

Magnolia Swamp Stomp

June 25

Distance: 18 miles

Starting Elevation: 320 feet

Ending Elevation: 300 feet

Obstacles/Rapids: You've finally escaped the Piedmont so the shoals are behind you. However, should water levels be low, pick your path carefully. Sandbars and deadfalls could slow you down.

Restroom Facilities:
Mile 0 Hawkins Bridge
Mile 10.5 Private Sandbar
Mile 18 Ga. 96 Bridge

Points of Interest:

Mile 0.25—Benjamin Hawkins Indian Agency & Federal Road—On a bluff at river left overlooking the river is the final resting place of Benjamin Hawkins who served as the Federal Agent to the Creek Nation from 1795 until his death in 1816. Princeton educated and a former U.S. Senator, Hawkins was dispatched to the frontier of Southwest Georgia to quell unrest between the Native people and settlers. While developing his plantation along the Flint and the Federal Road, he earned the respect of much of the Creek Nation and oversaw the longest period of peace with the Creeks. He befriended Creek leaders; took a Creek woman as a common-law wife; and his benevolence with the food he raised saved whole villages from time to time. It is said that his brand was so widely respected that he never lost a pig or cow. He believed that the law should treat both Indians and whites equally and foresaw a future in Southwest Georgia filled with self-sufficient farms growing peaches and other crops along with waterways harnessed to power mills and developed for transportation.

But all of Hawkins work could not undo the forces of the time. Unrest within the Creek Nation, and continued conflict with the British, brought rise to the War of 1812. While Hawkins worked diligently to prevent the war, his efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. Gen. Andrew Jackson eventually defeated the warring Creeks and demanded the surrender of two million acres of land from not only the warring faction of the Creeks, but also the peaceful Creeks aligned with Hawkins. Two years after the close of the war, Hawkins died here along the Flint.

A few more interesting tidbits about this fascinating man...He sired seven children with his Creek wife, naming two of them Muscogee and Cherokee, but political animal that he was, he named his only son James Madison and his youngest daughter, Jeffersonia. He didn't marry the mother of his children until he was on his deathbed.

He also left a mark on Southwest Georgia agriculture. A dedicated horticulturist, Hawkins established the first peach nursery in the area for the purpose of distributing large quantities of seedlings to the Creeks who loved peaches. It is said that he produced thousands of seedlings and thus, in his small way, can be credited with giving Georgia its modern day nickname of the Peach State.

Mile 3—Neisler Indian Mound—Located on private property in the floodplain along the west bank of the river, this is considered the largest Indian mound on the Flint. It measures 500 feet in circumference. The mound predates the Creek Indians and Benjamin Hawkins by more than 500 years. Mounds were used as platforms for the Creek's temple buildings.

Mile 6—Canebrake—If you view satellite images of the Flint in this stretch of river you will see a swath of deep green winding between a patchwork of farm fields, orchards and tree farms. That swath of green is the lowland swamp that stretches on both sides of the river, and one of the predominate plants of these lowlands is river cane. On river left, look for a large stand of this bamboo-like plant. While today, we don't find much use for river cane, 500 years ago cane was to the Creek Indians what plastic is to us. They crafted it into spears and arrows, stripped it and wove baskets and fish traps from it, and employed it as lathing in the walls of their homes. They made mats from it, corn cribs, knives, torches, rafts, tubes, and drills. They even ate the seeds and shoots of the plant. They were amazing in their resourcefulness...as are we. What might the Creeks think of our vehicles? And what might they say about the ones powered with frying oil?

Mile 8 Hartley Posey Mound—Smaller, but similar to the Neisler Mound, the Hartley Posey Mound is unique in that it occupies a site on a flat, high and flood-proof bluff. Archaeologists have partially excavated the mound and determined it to be of the Mississippian era. It was occupied between 1200 and 1500. The mound is located on the western side of the river on private property.

Mile 12 Patsiliga Creek—Past and Present—Another of the many Creek Indian towns that dotted the Flint River. The town has been documented by historians and identified by archaeologists. The town takes its name from the nearby creek of the same name. Patsiliga is said to be a Creek Indian word meaning "pigeon roosting place," a likely reference to the now extinct passenger pigeon. Though the scenery where Patsiliga meets the Flint is very similar now to what it was 500 years ago, the quality of the water flowing down Patsiliga is likely much different. Patsiliga is one of dozens of Flint River tributaries that are included on the state's list of "polluted" waters. Tests on Patsiliga have indicated unacceptable bacteria levels and unsafe mercury levels in fish. Mercury tainted fish pose a serious health threat to those critters—including humans—that consume them. In creeks like Patsiliga that drain swampy areas the problem of mercury is more pronounced. Tannic acid from the trees and their leaves in these swamps causes the water to be more acidic. This in turn results in mercury being converted to methyl mercury—a toxin that readily works its way into the food chain. Mercury may come from varied sources, but much can be attributed to our appetite for electricity...mercury is released into the air at coal-fired power plants.

Georgia's list of polluted waters, or 303d list, is published every two years. The streams are deemed polluted only after water quality testing confirms a problem. Once a stream is listed as impaired the state is required by the Clean Water Act to develop a clean up plan, or Total Maximum Daily Load. You can view Georgia's "polluted streams" list at http://www.gaepd.org/Files_PDF/305b/Y2008_303d/Y2008_Rivers_Streams.pdf You'll see a host of streams here, but it's only a fraction of all of Georgia's total 70,000-plus miles of waterways. Of those thousands of miles of streams in the state, less than 20 percent have been officially monitored by the state. That suggests that this lengthy list on the EPD website might actually need to be much longer. It also suggests the need for more citizen water monitors like those of you who have received Georgia Adopt-A-Stream training this week.

Mile 16 Cut Off—Depending on water levels and deadfalls, you can cut off more than a half mile of travel by taking advantage of the Flint deciding to carve a new course through Magnolia Swamp. Older maps (and the version you are using) show the river making a broad loop to the northeast here, but in recent years the Flint has carved a newer straighter path from point A to point B.

Mile 17.5 Ga. 96/Crawford County's Lone Star Connection—Crawford County, through which we have been paddling the last two days, is famous in Texas...well, sorta. In the 1830s when a group of Georgia volunteers set out for Texas to fight along side Sam Houston for independence from Mexico, a 17-year-old girl named Joanna Troutman from nearby Knoxville, made a battle flag for the Georgia volunteers. It has been said that her design ultimately became the distinctive "Lone Star" of Texas, but several others also lay claim to the design and the Texas legislature, in 1997, settled the dispute by recognizing a Dr. Charles B. Stewart of Texas as the official designer of the flag. Nevertheless, upon her death, Ms. Troutman's body was moved from here to Austin, Texas. A statue of a young woman sewing a flag is at her gravesite and a portrait of Joanna is hung in the State Capitol