

# Burnt Fort Boogie—Spring on the Satilla 2019

April 7—Satilla River

Distance: 8 miles

Starting Elevation: 13 feet 30.946147, -81.899719

Ending Elevation: 10 feet 30.905402, -81.859671

**Restroom Facilities:**     **Mile 0**             Burnt Fort Boat Ramp  
                                  **Mile 8**             Long Bluff/Satilla Lodge

## Points of Interest:

**Mile 0—Burnt Fort**—Our launch site is believed to be one of the possible sites of a circa 1750s settlement called New Hanover on the Satilla River established by an Indian trader and Quaker from Virginia named Edmund Gray. Gray, who was elected a representative and later expelled from Georgia’s colonial assembly, was undoubtedly one of the “characters” of his day. Historic accounts provide conflicting reports of the man describing him as collectively as a teetotaling Quaker, a “political adventurer,” a “radical dreamer” and a renegade that proved a “thorn in the side” of Georgia’s colonial government. After dismissal from the colonial assembly in 1755, he led a group of mostly landless families into the frontier along the Satilla River in the “no man’s land” between British-controlled Georgia and Spanish-controlled Florida. There he and others set up trade with Spain and local Indians. Though lucrative for what became known as “Gray’s Gang,” the Spanish trade in neighboring Florida was frowned upon by Georgia’s colonial government. Eventually, most in New Hanover withdrew to a settlement on Cumberland Island and then scattered to land around the St. Mary’s River. It is believed that Gray’s Gang built a fort on this site that was used as refuge by settlers during Indian uprisings and ultimately set ablaze by Indians in the early 1800s, giving rise to the name “Burnt Fort.” By the 1840s new migrants settled here, setting up a sawmill that processed logs harvested far upstream and then floated down the Satilla to this point. Locals interviewed for Alex McQueen’s 1932 book *History of Charlton County* recalled times when the river was so full of logs that it was possible to walk two miles up river from Burnt Fort on “raft after raft of some the largest yellow pine logs ever grown in Georgia.” A ferry also operated at this location until 1928. The circa-1956 bridge that still spans the river here was named to honor Alva J. Hopkins, a long-time legislator from Charlton County. Atlanta Journal columnist Charles Salter in the 1970s recorded the following accounts of timber rafting on the Satilla River from 78-year-old Fred Voight of Ware County: “My first experience in this was in August. We had six rafts of timber and a boy or two from each family went with each raft. We took the highest floating logs and made a kitchen raft and nailed boards on the logs and put wagon loads of dirt on there. You couldn’t turn the rafts loose on the Satilla until the water receded to within the bank, or the rafts could float out on a hill and leave you stranded. . . The river is so crooked, it’s a slow and painful process rounding those bends. . . We hadn’t gone around more than one bend before a cool thunderstorm started. We jumped in the warm river rather than take the cold rain. So we stayed wet for three days and three nights.” Upon reaching Burnt Fort the timber rafters would sell their wood and then take the train to Brunswick and from there back to home near Waycross. Aside from a grand adventure for a young boy, the journey and the timber delivered to the sawmill provided additional income for farmers. By this method, however, most of the long-leaf pines of south Georgia were harvested.

**Mile 4.1—Bloody Branch**—About four miles up this stream entering on river right, in 1794 Native Americans attacked and killed James Keene and one of his children as his wife and three other children watched in horror. The natives made off with the family’s possessions, including some 25 head of cattle, five horses and a wagon. The murders earned the creek the name “Bloody Branch.” Today, maps identify this creek as Bailey’s Branch and provide no name for the arm of the creek where historian John Goff, in Placenames of Georgia, reports that the murders took place—a spot about two miles west of Burnt Fort on modern day Ga. 252.

**Mile 4.5—Folkston Milk Riots**—Eight miles southwest of this spot is Folkston, best known as a gateway to the Okefenokee Swamp, but in 1950, the town made headlines because of local milk “riots.” When a local dairy ceased operation in the late 1940s, local communities began receiving their milk from Florida dairies. In 1950, the Georgia Department of Agriculture attempted to stop delivery of milk across the state line, claiming that it could not insure the safety of the Florida milk. The controversy boiled over into near riot when two Georgia agents poured “bluing” into 240 quarts of Florida milk meant for Folkston residents. Mayor R. Ward Harrison had the men arrested to protect them from an angry crowd that had gathered at the scene of the milk spoiling. In newspaper accounts, Mayor Ward was quoted: “Georgia’s Agriculture Commissioner may have a little state law which says he can pour bluing in milk, but he’s not going to do that in this town.” The Commissioner ultimately relented and allowed delivery of the Florida milk.

**Mile 5—Gorman’s Bluff and the Camden-Charlton County Line**—In 1854, the Georgia General Assembly commissioned Camden County citizens Stephen McCall, C.J. Patterson and J.E. Mizell to establish and mark the county line between Charlton and Camden counties, running it from the St. Mary’s River north to “Gorman’s Bluff on the Satilla River.” Patterson lived at Gorman’s Bluff, raising cattle and farming the land. McCall and Mizell hailed from the southern end of the line along the St. Mary’s and according to Alex McQueen, author of a 1932 History of Charlton County, none of the men wished to reside in Charlton. McCall reportedly said that “he wanted to run the line so that he would remain in Camden as he did not want to be a citizen of such a poor county as Charlton, in his opinion, would be.” In retrospect, McCall’s assessment of Charlton’s prospects for prosperity were prophetic. Today, Charlton’s nearly 13,000 residents enjoy a medium household income of \$40,111 while Camden claims more than 52,000 residents and a medium household income of more than \$52,000. The poverty rate in Charlton hovers at nearly 30 percent. In Charlton’s defense, nearly half the county’s land mass lies within the Okefenokee Swamp; the estimated alligator population in the Swamp (13,000) surpasses Charlton’s human population.

**Mile 6.5—Coastal Marshes**—With the entry into the tidal zone at Burnt Fort, the Satilla begins to show signs of Georgia’s massive coastal marshes. Detritus of marsh grass can often be seen drifting inland with the tide and marsh grasses begin appearing along the river’s shores. Georgia’s 100 mile coast holds an estimated 429,294 acres of tidal marshland. This area stretches from the state’s barrier islands four to eight miles inland and accounts for one third of all the salt marshes on the U.S.’s East Coast. It is one of the most productive ecosystems on the planet. Studies show that the state’s marshes produce nearly 20 tons of biomass per acre—four times more productive than the highest producing corn fields. This biomass is critically important to the life cycle of commercially important seafood like blue crabs, oysters and shrimp. So, if caught by the incoming tide, rather than curse the strenuous paddling, we might instead celebrate the tide and salt marsh. The twice daily high tides on the Georgia coast only act to make the marshes even more fertile.

**Mile 7—Hells Gate**—In 1897, the Satilla River Transport Company ran their steamer, Passport, up river to Burnt Fort four times weekly. The boat left Brunswick at 8:30 and arrived at Burnt Fort in the late afternoon. Undoubtedly, “Hells Gate” was one of the shallow spots with which the steamer’s captains dealt. In 1910, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers surveyed the Satilla from its mouth to Burnt Fort evaluating it for commercial navigation. After finding several “shoals,” the Corps recommended to Congress appropriations to rid the river of these obstacles. By 1921, Congress had doled out more than \$17,000 for Satilla river improvement projects and the Corps boasted that its work made possible the rafting of timber at “almost all stages” of the river. In 1920, the Corps estimated more than 64,000 tons of goods (almost half of it logs) valued at \$1.4 million was shipped on the Satilla.

**Mile 8—Satilla Lodge/Rice Plantations**—Portions of the Gowen property at Long Bluff were once cultivated for rice production. From the early 1700s until just after 1900, rice—not cotton—was king in coastal Georgia, but growing it was arduous work. Swamps and forests had to be cleared and then levee and canal systems constructed to permit the flooding of the fields. Slave labor made the crop viable. After the Civil War and Emancipation, property owners found it difficult to find a willing work force. That complication as well as competition from global markets and a series of damaging hurricanes hastened the end of rice production along the Satilla. Prior to the Civil War, Georgia produced as much as 51.7 million pounds of rice annually; by 1919 production had dwindled to 2 million pounds.

CAMDEN  
C O U N T Y

## Burnt Fort Boogie

April 7 LEGEND

Launch Site/Take Out



Pit Stop



Point of Interest



*"Come to the pond, or the river of  
your imagination, and put your lips to the  
world...And, live your life."*

*--Mary Oliver*

GA 252  
To Folkston

Burnt Fort



Powerlines -Mile 1

-Mile 2

Mile 3-

-Mile 4

Mile 5-

-Mile 6

-Mile 7

Mile 8-

Hells Gate



Satilla Lodge  
Rice Plantations



Coastal  
Marshes

Bloody Branch



Gorman's Bluff & Camden-  
Charlton County Line



Folkston Milk Riots



Riley Creek

CAMDEN  
C O U N T Y

CHARLTON  
C O U N T Y



# Paddle Georgia 2019 Spring on the Satilla