Mile 6.1—Hilly Mill Falls & Alan Jackson—On river left here is the mouth of Hilly Mill Creek. A short distance up the creek on private property is Hilly Mill Falls, a beautiful cascade of about 20 feet that spills into a long ledge that is worthy of exploration. The Nature Conservancy was instrumental in purchasing the islands as well as adjacent and nearby land.

Mile 6.2—Hilly Mill Hustle—This is one of the few swimmers who led naked troops in a daring crossing of the Chattahoochee three days earlier (see Smith’s Ferry & McCook’s Raid on Map 5). After successfully blazing a path of destruction from the Chattahoochee to the Flint River south of Atlanta, the Union cavalry hot-footed it back west to safety beyond the Chattahoochee, only to be intercepted by Confederate cavalry and infantry and utterly destroyed at the Battle of Brown’s Mill near Newnan. The splintered remnants of the Union cavalry escaped the battlefield and sprinted for the river in scattered groups. Col. Brownlow’s men reached Hollingsworth Ferry in the middle of the night where they found a precipitous bank and only two small canoes to shuttle them to safety. Brownlow—one of the few swimmers in the crowd— stripped to the skin—and spent the next five hours paddling and helping his comrades cross the river. When the Confederate cavalry overtook them, only about 150 made it to safety and more than 100 (including Brownlow) were caught between the river and the Rebels. Brownlow abandoned his horse and leaped into the river, swimming across under heavy fire. A day later he straggled into Union headquarters in Marietta wearing civilian clothes and a farmer’s straw hat. He was one of only about 500—out of 3,000—to return from the calamitous raid. Upon hearing the news, Gen. Sherman telegraphed his lieutenants: “I am quite unwell.” Seven years before this drama unfolded Levi Hollingsworth obtained a permit from the General Assembly to build a dam across the river at this point to power a gristmill and sawmill. Whether the dam was constructed remains unclear, but Hollingsworth did operate a brick kiln, furniture factory, woolen mill and his ferry. A family history claims that he also built a bridge across the river—one that was said to have been destroyed during the Civil War…obviously before Col. Brownlow and his men arrived. The ferry operated for more than 100 years, finally shutting down in 1978. A Department of Natural Resources boat ramp now marks the site.

Mile 6.6—Hilly Mill Falls & Alan Jackson—Yesterday the falls were a popular community gathering spot (Paddle Georgia participant Joe Kidd grew up swimming here). The pool at the falls’ base was also employed for baptisms by nearby Enon Grove Baptist Church. In more recent times, Hilly Mill inspired Newman native and country music superstar Alan Jackson to pen “Chattahoochee,” a song that was voted country music’s top single in 1993.

Mile 7.0—Daniel Shoals—Today, Centralhatchee remains important to the area, serving as one of Heard County’s water sources.

Mile 7.9—Daniel Shoals—Enjoy the falls! This is a special place. This location will also serve as our pit stop for the day. Taylor Glover, a former Chattahoochee Riverkeeper board member, owns the property with others.

Mile 8.4—Red Bone Creek Falls—Not as impressive as Hilly Mill, but still worth the visit. The falls on Red Bone Creek splash down about 10 feet and are visible from the river. The falls here and at Hilly Mill are more evidence of the Brevard fault.

Mile 8.9—Bushhead Shoals & Islands—This set of three islands totaling 20 acres is perhaps the largest island complex on the length of the river. In high water, the river can be navigated, leading to Bushhead Shoals at the end of the islands. At the head of each island it is not uncommon to find mammoth flotillas of trash—today’s very visible signs of metro Atlanta’s impact on the river. In the 1940s, timber on these islands was harvested by a crew using axes and saws. A team of mules and horses was employed to drag the timbers to the river where they were then winched across the channel to a waiting diesel-powered sawmill. While the horses and mules stayed on the islands for the duration of the six-month operation, the work crew ferried themselves to work each day. The sawmill hands reported that there were remains of many moonshine stills on the islands. Today, the land is fully forested and worthy of exploration.

The Nature Conservancy was instrumental in purchasing the islands as well as adjacent and nearby land on both sides of the river for protection as a state park, though no plans for the land have yet been developed. The best course through the shoals at the tail of the island is through the gap of the river channel around the islands and then work your way back to the center to run a chute over a small ledge. It’s nearly a mile from the head of the islands to the final shoal below the islands.

Mile 12.1—Daniel Shoals—The largest natural shoal on the river between Atlanta and Lake West Point, Daniel Shoals is a long ledge that is best navigated on far river left. An island marks the beginning of the shoals and the river becomes very shallow adjacent to the island. Paddlers should move to the left of the island and hug the bank on river left. Look for the large chute that flows to the center of the river. In high water, the shoal is navigable on both sides of the island.

Mile 14.8—Franklin/Chattahoochee Old Town—Our week-long journey ends where the river is said to have gotten its name. Modern-day Franklin is believed to be situated on the site of the Creek Indian town of Chattahoochee. In 1779, Benjamin Hawkins, the U.S. Indian Agent, was sent to the river derived from “Chatto,” meaning “people,” “hatchee,” meaning “creek,” and “hatchee,” meaning “perch” and “hatchee” meaning “creek.” The stream was recorded on earlier maps as Sundallathabee. You’d hardly guess by looking at it now, but in the 1800s this tributary was of economic significance. In 1834, the Georgia General Assembly adopted a law requiring that “Central Hatchie” creek remain open for the free passage of lumber boats from Tompkins Mill downstream to its confluence with the Chattahoochee. Today, Centralhatchee remains important to the area, serving as one of Heard County’s water sources.

Distance: 15 miles
Starting Elevaion: 670 feet Lat: 33.3404°N Lon: -85.0123 W
Ending Elevaion: 635 Lat: 33.2774°N Lon: -85.1011 W

Restroom Facilities: Mile 0 Hilly Mill Bend State Park Mile 6.6 Hilly Mill Creek Mile 15 Riverside Park Points of Interest: Mile 0—Chattahoochee Bend State Park—Perhaps no other development along the river represents the revival of the Chattahoochee downstream of Atlanta better than this state park. The first tracts of what would become the park were purchased by the state in 1999, and in 2005 Coweta County agreed to fund a general development plan for the park. Finally, in 2007 with help from House Natural Resources Chairperson Rep. Lynn Smith from Newman, $7 million in state funds were secured to make the park a reality. It opened in 2011. Of course, the Chattahoochee is the centerpiece of the 2000 acres that also features six miles of walking, biking and equestrian trails. The Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park, who helped organize our street party in Newman, assist the Department of Natural Resources with special projects at the park, including trail maintenance and regular river clean ups.

Mile 6—Hilly Mill Bend State Park—This tributary’s moniker comes from the Creek language: “Sundal” meaning “perch” and “hatchee” meaning “creek.” The stream was recorded on earlier maps as Sundallathabee. You’d hardly guess by looking at it now, but in the 1800s this tributary was of economic significance. In 1834, the Georgia General Assembly adopted a law requiring that “Central Hatchie” creek remain open for the free passage of lumber boats from Tompkins Mill downstream to its confluence with the Chattahoochee. A short walk across the river and up the riverside recreational path will take you to the Heard County Jail Museum to learn more about the region’s cultural history. Or, if you want to stay in your boat and continue the journey, it’s only 231.8 miles to the river’s end at Jim Woodruff Dam on the Georgia-Florida state line!