

Backyard Boogie—Paddle Georgia 2014

June 22—Chattahoochee River

Distance: 15 miles

Starting Elevation: 912 feet Lat: 34.0015°N Lon: -84.2347°W

Ending Elevation: 870 feet Lat: 33.9640°N Lon: -84.3828°W

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Jones Bridge Unit CRNRA **Mile 12** Azalea Park
 Mile 3.3 Garrard's Landing **Mile 13** Chattahoochee Nature Center
 Mile 8.5 Island Ford Unit CRNRA **Mile 16** Morgan Falls Dam

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Jones Bridge Shoals—Within sight of our launch, the best route through these shoals is on river right.

Mile 1—Fish Weir—One of the 128 documented fish weirs on Georgia's rivers. These weirs (or fish dams as some call them) played an important role as a means of providing sustenance for Native Americans and early settlers of Georgia. And, like the dams of today, these structures have historically been the source of controversy and conflict between river users. The rock dams blocked the passage of boats and because of their effectiveness in catching fish (and restricting spawning routes) threatened robust fish populations. As a result, since 1796 when the Georgia legislature first addressed the issue of fish weirs, our elected officials have adopted no less than 144 fish weir-related laws. An 1820 act declared that "it shall be unlawful for any person to obstruct or cause to be obstructed more than one-third part of the Chattahoochee or Chestatee rivers by dams or fish traps."

Mile 2.5—Fish Weir—This weir is a v-shaped structure in the center of the river. One arm stretches 65 feet upstream from its downstream point; the other extends 100 feet upstream toward the opposite bank. It was first recorded in 1976.

Mile 3.3—McAfee Bridge, Garrard's Landing & Johns Creek Environmental Campus—Just downstream of the modern-day Holcomb Bridge are the remains of this bridge which dates to 1834. At the time of the Civil War, it was the only bridge spanning the Chattahoochee near Atlanta aside from the Western & Atlantic railroad bridge, and thus it played a critical role in the Atlanta Campaign 150 years ago. On July 5, 1864 retreating Rebel troops burned the bridge to prevent its use by the pursuing Union soldiers, but within a week, Union engineers had rebuilt it. Union Gen. William T. Sherman, wanting to avoid a long siege of Atlanta, hoped to flush the Confederates out of Atlanta by disrupting rail lines leading to the city from the east and south. Thus, his plan involved repeated cavalry raids across the Chattahoochee and around Atlanta—several of which began with crossings of the river at this location. While these risky raids were successful in destroying rail lines, more often than not, they ended with the Union cavalry being chased by the Confederate cavalry as they raced back to the Chattahoochee and the safety of the river's north shore. Perhaps no story is more harrowing than that of 60-year-old Col. Horace Capron and his son Osmond who were cut off from their unit at the battle of King's Tanyard in Barrow County northeast of Atlanta on Aug. 3. Without horses and with Confederate troopers hot on their tail, they snuck their way northwest, surviving on blackberries and hoping beyond hope to see the Chattahoochee. On the third day of their odyssey they found the river and a dugout canoe. Setting out under the cover of darkness in the midst of a hair-raising thunderstorm, they drifted downstream, running unexpected rapids—a fright that almost ended the escape for the non-swimmers. They spent another day stealthily moving the canoe down river under cover of overhanging riverside trees and passing by fishing slaves that warned them: "Masters look out, pickets just ahead, killing your people just as fast as they can catch them." Finally, as the sun began to set on Aug. 7, they rounded a bend and in horror found the reconstructed McAfee Bridge ablaze. Thinking that the Confederates had driven the Union Army back across the Chattahoochee, the Caprons fell into despair. They trudged up the north bank of the river certain of their capture, but to their surprise they instead ran into Union troops. Unwittingly, they had witnessed, from the river, the first step in the Union's final strategy to take Atlanta. Gen. Sherman had ordered McAfee's Bridge burned to prevent the Confederates from pursuing as he shifted the bulk of his army west and south of Atlanta. Three weeks later, Atlanta would fall as Sherman's flanking move forced the Confederate Army to withdraw from the city. Garrard's Landing, a Roswell City park now occupies this historic land, along with the Johns Creek Environmental Campus (a sewage treatment plant disguised as a circa 1800s textile mill). Incidentally, the park is named for the family that once owned this land, not Union Gen. Kenner D. Garrard, who infamously set fire to Roswell's extensive textile mills.

Mile 3.3—DeKalb County Water Intake—The structure on river left opposite Garrard's Landing serves as nearby DeKalb County's water intake and can pump as much as 140 million gallons a day to meet the needs of the county's 700,000 residents.

Mile 3.7—Crooked Creek Water Reclamation Facility—This sewage treatment plant sits just upstream on Crooked Creek, a tributary entering on river left. Collecting and treating the sewage of Gwinnett County, one of Georgia's fastest growing counties, its history tells the story of the area's dramatic growth. Originally built in 1972 to treat one million gallons a day (MGD), the plant has expanded continuously during the past four decades. In 2016, it is expected to treat up to 25 MGD. During that time the lexicon of sewage treatment has also evolved. In 1972, such facilities were referred to as "sewage plants," that evolved into "wastewater treatment plants" and finally the present and sanitized "water reclamation facilities." Of course, the standards for treatment have also evolved. The effluent issuing forth from most "reclamation facilities" is considered cleaner than the water in the receiving streams.

Mile 4.5—Horseshoe Bend Country Club—Named for the bend in the river that it occupies, the site for this golf course was the original home of the Atlanta Steeplechase in 1966. The course hugs the right bank of the river for the next 1.5 miles.

Mile 8.5—Island Ford Unit CRNRA—Located on river left, this unit of the national park holds the park's headquarters (with restrooms). Established in 1978, the CRNRA was one of the federal government's first experiments with "urban national parks" designed to give city dwellers a respite in nature close to home. By all accounts, the CRNRA has been a huge success. It hosts more than 3 million visitors each year. The park headquarters overlooking the river was originally the summer home of Georgia Supreme Court Justice Sam Hewlett. Built in the 1930s, it features timbers from the Okefenokee Swamp and stones harvested from Stone Mountain. Shoals extend along the islands downstream of this boat launch for three-quarters of a mile.

Mile 10.6—Sand Dredge—The odd looking barge located on river right here is a dredge used to harvest sand from the river bottom. Sand and water is pumped on shore through the series of floating pipes. The sand is used primarily as an ingredient in concrete, but also is employed as conditioner for many local lawns and golf courses.

Mile 12—Azalea Park—This City of Roswell facility provides parking, boat ramp, restrooms and picnic areas.

Mile 13—Chattahoochee Nature Center—This 127-acre facility has educated children and adults about local wildlife and the Chattahoochee River since the 1970s. The Center hosts 100,000 visitors annually and also cares for more than 1,000 injured or ill animals each year for rehabilitation and reintroduction to the wild, if possible. The Center can be accessed via a dock and a walking path that crosses Willeo Road here. The Center is offering discounted entry rates of \$5 for all Paddle Georgia participants.

Mile 15.5—Morgan Falls Park—Standing sentinel over this Sandy Springs park and the river is a chimney that is original to the home built here by Joseph and Isabella Power in the 1820s. The Powers operated a ferry across the river here, as did Joseph's brother downstream at what has come to be known as Powers Ferry.

Mile 16—Morgan Falls Dam & Portage—Our portage route around the 110-year-old dam is on river left. Look for safety boaters and DO NOT approach the dam until given the OK from these boaters. At the time of its construction in 1904, this dam was the largest hydroelectric facility in the South. The majority of the power it produced was used to run the Atlanta street car system. In fact, before its construction, Bull Sluice Lake was touted in the Atlanta Constitution as "the greatest summer resort in the southern states" and plans called for a trolley line extending from downtown to the lake. That line never materialized, but lines to Marietta and Stone Mountain did. Today, the facility still produces electricity, but only a fraction of the city's needs (enough to power about 4,000 homes). In fact, Georgia Power Co.'s 20 hydropower plants across the state supply just three percent of the total electricity it sells. In the 1940s, as a nation, 40 percent of the power we used came from hydro-power plants like this one.