

Moody Forest Minuet– Paddle Georgia 2012

June 16—Altamaha River

Distance: 10 miles

Starting Elevation: 72 feet **Lat:** 31°56'23.28"N **Lon:** 82°22'23.18"W

Ending Elevation: 61 feet **Lat:** 31°54'52.38"N **Lon:** 82°14'47.54"W

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Deen's Landing
Mile 6	Morris Landing
Mile 10	Davis Landing

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Deen's Landing—Your Gateway to the Altamaha—19 miles upstream from this spot, the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers slam together to form the Altamaha—a river of superlatives. The Altamaha is Georgia's largest river, draining one-fourth the land area of Georgia. It is the third largest contributor of fresh water to the Atlantic Ocean on North America's east coast, and is home to more than 120 rare or endangered species. For these reasons, the Nature Conservancy has identified the river as one of "America's Last Great Places." Dip a paddle, toe or water cannon into the river here and you're dealing with water that has traveled from as far away as downtown Atlanta and Athens. The origins and meaning of the name "Altamaha" (pronounced ALL-ta-ma-HAW) are unknown, but it is certainly a name taken from Native Americans. In 1540, Hernando de Soto's chroniclers reference the "Altama" as the name of an Indian province in the area.

Mile 1—Bank Armoring at Powerlines—The first example on this journey of mankind's ongoing battle to tame the Altamaha. From here to Darien, you will encounter sites like this where individuals, governments and businesses have gone to great lengths to prevent the river from destroying property by armoring the river bank, using everything from engineered products like this to discarded concrete and asphalt. In recent years, these traditional bank armoring methods are being replaced with engineered rock veins and weirs that extend into the water and act to dissipate and redirect the river's flow. Such designs often permanently protect more river bank at lower costs. Traditional methods will, over time, ultimately fail. In the end, the river always wins.

Mile 1.5—U.S. 1 & Baxley—Overhead here passes the longest north-south highway in the United States. Fabled U.S. 1, runs 2390 miles from Key West, Florida to Ft. Kent, Maine, along the way passing through nearby Baxley. Baxley, itself, grew up as a transportation hub—originally known as "Station 7" on the Macon to Brunswick railroad. The establishment of the railroad in 1870 further spawned the exploitation of the area's pine forests for lumber and turpentine that had previously reached markets via the Altamaha. That enterprise sustained the community into the mid-1900s, but the growth of Baxley around the timber/turpentine business took its toll. Cleared forests suffered from erosion and loss of soil fertility; the vast stands of long-leaf pine that once dominated the area are gone. Today, Baxley celebrates its heritage each April with "Tree Fest," a community event featuring everything from turtle races to Miss Tree Fest pageants. Since 1975 when the Hatch Nuclear Plant was completed, Baxley sometimes refers to itself as "Georgia's Nuclear City."

Mile 2—Georgia Power Company's Plant Hatch Nuclear Generating Facility—With the exception of massive intake structures on the river, you'd hardly know a nuclear power plant sat at river right here. The Georgia Power facility became operational in 1975, and since then Hatch has supplied, on average, more than nine percent of Georgia's total electricity needs. The site includes two reactor units, eight cooling towers and a turbine room the size of two football fields. The plant also employs about 850 people. None of this could exist without the Altamaha River. The river supplies the plant with 56 million gallons of water a day (MGD) which is critical to plant operations in removing heat from the condenser and thus, ultimately from the reactor coolant system. Of the 56 MGD pumped from the river, about 20 MGD is returned, the rest you'll see billowing into the sky as water vapor as it does its thing cooling the reactors. The consumptive loss of water from the river amounts to less than one percent of the river's average monthly flows. While nuclear generating facilities do not emit greenhouse gases and other pollutants, the process does result in high level nuclear waste. At Hatch, that waste is kept in a large pool inside the plant where water systems are used to remove the "decay" heat. After several years the fuel can be moved to large, shielded storage casks outside the plant. This dry storage is designed to keep the fuel safe for decades. To date, the U.S. Department of Energy has not established a long-term storage facility for the nation's nuclear waste.

Mile 2.5—Moody Forest Natural Area—Hugging the south bank of the river here is The Nature Conservancy's Moody Forest Natural Area, a 4,432 nature preserve that holds, among other things, 200-300-year-old long-leaf and slash pines, 600-year-old cypress trees and the only known example of old-growth longleaf pine-blackjack oak forest. The tract was purchased in by The Nature Conservancy in 2000 from the heirs of the Moody family who had earned a living from the land since the mid-1800s. Through they used the land for their livelihood, grazing cattle and harvesting turpentine, they also preserved it, protecting the ancient forests and the habitat they provide. Today, the natural area is home to federally protected including red-cockaded woodpeckers, gopher tortoises, and Eastern indigo snakes—all creatures that are dependent upon the longleaf pine forest habitat.

Mile 4.5—Oxbows & Cut Throughs—This cut through serves as an excellent illustration of the ever-changing nature of Coastal Plain rivers. On river left, a slough peels off the main channel. Until recently, that slough was the main channel of the river. Paddle up the slough and you'll see what appears to be a creek entering the slough. In fact, that is the tail end of a large oxbow lake that years ago was a large looping bend in the river. Notice the woody debris in today's main channel, evidence of the river charting a newer straighter course through forested terra firma.

Mile 6—Morris Landing—The boat ramp and sandbar serves as the day's pit stop and is also the spot to pick up The Nature Conservancy's trailer shuttle to walking tours of the Moody Forest Natural Area.

Mile 6—Irrigation Pipe—On river left here, you'll find an intake used to pump water to nearby agricultural fields. In Georgia, property owners can pump as much as 100,000 gallons a day from nearby rivers or streams without obtaining a water withdrawal permit from Georgia's Environmental Protection Division. On average, Georgia farmers pump more than 800 million gallons of water from underground aquifers and rivers and streams each day, making farm use the third largest water use sector in the state (behind water withdrawals for generating electricity and public water supplies). Since 1970, Georgia farmers have increasingly relied on irrigation to raise their crops. That year, less than 200,000 acres were irrigated. Today, around 1.6 million acres are irrigated.

Mile 7—Navigational Dikes

Mile 10—Davis Landing & Georgia's First Pulitzer Prize Winner—Deep in the piney woods of Appling County some 80 years ago, a young woman named Caroline Pafford Miller could be found driving dirt roads like the one that rolls into Davis Landing. With her three sons in tow (oldest Bill and twin sons, Nip and Tuck...really), she documented the stories of hardworking backwoods women. Those stories were ultimately compiled in a book, *Lamb In His Bosom*, published in 1934. The book was an immediate success and earned her a Pulitzer Prize for literature—a first for a Georgia writer. Not bad for a young woman from Waycross who married her high school English teacher and never attended college. She wrote of strong women who overcame adversity, and she became an inspiration for other women, encouraging them to follow their dreams through her frequent speaking engagements: "Don't let people tell you there is no drama in your life, or that your surroundings are too colorless for novel material. If you can't find the novel in someone else's life, look into your own. Perhaps you don't have any Georgia pines to write about, but there is something else quite as lovely in your life. I am certain of that. There never was another you. Write the way you feel it."

