

# Still Lake Soiree—Spring on the Satilla 2019

April 6—Satilla River

**Distance:** 13.5 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 17 feet 31.048209, -81.936759

**Ending Elevation:** 13 feet 30.946147, -81.899719

**Restroom Facilities:**

<b>Mile 0</b>	Still Lake Fishing Club
<b>Mile 8</b>	3R Fish Camp
<b>Mile 14</b>	Burnt Fort Landing

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 0 Brantley County**—North of our launch site is Brantley County which is home to both the Satilla and Little Satilla rivers, Brantley has significant portions of its land within flood zones, and when the county was created in 1920, the swampy nature of the land may have played a role in ultimately establishing Nahunta as the county seat. County boosters from Hoboken in the relative high ground in the western part of the county believed their town should serve as the county seat because the high and dry land in the west was better suited for future development, but those on the east side of the county lobbied for Nahunta where two railroads intersected, albeit at a Depot that was originally built on stilts because of the surrounding swamps. Ultimately, after three years of court battles and an election, Nahunta won the right to be called county seat. In a piece included in the 1999 publication, *The Story of Brantley County*, Thomas Earl Cleland suggested Nahunta was, indeed, the best choice: “Where else could “county officials” conduct courthouse business before noon, launch a flat-bottom fishing boat at the railroad depot, catch a “mess of fish,” and still be home in time to clean them for supper? Stories have been told that “fishing water” surrounded the Nahunta Train Depot on all four quadrants, and that “war-mouth and bream” were biting better around the Depot than at White Ford, Strickland Landing, Long Lake, Jonas Lake, and the Old Barn near the Satilla.” With this history, it should come as no surprise that Brantley County High’s mascot is the heron, perhaps the best, and most common, fisher in these parts.

**Mile 0—Still Lake Fishing Club**—Our launch site for the day is the boat ramp of the Still Lake Fishing Club, a club that dates to the late 1940s when several World War II veterans went in together to establish a fish camp and getaway here. Many of the families of those founding members remain members today.

**Mile 2.2—Knee Buckle**—The given name of this sharp bend in the river is an indicator of the difficulty of navigating this river in steamboats and timber rafts during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Into the early 1900s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was regularly surveying the river to determine how it might be improved for commercial navigation. In a 1912 report to Congress, the Corps recommended removing snags and overhanging trees to render the river navigable all the way to Waycross. Said the report: “The improvement by the United States of Satilla River, Ga between Burnt Fort and Waycross is deemed advisable so far as to secure the removal of obstructions and the closing of incipient cutoffs... at an estimated cost of \$10,000.” The Corps would eventually become known for its boondoggle projects that kept the Corps busy but did little to increase commerce along the tortuous route of rivers like the Satilla.

**Mile 2.4—Boons Lake**—This slough on river left extends more than a mile north into the Satilla River floodplain.

**Mile 3.5—Blues Lake**—A narrow passage on river left leads to this picturesque oxbow lake.

**Mile 3.7—Cabbage Palmettos**—On river right here rising above the floodplain forest are these iconic palm trees of the southeast. Also known as sabal palmetto or sabal palm, mature specimens can attain heights of 70 feet. The unbranching trunk is topped by a crown of many leaves. Each leaf actually consists of a stem up to six feet long from which multiple slender leaflets grow. Cabbage palmettos played an important role in the culture of Native American tribes of the region. The white, crisp palm hearts were eaten; the fruits of the trees were used medicinally to relieve headaches; the large trunks were used to build homes and the leaves were woven to create rope and baskets. They are also an important food source with their fruits being consumed by crows, mockingbirds, warblers and woodpeckers. Raccoons are also fond of the fruit. Where abundant, cabbage palmettos can provide as much as 25 percent of the diet of raccoons.

**Mile 3.9—Great Satilla Preserve**—On river left here is an extensive boardwalk that leads to a home in the Great Satilla Preserve, a private community that spans across 2500 acres and 5.5 miles of riverfront. Plans call for only 15 percent of the acreage to be developed as home sites with the remaining land serving as common property. At first blush, the word “Satilla” appears to be one of the many lyrical Native American names for Georgia’s rivers. In reality, the Satilla is one of three major Georgia river basins whose name we believe is not derived from the native language. The first recorded name for the river is attributed to the French explorer, Jean Ribault, who sailed along the Georgia coast in 1562 and called the river “Somme.” Later when Spanish explored the area they reportedly named it “Saint Illa” in honor of a captain in the Spanish army. Saint Illa was the widely used name for the river into the 1800s. An 1874 report of the U.S. Department of Agriculture noted 6,200 acres of rice being cultivated along the Saint Illa River, and to this day, the name St. Illa is found on churches, roads, cemeteries and even healthcare facilities in southeast Georgia. In the late 1800s, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names officially settled on “Satilla.” As for Ribault, he not only lost naming rights to the Spaniards, he also met an untimely death at their hands. After his ships were marooned in a hurricane along the Florida coast, he and his men were captured and executed. But, perhaps Ribault got the last laugh in modern-day America. When the Six Flag Over Georgia amusement park opened in Atlanta in 1967, one of the original rides was Jean Ribault’s Adventure, a ersatz riverboat ride depicting the dangers facing early Georgia settlers.

**Mile 5.5—Douglas Fish Camp**—On river left is a private boat ramp leading to Douglas Fish Camp, one of many neighborhoods nestled atop the bluffs bordering the Satilla River’s floodplain.

**Mile 7.6—Cut through & Oxbow**—One of many cut-throughs and oxbow sloughs along our route, these off-shoots are created when the river erodes an outside bend and captures the downstream bend. This cut through eliminates a quarter-mile of the river’s “original” length. The name “oxbow” comes from the u-shaped collar placed around an ox’s neck to which a plow is attached.

**Mile 8.2—3R Fish Camp**—Our pit stop for the day, the boat launch at 3R Fish Camp is part of the Satilla River Water Trail.

**Mile 9.6—Allens Ferry**—George W. “Dick” Allen lends his name to this historic river crossing and quite a number of descendants. Born in 1837, Allen would ultimately sire 11 children by three wives (a fourth wife died in childbirth along with the infant). A Civil War veteran, he was in a Union prison at the close of the war, but returned to Charlton County where he married in 1868 Mary Ellen Grooms, the daughter of Josiah Grooms. It is perhaps this marriage that introduced Allen to the ferrying business; his wife’s father, Josiah Grooms, operated a ferry downstream at Burnt Fort. Allen died in 1904 and is buried, along with three wives, just west of here.

**Mile 13.1—Godley Landing & Magnolia Bluff**—The dock on river left here marks the location of Godley Landing, a river landing dating to the 1800s. Beyond the dock is Magnolia Bluff that rises about 50 feet above the river here and runs downstream almost a mile. Magnolia Bluff, like our campsite at Long Bluff, is characterized by a diverse deciduous and evergreen forest dominated by southern magnolia (shiny, dark green leaves and showy, fragrant white blooms) and beech (they’re the trees that hold on to their brown leaves through the winter). In Georgia, these bluff or steephead forests are home to at least 25 species of concern, including plumleaf azalea, Florida anise, bottlebrush buckeye and relict trillium.

**Mile 14.1—Billys Lake & Red-breast perch**—In the 1932 *History of Charlton County*, author Alex McQueen boldly asserts that “more fish... have been caught in Burntfort (now known as Billys) lake than any other one spot in the South, and it is still a favorite bedding place of bream and red-breast perch.” Indeed, the Satilla is nationally renowned for its redbreast sunfish fishery. This beautifully-colored fish know locally as “red bellies” accounts for more than half the fishing on the Satilla, according to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Redbreast and other panfish spawn during the spring so you may be lucky enough to see their circular-shaped nests fanned out of sand in shallow water along the river’s edge. In recent years, the redbreast fishery has been decimated by the illegal introduction of non-native flathead catfish. This voracious predator first arrived in the 1990s and, feeding on the redbreast, quickly reduced the population of the river’s premiere sport fish. Beginning in 2007, DNR began a flathead catfish eradication program. Between 2007 and 2013, state fisheries biologists removed some 42,800 flatheads totaling 102,000 pounds. Following this program, the redbreast fishery improved, but fully eradicating flatheads is virtually impossible and without a sustained effort, redbreast populations will continue to struggle. Billys Lake is the large slough on river right just upstream of Ga. 252.

BRANTLEY  
C O U N T Y

Still Lake  
Fishing Club  
 

**Still Lake Soiree**

**April 6 LEGEND**

**Launch Site/Take Out** 

**Pit Stop** 

**Point of Interest** 

*"I like geography best...because your mountains and rivers know the secret. Pay no attention to boundaries."*

--Brian Andreas

Mile 1

Mile 2

Boon's Lake 

Knee Buckle 

Mile 3

Cabbage Palmettos  Blues Lake 

Mile 4

Great Satilla Preserve 

Mile 5

Douglas Fish Camp 

Mile 6

Mile 7

Cut Through & Oxbow 

Mile 8

3R Fish Camp  

Mile 9

Mile 10

Allens Ferry 

Mile 11

Mile 12

Billys Lake & Redbreast Perch 

Mile 13

Godley Landing  Magnolia Bluff 

Mile 14

Burnt Fort Landing  

CAMDEN  
C O U N T Y

CHARLTON  
C O U N T Y



# Paddle Georgia 2019 Spring on the Satilla