

Ellijay Jig –Paddle Georgia 2009

June 20–Coosawattee & Oostanaula Rivers

Distance: 13 miles

Starting Elevation: 1244

Ending Elevation: 1090

Obstacles/Rapids: Once you pass beneath Old Ga. 5, you can expect mostly swift moving water for next nine miles until you reach the calm backwaters of Carters Lake. Some of these rapids are solid Class II that require some maneuvering in fast water, large ledges and big waves. For beginners and novices, an alternate take out is located at Mile 6. This alternative avoids the majority of the whitewater, however some rapids, including one Class II, are located in the paddle's first six miles. The Class II "American Flag Rapid" can be easily portaged. Shuttles back to camp from the alternate take out will run from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

- Mile 3** **Island Straightaway Shoals**—Where an island splits the river at the beginning of a long straightaway, a series of Class I shoals begins. The best route is far river right of the island and hugging the right shore in front of the houses. A rock garden and shoals will eventually block river right and you will need to ferry to river left to continue through these small shoals. Avoid the strainer at far river left after making the ferry and continuing through the shoals!
- Mile 4.5** **American Flag Rapid**—After passing CRR's River Park on the left and passing through through two small ledges, begin looking for a flagpole and American Flag on river right. This marks the location of this rapid. If you wish to portage, go to the flagpole, pull out and carry your boat down the road to continue below this Class II obstacle. Those that choose to run it should look for safety boaters pointing out the best route (depending on water levels). Likely, it will be a straight shot through the center of the rapid. At the most likely chute, a cascade of water spills over the ledge toward river right, filling open boats with water. Safety boaters will be stationed below to fish you and your boat out of the water if you capsize. DO NOT proceed into the rapid until the all clear signal has been given. If you capsize, hold on to your paddle and get your feet up and pointed downstream.
- Mile 5** **Rock Face Rapid**—Your first challenge past American Flag, look for a rock face on river left. Best route is down the middle of the rapid. Safety boaters will be stationed here to offer assistance. From here to the Canoe Park and the 6-mile take out are a series of Class I shoals.
- Mile 6.2** **Fish Weir Island Rapid**—Just beyond the steel bridge and Canoe Park, the river turns sharply to the north and enters a complex of islands that includes a fish weir. A rock garden blocks river left, so stay river right around the first small island and then bear to the left of the large island directly in front of you. Continue straight--parallel with the island—and over a small ledge formed by the fish weir.
- Mile 6.5** **Fluffy Bunny Rapids**—Smooth as a marshmallow bunny...not. This is series of four ledges you'll hop down over a stretch of a half mile. Look for safety boaters to provide direction. At the first ledge the best route is river left. Ledge 2 is best run at far river right. Ledge 3 begins right and ends with a turn back to the center of the river. Ledge 4 can be run starting both left and right, but both routes direct you back to the center toward a tall rock jutting above the water's surface at the middle of the river.
- Mile 7** **Mountaintown Creek Rapids**—This long series of shoals precedes the mouth of Mountaintown Creek. Best routes are down the center and center left. Recoup and bail boats in eddies on river right and left below the mouth of Mountaintown. Safety boaters will be stationed at Mountaintown to fish you out of the water.
- Mile 8** **Jack in the Pulpit Rapids**—Another series of Class II ledges immediately below Mountaintown Creek is best run on river right. Jack in the Pulpit, the wildflowers clinging to rock faces along the shore, will pray for you! The swift water remains fairly constant through mile 9 and...
- Mile 9** **Big Rock Rapid**—Large rocks and small islands split the river here. Look for safety boaters to give direction. A turbulent, but straight route is possible on river right or you can paddle a route to the left of the large rock at the top of the rapid and then turn right toward the center of the river and an island covered in small trees and shrubs.

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0 Restrooms at Gilmer County Park

Mile 4 Porta Toilet at Fish Trap Park. Take out on river left below the footbridge. Restrooms are located in the park and at the swimming pool across the river (there's a snack bar with ice cream there as well!)

Mile 6 Porta Toilet at Canoe Park in Coosawattee River Resort (This is the 6-Mile Take Out)

Mile 13 Corps of Engineers Pit Toilets at Ridgeway Boat Ramp

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Ellijay & The Apple Festival—Our journey begins in Georgia's apple capital and the seat of Gilmer County where each year some 600,000 bushels of apples (\$4.4 million in value) are harvested—about 30 bushels for every person in the county. Our launch site is home to the Apple Festival held each October during the height of the harvest. The county boasts of some 30 varieties of apples with a harvest from August to December. In the 1920s, John W. Clayton brought apple trees to the area and this helped insulate the area's cotton-dependent economy during the Great Depression. However, the county's real goldmine is all the leaf peepers who buy the apples each fall. Tourism brings in an estimated \$80 million each year. By the way, an apple contains about 80 calories. "An apple a day..." originates in Wales where they said: "Eat an apple on going to bed, and you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread."

Mile 1-10—Coosawattee River Resort—Below the Old Highway 5 Bridge, the river enters the Coosawattee River Resort, an 8,500-acre gated community that claims 12 miles of riverfront. The property is divided into more than 7,000 individual, privately owned lots connected by more than 300 miles of paved and gravel roads. Along the river you will see frequent public parks that are available to all members of the community. The homeowners association has graciously allowed us to use these properties and their facilities and even provided a prize for our Canoe-a-thon. Many of the homes and lots were developed prior to enforcement of Georgia's stream buffer laws which now prohibit construction within 50 feet of trout streams, thus you will see many areas where homes and outbuilding press precariously against the river banks. Most homes can be had in the \$150,000 to \$300,000 range.

Mile 2-9—Goldline Darter—Federally protected as "threatened," this tiny perch is likely swimming in the rapids we will paddle over today. Prior to the construction of Carters Dam, biologists believe that it ranged throughout the Coosawattee, but the dam wiped out its favorite habitat. A slender fish that reaches about 3 inches in length, its back is a pale to dusky color. It has a white belly on which a series of square lateral and dorsal blotches can be seen. These blotches are separated by a pale or gold-colored stripe. It can be found in the Coosawattee as well as the Cartecay and Ellijay rivers which join in Ellijay to form our paddle route.

Mile 2—Native American Fish Weir—The first of several fish weirs that you'll have the chance to see on this trip. These V-shaped rock structures were built by Native Americans and used to capture fish. A second weir is located at mile 6.2.

Mile 8—Mountaintown Creek—A whitewater destination of some repute, a 6-mile run from Ga. 282 includes many Class II rapids and ends, like our paddle today, in a three-mile lake paddle which discourages many whitewater enthusiasts.

Mile 9.5, 11.5 13.5—Waterfalls—Before the lake, the Coosawattee itself spilled over waterfalls here, but today cascades remain on tributaries. After the last rapid, look river right for a small tributary and the sound of falling water. At mile 11.5 on the lake, look for a cove filled with the ghostly remains of pine trees and paddle up it. This is Flat Creek which spills down the mountain to the lake. Beyond the boat ramp on Tails Creek you can paddle up to the base of Tails Creek Falls...but after 13 miles of paddling, you might want to save that excursion for tomorrow's fun.

