

# Antebellum Capital Cotillion— Paddle Georgia 2011

June 21 –Oconee River

**Distance:** 8 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 259 feet

**Ending Elevation:** 232 feet

**Launch Site GPS Coordinates:** Lat: 33 7 41.7 Lon: -83 12 13.7874

**Obstacles:** **Mile 3 Buzzard Island Dam**— This dam creates a dangerous rapid at the tail of the island. Do not attempt to run this rapid. A portage route will take you over a spit of land in the middle of the dam to a put in below the dam. Look for safety boaters and follow their instructions.

**Restroom Facilities:** **Mile 0** Sinclair Dam Boat Ramp  
**Mile 3.5** Oconee River Greenway  
**Mile 8** Boat Landing Road

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 0—Sinclair Dam & Oconee River Dams**—Just a mile upstream from our launch site sits Sinclair Dam, the Oconee’s second major dam of the “modern era” (Barnett Shoals was the first). Georgia Power began construction of the dam in 1929, but construction was suspended in 1930 as a result of the Depression's prolonged, negative impact on both electricity consumption and Company earnings. Construction resumed in 1949 and it was completed in 1952. The dam holds back 15,330 acres of water and the hydroplant can generate up to 45,000 kilowatts of electricity. While Sinclair Dam is one of two large dams on the Oconee, the Upper Oconee basin is actually home to more than 5,400 dams, according to a study by the University of Georgia’s River Basin Center. These dams have flooded 520 miles of stream habitat, which equals 8 percent of the total stream length in the Upper Oconee basin. That means that 73 percent of the stream segments in the basin lie downstream of at least one impoundment. The result is the severe fragmentation of stream habitat, alteration of stream flows and sediment deposition and changes to river temperatures that often trigger reproductive cycles in aquatic wildlife. For instance, below Sinclair Dam, studies show that populations of many sucker species, including the rare Robust Redhorse, are greatly impacted by unnatural releases from dams. For this reason, fisheries biologists advocate for dam releases that mimic historic river flows.

**Mile 1 Furman Shoals, Dams & an Epic Journey of the 1800s**—Sinclair Dam was built upon Furman Shoals and as you paddle through Milledgeville you will float over the last of the fall line shoals. Before day’s end, you’ll enter the Coastal Plain. It was upon these shoals that an unusual journey ended in the 1800s. The story is recounted in the book “Running the River: Poleboats, Steamboats & Timber Rafts on the Altamaha, Ocmulgee, Oconee & Ohooppee” by Carlton A. Morrison: “It is not generally known that the Oconee River, as far north as Barnett Shoals, has been declared by legislative enactment a navigable stream, and hence it is in the power of any boatman to demand passage through the dams, although only one ever exercised this power. Years before the War (Civil War) a man named Levi Crawford decided that he would build a boat, launch it at Barnett Shoals, in Oconee County, and make a trip...It was a queer looking craft...He had stretched upon the craft tents and every comfort necessary for his journey. The news of the building of the boat created quite a stir along the river, and especially with mill men who had dams across the stream, as they knew that the law required them to give passage to all boats, and it was incumbent on them to launch the boat below the obstruction or remove their dams. The first dam reached by Crawford’s boat was at Scull Shoals, then the property of Dr. Thomas Poullain...Dr. Poullain had to stop every plow in his fields and man in the factory from work to get the boat over the dam...This same plan was repeated at every obstruction...until the time Milledgeville was neared the boat had been shaken to pieces with so much handling. Here it struck some shoals in the river and was dashed to pieces on the rocks, the owner and his crew barely escaping with their lives and losing everything they had on board. The destruction of the boat was hailed with pleasure by all mill owners on the Oconee.”

**Mile 1.5—Cow Access**—Here you may find cattle drinking along the banks of the river. Unfortunately, this is a common sight along Georgia rivers. Cattle that are not fenced from streams and rivers often congregate in the shade along these waterways and enter the river to drink and...defecate. This contributes to high bacteria levels in our rivers; the cattle also destroy vegetation along the banks, causing more mud to wash into the river. While the University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service encourages farmers to fence their cattle and federal programs exist to aid in this practice, there are no state or local laws to keep cows out of rivers.

**Mile 2—Milledgeville Water Intake**—On river right here you will see Milledgeville’s raw water intake. The city is permitted to take up to 15 million gallons a day from the river. During our visit, you’ll drink and bath in water that you float upon.

**Mile 3—Buzzard Island**—Just above the Ga. 24 Bridge, you will run into Buzzard Island, the site of one of the early dams on the Oconee. The dam stretches across the head of the island, diverting most of the river’s flow around the right side of the island. At the tail of Buzzard Island, you will encounter the rest of the dam adjacent to the towering powerhouse associated with this dam. An examination of the wood and rock at the head of the dam indicate that the dam here was rebuilt and improved on more than one occasion. Dams at this site likely date back to the early 1800s when Milledgeville was established. For certain, mills harnessing the river’s power were numerous. A notice published in Milledgeville’s newspaper, *Georgia Journal*, on August 29, 1820 announced: “Notice to Mill owners on the Oconee River. The owners of mills on the Oconee River are required to take notice that it will be required of them to have locks in their mill dams ready for passage of boats by the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1821.”

**Mile 3.5—Old Highway Bridge/Oconee Greenway**—Just below the Ga. 24 bridge is a boat ramp and the remains of the previous highway bridge. When the new highway bridge was completed, Georgia’s Department of Transportation opted to dynamite the old bridge and leave its remains blocking the river. The site also marks the entrance to the Oconee River Greenway, a trails system that winds along the river and its tributaries. Earlier this year, the Greenway Authority received a \$1 million grant to extend the greenway an additional mile and a half. If you’d like to stretch your legs, this is the place to do it with a stroll along this path.

**Mile 4—Fishing Creek & Milledgeville**—On river right, you’ll find the mouth of Fishing Creek which flows through the heart of Milledgeville, Georgia’s state capital from 1807 to 1868. In 1802, the Creek Indians ceded their lands west of the Oconee River and in short order white settlers moved in. In 1803, the Georgia legislature moved to establish a town at the site, calling it Milledgeville, in honor of John Milledge, the current governor. Initially, the new capital was a crude frontier community, and visitors were generally unimpressed, noting the ill-kept and overcrowded inns, the gambling, the dueling, and the bitter political feuds. But, by 1815, fueled by cotton, Milledgeville was a thriving boom town. In 1864, the Union army ransacked the statehouse and devastated the town and countryside. Atlanta soon emerged as the new capital. But, Milledgeville has maintained strong ties to state institutions. The town is home to Georgia College & State University, Central State Hospital (the state’s primary psychiatric hospital) and Georgia Military College. Georgia’s previous capitals were Savannah, Augusta and Louisville.

**Mile 6.5—Milledgeville Wastewater Treatment Plant**—On river left here, you’ll find the Milledgeville wastewater treatment plant, and as you pass by it thank the Clean Water Act. Until the passage of this landmark legislation in 1972, many Georgia communities did not have wastewater treatment plants. Instead, raw or partially treated sewage was discharged directly to our rivers.

**Mile 7—Ft. Wilkinson Site**—On the high bluff at river right is the site of Ft. Wilkinson, a frontier fort constructed in 1797. It is considered the first fort west of the Oconee River. Benjamin Hawkins, the famed federal agent to the Native Americans in the area, lived here for a time and in 1802, it was here that the Creek Indians agreed to the Treaty of Ft. Wilkinson which ceded all Creek lands west of the Oconee River.

