

Calhoun Hustle—Paddle Georgia 2016

June 22—Coosawattee & Oostanaula Rivers

Distance: 21 miles

Starting Elevation: 627 feet **Lat:** 34.5413°N **Lon:** -84.9006°W

Ending Elevation: 619 feet **Lat:** 34.4774°N **Lon:** -84.0314°W

Restroom Facilities:

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| Mile 0 | Ga. 225 Boat Ramp |
| Mile 11 | Ga. 136 Boat Ramp |
| Mile 21 | Ga. 156 Boat Ramp |

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—New Echota—Our launch site for the day sits just a couple of hundred yards upstream from the confluence of the Coosawattee and the Conasauga rivers where in 1825, the Cherokee national legislature established its capital. The site that was a symbol of so much hope for the Cherokee people in 1825 would, 10 years later, come to symbolize the most tragic era in Cherokee history. It was here in 1835 that the Treaty of New Echota was signed. The treaty ceded all Cherokee land east of the Mississippi to the federal government and led to the forced removal of the Cherokee in 1838. When the Cherokees established their capital at New Echota, the act enraged Georgia's leaders, and when gold was discovered on the nearby Etowah River in 1828, the state government's efforts to remove the Cherokee intensified. Georgia's legislature passed laws forbidding the Cherokee legislature to meet and prohibiting Cherokees from testifying in court cases involving white people. In 1832, the state gave away Cherokee land to white settlers in a land lottery and for the next six years, the Georgia Guard conducted a form of vigilante justice against the Cherokee. The oppressed natives took their fight against these injustices all the way to the Supreme Court and the Court ruled in their favor, but Georgia, and President Andrew Jackson, ignored the ruling. In 1838, New Echota became the site of a Cherokee removal fort—where U.S. soldiers held Cherokee before forcing them west. Today, the Cherokee Nation does govern itself. The 200,000-strong tribe (second largest in the country) is centered in Oklahoma where some 70,000 live in a 7,000 square mile “jurisdictional service area.” The Nation controls the development of tribal assets that includes 66,000 acres of land as well as 96 miles of the Arkansas riverbed—a far distance and a far cry from the Coosawattee and Conasauga. The Oostanaula now becomes our paddle path for the next three days.

Mile 1.2—Fish Weir—Built by Native Americans, these weirs pre-date the Cherokee occupation though they might have been utilized by the Cherokee, just as they were utilized by early European settlers. In fact, eventually the State of Georgia adopted laws restricting their use because they were so effective. In use, a group of people would wade the water upstream of the V-shaped rock dam, spooking fish to the point where a basket awaited to corral the fish. Near this site, the Oostanaula (running north) and the Conasauga and Coosawattee (running south) all lie parallel to and within one mile of each other, separated only by two small ridges.

Mile 3.8—Steamboats on the Oostanaula—Near where U.S. 41 and the CSX rail bridges now cross the river, in 1874, a 111-foot-long, 18-foot-wide, double-decker steamboat with a draw of three feet was launched into the Oostanaula. The *Mary Carter*, built by L.H. Hall of Resaca, worked the upper Coosa River basin for three years during the heyday of steamboat navigation of the Oostanaula and Coosawattee rivers. Steamboats plied both rivers and ventured as far upstream as the present-day site of Carters Dam. In that day the arrival of steamboats in Resaca created quite a stir. Ms. Tilla Hooker, in a 1958 issue of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, recalled, “I was going to school, my first or second year, and when the boats would near Resaca, the whistle would start blowing and the children would get so excited Miss Hill (the teacher) would have to give us recess and would take us down to the dock to see them load lumber, logs, cotton, etc.”

Mile 4.4—I-75—Perhaps no other modern-day development has done more to change the face of Georgia than the construction of I-75. Like the steamboat routes and railroads of the 1800s and early 1900s, the interstate highway system has shaped our culture and fueled our economy. Georgian, Lucius D. Clay of Marietta, was tapped by President Eisenhower in 1954 to map out the nationwide system...an appointment that contributed to three major interstates converging on Atlanta. Of course, the interstate system also gave birth to truck stops. The Flying J in Resaca can be accessed via a short trail from the river.

Mile 4.8—Camp Creek & Battle of Resaca—One of the key battles of the Civil War was fought just upstream along this creek and illustrates the importance of rivers in warfare. On May 14, 1864 Confederate troops formed a line from the Oostanaula near here north and east to the Conasauga River. Union troops attacked the line, but with Camp Creek splitting the battlefield and endowed with “quicksand in places and steep muddy banks,” the obstacle aided the Confederates in repelling the attacks. The following day, Gen. William T. Sherman opted to send troops 10 miles downstream on the Oostanaula where they crossed at Lay's Ferry. This flanking maneuver threatened the Rebels' communications and supply lines, forcing them to flee across the Oostanaula in the dead of the night. The army crossed on a bridge where the U.S. 41 bridge now stands, burning it after crossing to slow Union troops.

Mile 10.5—Abandoned Calhoun Water Intake—How bad was the pollution from Dalton's carpet mills in the later part of the 20th century? In 1980 the City of Calhoun spent \$5 million building a drinking water intake on the Coosawattee and setting five and a half miles of pipe to avoid continued dependence on the Oostanaula. This was deemed cheaper and safer than the costs of treating the Oostanaula's foul water. Paddlers and fisherman who plied the Conasauga in the 70s, 80s and even into the 90s tell stories of massive fish kills, river water running the color of carpet dye and carpet lint so thick it clogged outboard motors.

Mile 11.1—Oostanaula Covered Bridge—Where Ga. 136 now crosses the river, Calhoun residents of the late 1800s and early 1900s passed on a wooden covered bridge. Local historian Eulalie Lewis recorded this account of a storm destroying the bridge around 1915: “John and Sam Simpson who lived in Calhoun were returning in a wagon one afternoon...and were caught in the storm. They hastened to the bridge for shelter from the pelting hail. Their team became frightened at the sound of hail on the roof, and the driver was unable to check them. As they rushed off the bridge, the brothers heard a crash and on looking back, saw an open chasm. The old bridge had given way under the strain of the wind and perhaps by vibration caused by the rushing team and had dropped into the river behind them.” The bridge was completely lost within two years of this incident when floodwaters severely damaged it.

Mile 11.5—Calhoun Sewage & Nutrient Trading—On river left here is the discharge from the Calhoun wastewater treatment plant. In recent years, Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) began enforcing limits on the amount of phosphorus that sewage treatment plants in the upper Coosa River basin can discharge to our rivers and streams. The stricter limits were enacted because of chronic algae blooms on Weiss Lake, the Alabama reservoir that receives all of northwest Georgia's waste. Unfortunately, studies show that nearly 70 percent of the phosphorus entering the system comes from non-point sources (run off from urban, suburban and agricultural land) that does not fall under any environmental regulations. In an effort to stem flows from these non-point sources, Calhoun is experimenting with nutrient trading in which the city pays for management practices at local farms that keep phosphorus and other nutrients from reaching the river. The belief is that these measures will be less expensive to implement and yield greater reductions in nutrient loads than costly upgrades at the sewage treatment plant. The pilot program now underway should shed light on the feasibility of large-scale nutrient trading to improve the health of the river and resolve Weiss Lake's algae blooms.

Mile 14—Lay's Ferry—Here on May 15, 1864, Union troops constructed a pontoon bridge and crossed the river in a move that turned a stalemate in Resaca into a victory for the Union army. Wrote Union Brigadier General Elliott W. Rice of the rout of a small Confederate contingency at the Battle of Lay's Ferry: “The importance of this engagement cannot be measured by the enemy's killed, captured, and wounded. The position gained placed our army on the flank of the enemy, and his communications at our mercy.”

Mile 20.2—Railroad—The bridge here emblazoned with the “PROM?” proposal marks the location of the original Selma, Rome & Dalton Railroad constructed here between 1867 and 1870. An 1882 advertisement for the route boasts of “splendid mountain scenery” and “first class eating houses” with convenient stops “long enough to afford ample time for the enjoyment of meals.” Today, the line is operated by Norfolk Southern.

