

Pine Mountain Merengue

June 21

Distance: 14 miles

Starting Elevation: 680

Ending Elevation: 560

Obstacles/Rapids: Throughout this section there are small shoals. With the exception of Natural Dam, none of these shoals are not of much consequence. Consider them a good tune up for more significant drops between Sprewell Bluff and Po Bidy Road. The Flint is very shallow and filled with shoals. The best routes through obstacles vary depending upon water levels. If water levels are low (below 7 feet at the Ga. 36 Bridge) expect to do a lot of dragging. We will announce water levels Friday evening.

Mile 10 **Rockhouse Mountain Shoals**—In the bend created by Rockhouse Mountain there are a series of shoals that include several small ledges, providing your first respectable body surfing opportunities.

Mile 13 **Natural Dam**—A series of short ledges run across the width of the river here. Stay river right. The largest set of ledges (three successive drops and pools) is just downstream from the green “Natural Dam” posted on a riverside tree. Look for a large rock to the right of center and seek out the downstream “Vs” between the rock and river right about 10-15 yards from right bank of river. There’s a nearly straight shot over each ledge here. Recover and then paddle downstream for one more sizable drop before you’re off to Sprewell Bluff.

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Ga. 18 Boat Ramp
 Mile 8.5 Goat Mountain Campground
 Mile 14 Sprewell Bluff State Park

Points of Interest:

Mile 2.5—Abandoned Railroad Bridge—You’ll find the pillars of an abandoned railroad here along with a unique use for this historic relic. The current property owner has converted one of the still existing bridge pillars into a riverside deck. Access to Camp Thunder is just upstream and downstream from this deck. Do not use this private property to access the Scout Camp from the river. Wait until you get to Scout Island around the bend.

Mile 3--Scout Island & Camp Thunder—A canoe landing here at the island provides access to the Scout Camp. If you left something in your tent and can’t live without it, now is the time to grab it! As you may have already noticed, the Gerald I Lawhorn Scout Base, all 2,400 acres of it, is a rather remarkable place. It owes much of its impressiveness to its namesake. Gerald I Lawhorn, now battling through the final stages of Lou Gehrig’s Disease, has put millions into the facility. A Georgia native, Lawhorn made his millions selling gas. At age 15, he began managing one of his father’s gas stations. After graduating from the University of Georgia, he started OK Oil which ultimately grew into Petro South, a Griffin-based chain of 290 gas stations. A long-time supporter of scouting, after being diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s in 2005, Lawhorn decided to sell his South Georgia plantation near Albany (an estimated value of \$21 million) and give all the proceeds to the Scouts—a truly remarkable gift.

Mile 4.0--Dripping Rocks/Double Branch Waterfall—A venture up this tiny creek is worth the effort. Look for a splash of water flowing from the bank at river left (it’s easy to miss!), park your boat and take a short hike. Located within the Scout Base, this trail marked by blue dots leads you up Double Branch to a small waterfall known as Dripping Rocks—a great place for a shower...but don’t expect hot water. On your hike notice the health of this stream. It’s runs clear and cold and unlike urban streams where flushes of stormwater create canyon-like streams, Double Branch winds between uncompromised stream banks. Dripping Rocks, itself, is a great place to see the crystalline rock known as Hollis quartzite. Hard and resistant to erosion, this quartzite forms the bulk of Pine Mountain which runs from the Chattahoochee River in the west to the Flint River here, and is the reason for the majestic bluffs characteristic of this stretch of the river.

Mile 7.0—Fish Camp Deluxe—Near the mouth of Buck Creek, you’ll find a series of residences and fish camps, including one bus converted to weekend dwelling place. Camps like these are common along the Flint and give the river a decidedly non-suburban flavor. For those accustomed to the Chattahoochee through Atlanta, it’s a far cry from the “country clubs” of North Fulton.

Mile 10--Rockhouse Mountain & Caves—Along the flank of this mountain reportedly exist caves that have been utilized for eons as shelter. The climb from the river is arduous. However, just a stone’s throw from the shore, you can explore some of the sheltered places created by the rock faces of this mountain that rises abruptly some 400 feet from the river bed. Rockhouse Mountain also marks Tally Gap—the gap carved by the Flint through Pine Mountain that separates Rockhouse from Spring Mountain. Stop here and breath in this scene. It is unique among Georgia rivers.

Mile 11--Pasley Shoals & the Shoal Bass—As you paddle east downstream from Tally Gap, Pine Wood Ridge will loom before you, overlooking Pasley Shoals and the accompanying island. An overlook in Sprewell Bluff State Park provides a spectacular view of these shoals, making this stretch of river the most photographed on the Flint. The shoals are also habitat for the Flint’s famed Shoal Bass—a unique species of black bass found only in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river basin. If bass were cars, the Large-Mouth would be a Cadillac, but the Shoalie would be a Ferrari. Big and lumbering, large-mouth prefer slack water; the shoalie, on the other hand, is smaller, swifter and pound-for-pound stronger, preferring the fast-moving water of the shoals. Once common in the Chattahoochee, damming of that river--especially at the fall line--has all but eliminated the species there, leaving the Flint as the last stronghold for this unique species that is a favorite of anglers. The fish spawn between April and June. Parents take note: the male does most of the work of brooding the young shoalies. He uses his tail to dig out a saucer shaped nest in course gravel beds out of the main current and then boldly guards the nest (which usually contain about 10,000 eggs). The female’s role is limited to laying the eggs. The most distinguishing feature of the shoal bass is the dark vertical bars running the length of the body. The red eye is another obvious feature, as well as the round, dark spot that appears toward the base of the tail. Average length is 9 to 12 inches, though some individuals can grow to 18 inches.

Mile 14--Sprewell Bluff State Park & Dams—As you paddle toward Sprewell Bluff State Park, say a thank you to President Jimmy Carter and the thousands of activists who in 1974 stopped the construction of three dams here that would have submerged 28 of the Flint’s most scenic miles, destroying habitat for the Shoal Bass and other rare species like the Halloween darter and the shoals spider lilies. Groups like the Georgia Conservancy, Audubon Society, League of Conservation Voters and the Flint River Preservation Society flooded then-Gov. Carter’s mailbox with some 6,000 letters, asking him to investigate the dams proposed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and authorized by Congress in 1963. These letters prompted Gov. Carter to do what you are doing now—take an overnight canoe trip on the river. During that trip he told fellow camper and DNR Commissioner, Joe Tanner, “If we are going to destroy all this natural beauty we better make sure that what we get in return is worth the price.” The Governor’s investigation revealed that the return wasn’t worth the price. The Corps had grossly overestimated the benefits of the dams and glossed over the environmental costs. For example, Carter uncovered that because of the Flint’s meager flow, the expected hydro-power benefits would be negligible. In fact, the river would turn the generators the equivalent of only 42 days each year. Scrutiny of these dam proposals was made possible, in part, by the National Environmental Policy Act--signed into law in 1969. This law requires federal agencies to analyze the environmental impacts of their projects prior to breaking ground. For years, the property at Sprewell Bluff has been owned by the Georgia Power Company (another dam-building entity and lead sponsor of Paddle Georgia), but in 1994, the electricity provider agreed to lease the property to the state for a period of 99 years. The park now encompasses 1372 acres.