

Auchumpkee Cha Cha

June 24

Distance: 11 miles

Starting Elevation: 330 feet

Ending Elevation: 320 feet

Obstacles/Rapids: Through the first three miles of the Cha Cha, you'll encounter shoals, generally any where you encounter an island. The last of these shoals is just downstream from Auchumpkee Creek. After navigating these shoals, you'll have about 54 miles of flatwater paddling in front of you to reach Montezuma. None of the shoals in this section exceed Class I.

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** US 80
 Mile 3.5 Flint River Adventures
 Mile 14 US 19/80

Points of Interest:

Mile 0.5—Spanish Moss—You've already spotted this harbinger of the Deep South upstream at Yellow Jacket Shoals, but from here to Montezuma, 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.

Mile 3—River House in 1994 Flood—At river right, you will see a small, riverfront home built upon stilts. The owner, Jack Ormand, built the house high above historic flood levels, but then came Tropical Storm Alberto and the 1994 Flood. The floodwaters reached eight feet above the second floor deck that now provides a bird's eye view of the river—only the roof remained above the river. In one day, Alberto dumped 24 inches of rain on parts of the Flint River Basin—that's about as much rain as the basin receives every six months. The flood that resulted is still Georgia's most costly natural disaster. The flooding killed 28 people in Georgia and caused more than \$500 million in damage to property and crops. Downstream in Montezuma, downtown flooded, as the river peaked at 34 feet, more than seven feet above the previous worst flood. Likewise in Albany, the town experienced its worst flooding ever. Parts of Albany State University were flooded to the second floor and caskets popped out of the ground. Ask anyone from these parts, and they are likely to have a Flood of '94 story.

Mile 3.5 Auchumpkee Creek—Another of the beautiful lyrical names for Georgia's streams, Auchumpkee drains parts of Upson and Monroe counties. Reportedly, Auchumpkee is a Muscogee Indian word meaning "hickory all about." Historians have also guessed that the creek gets its name from a mispronunciation of another Muscogee word, "otialgi," which was their word for islands. Auchumpkee is best known for the 120-foot covered bridge that spans the creek several miles upstream in Upson County. Originally completed in 1892, the bridge was destroyed during the flood of 1994 when a tree smashed into the bridge knocking it from its stacked stone pillars. After the flood, federal disaster relief funds and locally raised funds helped rebuild the structure, restoring it to its original grandeur by using historic building methods.

Mile 3.5 Maxwell Duke and his 1540 Uchee Indian Village—A half-mile walk up a trail near the mouth of Auchumpkee Creek will take you to Maxwell Duke's replica of a Creek Indian Village. In 1990, the local school teacher bought 20 acres of land here and began building the village with the help of family, students and friends. It is the culmination of a life spent studying Native American culture that began for him as a boy roaming the farmland of Peach, Houston, Taylor and Crawford counties searching for Native American artifacts. Since building the village, Duke has been on a one-man crusade to preserve the history of the region's Native American cultures and Benjamin Hawkins, the federal Indian agent and antithesis to Indian fighter and President Andrew Jackson. In the late 1700s, Hawkins earned the respect of his frontier neighbors as he attempted to guide them to a more agrarian lifestyle that might permit them to stay in their homeland rather than be pushed further west. Duke's replica village is just a few miles from the site of Hawkin's Indian Agency on the Flint. On our visit to the replica village, Duke, playing the part of Benjamin Hawkins, will treat those making the journey to samples of food that you would have likely found at a Native American village in the late 1700s.

Mile 3.5 Relict Trillium—In the area between the Flint and Auchumpkee Creek you can find this federally endangered flower. Growing only in Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina, it is a specialist of Fall Line/Coastal Plain habitat. In the Coastal Plain it is often found near boulders or ledges with soft limestone while in the Piedmont, you'll likely find it in deep loamy soils, either in rich ravines or alluvial terraces. Its most striking feature is its mottled leaves that include a silver stripe down the center of each of the three leaves surrounding the erect blossom. By late June, it will have flowered, but you might see one bearing fruit. Do not disturb these special flowers!! You can also find the relict trillium in the Montezuma Bluffs Natural Area further downstream along our paddle route.

Mile 4.5—Last Gasp of the Fall Line—Downstream from Auchumpkee Creek, you'll pass through a series of islands. Just beyond the islands is one final shoal. From this point forward, you'll be paddling on flatwater with sandbars replacing the shoals.

Mile 8 House on Bluff—At the end of this straightaway, you will see a house perched high atop a deeply eroded bluff...for now. Eventually, this property is likely to succumb to the indifference of the river. Today, it is merely a reminder of the power and ever-changing nature of river.. Along rivers, nothing is permanent, and placing structures close to the river almost always invites disaster. In an effort to protect water quality, the state of Georgia enforces a minimum 25-foot vegetative buffer along all warm-water streams and rivers, but when it comes to homes and other structures, property owners would be wise to construct well beyond the 25-foot minimum and out of the path of these relentless shapers of our land.

Mile 9 Rocks—Look for a nice set of rocks here on river right. Initial scouting trips suggested this might make a nice swimming hole...but that was in December when there was more water!

Mile 10 Brown Water Snake & Cottonmouths—On the deadfall at river right here, you'll see a brown water snake or a Cottonmouth...well, you might or might not, but along the length of our paddle route, you may very well encounter what may be the Southeast's most misunderstood and mis-identified snake—the Brown Water Snake. You are much less likely to encounter the poisonous Cottonmouth. Brown Water snakes tend to inhabit large rivers and lakes and are known to lounge on logs and limbs overhanging the water. They are large-bodied, brown to gray in color not unlike the Cottonmouth and they look very intimidating...but they are perfectly harmless. In fact, if approached they will usually flee to the security of underwater hiding places. Cottonmouths, on the other hand, are most commonly found in small creeks, backwaters, oxbow lakes, swamps and small ponds. They are almost never found on overhanging limbs and often hold their position when disturbed, coiling into a defensive position. In the water, they will swim away on the surface of the water. That said, use caution around any snakes. Brown Water Snakes and Cottonmouths are difficult to distinguish and even trained herpetologists examine them carefully before approaching.

Mile 11 Ft. Lawrence—Somewhere near the US 19/US 80 bridge over the Flint once stood Ft. Lawrence, one of three forts that were constructed in the Flint River Valley during the Creek War of 1813-1814. This military outpost was reportedly established across the river from Benjamin Hawkins' Indian Agency, and some 600 soldiers were stationed there to protect against hostile Creek Indians aligned with the British. While the sites of the Flint's other 1813-era forts have been identified, Ft. Lawrence's exact whereabouts remain a mystery.