Sisters Ferry Shimmy–Paddle Georgia 2023

June 29—Savannah River

Distance: 16.7 miles

Starting Elevation: 30 feet **32.532406, -81.275982**

Ending Elevation: 17 feet **32.379297, -81.181872**

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Tuckasee-King Landing
Mile 5	Fennell Property
Mile 17	Ebenezer Landing

Points of Interest:

Mile 0.5—Highway Bridge—An important river crossing from colonial times when Gen. James Oglethorpe established a ferry near here in 1739, a bridge didn't span the river here until 1959 when this structure was erected. When it was completed, historians lobbied leaders to name the bridge in memory of John Adam Truetlen, a Patriot who was the first elected governor of Georgia in 1777. Treutlen came to the Georgia colony with his mother and brother in 1745 as indentured servants, but a local pastor recognized his talents and enrolled him in school at Ebenezer. In adulthood, he acquired land, established a successful plantation along the river and became active in politics. During the American Revolution his home and out buildings were destroyed by Tories, forcing a move into South Carolina. There he died at the hands of Tories in 1782. This is the only highway bridge on our route.

Mile 0.9—CSX Railroad Bridge—A railroad bridge has spanned the river here since 1891 when the Southbound Railroad was constructed between Columbia, South Carolina and Savannah. Today, the Pratt truss bridge built in 1969 is part of CSX's 20,000-mile network of tracks. This bridge was designed as a center-pivot swing bridge to allow passage of large vessels.

Mile 3—Sisters Ferry—Near this spot in 1739, Gen. James Oglethorpe established a ferry. Thus, this stretch of water between here and the higher river bluffs immediately downstream of Kennedy Lake (where a second ferry was later established) was a strategic landmark during Georgia and South Carolina's colonial and antebellum history. In 1775, botanist William Bartram crossed the river on this ferry noting a mass of flaming blooms (flame azalea). Likewise, the French botanist, Andre Michaux, passed here in 1787, staying at the ferry house where nearby he collected wild lupines and killed "a very beautiful snake with yellow bands, black and red" (either the non-venomous scarlet king snake or the venomous coral snake both of which are still found in the area). In January 1782, Gen. Wayne Anthony and some 100 mounted soldiers crossed here in small boats, leading their swimming horses by their sides. Once in Georgia, Anthony drove the British into Savannah and finally forced their evacuation. In gratitude, the Georgia General Assembly gifted Wayne two rice plantations on the Savannah that were confiscated from British loyalists. Wayne then mortgaged his Pennsylvania home to purchase 47 slaves and attempt to make the plantations profitable. In this, he failed, as his foray as a rice planter nearly brought him financial ruin. During the Civil War, the Union army used Sisters Ferry to cross into South Carolina and continue its campaign to destroy the Confederacy. On Feb. 4, 1865, Union army surgeon Arminius Bill wrote of the crossing: "As the men come to the South Carolina shore, they greet the soil of the chief sinner in the Confederacy with unearthly groans, yells, grunts, barks and catcalls and this goes on all night as troops cross and land." The Union gunboat, Pontiac, with 14 cannons, was brought up river from Savannah to cover the army's crossing.

Mile 4.5—Kennedy Lake—On river right here is this slough that extends 0.7 mile to the northwest, flanked by a high bluff on the west and bottomland forest on the east. Hugh Kennedy and his brother, William, received numerous land grants from Georgia's colonial government in this area, including in 1753 some 100 acres "situated near a lagoon opposite to a place known as the two Sisters on Savannah River." The "lagoon" described in the Colonial Records came to be known as Kennedy Lake. Kennedy, sometime around 1770, erected a fence across the road leading through his property to the Sister Ferry, prompting outcry from South Carolinians who told Georgia's Commons House that the obstruction was preventing them from "driving stock and carrying poultry" to the Savannah market. Kennedy's fence seems to have been calculated for in 1773, he petitioned the House to establish a ferry of his own.

Mile 5.8—B & C Landing—On river left is a narrow channel that leads 0.5 mile to a concrete boat ramp within the Tillman Sand Ridge Heritage Preserve, a 1400-acre natural area managed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Low water may prevent passage all the way to the boat ramp.

Mile 6—Sisters Ferry Reach—This 3-mile-long straight of way flanked by a high bluff on the Georgia side of the river begins upstream at Kennedy Lake and ends downstream at Robinson Round. Look for wooden navigational weirs along this reach.

Mile 8.2—Big Boykin Bar—Having left the confining bluff to the west, the river enters a 4-mile-long meander with multiple points and sandbars. Big Boykin is the first of several sandbars in this run.

Mile 10.3—Bowl Maker Point—On river left here beyond a phalanx of trees is this oxbow lake, long since cut off from the main river channel. More than a half-mile in length, the lake was created in 1962 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged a 2000-foot-long channel across the neck of Bowl Maker Point to "improve navigation." That year, the Corps completed cut offs of seven points, removing a total of 520,492 cubic yards of material. That's enough dredge material to fill the 1776-foot tall One World Trade Center in New York City (the tallest building in the U.S.) nearly three times.

Mile 12—Haddon Lake—On river right, a narrow passage leads to this large, shallow oxbow lake lined with Spanish-moss-draped cypress trees. The Haddon family name looms large over the Savannah River valley. In addition to this lake the nearby community of Haddonville bears the family name. Samuel Haddon, born in 1824 in England, settled in the Savannah River valley around the time of the Civil War. By 1880 he was farming with his wife and seven children and five black servants in Screven County, according to census records. Upon reaching adulthood, his sons, Percy H. and Arthur H., became intimately involved in river navigation, Percy as a riverboat captain and Arthur as a Savannah merchant. Together in the early 1900s they formed the Savannah River Steamboat Company. Percy, whose career as a steamboat captain spanned from the late 1800s to the dying days of river transportation in the 1920s, was described in the *History of Effingham County* as a "bluff and hearty steamboat man." Newspaper accounts support such a description. In 1899, he attacked a deckhand with a piece of lumber after the worker accused him of failing to pay his wages. Haddon suffered a slashing knife wound running from his neck to his chest in the fracas. Then in 1911, he heroically stopped an armed gunman who burst into his Savannah office and shot at his secretary. When his Two States sank after hitting an underwater obstruction near the wharves in Augusta, he minced no words in calling on the federal government to bring relief: "I know of only one…effective remedy for the evil, and that is systematic dredging of the river." He died in 1938 never to see the federal government's extensive and futile efforts to transform the river into a commercial waterway.

Mile 12.1—Frying Pan Landing—On river right is a dock, boat ramp and cabin that mark the river's return to the Georgia-side bluff and another straight of way. For the next three miles, a series of riverfront dwellings tmark the historic locations of Frying Pan Landing as well as Gaffney's, Berry's and Seines landings. In the 1800s, there were more than 60 landings between Savannah and Augusta. Tyrone Power in his *Impressions of America During the Years 1833, 34 and 35* wrote of his journey up the river: "Our boat was small and very deeply laden, making hardly four miles an hour; but she had few passengers, was capitally provisioned, and possessed an indefatigable and most obliging commander... Every few miles we brought up to take in a fresh supply of fuel; we were thus enabled constantly to stretch our legs in the forest; but throughout the whole distance so exactly similar were most of these landings that a light-hearted countryman of mine…constantly used, on stopping, to say, "I'd like to be sure we haven't gone back; and that this place is itself, and not the other." Seines Landing, the last of the four on Ebenezer Reach was in the early 1900s the site of a stave mill, producing shaped pine slats for the construction of wooden barrels which were used to ship rosin and turpentine.

Mile 13.7—Hungleiter Branch—On river right, this narrow blackwater creek joins the river. At high water levels, the branch is accessible several hundred feet upstream, leading to some picturesque cypress trees.