Poor Robin Rhumba–Paddle Georgia 2023

June 26—Savannah River

Distance: 11 miles

Starting Elevation: 53 feet **32.783463, -81.432283**
Ending Elevation: 42 feet **32.703086, -81.428175**

Restroom Facilities:
Mile 0 Brier Creek Landing
Mile 11 Poor Robin Landing

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Brier Creek Landing—On river right at the mouth of a side channel leading to Brier Creek is this private boat landing. Since the 1800s, this spot has served as access to the Savannah and is frequently noted in newspaper accounts reporting on river commerce from the late 1800s through the early 1900s, including this account from the April 19, 1881 edition of the *Sylvania Telephone* in which the paper leans into the racially-charged rhetoric of the post-Reconstruction-era South: "We understand wholesale stealing operations were going on at Brier Creek Landing last Wednesday night…The Wheless [a steamboat] had arrived at her wharf there and was discharging freight, which parties were loading on their wagons and carts…A darkey was loading his cart with corn from the rear, and as fast as he put it in some one took it out at the front part, taking two sacks in all. Who the thieves were is not known but they were supposed to be a crowd of idle negroes who were lounging around the landing." On the day of the publication of this incident, the steamer Wheless went up in flames at her dock in Savannah. Like many of the Savannah's paddlewheelers, it lived a short life. Built in 1880, it was in service just a few months.

Mile 1—Fridays Dream Point—The "point" here refers to the neck and head of land that culminates in a rounded "point" creating the inner boundary of a oxbow sweeping to the east. Typically, points harbor sandbars while the opposite and outer bend pushes against a bluff. On other Georgia rivers, early cartographers more commonly referred to these geographic features as bights or rounds (emphasizing the outer bend rather than the inner point), but on the Savannah "points" are more commonly noted on historic maps than "rounds" or "bights." The origin of the name of this particular point remains a mystery. Within the next mile are two sets of navigational weirs. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began building these structures in the late 1800s and continued adding them into the mid-1900s, an effort to constrict and deepen the channel and prevent the formation of sandbars.

Mile 2.7—Pfeiffer Landing—During the 1800s and early 1900s, this bluff on river right was home to a bustling river landing known originally by the peculiar name of Haga Slaga Landing. Twice during the late 1800s, August editions of the *Savannah Morning News* reported the first bales of the year's cotton harvest arriving in that city via downriver steamers from Haga Slaga Landing. In an Aug. 8, 1882 edition, the News reported the peculiar story of a sleep-walking deck hand on the steamer Mary Fisher in the vicinity of Haga Slaga: "He was asleep on the deck about two o'clock…Suddenly jumping up, aroused by the terrors of a "nightmare," it is presumed, he sprang overboard. The plunge in the water thoroughly awakened him, however, and he cried out lustily for help…The steamer was backed and he was found sitting on the trunk of a tree near the bank." A more serious steamboat incident occurred just downstream of the landing as the Hamburg sunk in the mid-1800s. It remained an obstacle for other steamboat pilots until the 1890s. By the turn of the 20th century, Haga Slaga became known as Pfeiffer Landing. Carl Bruno Pfeiffer immigrated from Germany in 1867 and by the late 1800s was listed among the leading merchants of Sylvania. Newspaper accounts from the era track the trials, triumphs and oddities of the Sylvania merchant's interesting but short life. In 1890, he narrowly escaped losing his store to a fire; the same year, a sow belonging to a tenant on his farm gave birth to a six-legged pig; in 1892, he headed a posse which gave "hot pursuit" to three escapees from the Screven County jail; in 1897 fire did finally take out his Sylvania store, along with several other businesses. By 1898 he was proprietor of a nearly 10,000-acre turpentine operation surrounding the former Haga Slaga Landing. By then his health was failing, a result of chronic kidney disease, and his doctors suggested he visit Suwannee Springs in Live Oak, Florida. In 1899 letters from Pfeiffer extolling the virtues of the curative springs began appearing in local papers: "My disease had advanced so rapidly that when I arrived there medicines would do me no good. After staying there three weeks and following implicit instructions, I am entirely cured. I cannot say enough for these waters." Pfeiffer died within two years of his visit to the spring, taken by kidney disease and remembered as "prominent citizen of Screven County."

Mile 3.9—Pfeiffer Landing Cut—On river right is an oxbow lake that extends into the river bottom forest some 1,000 feet. This nearly mile-long bend in the river was once part of the main channel. Between the 1950s and early 1960s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged a new channel here, eliminating this oxbow, along with three others in the 7 miles between here and Poor Robin Landing. The dredging was conducted to improve navigation by removing some of the river's tight bends. In total the Corps work here, and at Thompson's Cowfold Point, Mosquito Camp Point and Poor Robin Upper Cut Point downstream, eliminated nearly 3.5 miles of the original channel. Some $800,000 in tax dollars paid for this engineering that resulted in the unintended consequence of negatively impacting water quality. When water courses through oxbows, the movement slows the water, giving the river more time to breakdown nutrients. Over the length of the river, these oxbows improve oxygen levels by neutralizing organic matter. In recent years, the Corps has begun spending millions to restore and reconnect some of these historic oxbows in hopes of improving overall oxygen levels in the river, something that is critical to fish and other aquatic species.

Mile 4.9—Thompson's Cow Fold Point—On river left, this wide oxbow lake stretches back into the bottomlands nearly a mile. An 1890 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers survey of this oxbow noted that the distance across the neck of land creating this oxbow was only about 400 feet wide and that "breakovers" across this neck had begun to cut off the oxbow. Historical aerial maps show that the oxbow survived until the 1950s when a combination of natural cuts and dredging by the Corps began isolating the oxbow to create the lake that exists today.

Mile 7.7—Sandbar—On river right an extensive sandbar appears at normal to low water levels. Immediately downstream on river left visible from the bar is a series of navigational weirs.

Mile 9—Mosquito Camp Point—On river left, this expansive oxbow lake is accessed via a narrow tunnel of willows. The oxbow's name surely reflects a miserable night spent here by some unfortunate boatman beneath a cloud of biting mosquitoes. Though mosquitoes weren't identified as the cause of malaria until 1898, the conditions in which mosquitoes thrived were long suspected as causing the fevers and chills associated with the disease. In 1856, a Charleston area rice plantation owner told the traveler Frederick Law Olmsted that he would rather "stand fifty feet from the best Kentucky rifleman and be shot at by the hour, as to spend a night" around his water-logged rice fields in the summer. As early as 1817, the City of Savannah adopted ordinances mandating the drainage of wetlands within the city and encouraging planters to switch from rice cultivation to "dry culture." Indeed, draining wetlands became one of the primary tools for fighting the disease in the early 1900s. During a six-year period in the 1930s, public works programs drained more than 500,000 acres of wetlands in 16 states. Other measures included spreading petroleum on the surface of open water, and ultimately, beginning in 1944, the use of insecticide DDT. Thus did our battle with the diminutive mosquito result in numerous unintended consequences: the loss of hundreds of thousands of wetlands and the near loss of American's national symbol, the bald eagle. The banning of DDT in 1972 has led the bald eagle's revival, and we've also learned that healthy wetlands—filled with the mosquito's natural predators (dragonflies)—can actually control populations of the annoying insects.

Mile 10.6—Poor Robin Upper Cut Point—On river right, a narrow, willow-choked channel leads to this wide oxbow lake that extends into the floodplain nearly a half mile. Remnants of the former main channel, oxbow lakes might be thought of as the river's "living room." Studies have shown that oxbows hold more algal, zooplankton, mussel and fish species than can be found in the main channel of the river. These slack water refuges also provide important habitat and food sources for juvenile fish.