

Rumba to Rome—Paddle Georgia 2016

June 24—Oostanaula & Coosa Rivers

Distance: 14 miles

Starting Elevation: 575 feet **Lat:** 34.3794°N **Lon:** -84.1253°W

Ending Elevation: 560 feet **Lat:** 34.2548°N **Lon:** -85.1801°W

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Ga. 140 Boat Ramp
Mile 13.1	Rome ECO River Center
Mile 14	Heritage Park

Points of Interest:

Mile 0.2—Wing Dam—As noted on the previous map, these rock dams jutting from the river’s edge are not a natural phenomenon. They were built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1870s and 1880s to facilitate the passage of steamboats to points as far north as present-day Carters Dam on the Coosawattee River. At that time, the land just downstream from the dam (built beginning in the 1960s) was home to one of the most productive plantations in north Georgia owned by the influential Carter family who, no doubt, helped influence Congress to allocate funds for these river improvements.

Mile 2.9—Armuchee Creek—A great paddling stream in its own right, Armuchee Creek’s headwaters flow in part from nearby Rocky Mountain where Paddle Georgia sponsor Oglethorpe Power operates a pump storage hydro-electric facility. During peak hours, water stored in a 220 acre reservoir on the top of the mountain is released through a 570 foot shaft and a 1,935 foot tunnel via turbines into another 600-acre lower reservoir. At night the water is pumped back to the upper reservoir using excess power generated at other power plants. OPC supplies wholesale electric power to thirty-eight of Georgia’s forty-two electric membership corporations (EMCs), with a service area that covers 37,000 square miles, or 65 percent of the state. In creating the power facility, Rocky Mountain’s broad, flat peak was leveled and excavated to make way for the reservoir.

Mile 3.2—UGA Farm & Jones Bend—On river left extending downstream to Woodward Creek is the 905-acre University of Georgia Northwest Georgia Research & Education Center—used primarily for beef cattle breeding research. In 2008, the Coosa River Basin Initiative (CRBI) convinced the state-owned farm to abide by their own recommendations to private farmers: “fence livestock out of streams and rivers.” Prior to this successful advocacy effort, farm operators allowed their cows full access to Woodward Creek. CRBI water tests showed that bacteria levels were elevated downstream of the farm. Unfortunately, livestock access remains a serious problem along the Oostanaula even still on this state-owned farm. When granted access to streams and rivers, livestock destroy river side plants, causing increased erosion while their feces pollutes the water.

Mile 4.9—Jones Bend Island—This island is a great play place and the gravel bar a great place to find mussel shells.

Mile 7.6—Dozier Creek & Whitmore Island—The mouth of Dozier Creek is marked by a shallow shoal and island. In the mid-1900s, the island was frequently visited by Rome residents who spent a week or more camping and fishing. In a 1974 interview published in the *Rome News-Tribune*, Wingfield Landsdell said, “We used to catch all the fish we could use, and have plenty for our friends. The best meals in the world were the ones we used to make from freshly caught fish cooked right on the spot at our camp on that island.” By the 1960s, however, this fishing paradise had been fouled. In the same newspaper article, writer Roger Aycock laments “pollution from civic and industrial sources have largely destroyed the once idyllic pursuit of river fishing and camping.”

Mile 8—Whitmore’s Bluff—Just downstream of Dozier Creek this bluff and ridge rises some 250 feet above the riverbed. The unique bluff habitat, rich in limestone soils is home to 334 species of plants, including the federally-protected wildflower, Georgia rockcress, and three-flowered hawthorn, a shrub listed as threatened in Georgia where only 15 known populations exist. In 2014, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in declaring Georgia rockcress a threatened species also designated 732 acres of land in five Georgia counties as critical habitat for the species, including 43 acres of privately owned land on this promontory. The bluff is also home to wildflowers like blue phlox, shooting stars, columbine, lance-leaf trillium and stonecrop. Because of its botanical diversity, physical beauty and Mitchell’s Cave, a small cave with spring issuing from it, the bluff has long been a destination for local residents. In the 1920s, local scout troops commonly visited; in recent years the Georgia Botanical Society has made regular pilgrimages to the bluff.

Mile 8.7—Native American Fish Weir—The only known fish weir on the Oostanaula in Floyd County, and a beauty. The rock wall on river left is still in tact, but the wall extending upstream on river right was partially removed during the Corps of Engineers’ 1870s navigational work. Some of the Corps wing dams can be seen just downstream of the weir during low water.

Mile 10.3—Berry College—The property at river right is owned by Berry College. With 26,000 acres, Berry boasts of the world’s largest contiguous college campus--most of it is managed timberland, wildlife management area and farmland. The school operates a beef and dairy cow facility and has a thriving pre-vet program. Deer are believed to outnumber students.

Mile 12.5—Chieftain’s Museum—The historic home of Major Ridge, a Cherokee leader at the time of their removal. Major Ridge fought alongside Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812 and it was there that he earned the rank “Major” and soon began using the title as his first name. Andrew Jackson, the President, would ultimately drive Ridge and his fellow Cherokee from their lands in the 1830s. Ridge signed the Treaty of New Echota, selling all Cherokee lands to the U.S. in exchange for land in present-day Oklahoma. Angered by the treaty and the suffering that ensued, fellow Cherokees murdered Ridge in 1839. Ironically, as a Cherokee Tribal Council member, Ridge pushed a law through Council sentencing to death any individual who sold tribal lands. Ridge operated a thriving plantation along the Oostanaula as well as a river ferry. Paddlers can take out just below the abandoned water intake structure at a rough fisherman’s trail to visit the Museum or paddle a half-mile further to take out at the Rome ECO River Center with a boat landing and dock and walk along a river trail back upstream to visit the museum. Admission charges apply.

Mile 13.1—Rome ECO River Center—Housed in the City of Rome’s circa 1893 water pumping station, this environmental education center opened in 2011 after extensive renovations of the historic building. The LEED Gold-certified building now houses numerous aquariums (including a 3,000 gallon tank) featuring native fish, turtles, snakes, alligators and frogs. The land on which the building sits is part of Ridge Ferry Park, the city’s premier park. In 1852, the property was, of course, employed otherwise. Shortly after Rome’s founding, an 1852 account recorded in *The Southern Cultivator*, a monthly journal “devoted to the interests of southern agriculture,” describes “Riverbank Farm” a thriving plantation operated by Dr. George M. Battey. The Journal reported that when Dr. Battey took ownership around 1850, it was “impoverished,” having been “cultivated on the scalping system of the Cherokees,” but that in short order, “under the improved system of the present owner...the old field of the aborigines has greatly altered.” Battey grew corn, wheat and cotton and cultivated a three-acre vegetable garden while raising cows, chickens, ducks, geese and pigeons.

Mile 13.4—City Clocktower View—Here the river serves up a picturesque view of Rome’s iconic Clocktower. North Georgia’s only “river town,” Rome sits at the confluence of the Oostanaula and Etowah. From this junction, it’s a 600-mile journey to Mobile Bay via the Coosa and Alabama rivers. The 100 block of Broad Street is known as the “Cotton Block” because cotton was brought here to ship down river. Frequent flooding in Rome prompted the construction of a levee system in 1939 which you’ll see on river right as you enter town. While the levee proved ineffective at preventing all floods in the downtown district, the construction of Allatoona Dam in 1952 finally did the trick. Floods were so troublesome for the city that in the late 1800s, downtown merchants abandoned their first floors and brought in fill dirt to raise the level of Broad Street. The first floors of many of downtown’s historic buildings are actually second floors. You’ll pass under several bridges as you come into town—most notably at the river’s confluence with the Etowah--the historic Central of Georgia rail bridge, a swing bridge built for passage of steamboats.

Mile 14.3—The Dixie—Lying along the southern bank of the Etowah and Coosa rivers is the remains of the *The Dixie*. The wood structure of the steamboat and some metal parts can still be discerned in low water, as can portions of the wharf where the boat once docked. The boat caught fire and sank here in 1914.

