

Oh Atlanta!

June 28

Distance: 15 miles

Obstacles/Rapids: Mile 0 Atlanta Waterworks Rapid—This obstacle may be portaged by carrying your boat down the steep slope to Peachtree Creek and launching from Peachtree Creek rather than the Atlanta Waterworks boat ramp located upstream of the rapid. The course through the rapid is very straight forward. Follow the current into the center of the rapid. There will be a small ledge and then lots of large waves. Keep the nose of your boat pointed downstream and enjoy the ride.

Restroom Facilities: Mile 0 Atlanta Waterworks

Mile 9 Utoy Creek—pull into the creek and park your canoe on right bank along the concrete sewer trunk line. Follow the trunk line up the creek to a small path that leads under a railroad to the back of an industrial park. Portable toilet is in the parking area.

Mile 15 Metro Atlanta Softball Complex

Points of Interest: **Mile 0**--Atlanta Waterworks and Standing Peachtree—The Atlanta Waterworks sits on the site of historic Fort Peachtree built during the War of 1812 to protect white settlers from Creek Indians who were allied with the British. A fort connecting Fort Peachtree with another fort, Fort Daniel at Hig Mountain, was opened in 1814. That 30-mile stretch of road became Atlanta's original Peachtree Road. Atlanta began using the Chattahoochee as a water source in 1893. At the time, the city pumped 20 million gallons a day to the downtown area. Today, the pumps here suck up as much as 220 million gallons per day.

Mile 0--Atlanta Waterworks Rapid—Not a natural rapid. The rapid here was created in the early 1900s when an extended drought left river levels so low that Atlanta could no longer pump water from the Chattahoochee. To raise water levels, the city built a small dam below the intake pipes. Drought conditions were a constant worry of the city until Buford Dam was built in the late 1950s.

Mile 0--R.L. Sutton Wastewater Discharge—the first major wastewater discharge visible on the river during the Paddle Georgia journey. Get use to them. Between here and Coweta County, 16 more wastewater treatment plants discharge to the river or one of its tributaries. R.L. Sutton treats more than 40 million gallons of sewage each day.

Mile 0.5--R.M. Clayton Wastewater Discharge—The outfall from the South's largest wastewater treatment facility. R.M. Clayton can treat more than 200 million gallons of sewage each day. Ironically, the much maligned plant is named for the engineer who designed and constructed the city's first sewer system. The original system piped raw sewage outside the city limits and emptied it directly into nearby streams flowing to the Chattahoochee. As you might imagine, this didn't work so well. Typhoid death rates in the city during the early 1900s attest to the inadequacies of Atlanta's original sewer system.

Mile 9--Buzzard's Roost Island—Just downstream from the Utoy Creek sewer discharges sits this historic island. The Sandtown Trail, perhaps the oldest road in the Southeast, which led from the Alabama and Tennessee frontiers east, is believed to have crossed the river at this spot. Evidence of both Woodland (1000 BC to 900 AD) and Mississippian (900 AD to 1600 AD) villages as well as Paleo-Indian (10,000 to 8,000 BC) mounds have been found throughout the area..

Mile 12--Sweetwater Creek—Located several miles upstream on this creek is Sweetwater Creek State Park, the site of the ruins of New Manchester Manufacturing Company which was destroyed by Union troops during the Civil War. The textile mill harnessed the power of the creek to make its product. After the War, the mill was never rebuilt and the place became something of a ghost town. Women that worked there were shipped North by Gen. W.T. Sherman and most were never heard from again.

Narrative: This 15-mile stretch of river is a lesson in what happens when you flush your toilet and the lesson is appropriately most evident at one of our "pit stops" at Utoy Creek (no need to describe it and spoil your fun). While the Chattahoochee's diminutive size has frustrated Atlanta's water supply, its size has also made wastewater treatment very troublesome. Put simply, there's not enough water around to dilute the waste of 4 million people. Thus, if the Chattahoochee is to be protected and made fishable and swimmable again downstream from the big city, sewage must be treated to the highest possible standards. Thankfully, the situation has improved dramatically since the 1960s when 50,000 gallons of untreated sewage was released to the river daily. A lawsuit brought by the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper against the City of Atlanta has, in recent years, done much to get the city on the track of correcting its chronic sewer problems.