

Oxbow Bolero

June 27

Distance: 20 miles

Starting Elevation/Coordinates: 256 ft./N32 41.315 W83 36.602

Ending Elevation/Coordinates: 230 ft./N32 32.538 W83 32.235

Obstacles/Rapids: No shoals or rapids obstruct the river's path. Look out for strainers, gators and Hogzilla II

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Johnston Place
Mile 9 Bullard Landing
Mile 20 Knowles Landing/Ga. 96

Points of Interest:

Mile 1-21—Hogzillas on the Loose—At any point between here and Hawkinsville, you may encounter feral hogs. Our encounters during scouting trips usually ending with the shy creatures scrambling off into the woods, but if you are lucky you may come upon a napping hog along the river banks. In recent years much interest has been generated by the killing of a giant feral hog far to the south of here in Alapaha. There, in June 2004, local hunter Chris Griffin shot and killed a 12-foot long, 1,000 pound boar. Originally, the photos of the giant creature were thought to be a hoax, but scientists from the National Geographic Society exhumed the animal's remains and confirmed that, indeed, it was "some pig." One of its tusks measured 18 inches long. DNA tests showed that it was a hybrid pig—part wild boar and part Hampshire. In the meantime, Alapaha has made hay from its famous hog. It has seen a surge in visitors and earlier this year, Hollywood arrived to begin filming the movie *The Legend of Hogzilla*. The town's fall festival has taken on a decidedly hoggish theme with a parade featuring a Hogzilla princess, children in pink pig outfits and a float carrying a Hogzilla replica. Earlier this year, an 11-year-old hunter in Alabama shot a similar-sized beast, but it turns out the "Bama Hog" was a farm-raised animal that had only recently been released to the wild.

In fact, feral hogs are invasive species first introduced to North America by Europeans in the 1500s. Like zebra mussels and kudzu, they have negative impacts to native ecosystems. Extensive disturbance of soil and vegetation as a result of their rooting habits affects plant communities and may cause shifts in plant community structure; they compete for food with native animal species like deer and turkey, and during the summer months, they create wallows, destroying the integrity of the plant and soil community.

Mile 0.5—Sand Mine—On river right in a massive eddy is a makeshift boat ramp leading to a recently closed sand mine operated by the LaFarge Company. The sand that was dug from the floodplain here has helped make LaFarge the world leader in the production of cement. For a company headquartered in Paris, it takes Ocmulgee River sand to create a multi-national conglomerate. The ponds left by the mining operation are worth a look—an odd turquoise-blue color.

Mile 1.5—Echeconnee Creek—This tributary forms the Bibb-Houston (pronounced How-stun) County line. Local youth have referred to it as "Itchy Creek." The name is a Creek Indian word meaning "Deer Trap Creek" from *Echo*, "deer" and *Conna*, "trap." The story goes that Native Americans attacked deer that came to drink at this creek because the steep banks made it difficult for the deer to escape. Those old enough and sober enough to remember the Atlanta Pop Festival which was held upstream along this creek near Byron may recall an incident that occurred at the Festival on July 4, 1970 in which revelers participated in a "mass skinny dip" in the creek. Anyone for a re-enactment? Just downstream from Echeconnee Creek on the Ocmulgee, keep your eyes peeled for a Native American fish trap. Reportedly, one exists in this area.

Mile 4—Warner Robins Wastewater Discharge—The city relies upon underground aquifers for its drinking water and depends upon the Ocmulgee to assimilate its waste. Here you'll find the discharge pipe from the City of Warner Robins Wastewater Treatment facility. The town's roots go back to 1941 when the United States Air Force established a military depot in the small community originally known as Wellston. The depot grew into Robins Air Force Base. Today the Base covers 6,400 acres and is Georgia's largest single employer, providing more than 25,000 jobs. In 1943, the community of Wellston was renamed Warner Robins after Brigadier General Augustine Warner Robins.

Mile 5—Saw Palmetto—Like Spanish moss, saw palmetto is a plant closely associated with the South. From this point forward, as you move closer to the Atlantic coast, saw palmetto will become more abundant. It is a small palm, normally reaching a height of around 2-4 m. Its trunk is sprawling, and it grows in clumps or dense thickets in sandy coastal lands or as undergrowth in pine woods or hardwood hammocks. The stems terminate in a rounded fan of about 20 slender, pointed leaflets. The stem itself is armed with fine, sharp teeth or spines that give the plant its name. Its fruit is a large reddish-black drupe. In addition to being an important food source for wildlife, the fruit also has significant pharmaceutical importance.

Today it is commonly used to treat urinary tract infections and enlarged prostates. Historically, it was said to have been a staple in the diet of the Seminole Indians and through the years, saw palmetto has been used to address atrophy of the testes, impotence, low libido in men, infertility in women, treatment of underdeveloped breasts, increased lactation, painful menstruation cycles, and clogged bronchial passages.

For our purposes, if you can talk a paddling partner into it, the large leaflets make great fans.

Mile 7.5—Oxbow—Here you will find an excellent example of how a river works. Older maps show a wide loop to the north at this site, but our path will bypass this loop. The river has simply decided to take a new path and is in to process of creating an oxbow lake here. If you look closely, you'll find countless examples of oxbow lakes at various stages of completion from here to Hawkinsville.

Mile 9—Bullard Landing—In the midst of the wilderness, a boat landing, and opposite the boat landing, a fishing cabin. You'll also find a pit stop here. Bullard Landing, and the community just to the east, is named for the Daniel Bullard family. Mr. Bullard was a wealthy plantation owner and business man who once owned much of this land. From 1870 to 1923 a post office operated in Bullard, but now the "town" is easily missed on a drive down US 23 toward Cochran. It is best known as the home of a modern-day wealthy plantation owner. Chuck Leavell, the Rolling Stones keyboardist and tree farmer, operates Charlane Plantation just up the road from Bullard Landing. The 2,000-acre plantation boasts of some of Georgia's finest quail, turkey, deer and duck hunting and offers overnight accommodations and facilities for special events. Sorry, Paddle Georgia couldn't afford it...and they couldn't sleep 200!

On another note, at this point you are about as close to being in the center of Georgia as you can get. The geographic center of the state is located just to the northeast of Bullard.

Mile 12.5—Horse Creek—Provided appropriate water levels, this creek is worth exploring. Many creeks along our route have indistinct mouths due to the nature of the river's floodplain which spreads out across the lowland swamps. This creek drains part of Warner Robins Air Force Base and a brief trip up it will give you a feel for the forests that stretch from the Ocmulgee's banks.

Mile 15.5—Cainey Branch—Like Horse Creek, this tributary provides nice exploration unless the summer's drought has made the mouth of the creek impassable.

Mile 20—Hwy 96 & Knowles Landing—Welcome to your first road bridge since Macon! You've just paddled 42 miles without going beneath a roadway—the longest such stretch in the three-year history of Paddle Georgia. You've also reached the jumping off spot for the town of Bonaire—the home of Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue whose influence was needed to secure our campsite at Bonaire Middle School. Thanks Sonny!