

Porterdale Polka—Paddle Georgia 2018

June 17—Yellow River

Distance: 15 miles

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

Ending Elevation: : 617 feet **Lat:** 33.572725°N, **Lon:** , -83.902145°W

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Milstead Dam
Mile 8	Mt. Tabor Road
Mile 14.6	Yellow River Park

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Milstead—Our route to our launch site today passes through the remains of more than a century of industrial activity fueled by the fall of the Yellow River. Milstead Dam diverts much of the flow of the river to the mill race which parallels the river for a quarter mile leading to a hydropower plant originally built in 1924. The Italian-based Enel Corporation, an energy provider focused on sustainable sources, continues to operate the 600 kw plant nearly a century after it first electrified the Milstead Division of Callaway Mills. The mill race, powerhouse and associated ruins are all that's left of a sprawling textile mill that operated here from 1902 until 1960. At its peak, the Milstead plant employed some 1,000 workers and supported a thriving mill town. A true mill village, the Callaway Company paid for the

construction of many public facilities, including homes, a general store, a drug store, a doctor's office, the water system, and a school. A gymnasium (complete with bowling alley), a swimming pool and a golf course were also built. Harnessing the river here at Long Shoals dates back to the 1800s. An 1885 Department of Interior report to Congress describes a dam built at the head of Long Shoals in 1871 that diverted water first to a sawmill, then further down a raceway to a paper mill and then still further to a grist mill. Long Shoals drop some 60 feet in less than a half mile, a descent that rivals other popular Southern whitewater destinations, but because the majority of the river's flow is diverted, the once wild Long Shoals are barren and dry except during periods of high flows.

Mile 0.6—Boar Tusk Branch—This creek on river right is notable as one of the primary tributaries that drains the town of Conyers, and because its name harkens back some 500 years to a time when Hernando de Soto first brought hogs to America during his travels through what would become Georgia and neighboring states. Since then, feral hogs have firmly established themselves. While nearly half of the population of feral hogs is found in the South, the tusked creatures can now be found in 31 of our 50 states.

Mile 1.8—Pine Log Road—While the concrete and steel Ga. 138 bridge now carries traffic over the Yellow, in the 1800s several stout pine stringers once supported the bridge that spanned the river here. So notable were the massive logs that the bridge came to be known as Pine Log Bridge. The name lives on in Conyers' Pine Log Road and Pine Log Park.

Mile 2.4—Water/Sewer Pipe—Water level dependent, you will either need to limbo below or portage around this obstacle.

Mile 2.8—Quigg Branch Water Pollution Control Plant—On river right here is the discharge from this facility which is permitted to pump up to 6 million gallons of treated sewage a day to the river. It is the largest of Rockdale County's five wastewater treatment plants. Last year, the County received a \$22.6 million state grant to build a new treatment facility that will eliminate three smaller and aging facilities. Keeping water and sewer infrastructure on pace with population growth has been a consistent challenge for fast-growing metro communities like Rockdale County. The county currently has the ability to treat 10 million gallons of sewage daily (MGD), but by 2050, that number will need to more than double to 22 MGD.

Mile 3.4—Glenn Shoals—At this bend and 0.6 mile below are a pair of shoals identified in turn-of-the-century surveys of the Yellow. Though the shoals were noted for the potential to generate up to 386 horsepower, it appears neither was ever developed.

Mile 4.1—North Georgia Live Steamers—On river left on land that is part of the Georgia International Horse Park, is this miniature train enthusiasts' park. The property features nearly a mile of miniature railroad track where model train enthusiasts can operate their 1/8th-sized steam locomotives. Engines can weigh up to 2,500 pounds and depending on the model can haul up to 50 people. The International Horse Park originally played host to the equestrian events during the 1996 Olympic Games, and now hosts everything from human steeplechases to the annual Conyers Cherry Blossom Festival. The site also features 8 miles of mountain bike trails, 15 miles of horseback trails and a golf course. In the late 1980s, local governments had purchased the 1,139-acre site for a sewage land application system that sprays treated wastewater on land rather than discharging it to streams and rivers. Popular in the 1970s and 80s, use of these treatment systems has largely been abandoned due to repeated droughts and long-running water wars because of the realization of the importance of returning water withdrawals directly to their source. The Horse Park property extends nearly 2 miles upstream and downstream from this location.

Mile 4.3—McDaniel's/Gee's Mill—At this site where an island splits the river, around the turn-of-the 19th century, stood a 9-foot dam that diverted water to a grist mill. A mill race can be seen on river right at the shoal. A 1908 Geological Survey of Georgia report notes McDaniel's Bridge and Mill at this location. Today, the road that passes over the river just downstream is known as Gees Mill Road. Just downstream of the bridge is a significant shoal with sizeable waves.

Mile 6—Big Haynes Creek—Some six miles up this significant tributary of the Yellow lies Randy Poynter Reservoir which serves as the drinking water supply for Rockdale County. The 650-acre reservoir can supply up to 32 million gallons of water daily.

Mile 9.4—Georgia Railroad—The Georgia Railroad has spanned the Yellow River here since the late 1830s. During the Civil War, the bridge played a strategic role in the Union Army's siege of Atlanta. On July 22, 1864, Union Cavalry raiders with orders to destroy the bridge and cut the Confederate Army's supply trains from Augusta, encountered a handful of local old men and boys defending the 555-foot span. The encounter did not end well for the home guard. "Ancient muzzle loaders and shotguns were no match for forty or fifty veteran troopers with Spencers [rifles]," wrote David Evans in *Sherman's Horseman: Union Cavalry Operations in the Atlanta Campaign*. "The first exchange killed a white-haired old man named Brown. The others simply ran away. Crossing to the east bank, the Yankees set fire to the wagon bridge and trestle, a large flour mill a short distance downstream and the house of the mill operator, Albert B. Torrence." Brigadier Gen. Kenner Garrard reported to Sherman two days later that his men had destroyed not only the bridge, but 6 miles of railroad as well as setting fire to depots in Conyers and Covington, 2000 bales of cotton, and a Confederate hospital. Some 200 slaves followed the Army back to safety north of Atlanta. This and others cavalry raids left the Confederates defending Atlanta with only one supply route leading south toward Macon.

Mile 12.1—Carroll's Boat Landing—From this site of a circa-1890s brickyard on river right, workers polled boats loaded with bricks down river to Porterdale for construction of the mills there.

Mile 12.3—Water/Sewer Pipe—Use the sandbar on river right to portage this piece of Newton County infrastructure.

Mile 12.4—Brown's Bridge—The stone piers here mark the location of a circa 1890 wooden bridge, an era in which economic development boosters in nearby Covington petitioned the federal government to "improve the river" between the Georgia Railroad Bridge and Porterdale. The Central Ocmulgee Navigation Company hoped that the river could be made navigable, thus making deposits of "granite, molders sand, terra-cotta clay and mineral paint" along the river banks both accessible and easily transported to the Georgia Railroad. In 1889, officers of the company urged Congress to appropriate \$10,000 to put the stream in "good order for small steamers and thereby establish four large industries and add greatly to the value of property along said stream." After surveying the river, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers saw things differently. In its report to Congress, the Corps wrote: "The improvement... would probably cost not less than \$500,000. If there be any prospective benefits arising from such improvements commensurate with that outlay I have been unable to discover them."



1910: Yellow River at Milstead with paper mill (foreground) and textile mill.