

Albany Allemande— Paddle Georgia 2013

June 17—Flint River

Distance: 14 miles

Starting Elevation: 190 feet Lat: 31.6022°N Lon: 84.1381°W

Ending Elevation: 151 feet Lat: 31.4388°N Lon: 84.1423°W

Restroom Facilities:
Mile 0 Flint River Hydro Dam
Mile 4.7 Radium Springs Boat Ramp
Mile 14 Mitchell County Landing

Points of Interest:

Mile 0.2—Muckafoonee Creek—A short distance up this creek on river right is the 1906 dam that created “Lake Worth.” Today, the dam serves as an overflow spillway for the larger dam on the Flint. This unusually named waterway is a combination of two even more unusually named creeks: Kinchafoonee and Muckalee creeks. The Creek Indian word Kinchafoonee is believed to have meant “Mortar Nutshells” while Muckalee, recorded the Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins, meant “pour on me.” While this is the site of one of the first hydro-power dams in South Georgia, the Georgia General Assembly had earlier established laws specifically protecting Kinchafoonee Creek from obstructions that would prevent fish passage. The 1876 law prohibited the construction of any “dam, trap, net, seine or other device for catching fish,” without providing an adequate fish passage of at least six feet in width.. There was a major loophole in the law: “Nothing herein contained shall be so construed to prevent the erection of dams for milling and manufacturing purposes,” and thus a dam came to be built on Kinchafoonee. These lyrical names still echo through the region’s culture. The Kinchafoonee Cowboys is a well-known honky-tonk band from the area and Leesburg’s Luke Bryan, included an ode to fishing, boating, four-wheeling and drinking called “Muckalee Creek Water” on his 2011 album Tailgates and Tanlines.

Mile 1.7—Brunswick-Albany Railroad— Beginning In 1871, this bridge carried the Brunswick and Albany Railroad, a railroad that was first chartered in 1835. Construction of the railroad was slow, however, and by the time of the Civil War, the line extended just 60 miles west from Brunswick on the Georgia coast. In 1863, the Confederate government seized the railroad and took up the tracks for reuse in more militarily important areas. The railroad languished until 1869 when the state approved aid (along with some 200 state convicts leased to the railroad company) and two years later the line was completed to Albany.

Mile 1.9—Broad Ave. Bridge & Albany Riverfront—The remnants of the Broad Ave. Bridge, demolition of which began in 2012, may still remain when we pass this historic river crossing. In 1858, Albany founder, Nelson Tift, commissioned the construction a wooden covered bridge by renowned builder and freed slave Horace King. While the bridge washed away in a flood, the “Bridge House” (also built by King in 1858) still stands. The House includes an archway through the center of the first floor that served as a tollhouse for the bridge. The second floor was a theater known as “Tift’s Hall.” Tift spared no expense in its appointment, hiring New York artists to paint murals on the walls. In the mid-1800s it was a showplace, hosting many performances and local social events. Today, it houses the Albany Convention & Visitor’s Bureau and serves as the centerpiece of a six-acre riverfront park. The park includes walking trails, playgrounds, river access and the Ray Charles Plaza with a life-size sculpture of the Albany native.

Mile 2.5—1994 Flood and Oakview and Riverside Cemetery—In July 1994, when Tropical Storm Alberto parked over Georgia and dumped 27 inches of rain in four days, the most devastating flood the Flint has known was set in motion. The Crisp County Power Dam holding back Lake Blackshear was breached; the Flint River Hydro Dam at Lake Chehaw was completely submerged and a wall of water descended on Albany. The flood displaced 23,000 residents and covered 23 square miles of Dougherty County as the river crested at 43 feet. The floodwaters spilled into Albany’s riverfront cemeteries and forced more than 400 caskets out of the ground. Some drifted down river as far as Newton. Ultimately, 96 bodies, unearched during the flood, were never identified. These unknowns were reinterred in a special area of the cemeteries that commemorates the great flood of ’94.

Mile 3.3—Viola Bend—The name for this sharp turn in the river honors the memory of the steamboat Viola. In 1845, Captain Van Vechten left Albany in the two-year-old steamer bound for Apalachicola, Florida with a load of more than 1,000 bales of cotton. At this bend, the ship ran into a rock ledge and was destroyed. More than half the cotton was lost or destroyed.

Mile 3.9—Cameleon Cave—Along the river bed here is the entrance to an underwater cave—one of many along the Flint that contribute water from the Floridan aquifer. Paddle Georgia participant and Flint Riverkeeper board member, Paul DeLoach, and his cave diving colleagues explored this cave and found that it extends 1500 feet and drops some 60 feet below the surface of the river. Paul will give a presentation about his underwater cave diving experiences on the Flint during tonight’s program.

Mile 4.6—The Blowhole—This spring issues forth water from the bed of the river. Careful exploration of the area will yield its exact location.

Mile 4.7—City Of Albany Wastewater Treatment Plant Discharge—The massive culvert on river right here is the discharge from the City of Albany’s wastewater treatment plant. The facility treats up to 32 million gallons of sewage daily.

Mile 4.9—Marine Corps Ditch & Draining of Wetlands—On river left is a massive drainage way, known locally as the “Marine Corps Ditch.” The conduit for shedding water from surrounding land extends nearly six miles to the Marine Corps Logistics Base in East Albany. It is one of dozens built to drain wetlands and low-lying land and render it “useful.” The practice dates back to the early part of the 20th century when state and local governments systematically drained and “reclaimed” swamps, wetlands and tidal marshes to control malaria and create more arable land. These alterations have caused a dramatic shift in the hydrology of river systems. With no wetlands to hold water and slowly release it, both floods and droughts are more pronounced. The impacts are most felt in coastal estuaries where commercially important seafood depends upon the proper amount of freshwater inflows. Since 1970, blue crab harvests on Georgia’s coast have declined by 60 percent while brown shrimp harvests have dropped by 50 percent.

Mile 6.1—Radium Springs—On river left is a stone bridge spanning the run leading 0.6 mile upstream to Radium Springs--one of Georgia’s Seven Natural Wonders. The largest spring in Georgia, it issues forth 70,000 gallons per minute at a steady 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Radium, a radioactive element that, in the early 1900s, was believed to have healing powers, is found in traces in the spring flow and its presence prompted the development of a resort along its banks during the 1920s. The casino, which was a social center in Albany throughout the 1900s, was demolished after sustaining damage during floods in 1994 and 1998. Today, the landscape around the springs has been restored with walking trails, gardens and gazebos. It is not accessible from the river.

Mile 8.1—Island & Cotton Boat Ruins— Here, partially buried in the sand and gravel of the island, are the remains of a cotton barge, one of many used to transport the crop from Albany to Apalachicola during the 1800s.

Mile 8.5—Nonami Plantation—From here downstream for the next four miles, this plantation owned by media mogul Ted Turner flanks the west bank of the river. Turner purchased the 8,000-acre spread in 2010 from friend and Atlanta land developer Tom Cousins. Turner is considered the largest private landowner in the country with more than two million acres. Nonami is said to have gotten its name from Cousin’s wife Ann who dubbed it “Nonami” because the couple could never settle on a name. The Turner Foundation is a supporter of Georgia River Network and many other river protection groups in Georgia.

Mile 11.7—Wilson Blue Spring—On river right, and up a narrow slough, you’ll find this spring.

Mile 13—Plant Mitchell—On river left is the water intake for this Georgia Power Co. coal and oil-fired power plant. By 2017, the company plans to convert the facility to a biomass-burning plant. If they are successful, it will be one of the nation’s largest biomass electric generating facilities, burning scrap wood not used for construction purposes.

Mile 13.4—Riverbend Spring—Blink and you’ll miss this spring pool nestled around the roots of a majestic cypress along the west bank of the river.