Moccasin Bend Boogie–Paddle Georgia 2025

June 19—Tennessee River

Distance: 7 miles **Starting Elevation: 640 feet** **Ending Elevation: 635 feet**

Pit Stops: **Mile 5.5—**Browns Ferry **Mile 7—**Tennessee River Place

Points of Interest

Mile 0—Coolidge Park—A centerpiece of Chattanooga's recreational trail system and north shore waterfront, this park features a splash pad and a restored 1894 carousel with 52 hand-carved animals, a calliope band organ and ornate gold leaf benches. It is also within close walking distance of retail stores and restaurants. The park is named for Charles H. Coolidge, a Chattanoogan who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his gallantry during World War II. He died in 2021 at the age of 99.

Mile 0—Ross's Landing—Directly opposite our launch site is the Tennessee Aquarium which sits on historic ground known as Ross's Landing. John Ross, was the son of a Scottish father and part-Cherokee mother who was raised in the Cherokee tradition but worked in his father's trading post and educated in white schools. As an adult he took over operation of his father's ferry and warehouse at this location, rose to prominence in Cherokee society and was elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1828—a position he would hold for nearly 40 years, spanning the Cherokee's fight to remain in their ancestral land, the forced removal to the west and the resettlement in the Oklahoma territory. Under his leadership in 1832, the Cherokee won a Supreme Court decision ruling that the State of Georgia's annexation of Cherokee land was unlawful and that treaties signed between the federal government and the Cherokee demanded that the U.S. government protect the tribe. President Andrew Jackson ignored the ruling. Six years later, the Cherokee were rounded up at gunpoint and sent west on what became known as the Trail of Tears. Many of the deportations began at this landing in June 1838. During that month, some 1600 Cherokee were loaded on steamboats and flatboats here to begin the trip west. The Cherokee and their removal are commemorated through art and installments at the landing, including intentionally-cracked pavers to symbolize the broken promises made to the tribe.

Mile 0.4—P.R. Oligati Bridge—The U.S. 27 bridge here is named after former Chattanooga Mayor P.R. Oligati. A marina on river left immediately downstream of the bridge bears the same name. The bridge was named in his honor when he was still serving as mayor. One observer commented at the time: "I'm not one to think a man ought to die before you pass him the flowers."

Mile 1—Resurgence—Peeking above riverside trees here is a colorful sculpture that is the centerpiece of a Tennessee Riverwalk access park known as Blue Goose Hollow. The park recognizes the early 20th century shantytown where many of Chattanooga's black citizens lived along the river until the 1950s when a redevelopment project forced 1400 residents from their homes. The Blue Goose Hollow community is famous as the birthplace of Bessie Smith, a jazz and blues singer who came to be known as the Empress of the Blues. Orphaned at age 11, Smith was raised by her aunt in the impoverished neighborhood. She got her start as a street performer along 9th Street, a center of Black culture in the city known as "The Big 9." The Tennessee Riverwalk continues to parallel the river even through the highly-industrialized two miles immediately down river.

Mile 2—Chattanooga Crane & Hoist—On river left is the bright blue docking structure of this riverside company. Immediately upstream of this structure is one of eight combined sewer overflow discharges operated by the City of Chattanooga. During rain events, storm water infiltrates sanitary sewers causing overflows. During these events, the city's collection system is designed to capture these overflows, provide primary treatment and then discharge the treated sewage and stormwater to the river.

Mile 2.7—I-24 & Ross Towhead—For the next two miles, this interstate highway butts up against the south shore of the river as it winds around the base of Lookout Mountain. When the highway was built in the 1950s, there wasn't quite enough room to fit the super highway. To solve that problem, fill dirt was dug from the north bank of Moccasin Bend and moved by barge to the south side. Additionally, an island on the south side known as Ross's Towhead was employed. Fill extended the mainland to the island.

Mile 3.4—Chattanooga Creek—The story of this much-maligned tributary mirrors the City of Chattanooga's transformation from "dirtiest city in America" to model of urban revitalization. Flowing some 26 miles through the heart of Chattanooga, the creek for more than 100 years was the recipient of all manner of pollution—from animal wastes to coal tar. It was so polluted that in 1995 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed a portion of the creek on the federal Superfund list. This listing led to cleanups. In 2008, the state of Tennessee completed a major remediation project that removed 108,000 tons of contaminated sediment from the creek bed and sealed the bed with a protective barrier to prevent future contamination. In 2019, EPA removed the creek from the Superfund list, deeming it no longer a threat to the minority and low-income residents that live along the creek. More recently, the local non-profit Waterways installed a trash trap on the creek to prevent litter from reaching the Tennessee River. Despite this progress, the creek is far from clean. The state still advises anglers not to eat fish caught from the stream because of PCB and chlordane contamination and recommends not swimming or wading in the stream because of high bacteria levels caused by continuing sewage overflow issues.

Mile 4.0—Moccasin Bend—On river right is this iconic oxbow known from millions of photos shot atop Lookout Mountain. Surrounded by a southern sweeping six-mile run of the Tennessee, the narrow peninsula of land encompasses some 1,000 acres, most of it protected as part of the Moccasin Bend National Archeological District (part of the Chickamauga National Military Park). Archeology conducted on the land has traced human habitation of the bend to 10,000 B.C. The property has been continuously occupied since then. In the modern era, it played a role in the removal of the Cherokee Indians during the Trail of Tears and in the battle for Chattanooga during the Civil War. Also situated on the bend is a state psychiatric hospital, an 18-hole golf course, the city of Chattanooga's sewage treatment plant and a handful of industrial complexes.

Mile 4.3—Lookout Creek—On river left is this mouth of this creek that runs through a valley along the western flank of Lookout Mountain. It is somewhat unique in that though it is only about 40 miles long, it spans across three states, beginning near Valley Head, Alabama and flowing through Rising Fawn and Trenton, Georgia before arriving in Tennessee. It's a creek worthy of a little side exploration.

Mile 4.5—Colonial Pipeline Crossing—Here on either side of the river signs warn not to dredge or anchor. Paddle Georgia sponsor Colonial Pipeline operates this petroleum pipeline that courses beneath the river here. It is part of a system of more than 5,000 miles of pipeline running from Houston to New York City that delivers 100 million gallons of fuel daily. Colonial provided funds for Georgia Rivers to offer scholarships to individuals and families to participate in Paddle Georgia and other trips in 2025.

Mile 5.5—Browns Ferry—On river left here is the entrance to Browns Ferry Marina. Immediately downstream of this entrance is a private boat ramp that serves as our pit stop for the day. This area was the site of historic Browns Ferry, a critical crossing of the river during the 1800s. It was established in 1803 by John Brown, a Cherokee leader who owned more than 600 acres in the area, and became part of the first wagon road through the Cherokee Nation. Brown also built a tavern during this time that still stands about a quarter-mile west of the river. In 1838, thousands of members of John Brown's own tribe passed over the ferry during the Cherokee removal. During the Civil War, several regiments of starving Union soldiers left their station in besieged Chattanooga in October 1863 and floated down the Tennessee under cover of darkness to seize Browns Ferry. The clandestine voyage was successful, and with assistance from Union troops coming up the Lookout Creek valley from Bridgeport, Alabama, the troops were able to control the ferry and road. Soon, the Union troops had erected a pontoon bridge at the ferry and opened critical supply lines (known as the "cracker line" after the hardtack eaten by the soldiers) into Chattanooga. It was the beginning of the end of the Confederate's siege of Chattanooga. A month later, during the Union defeat of the Confederates in the Battle of Chattanooga, the first of Gen. William T. Sherman's troops crossed the pontoon bridge here en route to Georgia.

Mile 6.2—Moccasin Bend WWTP—That sewer line you scrambled over on South Chickamauga Creek? This facility on river right is that pipe's final destination. The facility receives sewage from some 1200 miles of sewer lines and some 400,000 residents. It is capable of treating up to 100 million gallons a day.