

Cut Off Conga

June 26

Distance: 12 miles

Starting Elevation: 300 feet

Ending Elevation: 280 feet

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Ga. 96 Bridge
 Mile TBA
 Mile 12 Miona Ferry

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Great Swamp—In Georgia when we think of swamps, we think of the vast Okefenokee with its trembling islands and acres and acres of watery wilderness. More common in Georgia is the fall line swamp—those bottom lands filled with hardwoods adjacent to the river where the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain meet. Last year on the Ocmulgee, Paddle Georgia's route took us through Bond Swamp. This year, its Magnolia and Beechwood swamps found north and south of Ga. 96, respectively. Together they are referred to as Great Swamp. When the river floods, it spreads out into this floodplain, but during dry periods (like the one we're experiencing) you'll find large portions of these forests dry and not particularly swampy.

Mile 2—Peach County & Peaches—At this sharp northward bend in the river, we'll pass from Crawford County into Peach County—Georgia's newest county. Georgia has more counties than any other state in the nation—159 to be exact. It has been said that they are numerous because in the days of horses and buggies, residents wanted to live within a day's ride of their county seat. For residents of the Ft. Valley area in the early 1900s that meant a long ride to Perry in Houston County or a ride to Oglethorpe in Macon County—a ride that meant finding a way to cross the Flint. In reality, politics and territorialism played as much a role in the formation of Georgia counties, and no where was this truer than in what was to become Peach County.

In 1904, Georgia voters passed a constitutional amendment that limited the number of counties in the state to 145. Despite this amendment, between 1904 and 1920, the General Assembly created 15 more counties through additional constitutional amendments, so when the residents of Ft. Valley began talk of seceding from neighboring Houston and Macon counties, you can imagine there was some fall out. Civic clubs, businesses and local politicians in both counties got involved and vicious letters were circulated debating the issue. A Marshallville merchant who supported the new county was reportedly sent a letter advising him to "get out of town."

At the state level, the big debate centered on whether or not there was a need for more counties in Georgia. In fact, Ft. Valley's first attempt—through constitutional amendment—to create Peach County failed on the state ballot. Yet, Peach boosters persevered and in 1924 succeeded in securing "countyhood," and became Georgia's 161st county.

In 1932, Milton and Campbell counties merged with Fulton, and in 1945, Georgians adopted a new constitution that set an absolute limit of 159 counties. Today, new counties can only be created through the consolidation of two or more counties.

Peaches--It seems the people of Ft. Valley were quite savvy. Instead of naming their new county for a dead politician (as most Georgia counties are named), they chose "Peach" for obvious reasons. The county is largely considered the heart of Georgia's peach industry. This area is far enough north to receive sufficient winter chilling, but far enough south to avoid late frosts and guarantee early harvest dates. Additionally, the sandy loam soils of the fall line are more favorable to peach production than the Piedmont's heavy clays or the Coastal Plain's sands.

Peaches were first grown in China 4,000 years ago. They made their way to Georgia via Christopher Columbus who brought the seeds to the new world. Originally planted in St. Augustine, Florida, Franciscan monks introduced them to St. Simons and Cumberland islands along Georgia's coast in 1571, and by the mid-1700s the Cherokee Indians were cultivating them. As reported earlier, Benjamin Hawkins helped spread the fruit among the Creek Indians.

In Georgia, peaches experienced a boom in the years after the Civil War as the abolition of slavery forced farmers to search for alternatives to the traditional labor-intensive cotton crop. It was during this time period that the state came to be known as the "Peach State."

Today, Georgia produces about 140 million pounds of peaches each year worth an estimated \$35 million. About half that crop is harvested in Peach County. And, while there were once as many as 50 packing plants in the county, today the county's crop is handled through two modern packing plants.

Mile 5.5—Cut Off—Here, you will find yet another example of the Flint carving a new path to the sea. An oxbow on river right has all but been eliminated from the river's course. Eventually the cut off will be complete and the former bend in the river will become an isolated oxbow lake...interestingly it was on one of these oxbow lakes along the Ocmulgee River that the world-record large-mouth bass was caught by George Perry in 1932.

Miles 9--150 miles to Atlanta Airport & 200 miles to Apalachicola River—For what its worth...from this spot on the river, it is about 150 river miles from the Flint's origins beneath the Atlanta Airport and about 200 miles to the river's former mouth (now flooded by Jim Woodruff Dam and Lake Seminole). The Flint runs an estimated 348 miles in length. Along its length, three dams harness it—all of them downstream from this spot—Crisp County Power Dam near Cordele forms Lake Blackshear; Georgia Power's Chehaw Dam near Albany forms Chehaw Lake; and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jim Woodruff Dam at the confluence of the Chattahoochee and Flint forms Lake Seminole. From Jim Woodruff Dam, the Flint and Chattahoochee form the Apalachicola which flows 106 miles through the Florida panhandle to Apalachicola Bay. Together, these three rivers make up the 11th largest river system (measured by volume) in the United States. The Flint is the oddly named arm of this 19,600 square-mile river basin. Unlike the Apalachicola and Chattahoochee which held on to their lyrical Native American names, the Flint came to be known by its English name. The name comes from the Creek Indian village called Thronateeska that once existed near what is now Albany. Thronateeska means "flint picking up place" in the Creek language. Thankfully, for modern-day water managers in Georgia, Alabama and Florida, Flint stuck instead of Thronateeska. Otherwise, there'd be even more confusion in the nearly two-decade-old water war between the three states. The river systems at the heart of the controversies—this one and the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa--are often referred to by the acronyms A-C-F and A-C-T. Had Thronateeska won out, we'd have two A-C-Ts. If you are so inclined, feel free to call it Thronateeska

Mile 12.5 Miona Ferry—Our take out for today is the site of Georgia's last operating river ferry—look for remnants of the operation on the west bank of the river. In the early to mid 1800s, the only way to cross most rivers in Georgia was via a ferry—usually a flat wooden barge that was operated by a system of cables and pulleys and powered mainly by the river's current. The ferry here operated until 1988 when the Ga. 127 bridge replaced it. In its final form, the Miona Ferry was a 55-foot metal barge with a plank floor powered by a six-cylinder Chevrolet engine rigged up to cables. The crossing was safe, smooth and only took a couple of minutes. Today, the remains of the old ferry are owned by the City of Oglethorpe which hopes to find a way to display the artifacts so that this piece of Macon County history can be remembered. The equipment itself has a long history. It was originally located on the Ocmulgee River at Dames Ferry. When that ferry north of Macon shut down, the state brought the barge to Miona.

On Your Way to Camp—On the way to Ft. Valley, you will pass through the picturesque town of Marshallville and by the stately historic home of Samuel Rumph. A roadside marker commemorates his circa-1904 home and pays homage to the "father of Georgia's commercial peach industry." His invention, in 1875, of a peach shipping refrigerator and of the rigid mortised-end peach crate made the safe transit of fresh fruit practical. He developed many varieties of peaches and other fruits and was the first Georgian to grow and ship peaches on a commercial scale.