

# Echeconnee Cancan

June 26

**Distance:** 21 miles

**Starting Elevation/Coordinates:** 280 ft/N32 50.743 W83 37.611

**Ending Elevation/Coordinates:** 256 ft/N32 41.315 W83 36.602

**Obstacles/Rapids:** No shoals or rapids obstruct the river's path. It's Coastal Plain paddling to Hawkinsville!

**Restroom Facilities:**  
**Mile 0** Spring Street Park  
**Mile 9.5** Bond Swamp Road  
**Mile 21** Johnston Place

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 1—Riverside Drive/Wharf Street**—What is now Riverside Drive, paralleling the west bank of the river in Macon, was once called Wharf Street, a name commonly associated with coastal cities and a clue as to the importance of river navigation during Macon's early years. In 1829, the North Carolina became the first steamboat to make the trip from Darien to Macon and soon there after, more boats came. Situated on the fall line—just below the shoals and rapids you've paddled through during the past three days, Macon served as the head of navigation on the Ocmulgee and Wharf Street was where steamboats were loaded for the trip to the coast. The history of another Macon thoroughfare also speaks to the importance of the Ocmulgee to the young city. In 1823, the city was laid out in square city blocks with street names like Cherry, Poplar and Mulberry. The one exception to this rule is Cotton Ave. which cuts a diagonal swath across the neat street rows directly to the river. The poor but proud frontier farmers, known as "crackers" for the sound of their whips driving mules or oxen-laden wagons to market, had some say in the design of the new city. Seeking the most direct route to the river, they pushed their teams through the town planner's original surveying stakes.

**Mile 1—The Water Marvel of Macon**—This bit of quirky Macon history relayed by Georgia River Network board member and Macon native Dorinda G. Dallmeyer: "William Holt Ernest, otherwise known as the Water Marvel, seemed ordinary enough: a workingman, father, a member of the Baptist church. What distinguished him from everyone else was his ability to float for hours and his willingness to do so in public. Widely recognized in the community for his singular gift, Mr. Ernest once proposed to leap from the bridge into the Ocmulgee for \$1000, just to prove that he would be saved by the skill he said he could teach to anyone... When the day arrived he found the crowd assembled on the bridge had only been able to scabble together three dollars and he refused to go through with the stunt"

**Mile 1-2—Kaolin**—Along the west bank of the Ocmulgee as you pass through Macon, you may find deposits of kaolin. This section of Georgia is known as the kaolin belt and it parallels the fall line separating the state's Piedmont from its Coastal Plain. Kaolin, a white clayey rock, is considered one of Georgia's greatest mineral resources. In the 1990s, more than 8 million metric tons of kaolin was mined from Georgia each year, with an estimated value of more than \$1 billion. In recent years, overseas competition and high fuel costs have squeezed the industry's profitability. Kaolin can be found in all sorts of consumer products, including plastics, fiberglass, paper, ceramics, pesticides and paint. We can thank our rivers for these products as well as the China Clay Producers Association of Georgia (a Paddle Georgia 2007 Sponsor and industry association representing kaolin mining operations). Sedimentary kaolin deposits were formed in middle Georgia over millions of years as a result of the erosion of Piedmont rock (namely granite which contains feldspar, the primary parent of kaolin). When these rivers emptied into the great inland sea that once covered South Georgia they deposited the makings of kaolin.

**Mile 1.5--Ocmulgee National Monument & Walnut Creek**—A true historic treasure of Georgia, the Ocmulgee National Monument, with its seven earthen mounds and Earth Lodge, contains more than 12,000 years of human history. If you missed the chance to visit the site on Monday (and don't mind walking three miles on a 21-mile paddling day), a trail leads about 1.5 miles from Walnut Creek into the grounds of the monument. The first European trading post in the area was established by the British in 1690 within the current confines of the Monument, and in 1774, William Bartram passed through the Monument grounds describing the Creek Indian village like this: "On the heights of these low grounds are yet visible monuments, or traces, of an ancient town, such as artificial mounts or terraces, squares and banks, encircling considerable areas. Their old fields and planting land extend up and down the river, fifteen or twenty miles from this site."

**Miles 3.5—Macon Wastewater Treatment Plant**—Here's the other end of Macon's pipes. Macon discharges an estimated 36 million gallons of treated sewage to the Ocmulgee each day from its Lower Poplar Street and Rocky Creek treatment facilities. Some 900 miles of sewer lines carry wastewater to these facilities from homes and businesses in Macon. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division issues discharge permits for municipal and industrial treatment facilities. The permits outline the extent of pollutants that facilities can release to the river. Altamaha Riverkeeper and other member groups of Georgia River Network monitor these permits to ensure that requirements are being met.

**Mile 9.5—Graphic Packaging International**—On the upstream side of this bend in the river, you'll run into the water intake for Graphic Packaging International, a pulp mill that produces the cardboard that is used to package soft drinks and beer. That flat, long "fridge 12-pack" that has become so ubiquitous in recent years comes from GPI. The company can withdraw up to 18 million gallons of the Ocmulgee each day. On the downstream side of the bend is GPI's wastewater discharge. Next time you pop your "fridge pack" thank the Ocmulgee. The product could not be produced from Georgia pines without the help of the river.

**Mile 10.25—Bus Fish Camp**—On river left, you might notice an urban bus on the river bank here. An ingenious property owner has converted a bus (the kind with the accordion-like bend in the middle for maneuvering on city streets) into a deluxe Middle Georgia fish camp. From here to Hawkinsville, fish camps are common...though not fish camps made from buses.

**Mile 10.5—Railroad Bridge**—This is the only bridge in the 42 miles between Macon and Hwy 96 near Bonaire and an unusual one it is. Notice the gears on the round pillar. In days gone by this pivoting bridge was used to change the direction of locomotives that served nearby mines and other facilities.

**Mile 11—Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge**—Established in 1989 through The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bond Swamp encompasses 6,500 acres—most of it sitting within the Ocmulgee River floodplain. More than 200 bird species are believed to occur within the swamp.

**Mile 15.5—Sinks & Toilets**—Remember these sinks and toilets atop this eroding bluff on river left...you'll see them again in about a half mile—such is the nature of a meandering Coastal Plain river. Why they are there is anyone's guess.

**Mile 15.75—Tobesofkee Creek**—A uniquely named tributary though the meaning of the Indian name is uncertain. The earliest Europeans to record the name for the creek refer to it in numerous spellings and pronunciations. One of the more colorful suggestions is that Tobe means "I have lost" and sofskee refers to a corn gruel dish eaten by Native Americans. The legend goes that a Native American dubbed the name when he lost his provisions while crossing the stream.

**Mile 18—Spanish moss**—You may have already spotted this harbinger of the Deep South, but from here to Hawkinsville, Spanish moss will become more and more abundant. It is not a moss. Instead it is a member of the pineapple family, a true-flowering plant and an epiphyte—a plant that depends upon other plants for mechanical support but not its nutrients as do parasitic plants. Thus, the Spanish moss lives in harmony with its hosts. Its small, solitary, yellowish-green flowers are rarely seen, but its ghostly, gray leaves are, indeed, an icon of the South. It is legendary for hosting large quantities of insects—especially chiggers. The bugs hang out in the moss because it is a great location to hide from predators. Two species of bats are also known to use moss as daytime roosts, and it is the preferred nest material for numerous bird species.