

# Milstead Mambo—Paddle Georgia 2018

June 16—Yellow River

**Distance:** 15 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 790 feet **Lat:** 33.818164°N **Lon:** -84.084589°W

**Ending Elevation:** 700 feet **Lat:** 33.6910267°N, **Lon:** -83.994584°W

**Restroom Facilities:**

<b>Mile 0</b>	River Cliff Swin & Racquet Club
<b>Mile 7.1</b>	Norris Lake Road
<b>Mile 15</b>	Milstead Dam

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 1.4—Annistown Falls**—We'll portage around this Class III rapid on river right, but to do so you must paddle across the mouth of the falls. Simply stay to the right shore of the river and head for the rock outcropping. As you might guess, this site was utilized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by early Gwinnett County settlers who harnessed its power. At times during the 1800s, there was a saw mill and grist mill operating here. In the late 1800s, the grist mill was capable of processing 180 bushels a day and the sawmill produced some 150,000 feet of lumber and 40,000 shingles annually. Around the turn of the century, an 11-foot high dam harnessed the falls to power a cotton mill, but by 1908, fire had destroyed the mill, putting its 25 employees out of work. Further use of the Yellow's fall ceased...until whitewater boaters discovered the thrill ride in the later half of the 20th century. Archaeological surveys conducted in part by Paddle Georgia participant Leslie Raymer in 1998 found Native American artifacts in the area that show human habitation of the area dating back more than 1000 years. "Annistown" was dubbed by C.J. Haden who took ownership of the mill operations in 1897 and bestowed the name to honor either his wife or daughter. In earlier texts, it's Annestown.

**Mile 2—Yellow River Park**—From these shoals, Gwinnett County's Yellow River Park stretches for nearly two miles down river, including a 1.5-mile stretch in which the park encompasses both banks of the river. With 691 acres of undisturbed land, the park is known as one of Gwinnett's remaining natural escapes. Used primarily for passive recreation, the park holds 12 miles of biking, hiking and equestrian trails. During the past 40 years, Gwinnett has become almost synonymous with urban sprawl. Between 1970 and 1980, the county more than doubled in size to 166,903 people. Since then another 800,000 people have been added to the county, and today it still consistently ranks as among the fastest growing counties in the country. A 2004 University of Georgia analysis of tree cover showed that between 1991 and 2005, the county lost 15 percent of its tree canopy. It was during this explosive growth period that the county's public utilities department abandoned a plan to build a sewage treatment plant here and the parks and recreation department took over management of the land.

**Mile 5.3—Rockbridge Rapids & Hightower Trail**—Where modern-day Rockbridge Road crosses the Yellow, the Native American path known as the Hightower Trail once forded the river. There was never a bridge made of rock here. Instead, the name comes from a shallow shoal on the river where rock outcroppings made for a convenient crossing. The trail played a critical role in the settlement of Georgia and ultimately became the boundary line between Gwinnett and DeKalb counties. During these early years, travelers upon the trace could find near the river crossing here a tavern operated by Will Torrie which according to historical accounts, "possessed attraction which drew to it from all sides, men of all classes, especially the fun lovers, the dissolute, the bullies among the fighters, the gamblers and the drunkards of which there were many. As the population increased, this place became a regular knock-down drag-out black eye and bloody nose resort known and real of all men."

**Mile 5.6—Rockbridge Rapid & Island**—Here, an island splits the river, at what may well be the historic "Rockbridge" of the Hightower Trail (note the extensive rock outcropping at the head of the island). The rocks also create a substantial ledge best navigated on river left. Do not go to the right side of this island as the right branch leads to a significant ledge choked with strainers. At the tail of the island is another small ledge and rapid.

**Mile 6.4—Martin-Marietta Lithonia Quarry**—On river right here is an impressive outcropping of Lithonia gneiss, reminiscent of the landscapes of nearby Stone Mountain and Arabia Mountain. Beyond the outcropping is the Martin-Marietta Lithonia Quarry, a quarry site that has operated continuously since 1929, producing crushed stone and other aggregate that finds its way into construction projects across the region. The geology of the area runs deep—both literally and figuratively. Nearby is the "city of stone," Lithonia, which borrows its name from the Greek "lithos," meaning stone. One of the more interesting uses of this rock is in the manufacture of grit for chicken feed. Turns out, finely crushed stone, when added to chicken feed, provides the birds with important minerals and aids in their digestion.

**Mile 7.0—Unknown Bridge**—At low water levels, the remains of a wooden bridge are visible on the river bottom here. The history of the structure, however, remains a mystery. The bridge is not noted in surveys of the river from the late 1800s and is not noted on any historic maps of the area. Local historical societies also appear stumped by this structure. Construction materials visible in the weathered wood appear to be at least a century old.

**Mile 9.3 Johnston's Bridge**—Just upstream from the present-day Pleasant Hill Road bridge are the remains of its predecessor. In the late 1800s, the crossing here was known as Johnston's Bridge. Also nearby was a dam and mill built by Zachary Lee in 1838 that, in 1871, led to a notable conflict between river users. When Lee died, the dam and mill was sold to Zadock Baker who proceeded to repair the aging and leaking dam. The repairs proved so successful that backwater from the mill pond extended into lowlands along the river owned by Thomas Maguire. Finding his previously arable land under water, Maguire sued Baker. The case was ultimately decided by the Georgia Supreme Court who upheld lower court decisions, providing the mill owner with the right to flood upstream land.

**Mile 9.8—DeKalb-Rockdale County Line**—Here, the river leaves DeKalb County after coursing through the eastern edge of the county for just 4.5 miles. DeKalb, formed in 1822 from parts of Gwinnett, Henry and Fayette counties, was named in honor of Baron Johann DeKalb, a French soldier of German descent, who traveled to America first as a secret agent of the French to assess the mood of the colonists in the years leading up to the Revolution. His snooping attracted the attention of the British who had him arrested on suspicion of spying. After his arrest and release, he returned to France to report of the growing dissatisfaction of the American colonists, and that report ultimately played a role in France supporting the fledgling nation. DeKalb returned to America with Marquis de LaFayette and battled the British in South Carolina where he died in 1870 after being wounded 11 times in the Battle of Camden. Later when George Washington visited DeKalb's grave, he reportedly said, "So there lies the brave DeKalb, the generous stranger who came from a distant land to fight our battles and to water with his blood the tree of our liberty. Would to God he had lived to share its fruits."

**Mile 12.5—Lakeview Estates Wastewater Discharge**—On river right is the discharge from a small private sewage treatment facility that services Lakeview Estates, a neighborhood of mobile homes developed in the 1970s around lakes constructed along Shipley Creek. The treatment plant discharges up to 158,000 gallons of treated sewage to the river each day. It, and others like it, are one of many point source discharges monitored by Altamaha Riverkeeper, one of the beneficiaries of this year's Paddle Georgia event. Learn more about the work of ARK at [www.altamahariverkeeper.org](http://www.altamahariverkeeper.org)

**Mile 13—Irwin Bridge**—The remains of Irwin Bridge can be seen on both banks of the river. These piers carried traffic on Irwin Bridge Road during the mid-1900s, but they did so at the peril of motorists. During the 1940s and 50s, this aging bridge delayed the paving of Irwin Bridge Road for some two decades because funds were not available to replace it (the county did not want to pave the road until the bridge was replaced). In the early 1960s, a new bridge was finally built just downstream leading to pavement and the end of dust and mud on the road. However, the elevation of that circa 1962 bridge proved too low when floods in 2009 topped it. In 2011, that bridge was razed and the existing bridge was built several feet higher than the original.