

New Echota Trot – Paddle Georgia 2009

June 23 –Coosawattee & Oostanaula Rivers

Distance: 15 miles

Starting Elevation: 640

Ending Elevation: 620

Obstacles/Rapids: Aside from what should be two minor strainers at Mile 1 and Mile 3, there are no major obstacles in this run of river. Of course, you never step in the same river twice.

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Porta Toilet at Coosawattee Foundation and “The Island”
Mile 8.5 Porta Toilet at Pine Chapel Road. Exit river left and climb the embankment beneath the bridge. Toilet is located on the right-of-way on the downstream side of the bridge.
Mile 15 Porta Toilet at Ga. 225 Boat Ramp

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—More on “The Island”—Our launch site for the day was once an island in the Coosawattee, but in the 1960s a farmer filled in the eastern channel of the river. Though it’s been 40 years since it was an island, it is still known as “The Island” Poking around, you can still discern the old channel. The official Cherokee Indian voting precinct of Rabbit Trap Town was also located in the vicinity. Had you been here in 1832, you would have found cleared fields and orchards surrounding the river.

Mile 5—Baxter Mound and UGA Farm—Within the large U-shaped bend of the river here sits the University of Georgia’s Calhoun unit of the Northwest Georgia Research and Education Center. This 653 acre farm is used for beef cattle research, forages and organic waste recycling. Some 300 cows roam the fields here, helping scientists understand how a cow’s diet affects its production. Amidst the cows is a significant historic site—a large ceremonial mound known as the Baxter Mound. Like the Etowah Indian Mounds in Cartersville, this mound is located on the north side of a major river directly opposite the mouth of a major tributary. In this case, the tributary is Salacoa Creek. Salacoa is a Creek Indian word meaning “Slick Corn.”

Mile 5—Fields Ferry—Near the confluence of Salacoa Creek and the Coosawattee River, the Fields family operated a Ferry in the mid to late 1800s. Just downstream at Owens Gin Road, you’ll find the remains of the family’s other operation—a water-powered mill on the north bank of the river. The mill, like the ferry, dates to the 1800s. During the Civil War, this ferry to the east of Resaca, was used as a crossing point after the Union troops scored a victory at the Battle of Resaca and forced the Confederates to abandon their Oostanaula River line.

Mile 8.5—Limestone Bluffs and Cave—Well, not really a cave, but unique nonetheless. At river right is a series of low bluffs that, in places, overhang the river. Depending on water levels, you can paddle beneath these ledges and into some slots that give the impression of entering a watery cave—cave, not grave.

Mile 8.5—Pine Chapel Road & Oostenauleh—Just north on Pine Chapel Road from the river is Pine Chapel Church. The original structure was made from local pines prior to 1860. Also along this route in the early 1800s was a trading post operated by Charles Hicks. The post came to be known as Hicks’ Public Stop. On the south side of the river was the first capital of the Cherokee Nation in North Georgia—Oostenauleh. The capital was established around 1775 after the destruction of Echota in Eastern Tennessee. Despite being burned twice in 1783 and 1784 by John Sevier in retaliation for Indian attacks in Tennessee, Oostenauleh remained the tribal national capital until 1817 when the planned town of New Echota was established as the new capital just down river.

Today the area is noteworthy for river travelers because of the scents emanating from nearby fields. These fields are utilized to spread “biosolids” from local wastewater treatment plants. Appropriately, the road also serves as our pit stop for the day. Ever wonder what a Cherokee Indian would think of porta-toilets?

Mile 11.5—Harlan Farm—The forested property on river right was once the home place of one of Gordon County’s earliest settlers, Judge Harlan. A home dating to 1869 still stands on the property and features wall and ceiling stenciling, hand-painted by German itinerant artisans. Also on the property is one of Gordon County’s last operating corn distilleries. Revenue agents busted the still in the 1960s.

Mile 13.5—Native American Fish Weir—Visible only in low water, another testament to the industry of the area’s initial inhabitants. Question for thought: what Native American came up with the idea of the fish trap? Was this person male or female and did everyone think they were crazy when they suggested hauling a bunch of rocks around in the river?

Mile 14—Calhoun Water Intake & Water Quality—In the 1980s, the City of Calhoun moved its drinking water intake from the Oostanaula River to the Coosawattee in search of cleaner water than could be found in the Oostanaula River closer to town. The Oostanaula suffered from poor water quality for years due to pollution coming down the Conasauga from Dalton’s carpet mills. On the Coosawattee, and especially at this location where nearby Craneater Creek pumps six million gallons of spring-fed water into the river each day, they found cleaner water. Unfortunately, poor water quality still frustrates water providers in Calhoun and further downstream in Rome. Earlier this spring, water utilities in both cities blamed foul tasting and smelling tap water on high nutrients and algae born at Carters Lake. Carters Lake is included in Georgia’s list of “polluted” water bodies due to high algae levels. The green color of the lake is a tell-tale sign. It is believed that run off from chicken farms and the application of chicken litter on farm fields is the primary contributor to the algae levels. Chicken litter has a high phosphorus content—a fuel for algae growth. While phosphorus and other nutrients are essential for healthy river ecosystems, too much can cause problems. Excessive algae growth can cause fish kills when the algae dies and decomposes, robbing oxygen from the water. This particular stretch of the Coosawattee, and in fact the remainder of our Paddle Georgia course, is included on the state’s list of polluted streams due to PCB contamination in fish. This contamination stems from a now-closed General Electric manufacturing plant some 60 miles downstream in Rome. PCBs have worked their way into the basin’s food chain making fish caught in the Coosa and its tributaries unsafe to eat on a regular basis.

Mile 15 New Echota Historic Site— Our take out for the day sits just a couple of hundred yards upstream from the confluence of the Coosawattee and the Conasauga rivers where in 1825, the Cherokee national legislature established its capital. The site that was a symbol of so much hope for the Cherokee people in 1825 would, 10 years later, come to symbolize the most tragic era in Cherokee history. It was here in 1835 that the Treaty of New Echota was signed. The treaty ceded all Cherokee land east of the Mississippi to the federal government and led to the forced removal of the Cherokee in 1838.

When the Cherokees established their capital at New Echota, the act enraged Georgia’s leaders, and when gold was discovered on the nearby Etowah River in 1828, the state government’s efforts to remove the Cherokee intensified. Georgia’s legislature passed laws forbidding the Cherokee legislature to meet and prohibiting Cherokees from testifying in court cases involving white people. In 1832, the state gave away Cherokee land to white settlers in a land lottery and for the next six years, the Georgia Guard conducted a form of vigilante justice against the Cherokee. The Cherokee took their fight against these injustices all the way to the Supreme Court and the Court ruled in their favor, but Georgia, and President Andrew Jackson, ignored the ruling. In 1838, New Echota became the site of a Cherokee removal fort—a place where U.S. soldiers held Cherokee as prisoners before forcing them west. Today, the Cherokee Nation does, in fact, govern itself. The 200,000-strong tribe (second largest in the country) is centered in Oklahoma where some 70,000 live in a 7,000 square mile “jurisdictional service area.” The Nation controls the development of tribal assets which includes 66,000 acres of land as well as 96 miles of the Arkansas riverbed—a far distance and a far cry from the Coosawattee and Conasauga.