

# Blue Hole Bop— Paddle Georgia 2013

June 20—Flint River

**Distance:** 14 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** Hoggard Mill Rd. Boat Ramp  
**Mile 7.2** County Line Boat Ramp  
**Mile 14** Private Residence

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 0.4—Winding Shoals & River “Improvements”**—It is hard to fathom the lengths to which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers went in order to render the Flint navigable from Bainbridge to Albany, but the evidence can be seen on nearly every stretch of river. Any where you see narrow rock islands that constrict the flow of the river into a narrow channel you are seeing the fingerprints of the Corps. This is especially true at “Winding Shoals.” During the late 1800s, from this spot downstream for nearly a mile, the Corps worked to remedy this troublesome obstacle for steamboats. At the time the goal was to create a 100 foot channel that was three feet deep at ordinary low water from the mouth of the river to Albany. Here at Winding Shoals, in 1877, the Corps built 390 linear feet of rock dams, removed three snags, blasted ten times and removed 450 cubic yards of rock. The Corps’ work along the river here continued into the 1910s. Today a row of riverfront houses on the east bank overlooks the blasted shoals and rock islands.

**Mile 2.4—Crawford’s Point**—A narrow rock island here marks the location of more handiwork by the Corps. In an 1877 report to Congress, the Corps boasted that the channel at Crawford’s Point had been transformed from a depth of 0 feet to a depth of four feet while the width of the channel had been expanded from 70 to 100 feet. They accomplished this by removing a “dry ledge” to widen the channel and by making 254 blasts of dynamite that enabled them to remove 1,198 cubic yards of rock, or approximately 4.8 million pounds of rock. That’s enough rock to fill a line of modern dump trucks that stretches for 1.4 miles!

**Mile 4—Cow Access**—For the next two miles on river right, there are multiple locations where cattle have access to the river, creating denuded river banks pocked with manure that flows into the river with every rain event. Scenes like this are bad news for our rivers and the critters that live (and play) in them. Bacteria levels downstream increase, as do nutrient levels that can lead to oxygen-depleting algal blooms. The mud that spills into the river can also affect fish spawning and the survival of young fish. The impacts are also felt on the farm. When cattle congregate along river banks, their manure becomes concentrated rather than being spread over a large pasture area, reducing the benefits of this natural fertilizer. Cattle can also perish when they become stuck in riverside mud or swept away in high water. No Georgia laws prohibit cattle access to streams, but the state encourages farmers to fence their cattle, and there are numerous federal programs that aid farmers in erecting fence and developing alternative water sources.

**Mile 5.5—Bovine Spring**—Perhaps the biggest and most obvious spring that you’ll encounter on this seven-day journey, this spring spills out on river right, forming a large circular spring pool in the bank of the river. While this spring is obvious, cave diver and Paddle Georgia participant Paul DeLoach reports that he has identified numerous springs by making use of infrared aerial photographs. During the winter, the Flint’s springs show up easily, as they flow at a constant 68 degrees Fahrenheit. During the heat of summer, they offer a chilling respite.

**Mile 6—Needle Eye Shoal**—At this approximate location during the early 1900s, the Corps of Engineers worked on a obstacle they dubbed “Needle Eye Shoal.” They must have done a bang up job; there is little left to suggest its previous existence.

**Mile 6.3—Feral Hogs & Barbecue**—During pre-Paddle Georgia scouting trips, a group of feral hogs was spotted on the east bank of the river here. Prior to the arrival of the first New World explorers, there were no pigs in North America. Hernando De Soto brought a herd of the animals, and today wild hogs are part of the lore of Georgia’s swamps and woodlands while barbecued pork is perhaps the most iconic of Southern foods. The Georgia General Assembly kicks off each of its sessions with a “Wild Hog Supper”—a tradition that dates back to 1962. The first documented pig feast in North America occurred during De Soto’s journey. It was nothing like our legislators’ annual feast. One soldier wrote: “We ate it boiled in water without salt or anything else.”

**Mile 7.2--Mitchell-Baker-Decatur County Line & Boat Ramp**—At river left is County Line Boat Ramp, so named because it sits just inside the Mitchell County line, where Mitchell, Baker and Decatur counties meet. With a population of 23,462, Mitchell County’s economy is driven largely by agriculture as it has been for nearly two centuries. It is also the site of what came to be known as the “Camilla Massacre,” a tragedy that illustrates the contentious politics of the South’s Reconstruction Era at the close of the Civil War. During military occupation of Georgia, 29 black men were elected to the General Assembly, but in early September 1868, white democrats voted to expel these members. This prompted Philip Joiner, one of those purged from the Assembly, to lead a 30-mile march from Albany to Camilla to attend a Republican political rally. As the group of about 300 “Freedmen” reached the courthouse square in Camilla, the county’s sheriff and a posse of townspeople opened fire. The crowd dispersed into surrounding woods and over the next several days, the sheriff systematically pursued them through the countryside, killing or wounding those he tracked down. At least 13 were killed and more than 30 wounded. No one was ever tried for the deaths of the Freedmen, and though the incident prompted the federal government to return Georgia to military rule, the Freedman’s Bureau, designed to assist former slaves in their transition, would cease to exist by 1872. After the Reconstruction Era, no black people were elected to Georgia’s General Assembly until 1962. Camilla publicly commemorated the victims of the massacre in 1998. On a lighter note, a Mitchell County history written in the 1930s makes note of several “Unusuals,” including the birth of a 25-pound baby, the mother of 32 children and the birth of two sets of twins to the same woman...in the same year—the first arrived in January, the second in December.

**Mile 7.6--Center-pivot Irrigation**—On both sides of the river here are center-pivot irrigation systems. In fact, aerial images of the Flint River valley reveal a landscape dotted with bulls-eye shaped farmland—the visual effects of the pivot’s circular motion. Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division has issued more than 10,000 permits to farmers for irrigating crops in the Flint River valley. At the height of the growing season, these systems can suck up to two billion gallons of water a day from the river and the Floridan aquifer—nearly four times the amount that the 15-county metro Atlanta area uses each day. The vast majority of these permits have been issued in the last 30 years. In 1970, there were only 200,000 acres of irrigated farmland in Georgia. Today, there are more than 1.5 million acres. Withdrawals from the Flint, its tributaries and the Floridan aquifer which feeds the river, coupled with water management practices in the river’s headwaters of Metro Atlanta have significantly reduced flows in the Flint. Since 1980, low flows on the upper reaches of the river have been reduced by up to 70 percent. On the lower Flint, flows have decreased by 30 percent and some tributaries go completely dry during the summer. A program headed by the Nature Conservancy, the USDA and the Flint River Soil & Water Conservation District aims to remedy this problem by improving the efficiency of these irrigation systems. VRI, or variable rate irrigation, uses GPS-based technology that makes it possible to selectively turn specific nozzles on and off based on where water is needed as the pivot crawls across the crops. VRI and other conservation practices have helped local farmers reduce their water use by as much as 30 percent.

**Mile 9.4—Hog Parlor Spring**—Keep your eyes peeled for a pair of springs along the east side of the river here.

**Mile 12.6—Limestone’s Last Gasp**—Here you’ll find some rock islands that signify the virtual end to the Flint’s course through Ocala limestone. From here to Bainbridge, the river widens and slows—the effects of Jim Woodruff Dam some 34 miles downstream—and the river’s limestone bluffs are replaced by low, sandy shorelines.