

Allatoona Allemande–Paddle Georgia 2017

June 20—Etowah River

Distance: 11 miles

Starting Elevation: 850 feet Lat: 34.24636°N, Lon: - 84.47819°W

Ending Elevation: 836 feet Lat: 34.21450°N Lon: -84.56760°W

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Etowah River Park
 Mile 11 Knox Bridge Boat Ramp

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Canton Cotton Mill—A bit of Canton’s history stands beyond the tree line opposite our launch site. Built in 1924, the massive brick Canton Cotton Mill No. 2 once employed 550 people and processed up to 30,000 bales of cotton each year. In the 1930s, fully a third of the town’s population was employed in the textile industry. This mill operated until 1981, and in 2000, it was transformed into loft apartments. Today no textile industry exists in Canton.

Mile 0—Parrie Pinyan Landing—This boat launch was dedicated to the memory of Parrie Pinyan, a Cherokee County native, Paddle Georgia alumnus and long-time river advocate who died after a long fight with cancer in 2013. That the launch bears Parrie’s name is appropriate for she provided key testimony in a legal appeal of environmental permits issued by the state for the nearby Canton Marketplace shopping center. The appeal brought by the Coosa River Basin Initiative in 2008 ultimately forced the developer to reduce impacts to streams at the building site by 20 percent and provide \$500,000 for land protection projects in the upper Etowah River basin. Included in the settlement with the developer was \$25,000 to build a boat launch on the river in Canton—the first ever in the city. Parrie participated in numerous early Paddle Georgia trips, and the photograph featured on the sign at the launch was shot during Paddle Georgia 2006 on the Etowah River. At the River’s End Celebration in Bainbridge at the close of Paddle Georgia 2014, Parrie’s Paddle Georgia friends gathered to scatter her ashes in the Flint River. The footbridge just downstream of the launch connects Etowah River Park with Canton’s Heritage Park.

Mile 0.5—Canton Water Intake/City of Canton—Canton was first incorporated under the name of Etowah in 1833, but the following year, the Georgia legislature approved the name “Canton.” Founders of the town had tried to establish a silk industry like that found in Canton, China and thus wanted a name to promote their pursuits. Though the silk industry never developed, the town did ultimately develop a textile industry in its cotton mills. Cherokee County was once among Georgia’s top producers of cotton per acre, and Canton Textile Mills, located on the banks of the Etowah was one of the largest denim manufacturers in the South. Today, Canton is a growing bedroom community. In the first decade of the 21st century, Cherokee County consistently ranked among the top 35 fastest growing counties in the nation. Between 2000 and 2010, the county’s population grew by 51 percent to 214,000. A paddle down the Etowah during a rain will show you the impacts of their arrival: expect a river the color of the Piedmont’s red clay as dirt from massive land clearing projects for residential and commercial developments washes off these sites. This muddy river is bad news for the river’s fish. The dirt clogs up their gills, makes it difficult for them to find food and decreases their reproductive success. Want to know how it feels to be a fish looking for love in a muddy stream? Try throwing a bucket of mud in your bed! The mud also increases the cost of treating the river to drinking water standards. Canton takes its drinking water from the Etowah here.

Mile 1.9—Edgewater & Crescent Farm—Atop a high hill on river right sits, “Edgewater,” the former home of Gus Coggins and his 400-acre Crescent Farm-- so named because the Etowah encircled the farm in a crescent shape. Coggins was a successful farmer, horsebreeder and businessman caught up in the unique social fabric of the post-Civil War south. Because former slaves could be employed cheaper than comparable white laborers, Coggins, like many businessmen, hired blacks instead of whites. This practice drew the ire of unemployed whites who began forming vigilante groups whose sole purpose was to punish white businessmen who hired blacks. The vigilante groups routinely burned his barns and stables. Historians believe that in response, Coggins constructed a massive stone barn (with materials harvested from the Etowah River) in 1906 to house his best horses. Today what came to be known as the “Rock Barn” still stands and is the home of the Cherokee County Historical Society—a visible reminder of the South’s culture of violence and fear in the decades following the Civil War.

Mile 2.6—City of Canton Wastewater Treatment Plant—Downstream of the Ga. 5 Bridge sits the City of Canton’s wastewater treatment plant. This facility can treat 2.35 million gallons of sewage a day. A biological phosphorus removal process along with a chemical addition and filtration allow effluent from this plant to meet requirements of reuse water systems. All water use at the plant itself is from this reuse water. Nevertheless, phosphorus discharges from this and other wastewater treatment plants in the Upper Etowah Basin contribute to high nutrient levels on Lake Allatoona which can lead to algal blooms and fish kills.

Mile 7—Jug Creek Wetlands—On river right where Jug Creek empties into the river is an extensive wetlands area. When water levels are appropriate, an adventure through this swampy realm is worth the side trip.

Mile 8—Shoal Creek Donalson Furnace—A 1.5-mile venture (3-mile round trip) up Shoal Creek will lead you to the impressive remains of the Donalson Furnace, a Civil War era iron furnace. The furnace was built by Judge Joseph Donaldson, one of the founders of Canton and the first to build a ferry across the Etowah in Canton. Reportedly, Donalson built the furnace as a ruse during the war in order to protect his sons from conscription into the Confederate Army. The construction of the iron furnace was a critical part of the war effort and would have exempted his sons from military service. Lending credence to this theory is the fact that the furnace was never fired and there was no evidence of iron or slag found in the area. However, other accounts of Donalson’s war efforts suggest he was an ardent supporter of the Confederate cause. He was among the largest slaveholders in the county and outfitted an entire company of soldiers in 1861. Do not undertake this side trip if you arrive at the mouth of Shoal Creek after 2 p.m.

Mile 8.7—Lake Allatoona—About six miles below Boling Park in Canton, you will encounter the first backwater sloughs of Lake Allatoona. The river’s current slackens and the river itself spreads over former bottomlands. Some 20 miles downstream, Allatoona Dam blocks the river’s path, creating the 12,000-acre impoundment. Completed in 1950 at a cost of \$31.5 million, Allatoona Dam’s original primary purpose was to save the city of Rome downstream from routine flooding. Now, some six decades later, the federal impoundment does much more. The powerhouse at the dam produces enough electricity to power 17,000 homes annually and the recreation/tourism industry that hosts some six million lake visitors each year generates an estimated \$250 million annually. The lake also enables one of the biggest controversies in Georgia’s water management policy—an interbasin water transfer from the Etowah to the Chattahoochee basin. Each day, the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority withdraws millions of gallons from Lake Allatoona and pumps it to water users in the Chattahoochee basin. Much of that withdrawal is never returned to the Etowah, depriving the lake and downstream communities of the benefit of that water. In part, it was the threat of water transfers to Atlanta, out of the Coosa River Basin which flows into Alabama, that prompted the State of Alabama to file suit to stop Atlanta’s play for more water in 1990. That lawsuit evolved into a “water war” that still remains unresolved.

Mile 9.6—Georgia National Cemetery—On river right here overlooking the Etowah is the 775-acre Georgia National Cemetery, dedicated in June 2006 and the second national cemetery in Georgia. It includes sites for 33,000 full-casket graves, 3,000 in-ground sites for cremation remains and 3,000 columbaria niches for cremation remains. The property was donated by the late Scott Hudgens, a well-known Atlanta land developer and World War II veteran himself.

Mile 10.8—Blankenship Sand Co.—Blankenship Sand Company operates a sand dredge in the stretch of lake above and below Knox Bridge. The company also operates a dredge upstream near East Cherokee Drive. Here they suck sand from the river bottom, helping to prevent the lake from filling with sediment—a process that is inevitable over the coming millenniums. Each year, Mr. Blankenship and his crew remove about 100,000 tons of sand from the river—enough to fill 4,000 tractor trailers. That 100,000 tons of sand represents 15 million gallons of storage capacity in the lake.