

# Chattahoochee Bend Buck– Paddle Georgia 2014

June 26—Chattahoochee River

**Distance:** 20 miles

**Starting Elevation: 722 feet Lat: 33.5648°N Lon: -84.8230°W**

**Ending Elevation: 670 feet Lat: 33.4304°N Lon: -85.0123°W**

**Restroom Facilities:**     **Mile 0**    North Georgia Turf Farm                     **Mile 14.9**    McIntosh Reserve  
   **Mile 10.2**    Coweta County Riverside Park                     **Mile 20**     Chattahoochee Bend State Park

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 0—North Georgia Turf Farm**—Our launch site for the day is provided by North Georgia Turf, a sod farm that produces turf grass for homes, athletic fields, golf courses and other uses. Where corn and cotton were once the dominant crops of Georgia’s river bottoms, turfgrass is proving more profitable. Between 2005 and 2010 anywhere from 27,000 to 50,000 acres of sod was grown annually in the state, and in 2009, sod sales totaled \$116 million, ranking in the top 20 of the state’s farm commodities. Georgia’s corn crop, though planted on 420,000 acres, accounted for just \$203 million in sales. Sod is used as a means to quickly cover bare soil at development sites, helping to prevent soil erosion, but the intensive nature of sod farming—requiring frequent fertilization and water, and the removal of topsoil with each harvest—can lead to water pollution and soil erosion at production sites.

**Mile 0.8—Jones Ferry**—This is the site of a ferry that operated through the 1800s and up until the 1920s.

**Mile 1.3—Chattahoochee River Land Protection Campaign**—On river left here, the City of Chattahoochee Hills owns 234 acres that is slated for development as a city park. The land is part of more than 16,000 acres along the Chattahoochee that the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy and other partners acquired between 1995 and 2011 to create a green corridor along the river from Helen to Columbus. The project has protected 75 miles of river frontage at a cost of more than \$250 million.

**Mile 3.4—Bluffs at White Oak Creek**—The rocky outcroppings on river left are reminiscent of the bluffs at Palisades further up river. The Brevard fault—a 160-mile geological fault that cuts across North Georgia from the northeast tip of the state to the Alabama line at West Point—is responsible for these outcroppings. The bluffs along the river formed by the Brevard fault often harbor trees associated with North Georgia’s mountains including rhododendron and mountain laurel.

**Mile 4.5—Hutcheson’s Ferry**—A ferry at this location established in the 1800s ran until after 1940. In 1878 it is believed that the ferry was used to carry the body of State Senator Cheadle Cochran to be buried in the Laseter Cemetery located on a rise overlooking the river just to the west of this location. Cochran operated a mill (now Cochran Mill Park) located on the east side of the river during the early days of Campbell County (later to become Fulton County).

**Mile 8—Bowensville Manufacturing**—Though the fall on the Chattahoochee here is minimal and shoals are infrequent, just upstream on Snake Creek the geology was well suited for harnessing the creek’s water power. In 1847, the Bowen brothers established Carroll County’s first cotton mill, with Snake Creek’s fall powering 500 spindles. A cotton mill then operated almost continuously here until 1970. Though remote, Bowensville—later to become Banning—was among the first Georgia communities to enter the electric age thanks to the power of the creek. It is said that Atlanta residents, who were still without the modern convenience—would take excursions to the little mill village to see the electric lights. Today, the creek still fuels the local economy—the old mill is home to the Lodges at Banning Mills, a retreat that features the “world’s largest zipline” which spans the deep gorge formed by the creek.

**Mile 9.2—Moore’s Bridge Park**—The remains of a circa 1917 metal bridge connecting Coweta to Carroll County mark the original site of Moore’s Bridge, a 480-foot-long covered bridge built by noted Chattahoochee bridge builder and former slave, Horace King. The bridge was the scene of a comical episode during the Civil War. Looking to encircle Atlanta and cut off rail transportation to the city from the south, the Union Army sent cavalry downstream along the river seeking potential crossings. To their surprise and delight, on July 13, 1864 they found Moore’s Bridge. When the first Union soldiers arrived at the bridge (disguised in Confederate uniforms) they surprised a small contingent of Rebel soldiers skinny dipping in the river. Those that escaped capture did so unclothed and barefoot on the Coweta County side of the river, riding on to nearby Newnan to warn that the “Yankees were coming.” An artillery skirmish on July 14 followed this initial contact, and the fight for the bridge ended with the Union Army setting fire to it. This was Union Gen. William Sherman’s first foray into cavalry raids south of Atlanta to cut rail lines, and the raid’s utter failure should have been an omen that his strategy would not work. The destroyed bridge would come back to haunt the Yankee cavalry; on subsequent raids nearby they found themselves trapped on the east bank of the river with no means of escape from pursuing Confederate cavalry. In 1867, King rebuilt the bridge, only to see it washed away by a flood in 1881. In 2009 the Trust for Public Land purchased the property on the west bank of the river; Carroll County is expected to develop the property as a passive recreation park complete with canoe/kayak launches along the 1.4 miles of river frontage.

**Mile 10.5—Railroad Bridge**—A railroad has spanned the river here since 1872 when the Savannah, Griffin & North Alabama Railroad was extended to Carrollton. In 1882, it took a train five hours to run the 60 miles from Griffin to Carrollton with stops in Brooksville, Senoia, Turin, Sharpsburg, Newnan, Sargent, and Whitesburg. Many of the Georgia railroads of this era were built with leased prisoner labor. The state of Georgia, not wanting to pay to house and feed prisoners, instead leased them to railroad companies whose owners, by and large, treated them as slaves. In fact, most of the prisoners were former slaves. One state official close to the lease program, noting the increase in deaths among railroad workers, callously observed that casualties would have been fewer if the prisoners were “property having value to preserve.” The prisoner leasing system persisted in Georgia and some historians credit the system of cheap labor with revitalizing industrial development during Reconstruction and spawning the “New South.”

**Mile 11.3—Plant Yates**—Built in 1950, Yates has long been considered one of the state’s oldest—and most-polluting—coal-fired power plants, but in 2013, Georgia Power announced that it would shutter five of seven units at the plant and convert the remaining two units to natural gas. This announcement followed in 2007 the installation of cooling towers to reduce impacts on the river. The towers eliminated 93 percent of the plant’s daily withdrawals from the river as well as its heated water discharge. In 1999 at the height of a summer drought, thousands of fish died when water temperatures topped 100 degrees downstream of the plant’s discharge pipes.

**Mile 14.9—McIntosh Reserve**—The bluff on river right marks the site of Creek Indian Chief William McIntosh’s plantation, Lockchau Talofau (Acorn Bluff), established around 1817. The plantation was worked by 72 slaves and McIntosh’s home served as a tavern and inn, owing to its location on the Federal Road and a strategic crossing of the river. McIntosh signed the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825 that relinquished all Creek lands in Georgia to the U.S. government, and shortly thereafter, 200 of his fellow tribesmen set fire to his plantation and killed him. His dramatic murder was witnessed by many because high waters on the Chattahoochee had kept travelers holed up at his Inn, waiting for an easier river crossing. Gen. Alexander Ware, whose plantation was nearby on the east side of the river, provided relief for the McIntosh family and more than 100 other Creek refugees who feared for their lives. Georgia Gov. George Troup, a cousin of McIntosh’s, offered only meager assistance. A staunch advocate of the removal of the Creeks, Troup defied the federal government when President John Quincy Adams withdrew the questionably-negotiated Treaty of Indian Springs. In a states rights showdown 35 years before the Civil War, Troup organized the state militia to fight federal troops should they intervene. President Adams backed down, the treaty stood, and by 1927 many of the Creeks were forcibly removed from their homes. Paddlers can take out just above the shoals downstream of Acorn Bluff for a quarter-mile walk to restrooms. Further downstream is a boat ramp providing access to the park.

**Mile 17 & 20.3—Chattahoochee Bend State Park**—A canoe/kayak launch on river left at Mile 17 marks canoe-in camping sites at this state park which opened in 2011—Georgia’s first new state park since 1993. At 2900-acres it ranks as the state’s fifth largest park and protects five miles of river frontage. Our take out for the day is located at Mile 20.3 and the park’s boat ramp.