

# Piedmont Polka

June 23

**Distance:** 15 miles

**Starting Elevation/GPS Coordinates:** 482 feet/N33 18.978 W83 50.420

**Ending Elevation/GPS Coordinates:** 352 ft/N33 09.568 W83 49.398

## **Obstacles/Rapids:**

- Mile 3.2** **Turtle Island Shoals**—At mile three, you'll reach a small set of shoals which will lead you to a large rock garden on river left and a large island on river right. A deep channel flows to the right of "Turtle Island." Follow the deep channel around the island where the shoals begin again at the end of the island. The best route is between Turtle Island and a smaller island just downstream, following the current back to the center of the river.
- Mile 3.5** **Sycamore Strainer Rapid**—This rapid is a nice two-ledge descent that requires that you ferry from river left to river right after descending the first ledge. After leaving the Turtle Island Shoals and island complex, you'll pass another large island and small shoal at the island's end. At this point look for a makeshift camp on river left located at the head of yet another island. Stay left of this island to approach Sycamore Strainer Rapid at the end of the island. Navigate through a short ledge in the middle of the channel, heading toward river left and then turn right before descending the second ledge. If you go through the second ledge on river left, the current will take you into a large, partially submerged sycamore tree. This should be avoided! Ferry river right to make the descent down the second ledge here. There are two possible chutes—one down the center and one at river right.
- Mile 4** **Forty Acre Island Shoals**—Very important!! After Sycamore Strainer Rapid, stay river right. At mile 4 Forty Acre Island splits the river. Do not attempt to paddle through the strainer-choked passage on river left at the top of the island. Stay with the main body of the river and paddle through small shoals to the right of a small island. After the island a short stretch of calm water will signal the approach to Lamar Mill Rapid.
- Mile 4.5** **Lamar Mill Portage**—Safety boaters will be posted at the top of Lamar Mill Rapid directing you to the portage route—a small island at river right. No paddlers will be permitted to run Lamar Mill Rapid—a Class II-III rapid. Proceed along the portage route slowly and with great care. The terrain is very rugged here, and can be treacherous.
- Mile 5** **Wise Creek Rapid**—This ledge at the head of Nelson Island can be avoided all together by staying to the right of the island. However, if you wish to use the pit stop, you'll need to run the rapid. The pit stop is located at the boat ramp at the mouth of Wise Creek directly in front of the rapid. This ledge creates large waves, but is easily navigated through its center or far right.

**Restroom Facilities:**     **Mile 0** Ocmulgee River Boat Ramp  
                                  **Mile 5.5** Wise Creek Boat Ramp  
                                  **Mile 15** Hwy. 83 Boat Ramp

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 0—Lloyd Shoals Dam**—Completed in 1910, Lloyd Shoals Dam submerges the confluence of the South, Alcovy and Yellow rivers to form 4,750-acre Lake Jackson. The rivers that join to form the Ocmulgee drain the eastern-half of Metro Atlanta. The Yellow and Alcovy rivers drain Gwinnett County while the South River has its beginnings in Atlanta. The South River served as Atlanta's original sewer. Around 1880, the spring that started the South River was lined with rocks and covered by city workers, becoming the natural conduit for the sewage released from the town's few affluent homes with flush toilets. Today, the South River and other Ocmulgee River tributaries of Metro Atlanta receive more than 100 million gallons of treated wastewater each day. Improvements to Metro Atlanta's wastewater treatment facilities have greatly improved water quality in Lake Jackson during the past 30 years, but 51 miles of our paddle path on the Ocmulgee this year does not meet state water quality standards due to PCB contamination in fish or high fecal bacteria levels.

**Mile 0.25—Butts County Water Intake**—Our first water intake facility on the trip. This one quenches the thirst of the good people of Jackson. The vast majority of Georgia communities are located downstream from Metro Atlanta, meaning that the quality and quantity of the water sent downstream from the big city has far-reaching impacts.

**Mile 3—Giles Ferry**—You can still see the cuts in the bank for this historic ferry. A ferry first operated here in 1832, and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was among the last of the Ocmulgee's ferries to give way to bridges. In the 1830s, the going rates for transport on an Ocmulgee ferry were 50 cents for a loaded wagon and team of horses, 6 cents for a horse and rider and 2 cents each for sheep and hogs.

**Mile 3.5—Seven Islands Area**—This labyrinth of islands that begins at Mile 3 and continues to Wise Creek two miles downstream is historically known as Seven Islands. It includes Forty Acre Island and holds the largest rapid on the Ocmulgee River. Today, it seems a wild place, but humans have come to this land and water for centuries. The site on the Ocmulgee is mentioned in the journals of 17<sup>th</sup> century fur traders and William Bartram visited the spot during his wanderings in 1730, recording a Native American population of 1400 along the river banks. Later, early settlers would harness the power of the river at this rugged fall line spot, constructing what came to be known as Lamar Mill.

**Mile 4.5—Lamar Mill**—You'll see the impressive stone ruins of Lamar Mill on river right during the portage. In 1842 Parham Lindsey constructed a grist mill and then a cotton mill at this site, selling it three years later to the Planter's Manufacturing Co. of Butts County on the condition that he retain fishing and trapping rights on the property. A sizeable community quickly grew up around the mill; in 1849, the mill employed 75 workers who produced 800 yards of cloth each day. In November 1864, the mill was burned by Union troops, ending the brief industrial history of the Seven Islands area. During the mill's heyday, the cloth and thread it produced was in high demand and was sent to distant points—much to the frustration of locals who also needed the products. Reportedly, a group of local women, feeling their needs were being overlooked, confiscated a wagon load on its way to faraway markets.

**Mile 5—Wise Creek Robust Redhorse Restoration Project**—The wooden timbers along the river bank at Wise Creek are part of a habitat stabilization project aimed at protecting the Robust Redhorse, a fish once thought to be extinct that was rediscovered in 1991 in the Oconee River. The redhorse is often referred to as a "mystery fish" because so little is known about this member of the sucker family. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources has begun a captive breeding program and has released approximately 6,500 redhorses into the Ocmulgee. The Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee is studying the fish in hopes of restoring it to the Ocmulgee and other Georgia rivers. As the name implies it is a large fish (average length 25 inches) highlighted by a rose-colored tail fin. It feeds largely on corbicula (small invasive Asian clams) and prefers to spawn in shallow water over gravel deposits.

**Mile 1-Mile 15—Oconee National Forest**—The Oconee National Forest forms the east bank of the river for all 15 miles of today's paddle. The Forest encompasses 115,000 acres in Georgia, including 30,300 acres in Jasper County. It is estimated that only 7 percent of the trees in this forest are more than 120 years old—evidence of our past and current dependence upon these forests. The ONF is also home to the federally protected red-cockaded woodpecker, a species that requires old growth pines for its survival.