

Limestone Limbo—Paddle Georgia 2013

June 18—Flint River

Distance: 21 miles

Starting Elevation: 151 feet **Lat:** 31.4388°N **Lon:** 84.1423°W

Ending Elevation: 137 feet **Lat:** 31.3094°N **Lon:** 84.3353°W

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Mitchell County Landing
Mile 14.7	Pineland Plantation Boat Ramp
Mile 21	Ga. 37 Boat Ramp

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Punk’s Landing—Our launch site for the day is a Mitchell County park with camping and picnic areas. Locally, it is known as “Punk’s Landing.” Before the devastating floods that hit the area in the 1990s, a man known as “Punk” operated a bait shop here and though the bait shop is long gone, the name remains.

Mile 0.4—The Wall Spring—Issuing forth from a limestone bluff on river right is this aptly named spring.

Mile 1.9—Red Bluff—One thing about the Flint, those who mapped and named the river’s features weren’t too creative. There are three Horseshoe Bends identified on official U.S. Geological Survey maps and two Red Bluffs. This is the first one. A row of houses is perched precariously at the brow of this bluff, and undoubtedly, some day in the future, the river will claim those structures. While bank erosion is a natural process, it can be accelerated by land use practices, especially the removal of streambank vegetation.

Mile 2.9—Vine Spring—One of some 20 springs between Albany and Bainbridge, The Vine feeds water from the Floridan aquifer, keeping the Flint flowing during times of drought. During these periods, inputs from the river’s springs can increase the river’s flow by 50 percent. A quick look at a map of the Lower Flint illustrates the importance of these springs. Between Albany and Bainbridge—a distance of some 80 miles—just six creeks enter the river. On the Upper Flint, you’ll find six tributaries in as few as ten river miles.

Mile 4.1—Buzzard Roost Island—There are at least two Buzzard Roost Islands in Georgia (another is located on the Chattahoochee), but there are no buzzards. Buzzards are found only in Europe and Asia. There, “buzzard” is the correct common name for several species of hawks—but they look nothing like our bald-headed North American turkey and black vultures. Early English explorers and settlers of the New World attached the name “buzzard” to these soaring birds and the moniker stuck. Vultures, both turkey and black, are common along the Flint and are known to roost in large colonies. In flight the two can be distinguished by their wings. Black vultures have black wings with white tips while Turkey vultures have two-toned wings. Given that they feed on rotting animal flesh, you’d think a poor sense of smell would be beneficial, but, in fact, these birds have an excellent sense of smell which helps them locate their odiferous food.

Mile 8.5—Baconton Wastewater Discharge and...Pecans?—On river left here is the discharge pipe for the City of Baconton, population 915 and the birthplace of “papershell pecans” a cultivar of the pecan tree that produces easy to crack nuts. In fact, Mitchell and Dougherty counties are the heart of Georgia’s \$233 million pecan harvest, and each November, Baconton hosts a Pecan Harvest Festival with a pecan cracking contest, pecan pie baking contests, arts, crafts and entertainment. Georgia claims more than 144,000 acres planted in pecans and is the top pecan-producing state in the nation. Thus, the Baconton wastewater treatment plant, with help from the Flint, carries away the treated waste of many of the men and women who grow, harvest and process Georgia’s pecans.

Mile 9.2—Walton Spring—You’ll find this spring up the slough on river left in this sharp bend of the river behind the island. The slough is Raccoon Creek, one of the very few creeks that feed the Flint between Albany and Bainbridge.

Mile 10.2--Prosser’s Island—The Flint’s clear water and limestone bottom make it easy, with scuba or snorkeling gear, to locate arrowheads and other antiquities on the river bed; Prossers Island and the surrounding area have long been a popular destination for relic hunters. The Flint’s course through 56-million-year-old Ocala limestone provides the opportunity to see countless fossils sealed in the ancient sedimentary rock. In 2012, the fossilized remains of a prehistoric whale were found along the river’s edge near Albany. The Basilosaurus swam the ocean some 35 million years ago (remember South Georgia was once completely submerged!) and measured 50-70 feet long. A team of students and professors from Georgia Southern University worked to excavate the fossil late last summer, but before they could complete their work and remove the relic for study and display, looters made off with a portion of the specimen. The fossils have not yet been recovered. In fact, the removal of artifacts (including arrowheads) from Georgia’s navigable rivers without a permit is prohibited.

Mile 11.5—Culpepper Spring—Located on the east bank of the river.

Mile 13.4—Double Springs, Blind Cave Salamanders & Albino Crayfish—Located on the west bank of the river flowing out of a crevice in the limestone bluff, the spring has been explored by cave diver Paul DeLoach who described a 2011 dive in the spring: “As you proceed into the cave some 250 ft there is a karst window overhead from which you can see surface light. There is a small depression at the surface and a small surface pool. After passing under this feature the cave floor begins to drop from 40 feet to 70 feet, and then again to almost 90 feet. The cave then takes an easterly turn and goes beneath the Flint River, continues into Mitchell County and changes from a stream channel to one with high vaulted ceilings and fissures.” On this same dive, his partner Guy Bryant described a catfish more than three feet in length. In addition to harboring common fish, this underwater world is home to two unique creatures—the Georgia Blind Cave Salamander and the Dougherty Plain Cave Crayfish. The salamanders have no eyes and little pigment, rendering them pinkish white and somewhat iridescent. They sport long, red external gills behind a broad head and grow to lengths of up to three inches. Beyond that, we know nothing of the creature’s eating, reproductive or survival habits—after all, only a handful of individuals have ever seen them in their natural habitat. The crayfishes are equally mysterious. They have a set of pigmentless eyes, and antennae twice as long as their slender, white, two-inch-long body. Both might have remained undiscovered had we not started taping the Floridan aquifer. The salamander was first found in 1939 when an engineer with Dougherty County’s water system lifted one out of a 200-foot well. The crayfish was discovered two years later—also in a well. The creatures are listed as threatened by the State of Georgia and perhaps the biggest threat to their continued existence are those very wells. Excessive withdrawals from the Floridan aquifer reduce their habitat while agricultural pesticides and fertilizers contaminate their water.

Mile 14.7—Pineland Plantation & Albany Quail Project—Known as one of the premiere quail hunting preserves in the region, Pineland spans some 20,000 acres of fields and pine forests; it is also home to the Albany Quail Project, a 21-year-old quail management research and monitoring program aimed at restoring wild quail populations. Between 1992 and 2006, the project radio-tracked more than 8,000 wild bobwhite quails, and with this research, introduced new management techniques that have resulted in steady increases in the region’s quail population—good news for the quail and hunters. During the latter half of the 20th century, habitat loss from intensive agriculture precipitated an 85 percent decline in quail populations from 1960 levels.

Mile 20.6--Newton—Just to the west of the river here is the town of Newton. During the 1994 flood, the town was inundated and floodwaters reached nearly to the second floor of the Baker County Courthouse downtown. After the devastation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency funded the acquisition and demolition of 20 homes and 19 businesses, and when the river spilled its banks again in 1998, many were spared the flooding. Baker County has since moved its offices out of the courthouse to higher land, closing a chapter on an interesting history for the circa 1900 building. Its architect, J.W. Golucke, died in the courthouse in 1907 after being imprisoned on charges of misappropriating funds for its construction.