pushing into the farthest reaches of the Savannah system in their reproductive ritual. In fact, in the late 1800s, residents along the Broad River complained of the decline in the fishery as a result of the Augusta Canal Dam built in the 1840s. Today, those populations of landlocked, stocked stripers on the Savannah's lakes do not spawn. Their survival is entirely up to our stocking programs. So, get the picture,... we spend \$78 million to build Clarks Hill Dam and in the process wipe out the stripers. We then spend countless millions more on restocking programs. But wait, there's more! Due to the operation of Richard Russell Dam just upstream, the stocked stripers have difficulty surviving. To correct this conundrum, the Corps of Engineers has embarked on an \$11 million plan that involves injecting oxygen into the lake through several miles of pipes placed along the lake bottom. So goes the saga of the striper—what mother nature once did for free now requires appropriations from Congress. Though I suspect anyone who has had the pleasure of battling a 20-pound striper won't complain too much about the public investment or the ingenious work that the investment supports.

Mile 7 Cows & the Corps Clash—As reported in the *Augusta Chronicle*, in the early days of the reservoir there was conflict between the area's traditional land users and the federal government. On Oct. 7, 1952, O.L. Bumpas, reservoir manager for the Corps of Engineers, angered farmers with a curt letter giving them ten days to remove cattle from government land. The resulting outcry, channeled through local politicians to Congress and the Corps' commanding general, yielded a reversal of the order three days later. In those days, nearly 1,000 farmers lived and farmed in the lake area. Ultimately, Chris-Crafts (boats) replaced cattle.