Blue Springs Bump–Paddle Georgia 2023

June 27—Savannah River

Distance: 7.5 miles

Starting Elevation: 42 feet **32.703086, -81.428175**

Ending Elevation: 36 feet **32.628891, -81.418839**

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0 Poor Robin Landing

Mile 7.5 Blue Springs Landing

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Poor Robin Landing—A boat landing dating to the colonial period (it is referenced in newspapers in 1767), Poor Robin remained an important steamboat landing through the 20th century, so much so that an ambitious plan was hatched by Sylvania residents to construct a 20-mile railroad from the town to a landing along the Savannah "between Hudson's Ferry and Poor Robin Landing." Though the Sylvania and Savannah Railway Company was incorporated by the state in 1905, the plan never bore fruit. In addition to serving as an important point of commerce between inland farmers and the port of Savannah, Poor Robin was also a destination for social gatherings. In 1905, a local school held a picnic at the landing that was described in the June 24 edition of the *Sylvania Telephone* newspaper: "After satisfying our thirst and gratifying our appetites with the good things provided by those noble people, we were treated to a ten-mile ride by Capt. P.H. Haddon, upon the steamer Two States, and to add to the pleasure of the voyage Mrs. Haddon furnished us with some nice music." The Two States, was a 157-foot long, 285-horsepower vessel built in Savannah in 1901 that operated on the river until 1919. The unusually named place is the first, but not the last Poor Robin, along Georgia's rivers. Later, the Poor Robin moniker became attached to bluff on both the Oconee and Ocmulgee and a well-known spring along the Ocmulgee near Abbeville. Where the Poor Robin name came from remains a mystery. Historian John Goff has suggested that since the "Poor Robin" features on the Savannah, Oconee and Ocmulgee run along a relatively straight line, they may be a reference to an Native American guide that led early explorers across what is now Middle Georgia. The Poor Robin name was popularized in 17th century England with the publication of Poor Robin's Almanac and other tomes attributed to a writer using the penname Poor Robin.

Mile 1.4—Ware Creek Cut—On river left rip rap lines the bank indicating the site of one of 35 manmade cuts completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers between 1959 and 1976. Prior to 1960, the river formed a sinuous S-curve here with Poor Robin Lower Point to the south and a loop that reached northward to Ware Creek. Then in late 1960, the dredge boats Northwood and Hampton Roads began work on this section of river digging a straighter channel and cutting off more than a mile of the former river channel. Material was then placed at the inlet to these oxbows to assure that the river stayed in its newly engineered channel. USACE reports show that more than $800,000 was spent straightening the river between Savannah and Augusta in 1960-61. The remnants of both oxbows can be accessed on river right and left immediately downstream. The lake formed by Poor Robin Lower Point loops back 0.3 mile.

Mile 2.8—Big Lake/Pike Creek—On river left is the mouth of Pike Creek which leads up a narrow channel for 0.3 mile before opening up into Big Lake, a comparatively wide water body lined with Spanish-moss draped cypress trees that reaches into the bottomland forest another 0.4 mile. The short straight of way immediately downstream of the mouth of Pike Creek is called Cornhouse Reach.

Mile 4.5—Blanket Point Cut—On river right, this extensive oxbow lake in the shape of an inverted U loops northward through the bottomland forest for more than a mile. Until 1976, this oxbow, known as Blanket Point, was part of the main channel of the river, but that year the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged through the neck of the oxbow, straightening and shortening the main channel in an effort to improve navigation. Anchored on the north bank of the oxbow are a series of floathouses. Used as fish camps and weekend getaways, floating cabins like these were outlawed on navigable rivers in 1992 by the Georgia General Assembly. However, the law did not apply to non-navigable waters such as this oxbow…even though it is connected to a navigable river. The law was enacted in response to large numbers of floathouses on the Altamaha River that were creating navigational hazards and pollution problems. Most of the dwellings did not include marine grade heads. Floathouses, or "shantyboats," have been found on rivers since people were destitute…meaning forever. The population of such boats swelled during the Great Depression as families sought cheap means of survival in places where rent and taxes were difficult to levy and food was readily available. On the Savannah, the shantyboat tradition traces its roots to the early 1800s when the city of Savannah's lower caste took to the river for survival. The number of river dwellers was so great that by 1831 it prompted action by the Georgia General Assembly which adopted legislation to prevent "itinerant or unauthorized persons from locating themselves on or near the river Savannah, under the pretense of fishing." The legislation enumerated the problems: "the Savannah River…is infested by a number of evil disposed persons, inhabiting huts, or camps, arks or floating houses, who under the pretense of being engaged in fishing, are in the habit of trading with negroes, to the great injury of their owners, and to the corruption of the morals of the slaves." The legislation specifically prohibited any "persons to inhabit, occupy or reside in any ark, flat or floating house on the said river, or the waters thererof, or on the creeks communicating therewith." Immediately downstream of the this oxbow, the river runs on a short straight of way historically known as Little Cornhouse Reach.

Mile 4.9—Martins Landing—On river left is the site of this historic landing established by Alfred M. Martin in 1879 after the South Carolina General Assembly authorized him to "build a wharf at Martin's Landing, on Savannah River." Alfred's father, Edmund Martin married into the Maner family which had vast holdings along the river here that came to be known as Woodstock Plantation. The circa-1823 home on the property still stands, spared during the Civil War by marauding Union troops because of friendly mutual acquaintances between Gen. William Sherman and Martin, according to legend. Like many planters along the river's corridor, the preferred method for getting farm goods to market was via river steamers bound for Augusta and Savannah, thus the importance of Martin's wharf. At low water an abandoned dock becomes visible, marking the approximate location of this landing.

Mile 6.6—Wildcat Cut—Here the river cuts off a former oxbow of more than a mile and a half in length known as Jacob Jump Point. Beginning in the late 1930s, the river began carving a path across the neck of this oxbow and by the early 1950s had fully isolated the oxbow. As of 2022, the upstream side of the oxbow was completely blocked, the bottomland forest overtaking the old river bed. However, the downstream end is still accessible at high water via a narrow, wood-clogged passage. In carving a new path, the river eliminated two colorfully named "points," or oxbows, that were part of this 3-mile S curve: Willow Oak and Monkey points. In literature, Jacob Jump Point finds itself part of a 2015 novel by Augusta native Eric Morris. Jacob Jump tells the story of a week-long, ill-fated boating trip down the Savannah from Augusta to Tybee Island.

Mile 7—Black Creek—Caught at the right water levels, it's possible to venture up this creek on river right and to a crystal clear spring run that spills into Black Creek about 300 feet from the river. This area is known as Blue Springs because of the numerous springs that issue forth through near-surface limestone strata. Blue Springs, a once popular community swimming hole and gathering place is located 0.4 mile from Blue Spring Landing along Blue Springs Road. In 1951, W.R. Altman sold 3.5 acres surrounding the spring to Screven County for $1. His desire was to make permanent the public use of his spring which by 1951 had become common practice. However, by the early 2000s, the spring flow had diminished, the place fell out of use, and Screven County leaders saw the one-time popular park as a liability. In 2009, the county commission moved to sell the property, but public outcry forced them to reconsider. In 2023, the property still remained in the hands of Screven County.