The old bridge had given way under the strain of the wind and perhaps by vibration, the obstacle had 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 Oostanuala—Near where U.S. 41 and the CSX rail bridges now cross the river, in 1874, a 110-foot-long, 18-foot-wide, double-decker steamboat with a draw of three feet was launched into the Oostanuala. 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 Oostanuala 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 account of a storm destroying the bridge

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| 0    | Ga. 225 Boat Ramp   | 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 1817, 10 years later a some would 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 Cherokee 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 Oostanuala now becomes our paddle path for the next three days through a string of weirs and rapids (see map).</p>

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 Oostanuala near here north and east to the Coosa 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 flank maneuver threatened the Rebels' communications and supply lines, forcing them to flee across the Oostanuala 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 4.5—Abandoned Calhoun Water Treatment Plant—How bad was the pollution from Dalton’s carpet mills in the later part of the 20th century? In 1980 the City of Calhoun built a $1.5 million drinking water intake on the Coosaawattee and setting five and a half miles of pipe to avoid continued pollution on the Oostanuala. This was deemed cheaper and safer than the costs of treating the Oostanuala’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 color of carpet dye and carpet lint so thick it clogged outboard motors.

Mile 11.1—Oostanuala 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 crack 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 Enterprise 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 than building a new 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 its communications at our mercy.”

Paddle Georgia 2016 — June 22—Coosawattee & Oostanuala 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: -84.8314°W