

Beard's Bluff Bump—Paddle Georgia 2024

June 19—Altamaha River

Distance: 15.1 miles Upper Wayne County Landing (Mile 78.3) to Jaycee Landing (Mile 63.2)

Starting Elevation: 48 feet 31.785049, -81.984421 **Ending Elevation: 31 feet 31.667092, -81.845233**

Pit Stops: Mile 78.3—Upper Wayne County Landing **Mile 69.1**—Oglethorpe Bluff Landing **Mile 63.2**—Jaycee Landing

Points of Interest:

Mile 78.0—Tar Landing—According to *Wayne County Georgia: Its History and Its People*, beginning in 1858, this site on river right became home to one of the first turpentine mills in the area when the McDuffies, a pair of brothers from North Carolina, ventured south to tap Georgia's seemingly endless stands of longleaf pine. By the late 1800s, Georgia was the country's leading naval stores producer and through the 1940s, Brunswick and Savannah remained the world's leading ports for the shipment of naval stores. Originally, gum from pines was used to waterproof wooden ships, thus the industry came to be known as the naval stores industry.

Mile 77—Beard's Creek—In the 1880s, river currents at this location, where it widens at the mouth of Beard's Creek, created a sandbar and navigational hazard for steamboats and timber rafts. In 1884-85, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers attempted to eliminate this sandbar by constructing a 1700-foot jetty or training wall that extended from the mouth of the creek downstream toward Beard's Bluff. The wood and rock wall employed more than 1200 cubic yards of stone and gravel and more than 3500 cubic yards of wooden fascines.

Mile 76.7—Beard's Bluff & Adamson's Fish Camp—On river left along this bluff is the boat ramp of Adamson's Fish Camp, a campground established in 1941 by Dewey Adamson. The cultural history associated with the bluff is long and entertaining. In 1742, Gen. James Oglethorpe ordered a stockade built to guard the river crossing, and during the Revolutionary War, Georgia militia built a small fort there as well. Following American independence, Fort Telfair, built on Beards Bluff around 1790, played an important role in relations with the Creek Nation. The bluff is also notable as the birthplace of the steamboat, *Altamaha*. F.E. Breen built the 346-ton, 120-foot-long, 29-foot-wide sternwheeler using wood cut from the surrounding woods. The ship reportedly drew only 15 inches. That design kept the boat on the river for more than 30 years, making it one of the river's longest-serving vessels.

Mile 76.2—Long County Landing—Boat ramp and parking area on river left

Mile 73.9—Strickland Bight—This sharp oxbow is marked by a sandbar on river left and bluff-top homes on river right.

Mile 73—Marrowbone Round—On river right here is this oxbow lake accessible in high water. The 1.5-mile oxbow was once the river's main channel but over the last century, the river has carved a new, more direct, path isolating the round.

Mile 71.7—Yankee Reach—The Union Army was, in fact, very active on the Georgia coast and the Altamaha during the Civil War. Indeed, the saga of the *Gov. Troup*, a steamboat built in Savannah in 1859, is a testament to the vigor with which the Union Army pursued its duties on this river. During the war, the Confederate government purchased the *Gov. Troup* for \$20,000 and employed the vessel in collecting tithes from farmers along the Altamaha River system. This duty likely did not endear her to the river's citizenry. In the closing stages of the war, the Union Army enlisted two Unionist citizens, Jacob Moody, a prominent resident of Appling County, and Robert T. Williams, in an effort to capture the *Gov. Troup*. During the night of May 1, 1865 a group of 41 men, including Confederate deserters, led by Moody and Williams seized the craft on the Ocmulgee and proceeded down river to Darien and then Savannah where they expected to turn her over to the Union Army. Much to the frustration of the river pirates and the Army, a Union Navy vessel intercepted the *Gov. Troup* and took her as a prize. Only after a series of tersely worded letters to the Navy was the Army able to retrieve its prize. Moody and Williams pressed their case with the Army, and finally in early 1867, the U.S. government approved payment of \$1500 each to Moody and Williams and \$100 for ten of their accomplices. The ill-fated *Gov. Troup* caught fire and sank on the Savannah River nearly a month after its capture. Forty people perished in the disaster.

Mile 70.3—Island & Training Dike—Here the river spreads around an island, and during low water, at the tail of the island a series of posts extending from the river bottom are visible. Dating to 1903, this training dike extended some 500 feet.

Mile 69.4—Oglethorpe Bluff—Though it is not known whether Georgia's founder, James Oglethorpe, ever ventured this far up the Altamaha, the General did travel extensively along the Georgia coast, and in 1739 made a two-month trip across modern-day Georgia to meet Native Americans at the Chattahoochee River. Along the way, they encountered herds of 60 or more buffalo. One of Oglethorpe's rangers described the beasts: "There is a great plenty and they are very good eating. Though they are a very heavy beast they will out run a horse and quite tire him."

Mile 69.1—Oglethorpe Bluff/Pig Farm Landing—Pit stop for the day!

Mile 67.6—Wreck of the *Tar Heel*—On March 22, 1888, as the captain of the steamer *Tar Heel* tried to navigate around a mid-river island that formed a narrow channel known as Oswell's Cut here. The ship hit a snag and sank in just ten minutes. A month prior to the wreck, the captain of the *Tar Heel*, John Swain McBurrows, drew the attention of the *Macon Telegraph*, in part because of the color of his skin, but perhaps mostly because his story played into a convenient narrative of white supremacist ideology in the Reconstruction-era South: that former slaves had it better in the South than they might elsewhere, including their native land of Africa. Under the headline: "Didn't Like Liberia, Its Mechanic Arts Too Primitive and its People's Attire Likewise," the *Telegraph* reported: "Several years ago John... with about 150 more colored people, set out for Liberia, Africa, then pictured as the colored man's haven of rest." McBurrows became homesick and was soon sailing back to the U.S.. Wrote the *Telegraph*: "He says the costumes of that country didn't suit him. The climate was too hot and the natives wore too little clothing for a man who had any respect for decency."

Mile 67.4—Hughes Old River—Here, on river left, this oxbow lake extends nearly two miles from the river's main channel. The "old river" bears the name of one of the Liberty County's leading families of the 19th century. Capt. Joseph William Hughes, Jr., a Confederate Civil War veteran, represented the county in the Georgia General Assembly, but his son, Joseph William Hughes III, left his name on this place when he developed the oxbow into a naval stores landing in the late 1800s. By 1898, a tramway moved goods overland to the landing for shipment to Darien. Later, the landing became a popular hunting and fishing club. In the late 1980s, club members took umbrage to non-club members fishing in Old River and sued to keep the water off limits to the public. The Georgia Supreme Court affirmed the club's right to restrict fishing, but, the justices refused to bar boaters from traveling on the water body, citing uncertainty about whether Hughes Old River could be defined as a "navigable" body of water based on Georgia's circa-1863 law defining navigable streams. That law states that water bodies are navigable if they are "capable of transporting boats loaded with freight." Much to the chagrin of paddling enthusiasts, the state's dated navigability law, enacted long before widespread recreational use of the state's waterways, has been used to deny the right of passage to boaters on small streams where a landowner holds property on both sides of the stream. Until the General Assembly makes a change or a new legal precedent is set, the 1863 law may continue to be used to deny boaters passage on Georgia's rivers. Griffin Ridge Wildlife Management Area on river left, encompassing 5,600 acres, stretches from the mouth of Hughes Old River downstream to U.S. 25/301.

Mile 66—Goose Creek

Mile 65.8—Linder's Bluff—Linder's Bluff figured in the lore of the Altamaha's rafthands. Tradition held that rookie rafters were challenged to toss their pocketknives to the top of the 60-foot-high bluff here. If they were successful, they were told, they would be rewarded with a brand new one. Needless to say, many a naïve raft hand was duped into throwing away his knife.

Mile 64—Bug's Bluff—On river right, at the base of this bluff, is a backwater slough in which you'll find numerous floating docks with house-like structures atop them. These, and similar "floathouses" on Penholoway Creek (some 25 miles downstream) are all that's left of the Altamaha's once significant shantyboat communities. In 1992 the state adopted rules outlawing non-motorized houseboats on navigable streams; some responded by moving their dwellings to "non-navigable" streams like this slough.

Mile 63.2—Jaycee Landing—Overlooking the landing is a granite marker commemorating the U.S.S. *Altamaha*, an aircraft carrier commissioned in 1942, that saw duty during World War II and was decommissioned and scrapped in 1961.