

# Fish Camp Calypso— Paddle Georgia 2015

June 22—Ogeechee River

**Distance:** 14 miles

**Starting Elevation: 95 feet Lat: 32.4944°N Lon: -81.5553°W**

**Ending Elevation: 75 feet Lat: 32.3768°N Lon: -81.5212°W**

**Restroom Facilities:**

<b>Mile 0</b>	Ga. 24
<b>Mile 6</b>	Sheppard Landing
<b>Mile 13.7</b>	Beasley Landing

## **Point of Interest:**

**Mile 0.7—Effingham County**—On river left, we leave Screven County and enter Effingham County, formed in 1777, the fourth of Georgia's eight original counties. Today Effingham has a population of more than 50,000 and in the early 2000s the suburban Savannah county was ranked the 44<sup>th</sup> fastest growing county in the nation. New industry and its proximity to the port of Savannah has spurred much of the growth. At the turn of another century, it was a different land. The Georgia Historical & Industrial Statistics of 1901 provided these details about the county of about 8,000 inhabitants: "The Savannah river separates it from South Carolina and the Ogeechee is on its western border. These rivers and the creeks that flow into them furnish to this county a plentiful supply of fish, and in the proper season, some of the finest shad found in the Savannah market are fresh from these rivers...Pine and cypress lumber obtained from the forests find a convenient market in Savannah. The annual output of lumber and naval stores amounts to \$150,000 The productions of the county are cotton, corn, peas, potatoes, rice, melons, peaches, apples, pears, quinces and grapes." Springfield, home of our Effingham County High School campsite, remains the county seat, but not the center of population. The county's population is centered further east toward Savannah in Rincon.

**Mile 1—DOT Mitigation Site**—On river right is a Georgia Department of Transportation wetlands mitigation site. The federal Clean Water Act requires that when construction activity fills or destroys wetlands, the responsible party must restore, improve or preserve wetlands elsewhere. What's a wetland? The official definition is this: "Those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas." A century ago, it was the policy of state and federal governments to drain and fill wetlands wherever possible. The belief at the time was that these "improvements" created more arable land and eliminated useless, disease-and-insect ridden places. "Drainage Districts" were created and federal and state dollars flowed to dry up the land. We have since learned that wetlands are critical to clean water. They filter pollutants, store floodwater, provide habitat for fish and wildlife, serve as nurseries for many commercially valuable crops and seafood and give us a place to hunt and fish. It has been estimated that Georgia has lost more than 20 percent of its wetlands since the 1780s—one of many reasons that our rivers do not flow as clear and clean as they once did. The U.S. Geological Survey classifies about 20 percent of Georgia's land area as wetlands.

**Mile 1.1—Shoals**—In low water, a rock shelf appears here, creating a small shoal that may require a short portage. Likewise, shortly downstream another shoal may be visible in extreme low water.

**Mile 2.8—Ogeechee Forest Landing**—One of several riverfront communities on this stretch of river that in 2011 felt the impacts of the massive fish kill associated with the discharge from the King America textile facility some 24 miles upriver. The fish kill prompted more than 60 civil suits against the company with many riverfront property owners claiming diminished use of their property and devalued land prices.

**Mile 3.4—Gobar Landing**—Riverfront neighborhood on river right.

**Mile 4.2—Walden Branch Cut off**—One of many oxbow cut offs along our route. To the right, the river has carved a new, more direct path through the lowland forest. To the left is a long oxbow shaped like a boot that winds three-tenths of a mile at the mouth of Walden Branch. The new route is less than a tenth of a mile long.

**Mile 5.8—Circa 1878 Toll Bridge**—These bridge pilings are likely the remains of a toll bridge built in 1878 by lumber baron E.E. Foy who operated a large sawmill on the east side of the river in the community of Egypt and was responsible for establishing a turpentine mill in Portal. The bridge was destroyed by a flood in 1881 and was never rebuilt. You could say that Egypt, a boomtown at the turn of the century, was a town that Foy built. His large sawmill there was the heart of the community, but Foy also employed hundreds in harvesting and distilling turpentine and had an extensive syrup making enterprise in Egypt. He and a partner patented a syrup skimmer in 1882 and in 1902 his operation gained attention in the U.S. Bureau of Chemistry's Bulletin: "Inspection of Sugar Cane Fields and Syrup Factories." Wrote the inspectors: "Foy makes a specialty of feeding the skimmings and other waste products to pigs. The well-known fattening properties of skimmings was illustrated in a striking manner by the sleek and rotund condition of the pigs being fed." Foy served in the Georgia House of Representatives in the 1880s and died in 1907.

**Mile 5.9—Shearwood Railroad**—These bridge pilings once supported the 38-mile-long Shearwood Railway. Built between 1910 and 1918, during the 1920s a daily passenger train ran from Egypt on the east side of the Ogeechee to Claxton, south of Statesboro. The railway was built by John N. Shearhouse who, like Foy, found profits in the lumber and turpentine trade. During its heyday, this rail line included three locomotives, four passenger cars, a boxcar and a flatcar. Among its more common freight was watermelons, and the fertilizer to grow those melons. The railroad name comes from the lumber company that Shearhouse operated. In 1926, Shearhouse was killed in a railroad accident; in 1937 the line was abandoned. The old rail bed is now used as a road.

**Mile 8.2—Strainers**—At this bend, you enter series of sharp oxbows filled with many strainers. As the crow flies, it is just 0.4 mile to the other side of this maze, but in that space the river winds 1.4 miles

**Mile 9.9—Riverview Landing**—Riverfront neighborhood on river right.

**Mile 10.5—Midland Railway**—These bridge pilings mark an important, but short-lived early 20<sup>th</sup> century railroad link for the city of Statesboro—the Midland Railway. The Midland was constructed between 1908 and 1915 and provided Statesboro with a rail link to Savannah. In 1919 the company had three locomotives, 67 freight cars, four coaches, two combination cars, and one caboose. The 48-mile trip from Savannah to Statesboro took 3 hours. This section of the railway folded in 1923. Growth in Statesboro after the Civil War was hampered by its position on the south side of the Ogeechee River, out of reach of the Central of Georgia railroad that ran along the north side of the river. During the Civil War, a Union commander unwittingly arrived in Statesboro and asked the proprietor of a saloon for directions to the town. The saloonkeeper replied; "You are standing in the middle of town." The Union officer couldn't be blamed for overlooking the "town," in 1864 it consisted of a few simple structures inhabited by a handful of families. The Union Army then destroyed the "courthouse," a log structure that served as a barn when court was not in session. By 1890, Statesboro had grown to a town of 425 residents, and by 1900, with a rail connection to the rest of the world secured, the town's population had grown to 1200. As the long-leaf pines surrounding town fell to the lumbermen, the piney savannahs were replaced by rows of cotton and by 1908, Statesboro was the world's leading market for Sea Island Cotton, a variety highly-prized for its extra-long fibers. But, the turn of the century development that has had the most lasting impact on Statesboro was the landing in 1906 of state agricultural and mechanical school. That school soon became Georgia Teachers College and ultimately Georgia Southern University. Today, GSU is home to 20,000 students and pumps some \$800 million into the local economy annually. Statesboro is also notable for an iconic blues song: "Statesboro Blues," originally recorded by Thomson, Georgia native, Blind Willie McTell. McTell, who was indeed blind, was one of the great blues musicians of the 1920s and 30s and learned to play the guitar with his family and neighbors while living in Statesboro.

**Mile 11.4 Shoal & Shearhouse Landing**—You'll find a shoal here in low water followed by a riverfront neighborhood.

