

# Rocky Plains Rumba–Paddle Georgia 2018

June 18—Yellow River

**Distance:** 11 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 600 feet **Lat:** 33.567210°N, **Lon:** -83.895414°W

**Ending Elevation:** : 549 feet **Lat:** 33.455909°N, **Lon:** , -83.879798°W

**Restroom Facilities:**

|                |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Mile 0</b>  | Porterdale            |
| <b>Mile 11</b> | Bert Adams Scout Camp |

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 0—Porterdale**—The quintessential textile town is rich in history—largely due to its location at Cedar Shoals, an extensive fall and shoals area dropping 90 feet in elevation in less than a mile. The first settlers to draw lots here in 1821 quickly harnessed the falls and by 1826, a grist mill, sawmill and blacksmith’s shop were established. By 1855, a chair factory and wool carding machine were added. The annual output of these industries amounted to some \$16,000, or about \$451,000 in 2018 dollars. Not surprisingly, the site attracted the attention of investors. In the 1850s, a Boston-based firm known as the Cedar Shoals Water Power Company was formed with designs to build a textile empire on the Yellow that would rival Lowell, Massachusetts. Their pitch to potential investors betrays the attitude of northerners to the South during that era, and in extolling the low cost of doing business in Georgia, reads strikingly similar to our modern-day pitches to the likes of Google: “Our location possesses many advantages... The climate is very healthy and attractive—neither excessive heat or cold. Rich southern fruits abound and yield many luxuries very unfrequent here (Boston), as well as some impossible to obtain at the North... and the necessary expenses of living are but little more than half what they are in Boston or New York... We find many of the natives here in the mechanic arts about seventy-five years behind the age, consequently the field is open and large for introduction of all the new and useful improvements of our native State, Massachusetts, in all different departments and branches of art... thus making (possible) a New England Colony or City in the heart of the State of Georgia.” The northern investors were never able to raise the capital, and the operations at Cedar Shoals remained in local hands. During the early 1860s, Hugh McLean took possession of a portion of the Cedar Shoals property and operated a cotton mill on the shoals. In 1864, when the Union Army threatened the area, McLean began flying a British flag over his factory in hopes avoiding the deprivations of the invading Yankees. Locals were aroused by this lack of loyalty to the Confederacy, and some, with designs on acquiring the mill, came to McLean warning of a potential uprising and lynching. Fearing for his life, McLean sold his operation for \$60,000 and left town. In fact, the threat of violence was merely a ruse used to acquire the business. McLean eventually sued his antagonists to regain his mill, but lost his fight in the Georgia Supreme Court in 1872. Ultimately, the Cedar Shoals property fell into the hands of Oliver S. Porter, establishing in 1890 Porterdale Mills. The massive, 800-foot-long mill building fronting the river was built in 1899 (from bricks made upriver and floated down on poleboats). From then until the early 1970s, Porterdale was a thriving mill town, employing hundreds, most of whom resided in the village of company-owned houses. Producing yarn, twine and cotton rope, Porterdale was at one time noted as the world’s largest producer of fishing line. Porterdale Mills closed in the 1970s, and the town languished until recently when city leaders began focusing on redeveloping the community’s unique assets. In 2006, the old mill was repurposed and developed, and the river—long the heartbeat of the community—became a focal point of the town’s revival with the development of Yellow River Park and its boat launch. The stretch of river between the mill and Cedar Shoals Park is probably the most scenic stretch of the Yellow.

**Mile 0.5—Yellow River Water Reclamation Facility**—On river left beyond Cedar Shoals Park is this Newton County Water & Sewer facility that treats about 2 million gallons of sewage daily. Unlike typical riverside sewage treatment plants, it does not discharge directly to the river. Instead, after initial treatment, the wastewater is pumped a mile to the southeast where it is then sprayed on some 2,400 acres of land, allowing the water to soak into the ground, completing the treatment through natural processes.

**Mile 0.5—Shoals & Strainer**—The last of the Yellow’s shoals is a series of small ledges. Stay to the left and be prepared to portage over the last ledge as the deep water route on river right is blocked by a large pine tree strainer.

**Mile 2.5—Newton County Landfill**—On river right is this beleaguered landfill that for years has vexed county leaders and frustrated advocates working to protect the Yellow River. The problem: an unlined cell at the county landfill that has led to the contamination of groundwater that inevitably finds its way to the river. Earlier this year, the Newton County Commission voted to move forward with a \$9 million project to eliminate the pollution problem by excavating the waste and moving it to a lined cell.

**Mile 3.7—Langston Shoals & Gold Mine**—A 1891 Corps of Engineers survey described the shoals here as 800 feet long with a fall of about 5.5 feet. The surveyors also noted a gold mine located on river right which a 1909 Geological Survey of Georgia publication also documented as “a small placer deposit... which has been worked for gold at several different times, some mining having been carried on before the Civil War. The deposit, which is quite limited in area, occurs along a small branch and would not probably repay mining operations other than of a very limited character.” Opposite the gold mine and downstream slightly is the mouth of Dried Indian Creek. The tributary is said to have gotten its name when an early settler found along the banks of the creek the dried corpse of a Native American tied to a tree.

**Mile 7.3—Little Springs Farm**—Rocky Plains Road marks the northern boundary of Little Springs Farm, a 2,800-acre cattle farm that fronts the east bank of the river for the next 2.4 miles. The farm is notable for its former owner, Joachim Herz, who died at age 65 in 2008 in a boating accident. Herz, a billionaire heir of a Germany-based coffee retailer, came to the U.S. in the 1970s and bought this farm. The man Forbes magazine once ranked as the 368<sup>th</sup> richest person in the world was known for puttering around the farm on heavy equipment, finding unique rocks and digging them up to place at strategic locations on the property. Though his ties to Germany were still strong, his wish was to be buried on his farm. His grave, marked with an engraved stone from the farm, rests on a knoll overlooking the river. The Joachim Herz Stiftung Foundation still owns the farm; the foundation funds programs supporting education and scientific, medical and legal research in both Germany and the U.S.

**Mile 7.5—Sullivan Memorial**—Bolted some 20-feet high in a sycamore tree here is a piece of driftwood resembling a cross that marks the location where Covington resident Pat Campbell discovered the body of Shanequa Quanee Sullivan on March 3. Campbell, an avid outdoorsman, made the discovery while fishing on the river and notified authorities who are now investigating the 23-year-old Sullivan’s death as a homicide. Moved by the incident, Campbell felt compelled to create a memorial for Sullivan and her family. Campbell told the *Rockdale/Newton Citizen* newspaper: “It helped them and it helped me. And, what would help me even more is to find out exactly what happened to her and to have the person responsible held accountable.”

**Mile 8.5—Fish Dam Shoals**—An 1891 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers survey of the Yellow River identifies this as the location of Fish Dam Shoals, suggesting that this was the site of a pre-historic or circa 1800s fish trap. Archaeologists have confirmed 128 fish weirs on Georgia’s rivers. The v-shaped rock dams were used to corral and capture fish.

**Mile 9.8—Bert Adams Scout Camp**—Beginning at this bend, this 1300-acre Boy Scouts of America camp stretches downstream on river left for nearly two miles. The site has been home to the Scout Camp since 1960. It is named in honor of an Atlanta realtor who helped establish the first camp for the Atlanta Council along the Chattahoochee River in 1927. Adams, who died at the age of 47 in 1926, never lived to see the first camp at the property he secured. Among other things, the camp provides opportunities for camping, swimming, hiking, boating, shooting and climbing, and, of course, earning merit badges. There are more than 135 Boy Scout merit badges. Since 1910, only 367 people have earned all the Scout merit badges. Our take out downstream is one site where the Yellow River Water Trail is working to improve access. When you see our “innovative” take out, you’ll understand the importance of the group’s work. For more information on the YRWT, visit [www.yellowriverwatertrail.org](http://www.yellowriverwatertrail.org).