

McGraw Ford Foxtrot–Paddle Georgia 2017

June 18—Etowah River

Distance: 17 miles

Starting Elevation: 958 feet **Lat:** 34.31372°N, **Lon:** -84.22874°W

Ending Elevation: 914 feet **Lat:** 34.29947°N **Lon:** - 84.39646°W

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Eagles Beak Park
Mile 9.3	Conns Creek
Mile 17	East Cherokee Drive

Points of Interest:

Mile 0.8—Old Federal Road & Scudder’s Inn—You’d hardly suspect it now, but this two-lane road was once the major thoroughfare by which early settlers entered the Cherokee Nation of North Georgia. A trading path as early as 1731, the old route evolved into the Federal Road through the efforts of various people rather than the federal government. Among the most important were the Cherokee Indians who constructed portions of the road in exchange for the right to operate inns and stores as well as ferries on the more than 80 streams and rivers that the road traversed. In the 1820s, the going rate for a ferry crossing was \$1 for a wagon and four horses, 50 cents for a man and horse and one cent each for hogs, sheep and goats. This river crossing was known as Frogtown Ford. Enterprising whites also moved in to profit off travelers, often resulting in conflicts with the Cherokee. A quarter mile east of the river here, American citizen Jacob Scudder operated an inn from 1817 to 1831 and refused to pay taxes to the Cherokee for that privilege. The Cherokee retaliated with fines and the seizure of some of his property. With the removal of the Cherokee and the advent of new roads, use of the Federal Road declined. Railroads further reduced the road’s significance.

Mile 2.1—Fish Weir—The first of these ancient structures you will float over on this journey. Built 500 to 100 years ago, there are dozens more between here and Rome. In fact, the Etowah is believed to have more fish weirs than can be found on all other Georgia rivers combined. Look for the v-shaped rock dams pointing downstream. Native Americans would catch fish by forming a line of people upstream of the dam and spooking fish to the downstream point where a basket would be waiting to corral the fish. Early settlers also made use of these structures.

Mile 3.8—Woodhaven Bend—At this bend in the river you’ll find a boat launch and pavilion, marking the start of this upscale subdivision that the Etowah winds around for the next two miles. The equestrian estate neighborhood was the vision of Robin Loudermilk, CEO of the Atlanta-based rent-to-own company, Aaron Rents. Development of the property included the preservation of a 150-foot buffer along the river. All residents of the neighborhood have access to the river via walking paths and several boat launches—a development plan that better protects the river corridor and better serves the residents. Of course, residents have to pay for the pleasure of these river amenities. In 2004, the first homes in the subdivision started at \$800,000.

Mile 5.7—Yellow Creek Road Iron Bridge—The remains of the iron bridge mark this former route of Yellow Creek Road and the site of a tragic incident in 1905 involving the superintendent of the Franklin-Creighton Gold Mine. That incident likely precipitated the construction of the bridge. This account appeared in the April 28, 1905 issue of the *Rome News-Tribune*: “A terrible tragedy was enacted at Creighton Wednesday afternoon when Edward Axson, wife and baby were drowned in the Etowah river. Mr. Axson accompanied by his wife and child were going to a picnic a few miles distant from Creighton. He was driving a nettlesome span of horses. About one-fourth of a mile from the river the horses ran away. Instead of a bridge the river is crossed by means of a flat and this is always left on the bank directly in the path of the road. The horses dashed across the flat, carrying their human burden and plunged into the river, which was about 15 feet deep at this place. Mr. Axson sought to rescue his wife and child. He gathered them under each arm and struggled to gain the task, but it was too great a burden. The bodies of Mrs. Axson and baby were washed towards the dam and were found immediately. Mr. Axson’s body was not found until late yesterday.” This was of particular interest to Romans as Axson was a native son, the brother of Ellen Axson Wilson, wife of Woodrow Wilson who in 1913 would become the country’s 28th president. The remains of the dam mentioned in this news story lie just around the bend.

Mile 5.8—Franklin-Creighton Gold Mine & and Other Historic Nuggets—The cross-river shoal at this location marks the site of a dam that helped power the Franklin-Creighton Goldmine. In the early 1830s, an English immigrant, John Pascoe, established a mine near this site that proved quite successful, but he was a victim of his own prosperity. He died of mercury poisoning in 1853, the result of constant exposure to mercury in the gold ore processing operation. The legacy of mercury has lasted much longer than the gold. Even today, fish caught from the Etowah River have been found to contain unhealthy levels of mercury and some of it is believed to be the result of mercury’s extensive use at mining operations during the 1800s. The other notable miner at this site was Mary G. Franklin, a widow who drew a forty-acre lot in the 1832 Land Lottery. After acquiring the property, she had dozens of offers for her holding. Her curiosity piqued, Mrs. Franklin decided to investigate her new property. Upon her arrival, she found a score of men shoveling dirt and panning gold. Mrs. Franklin had the men removed and her efforts on the property ultimately led to the development of one of the area’s most successful mines. In 1882, Northern investors expanded the mine and by 1896 the site held a complete mining plant with large stamp mill, a chlorination plant, assay laboratory, blacksmith shop, stables, miners’ cottages and the Etowah River dam with two large turbines to generate power for the site. In 1913, a mine shaft collapsed beneath the river, filling the mines with water and making further operation of the plant financially infeasible.

Mile 7.1—Shoals—This is the first set of three shoals on this run of river. This set extends more than a quarter mile.

Mile 8.7—Fish Weir & Shoals—This set of shoals ends with a distinct V-shaped fish weir on the right side of the river.

Mile 8.8—McGraw Ford Wildlife Management Area—A state wildlife management area encompassing some 2400 acres, including some of the most picturesque paddling to be found on the Etowah, starts here on river right. The WMA extends four miles downstream to around Smithwick Creek and includes a patchwork of parcels on both sides of the river.

Mile 8.9—Shoals—These shoals extend to Conns Creek where our pit stop is located along a sandbar on river right.

Mile 9.8—Fish Weir—Perhaps one of the most distinctive weirs in Cherokee County.

Mile 11.3—Long Swamp Creek/Battle of Taliwa—Around 1755, where Long Swamp and the Etowah meet, the Battle of Taliwa was fought. Some 500 Cherokee Indians under the direction of Oconostota defeated a larger band of Creeks. Among the Cherokee warriors, there was at least one heroine, Nancy Ward or “Nan’yehi”—the 18-year-old wife of the Cherokee known as “Kingfisher” When Kingfisher was slain in the battle, she took up his gun and continued the fight. Reportedly, her courage led the Cherokee in a rout of the enemy. So complete was the defeat that the Creeks retreated permanently south of the Chattahoochee River, and Nancy Ward earned the title of honor: “Beloved Woman.” Nancy later married Bryant Ward, a white man who took up residence amongst the Cherokees. She became an outspoken supporter of peace with white settlers. She died in 1822.

Mile 12.6—Fish Weir

Mile 15.7—Cherokee County Water & Sewer Intake—This large structure on river left is the intake facility for the Cherokee County Water and Sewerage Authority. CCWSA supplies about 14 million gallons a day (MGD) to 130,000 people. During periods of low flow, water releases from CCWSA’s Hollis Lathem Reservoir on Yellow Creek upstream ensure adequate flows for continued withdrawals. Like many water providers in Georgia, CCWSA saw a significant decline in water demand following the drought of 2007-2008. Prior to the drought, CCWSA pumped as much as 25 MGD, but since then drought-related watering restrictions and water conservation measures have helped reduced peak demand by about 7 MGD. More efficient use of water is good news for the river, the critters that live in it and downstream communities also dependent on the Etowah for their drinking water.