

Euharlee Hoe Down—Paddle Georgia 2017

June 22—Etowah River

Distance: 9 miles

Starting Elevation: 640 feet Lat: 34.14722°N Lon: -84.92189°W

Ending Elevation: 620 feet Lat: 34.208341°N Lon: -84.978665°W

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Euharlee Road Boat Ramp
Mile 3.2	Hardin Bridge Boat Ramp
Mile 9.2	Macedonia Road Boat Ramp

Points of Interest:

Mile 1.1—Akerman Ferry—Near this location in the late 1800s operated Akerman Ferry. During that time period, Amos Akerman, one of Bartow County’s most notable statesmen, was practicing law in Cartersville. An anti-secessionist prior to the Civil War, Akerman nevertheless enlisted in the Confederate Army. After the war, he aligned himself with the party of Lincoln, and in 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed him U.S. District Attorney for Georgia and later U.S. Attorney General. An advocate for equal rights for former slaves, in his capacity as Attorney General, he established an investigative agency that would ultimately evolve into the FBI, and he zealously prosecuted crimes committed by the Ku Klux Klan. In 1870 in Elberton, he organized a group of former slaves in an attempt to vote. That bold move made him a pariah in the northeast Georgia town and led to his move to Cartersville where he died in 1880.

Mile 1.3—Fish Weir & The Endangered Etowah darter—Shoals like this one created by this Native American fish weir are preferred habitat of many fish, including the federally endangered Etowah darter. This fish is still found in the Upper Etowah and its tributaries and was once found in the river below Allatoona Pass, before the construction of Allatoona Dam in 1950. The operation of the dam has dramatically altered habitat in the river’s 48 miles from the dam to Rome. Prior to the dam’s construction, 80 species of fish could be found in this stretch of river. Today, only 45 species exist here. However, biologists believe that by altering the operation of Allatoona Dam, it may be possible to restore some species to the mainstem of the Etowah, including the Etowah darter.

Mile 3—Ashpole Creek & Gilliam Springs—Paddle into the mouth of Ashpole Creek with your hand in the water and you will note a decided change in water temperature. About 0.1 mile upstream on Ashpole Creek is the spring run issuing forth from Gilliam Springs—a beautiful clear, strong spring that issues forth from the a rock wall about eight feet in height. It is accessible by walking up the creek, but please respect this private property. During the summer months, large numbers of striped bass refuge in the cold water at the mouth of Ashpole Creek and the Etowah in general. The Coosa River is one of the few places where “land-locked” striped bass still successfully reproduce. An anadromous species, stripers traditionally live in the sea and migrate up rivers to spawn, but the Coosa and Alabama rivers’ numerous dams have blocked that historic migratory route. Fortunately for the fish and the anglers who love to catch them, there is just enough free-flowing water in the Coosa and Oostanula rivers around Rome to enable successful spawning. While the stripers don’t spawn in the Etowah, they do enjoy the river’s cooler water during the summer. In other Georgia river systems, stripers are stocked to sustain populations of this important sport fish. A top tier predator, it is not uncommon to land 30-pound trophies on the Etowah and other tributaries of the Coosa.

Mile 3.2—Hardin Bridge—The last remaining operational iron truss bridge on the Etowah River, it closed permanently in 2008 and was later dismantled. The new bridge just upstream was completed in 2011. The piers that remain predate the Civil War. The former wooden bridge here was a key crossing point for troops during the Civil War, and on river right, on both sides of the former bridge, the remnants of trenches built for protection of the bridge during that conflict remain. More recently, Hardin Bridge has been developed into a public access point that is part of the Etowah River Water Trail. The site, now under construction, is being developed by Bartow County and is funded in part by a Georgia Department of Natural Resources Recreational Trails grant. During the past three years, Bartow County has invested some \$500,000 in developing this launch and the Macedonia Road site (our take out for the day). Local communities are finding water trails cheaper and easier to build than traditional recreational trails because it’s not necessary to put down miles of concrete or asphalt.

Mile 4.3—Stream Buffers and Riverfront Development—Riverfront development at this location serves as a reminder of the state’s stream buffer laws. Georgia law prohibits the removal of vegetation and construction activity within 25 feet of warm-water streams and within 50 feet of cold-water trout streams. Vegetated buffers along streams and rivers provide habitat for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, help regulate stream temperatures, filter pollutants and reduce streambank erosion.

Mile 5.7—Rock Garden—At this bend, the river spreads out into an impressive rock garden that requires you to pick your way carefully to find deep water. The rock garden also holds a fish weir that zig zags across the river, forming three distinct “Vs” A popular play spot for modern man, it was also a favorite of Native Americans. During the early spring, rock bluffs along the banks of the river here harbor beautiful shooting star wildflowers.

Mile 6.4—Williams Energy Pipeline—On river left here you’ll see a Williams Energy gas pipeline still under construction. The pipeline is designed to bring domestic, fracked natural gas to power plants in Georgia. While the threats to drinking water associated with fracking have been widely discussed and debated, the proliferation of pipelines to carry the gas—and the risks associated with these pipelines— has received less attention. Pipeline construction comes with extensive impacts to wetlands, streams and rivers. At this site on the Etowah, the crossing was accomplished using an “open wet trench” technique. Had you been here in January, you would have seen a temporary rock and pipe “bridge” spanning the river with backhoes digging up a channel in the river bottom. The work resulted in the release of significant sediment downstream. The preferred method for crossing large rivers is to bore beneath the river bed so as not to disturb the river itself, but at this location, the karst geology made that method impractical. The Coosa River Basin Initiative tried to get federal regulators to require Williams Energy to conduct an alternative route study, but that effort proved unsuccessful. However, The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did negotiate millions of dollars in mitigation to protect habitat for federally endangered species impacted by the pipeline construction. Williams also agreed to make a donation to CRBI—money that is being used to fund scholarships for Georgia teachers participating in this year’s Paddle Georgia.

Mile 6.7—Island Ford—The island complex just downstream lends its name to a historic ford near this location that in the 1800s connected the community of Ford on the south side of the river with Kingston on the north side. In October 1899, the postmaster of Ford, Roland Arnold, drowned at this site while attempting to cross the river while delivering mail. The community that he serviced centered around a grist mill located on the river operated by Joseph Ford in the late 1800s. The Etowah Valley Historical Society reports that in 1880 Ford’s Mill produced 762,000 pounds of cornmeal, flour and feed. Today, the most notable riverfront property owners are the Gordy family. Frank Gordy founded Atlanta’s The Varsity restaurant in 1928 and his descendants who still operate the restaurants own a large tract on river right. The island complex is the largest on the length of the Etowah. The best route is river right where two small ledges create a little paddling excitement. In the early spring, when drum in vast numbers congregate here to spawn, the water appears to boil as the fish thrash and splash in the shallow water.

Mile 8.7—Etowah Bend Gliderport—If you see gliders or ultralights touring above the river, this airstrip on river right is likely their origin. The small strip caters to those piloting experimental aircraft.

Mile 9.2—Neel’s Landing—Completed in 2015, this Bartow County boat launch was the culmination of nearly six years of fundraising and advocacy efforts on the part of the Coosa River Basin Initiative. CRBI secured more than \$20,000 to construct the landing, and partnered with Bartow County and multiple businesses that provided products and services to build the public access point. Prior to development, the Neel family fought a losing battle against illegal dumping and off-road vehicle use that turned the river bottom around the bridge into a littered mud bog. It looks a little different now.