

# State Line Shag–Paddle Georgia 2019

June 17—Withlacoochee River

**Distance:** 14 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 87 feet

30.67456,-83.39437

**Ending Elevation:** 80 feet

30.59644,-83.25973

## **Restroom Facilities:**

<b>Mile 0</b>	Clyattville Road
<b>Mile 7.2</b>	Ga. 31
<b>Mile 14</b>	Bellville Road

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 4.5—McIntyre Spring**—Rising from the river bottom on river right at the base of limestone outcroppings, this spring is difficult to locate in high water. Look for clear water and stick your hand in the river to locate the drop in water temperature. The water flowing from the spring usually sits at 68 degrees Fahrenheit. What may appear a simple fount issuing from the river bottom is actually a portal to the complex underground world of the Floridan aquifer which provides drinking water for much South Georgia and North Florida. Since the 1970s, scuba divers, who have wriggled through the entrance to this spring some 15 feet below the surface, have mapped 4,601 feet of underwater passages with the longest passage descending to a depth of 180 feet below the surface of the river. Diver Guy Bryant and companions, who mapped the spring in 1991, spent more than four hours in the cave.

**Mile 5.2—Florida State Line**—Here, the Withlacoochee dips into Florida for the first time. Over the next three miles, the river will cross the border two more times. This boundary was settled in 1795 when Spain and the U.S agreed to a border along the 31<sup>st</sup> latitude running from the Mississippi River east to the Chattahoochee River and then east from the junction of the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers to St. Mary's on the Atlantic Coast. In May 1798 beginning at the Mississippi River, Andrew Ellicott's surveying team moved east marking the then international border with periodic mounds of rocks. By mid-September 1799, the team had completed 381 miles of border and reached the mouths of the Chattahoochee and Flint where they encountered hostile Creek Indians. During one night while camped near the rivers' confluence, the Native Americans drove off the surveyors' horses and cattle and pillaged their boat. The following morning, the surveyors abandoned their task and sailed down the Apalachicola. U.S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins demanded that Creek leaders friendly to the U.S. exact justice on the perpetrators. These chiefs tracked down at least one leader of the offending group and metted out a brutal execution. They sent the following report to Hawkins: "We pulled down and set fire to his house, we beat him with sticks until he was on the ground as a dead man, we cut off one of his ears with a part of his cheek and put a sharp stick up his fundament." No doubt, such brutal punishments made at the behest of representatives of the U.S. government led to growing dissension amongst the native people and ultimately to what would become known as the Creek and Seminole wars in the early 1800s. With Ellicott's survey abandoned, the border between Spanish Florida and the U.S. remained in limbo even after the U.S. acquired Florida from Spain in 1819. In fact, the Georgia-Florida line wasn't officially surveyed until 1859. Then the Civil War delayed congressional approval of the border until 1872.

**Mile 5.5—Valdosta Southern Railroad**—Wooden pilings extending into the river here are the remains of this railroad trestle that allowed the passage of trains between Valdosta, Georgia and Madison, Florida. The 28-mile railroad opened in 1901. At that time, the ride from Valdosta to Madison, with five stops at smaller hamlets along the route, took one hour and 35 minutes. In the mid-1900s, the line was purchased by Owens-Illinois which operated a paper mill in Clyattville. While the paper mill is still running and the rail line still operates between Valdosta and Clyattville, 18 miles of the line were abandoned in 1972. On the Florida side of the river, the rail bed has been converted into the Four Freedoms Trail, a paved recreational trail that extends to downtown Madison.

**Mile 6.3—State Line Rapid**—The largest of the Withlacoochee's shoals, this obstacle is a series of shallow shoals and ledges that stretch over about 700 feet. The largest of the ledges on far river left just downstream from the first set of shoals borders on Class II in difficulty, but can be avoided—water levels permitting--by taking the more gradual fall through shallow shoals to the right of center. In his 1874 survey, E. Sherman Gould of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers refers to this as Warner's Shoals and estimated that the shoals could be eliminated using explosives and by hand prying with crow-bars at a cost of \$1500. That recommendation was never acted upon, and the shoals likely appear very much the way Gould found them when he traveled the river in his small rowboat.

**Mile 6.9—Arnold Spring**—Located on river left, this spring issues forth into the river from a round pool nestled into the bank. There are more than 700 springs in Florida, 33 of which are considered first magnitude springs that issue at least 64 million gallons a day. These include Madison Blue Springs and Lafayette Blue Springs which we will visit later in our journey. Second magnitude springs like Arnold flow at a rate of 6.5 million to 64 million gallons a day. According to the Florida Geological Survey, Florida is home to more freshwater springs than any other state.

**Mile 8.8—Horn Ferry**—Constructed in 2015, the Ga. 31 bridge is the just latest crossing of the river in this vicinity during the past 190 years. In the 1830s, during the Seminole War, near this site was Warner's Ferry, located on the property of Zenas Warner (who also lent his name to State Line Rapid upstream). Soldiers crossed the river here on multiple occasions, providing support to early settlers subject to attacks from the Native Americans. Jacob Rhett Motte, an Army surgeon who served during the war, records one of those crossings in his memoir *Journal into Wilderness, An Army Surgeon's Account of Life in Camp and Field during the Creek and Seminole Wars 1836-1838*: "We took up a line of march on the 30th April; crossed Warner's Ferry over the Upper Withlacoochee on the 1<sup>st</sup> May; and encamped that night on the south bank. From that point until we reached Livingston's Ferry on the Suwannee, we had a continued series of stoppages, stallings, etc... At every mile the teams had to be unhitched, and the men take the traces in hand and drag the wagons through swampy bogs and spongy flats, where no horse could move; they were often in water up to their waists, much of the way being through ponds left by the fallen river." Indeed, floodwaters wreaked havoc here well into the 1900s. In 1928, a circa-1895 wooden bridge was severely damaged in a flood and replaced. Then in the early 1940s, that bridge was replaced by a low-slung steel and concrete structure that served the community until this latest version was erected. Nearby was a stockade or fort constructed by the Army during the Seminole Wars to provide protection to settlers in the area.

**Mile 9—Withlacoochee East Conservation Area**—On river left at this sharp bend with a crystal clear tributary spilling over a small waterfall begins several parcels of land owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District. The District purchased the land in 2003 as part of an effort to preserve undeveloped land in the river basin. Florida's five water management districts are charged with managing the state's water supply, protecting water quality and providing flood protection. The District's land acquisition program aims to keep land in its natural state which in turn protects the health of local water bodies and prevents floodplain development. Florida's water management district program is robust. In 2018-19, the Suwannee District worked with a budget of \$70.9 million. In contrast, while Georgia has a statewide water management plan and water planning districts, those districts exist mostly in name only. This year, the state made \$300,000 in grants available to the 11 regional planning districts. Only the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District, which manages water supply plans for the 15-county Atlanta region, has an actual budget (\$1.3 million in 2018). Since its creation in 2001, the MNGWPD has made significant strides in reducing water use in the region and expanding both water supply and wastewater capacity.

**Mile 12.1—Packaging Corporation of America Discharge**—On river left here is the discharge for this Clyattville linerboard mill. The mill discharges about 14 million gallons of treated wastewater to the river daily from an underwater pipe in the river here. The effluent travels for some six miles from the Georgia-based facility through a series of treatment ponds and pipes. The metal structure on river left was once a dam on Jumping Gully Creek that was part of the facility's treatment system. Upgrades to the treatment system eliminated the need for the dam. The plant produces more than 4.1 million tons of linerboard annually that ultimately packages many of the consumer products we purchase.