

# Ode to the Ohoopée—Paddle Georgia 2012

June 17—Altamaha River

**Distance:** 12 miles

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

**Ending Elevation: 58 feet Lat: 31°53'7.02"N Lon: 82° 6'27.10"W**

**Restroom Facilities:**

<b>Mile 0</b>	Davis Landing
<b>Mile 4.5</b>	Eason Bluff Landing
<b>Mile 12</b>	Stanfield Landing

## Points of Interest:

**Mile 1.3—Gas Pipelines and Stream Buffers**—Because of their importance in protecting stream health and providing habitat for wildlife, the vegetated areas along rivers and streams in Georgia (the buffer zones) are protected. State law prohibits removing plants, disturbing soil and construction within 25 feet of all rivers and streams. However, exceptions are made—like with this pipeline crossing. Pipeline projects are granted variances because the pipelines require the removal of streamside trees. But, how should operators of these pipelines and other projects that remove riverside trees compensate for their loss? Georgia’s current law requires only “re-vegetation” but currently EPD is considering new rules that would require additional compensation for projects having “major” impacts. The changes were prompted by a proposal to remove nearly three miles of trees along the Chattahoochee River and its tributaries to improve safety at Charlie Brown Airport in Fulton County. EPD granted a variance for the project without requiring additional compensation or mitigation. The variance was appealed by Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and EPD later withdrew the variance. A stakeholders group convened by EPD is currently revising state rules in an attempt to address this “loophole” in the law.

**Mile 2.5—Hell Shoals**—Believe it or not, there are shoals on the sandy Altamaha. Hell Shoals received its name from the raftsmen that floated timber down the Altamaha in the 1800s. It is not the only devilish name assigned to Altamaha features by the raftsmen. Further downstream, you’ll pass Old Hell Bight, Deadman’s Point and Kneebuckle Bend. The Corps of Engineers took some of the hellishness out of the obstacle in 1909 when they removed 728 cubic yards of stone from the shoals to improve navigation. The piles of rock forming an island at mid-river are the remains of some of the Corps’ “improvements.”

**Mile 4.5—Eason Bluff Landing & Altamaha River Partnership**—This boat launch and adjacent covered picnic area are courtesy of Appling County and the Altamaha River Partnership, a coalition of state, regional, and local representatives formed in 1998 to promote nature-based tourism and associated economic development opportunities within 11 counties bordering the Altamaha River. Recognizing the importance of the river as an amenity for local citizens and as a destination for tourists, the Partnership has created a “water trail” along the river. As a result, the Altamaha and its users are blessed with a host of developed boat launches that serve as a model for other water trails across the state. Georgia River Network serves as the “clearinghouse” for information about Georgia water trails. GRN’s website ([www.garivers.org/gwtc](http://www.garivers.org/gwtc)) provides information about all of Georgia’s water trails..

**Mile 6—Iron Mine Bluff and the Explorations of Clarence Bloomfield Moore**—Near this bluff, Clarence Bloomfield Moore in the 1890s exhumed human remains along with shell beads from a Native American burial mound. It was one of dozens of excavations the paper company-magnate-turned-archeologist performed along the Altamaha. After accumulating a personal fortune at his family paper company, in the late 1800s, the Harvard-educated Philadelphian and life-long bachelor left his business to managers and devoted the next three decades of his life to exploring the Southeast’s Native American archaeological sites. He outfitted a steamboat called the “Gopher” and plied up the Altamaha unearthing artifacts and clues about the lives of the river’s original inhabitants.

**Mile 7—Riverfront Cabins & Floodplain Construction**—Homes on stilts like these sitting squarely in the river’s floodplain are common along the length of the Altamaha. Since 1978, federal flood insurance policy holders in Georgia have received more than \$167 million in claim payments. While that’s a load of money, Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources estimates that most of the state’s flood-prone property owners do not have flood insurance.

**Mile 11.5—Ohoopée River**—At river left here, the Ohoopée spills its blackwater into the Altamaha. Originally on our Paddle Georgia 2012 route, our two days on the Ohoopée were abandoned because of low water levels. With its headwaters in the Coastal Plain, the Ohoopée is the quintessential South Georgia river with its tannin-colored water flowing between snow white sandbars and Spanish-moss draped cypress and tupelo trees. It flows through Tattnall County and not far from our campsite. Though Tattnall County is in the heart of the Vidalia Onion Belt (and the top producer of the sweet onions in the state), it and its county seat of Reidsville may be best known as the home of a state prison located along the banks of the Ohoopée. The Prison is famous as the location of the filming of the 1974 Burt Reynolds’ movie, *The Longest Yard*. The Ohoopée makes an appearance in the movie and plays an important part in the lore of the state prison. Many an escaped convict has died or been tracked down in the swamps along the river. In 1943, one of a band of 24 escapees drowned in the river; 30 years later, a group of seven were captured in the river’s bottomlands less than 24 hours after their escape.

Before the state prison occupied the banks of the Ohoopée, one of Tattnall County’s prominent early settlers worked some 5,000 acres along the river. Henry Solomon Strickland moved to the area in 1810 and established a plantation at the head of navigation on the river. He prospered from the land and by 1840 was elected state senator from the area. In 1861, he represented Tattnall County at the Georgia Secession Convention, in which delegates voted to secede from the Union, leading to the Civil War. Though Strickland was among the largest landowners and slave owners in the county, he feared that war with the North would ruin Georgia. Both he and Benjamin Brewton, Tattnall’s other delegate to the convention, voted against secession. Strickland died less than a year later, never to see his dire prediction come true.

For all the cotton that Strickland undoubtedly grew, his largest “crop” might have been his children. He married three times, producing 20 offspring in his 70 years. His last wife died in 1859, and at the occasion of her death he penned this poem (some lines omitted for brevity):

On the Ohoopée Banks I Stand—  
My Tears are falling to the sand.  
For my companion is called away,  
On, never, never to return.

She was a Wife when in Distress  
A mother to the Motherless,  
But God saw best for us to part,  
And now it grieves me to my Heart.

Her children round her dying bed,  
I was on my Knees close to her head  
To hear her scream at every breath  
“Oh, God, have mercy and send down death.”

It makes three wives I’ve Lost this way,  
Oh, God, have mercy on me, I pray.  
Such women pure and good and kind  
Are God’s great gift to all mankind...

The neighbors have been kind and good  
To try to comfort as best they could,  
But God alone knows what to do  
In times like this as we go through.

Without her smile, her helping hand  
I must press on as best I can,  
But some sweet day in Heaven Above  
We’ll meet again in lasting love.

