

Ichawaynochaway Waltz—Paddle Georgia 2013

June 19—Flint River

Distance: 18 miles

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

Ending Elevation: 121 feet **Lat:** 31.1592°N **Lon:** 84.4779°W

Restroom Facilities:

- Mile 0** Ga. 37 Boat Ramp
- Mile 8.3** Covey Rise Plantation
- Mile 18** Hoggard Mill Rd. Boat Ramp

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Flint River Mussels—Opposite the boat ramp here is a location popular with malacologists—scientists who study mussels. The Flint was the historic home to 29 mussel species; today only 22 species remain, including the federally protected Fat Threeridge, Purple Bankclimber, Shiny-rayed Pocketbook, Gulf Moccasinshell, Oval Pigtoe and Southern Creekmussel. Sedentary filter feeders, mussels are considered a “canary in the coal mine” for our rivers as they are often the first species to feel the effects of pollution. The southeast is the center of global mussel diversity. Historically 300 species could be found here. Unfortunately, seven percent of those mussels are now considered extinct and another 40 percent are considered endangered or threatened. That’s bad news for the mussels *and* bad news for us because mussels keep our rivers clean by filtering nutrients from the water.

Mile 0.6—Flint River Retreat—This campground operated by a local farmer features nearly a mile of riverfront and offers cabins, RV hook ups, tent sites and canoe and kayak rentals. Shuttles are run on river using their uniquely outfitted pontoon boat.

Mile 1—Flint River Water Supply Experiment—Due west of this location, in the Elmodel Wildlife Management Area, the state is conducting an experiment that it hopes will solve low-flow issues on the Flint and its tributaries *and* remedy metro Atlanta’s growing demand for water. The project involves drilling wells and pumping water from the Floridan aquifer (the aquifer that feeds the Flint and its tributaries) into deeper aquifers thousands of feet underground to “store” the water so that during periods of drought that same water can be pumped back into the Flint. The project, as originally envisioned, would produce water to meet minimum flow requirements at the Florida state line where the Flint and Chattahoochee meet to form the Apalachicola. This, in turn, would allow metro Atlanta to pump more water from the Chattahoochee River. The cost of the project: \$900 million to \$1.2 billion to be paid for by taxpayers and/or metro Atlanta water customers. Aquifer storage and recovery, as the process is called, has never been successfully executed in Georgia. In fact, in parts of Georgia its use is prohibited because of concerns over contamination of pristine groundwater. If this multi-million-dollar scheme sounds like a boondoggle, just follow the money. Its original proponents were a politically-connected consulting firm headed by former Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Joe Tanner. The firm, using the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission as a conduit, applied for and received a \$4.6 grant from Gov. Nathan Deal’s Water Supply Program to conduct this experiment, despite the fact that the state agency evaluating potential water supply projects gave it “zero” on a scale of 100 when scoring the project for “need.” Joe Tanner & Associates was a major contributor to Gov. Deal’s gubernatorial campaign. Earlier this year, the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission, dropped the project; Joe Tanner & Associates followed. The state has now taken over the experiment. The Georgia Water Coalition named this experiment to its 2012 Dirty Dozen, a list of the most egregious affronts to Georgia’s water resources.

Mile 3—Sister Islands & Hernando De Soto—Though it is difficult to trace the Spanish conquistador’s exact route through Georgia, historians believe that he crossed the Flint River twice—the first time going from east to west near this set of islands in March 1540. Using felled timbers near the river, De Soto’s men crafted a boat and using ropes tied to bow and stern ferried the army of several hundred men across the river. The marauding explorers wreaked havoc and death on the native people as they wandered for three years across the southeast. De Soto died near the Mississippi River two years after crossing the Flint. In 1853, when his army stumbled into a Spanish settlement in present day Mexico, only half of the original 700 in the expedition remained.

Mile 8.3—Covey Rise Plantation & Bobwhite Quail—On river left here is our pit stop and another of the Flint’s many quail hunting “plantations.” The fowl that supports all these operations is Georgia’s state game bird. Chicken-like in appearance and ground-dwelling, it stands about six inches tall and weighs in at about seven ounces. As this plantation’s name suggests, quails tend to travel in packs of two or more families called “coveys.” They are reddish-brown in color, sporting a white stripe above their eyes and a white throat patch. Their call is distinctive and lends them their name: “bob-white.”

Mile 12.6—Big Sandbar—Because the Flint cuts a path through Ocala limestone, most of the river’s banks are armored and sandbars are infrequent, but this monstrous bar on river left provides a great study in river “energy.” Here, the Flint’s flow presses fast and hard against the west bank, creating a massive eddy on the east bank where the river’s energy dissipates, and with it, sediment, carried by the flow falls out, creating the sandbar.

Mile 14—Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center—On river right here is this 29,000-acre outdoor laboratory that was once the quail hunting reserve of Robert W. Woodruff, long-time chairman of the Coca-Cola Co. An avid outdoorsman, Woodruff managed the land to maintain longleaf pine and wiregrass habitat—a habitat that once covered much of the southeast. After Woodruff’s death in 1985, the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation established the center and continues to fund its various research and education projects. It is named for the senior vice-president of Coca-Cola and long-time associate of Woodruff.

Mile 15—Steamboat/Cotton Boat Ruins—On river left, at low water levels, the remains of a river vessel more than 100-years-old can be seen. In the 1800s, there were dozens of steamboat landings on the Flint - from its mouth at the Chattahoochee to Albany. Cotton from nearby farms was brought to these landings and shipped down river destined for the Port of Apalachicola on the Gulf of Mexico. During that time, Apalachicola was the third busiest port on the Gulf (behind New Orleans and Mobile). With the advent of railroads that enabled transport of cotton overland to Atlantic coast ports, the importance of the Flint as a commercial highway diminished. While steamers were the primary means of moving cotton, “cotton boxes” were also employed. These large motor-less barges carried as many as 600 bales of cotton.

Mile 16.6—Ichawaynochaway Creek & Rights of Passage—On river right is this beautiful and beautifully-named creek pronounced “Itch-a-way Notch-a-way” that runs through the heart of the Jones Center property. Unfortunately, it is also currently illegal for you to paddle up it. It is the site of a landmark legal decision in the 1990s that reduced stream and river access for recreational boaters in Georgia. In the case, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that property owners who own land on both sides of a river or stream that is not deemed navigable may restrict access to that water body. A law adopted in 1863 provides the definition of “navigable” as any stream “capable of transporting boats loaded with freight in the regular course of trade either for the whole or a part of the year. The mere rafting of timber or the transporting of wood in small boats shall not make a stream navigable.” In this legal conflict, a local angler constructed a 16-foot-long, four-foot-wide Styrofoam and wood raft, loaded it with a goat, a bale of cotton, and two passengers and then embarked on the creek. Unfortunately for today’s paddlers, this creative rouse failed to convince the justices, and thus, the 150-year-old law stands. In 1863, no one could have envisioned canoes, kayaks and rubber rafts or the commercial importance of paddlesports on local economies. River access advocates hope that in the future the right case will come along, making a legal “update” of the archaic law possible.

Mile 17.6—Hell’s Gate Shoals—This significant shoal has troubled river travelers since the 1800s when it earned its devilish name. Tortuous boat channels and tricky currents were the bane of many a steamboat pilot here and this location got much attention from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers which blasted, dredged and channelized the river during the late 1800s with the goal of creating a three-foot deep channel, 100-feet wide from the river’s mouth to Albany.