Clyatt (1821–90) who operated a mill on a Withlacoochee tributary that also bears his name. Clyatt was a store owner and also served as the town postmaster in the mid 1800s. Clyattville Road runs 14.7 miles from Godwin Bluff to Spook Bridge, and 14.6 miles to Okapilco Polka. It was during this same decade when pollution from upstream industrial facilities created another kind of commotion here. In August 1941, the Constitution reported: “Big crowds recently flocked to the Withlacoochee River, where the water was thick with dead and disabled fish. The big fish edged to the banks seeking freshwater and people waded in and caught them.” Fish kills over the next two decades, including many on the Withlacoochee, alarmed sportsmen who were among the first to call for laws to stop wanton pollution of the state’s streams. By 1942, the Georgia Wildlife Federation, formed just six years earlier to address the loss of deer, wild turkey and other game species, took a stand on water pollution, calling on the state to “adopt laws controlling pollution of streams regardless of the inconveniences it might cause manufacturing firms and canneries.” Despite the outcry from sportmen and other river users, Georgia would not adopt its first water pollution control laws for another two decades. In 1964 when the General Assembly adopted the Water Quality Control Act, 97 percent of the liquid waste from industrial facilities was discharged to Georgia’s rivers and streams without treatment and 70 percent of municipal sewage was discharged without treatment. Since the passage of the federal Clean Water Act in 1972, industrial facilities and municipal sewage treatment plants have been required to treat their waste. Today, EPA estimates that 99 percent of all municipal and industrial waste receives adequate treatment. As a result, the health of Georgia’s rivers is dramatically better and fish kills are extremely rare.

Mile 4.4—Okapilco Creek –This significant tributary winds some 60 miles through Worth, Colquitt and Brooks counties. The Native American name is believed to come from the Hitchitee word “oke,” meaning water, and “puthko,” meaning grape. Certainly, there is an abundance of wild grapes or muscadines in this area and among their favorite habitats are the margins along rivers and streams. Look for the heart-shaped leaves with deeply-toothed edges hanging from riverside trees with the leaves often extending to the river’s surface. Return in August and September to reap the rewards of the vine’s sweet, purple-colored, tough-skinned fruits.

Mile 5.4—Spain’s Ferry & Voyage of E. Sherman Gould—From the site of this former ferry, which operated during the 1800s through the early 1900s, E. Sherman Gould, an assistant engineer with the U.S. Army, in 1874 embarked on a 90-mile journey in a “small rowboat” for the purposes of surveying the river to determine its suitability for commercial navigation. His description of the next several miles of river still holds true today: “The banks, though for the first 15 miles mostly of sand, assume after that a rocky character and a great deal of limestone occurs in them.” Indeed, for the next several miles, the river is reminiscent of other Coastal Plain rivers with many willow-lined sandy banks and numerous sharp bends and stretches where the river narrows. Gould was impressed by the scenery, but he was less inspired by the river’s commercial prospects. He did, after all, descend the river at low water. He wrote: “It would be useless, I think, to attempt to render the river practicable at all stages.” The ferry takes its name from the Spain family of Brooks County who settled in the area in the mid-1840s and once owned some 25,000 acres. The Spain family home known as Forest Hills Plantation and dating to the 1840s still stands about a mile west of the river near here.

Mile 8.1— Knight’s Ferry—This public boat ramp occupies the site of a circa-1800s river ferry and later in the early 1900s, a bridge. It serves as our pit stop for the day. Downstream from Knight’s Ferry, the river begins to narrow in places and run between willow-flanked banks. Islands, woody debris and streamers become more common.

Mile 10.3—Willow—Here you will find much of this deciduous tree with long narrow, spear-shaped leaves crowding the river banks. Aside from providing habitat favored by American alligators, willow plays an important role in stabilizing river banks and providing services to both animal and man. Birds like the yellow-bellied sapsucker feed on its sap; likewise, it provides nectar to bees but break open the rock to get to the inside, consisting of quartz and silica. The region’s agatized coral exhibits a full spectrum of colors from pink to white and almost every color in between. The fight to recognize agatized coral as an official state symbol created a humorous diversion for Florida legislators in 1979. The problem was legislators in 1970 had already designated moonstone as the state gem—a symbolic gesture to promote the state’s contribution to the Apollo missions to the moon launched from Cape Canaveral (despite the fact that moonstone cannot be found in Florida). Push back from powerful Cape Canaveral legislators prompted the agatized coral bill’s sponsor to keep moonstone as the state “gem” and add agatized coral as the state “stone.” The ensuing debate brought about suggestions to make kidney stones or gall stones the state stone.

Mile 12.5—Cut Through—Here the river narrows as it cuts through a former bend in the river. On river right are sandbars that mark the former route of the river, now a 500-foot looping and mostly dry oxbow. Due to the presence of much limestone, the Withlacoochee is less prone to cut new paths as are other rivers flowing through the Coastal Plain.

Mile 13.5—Vanishing Sandbars—In most rivers of the lower Coastal Plain, sandbars are abundant and show a distinct change in water levels. These are areas of deposition of sediment along meandering rivers. As water levels drop, the bars will continue to increase in area, but break open the rock to get to the inside, consisting of quartz and silica. The region’s agatized coral exhibits a full spectrum of colors from pink to white and almost every color in between. The fight to recognize agatized coral as an official state symbol created a humorous diversion for Florida legislators in 1979. The problem was legislators in 1970 had already designated moonstone as the state gem—a symbolic gesture to promote the state’s contribution to the Apollo missions to the moon launched from Cape Canaveral (despite the fact that moonstone cannot be found in Florida). Push back from powerful Cape Canaveral legislators prompted the agatized coral bill’s sponsor to keep moonstone as the state “gem” and add agatized coral as the state “stone.” The ensuing debate brought about suggestions to make kidney stones or gall stones the state stone.

Mile 14.7—Clyattville—Clyattville Road runs five miles east to the town of Clyattville which takes its name from James M. Clyatt (1821-1890) who operated a mill on a Withlacoochee tributary that also bears his name. Clyatt was a store owner and also served as the town postmaster in the mid 1800s.