

## Spring on the Satilla 2020 Day 1

**Mile 0—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.

**Mile 1—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 1—Unnamed Tributary**—On river right a slough leads to an unnamed tributary that can be explored in high water.

**Mile 3.2—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 3.6—Trout Lake**—Of course, there are no cold-water trout like brookies, rainbows or browns in South Georgia, but there are spotted sea trout that range along the Georgia coast and up tidal rivers. It may have been this trout that lent this oxbow lake its name. Spotted sea trout are among the most popular sport fish on the Georgia coast.

**Mile 3.7—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 4.2—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 8—Burnt Fort**—This site is off our official map, but if you are ambitious, you could paddle all the way to Burnt Fort and back to Satilla Lodge in a day. Burnt Fort was a logging center on the Satilla River where a sawmill processed logs floated downstream from upland farms. 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.

