

Three Rivers Rumba – Paddle Georgia 2009

June 26–Coosawattee & Oostanaula Rivers

Distance: 15 miles

Starting Elevation: 590 feet

Ending Elevation: 580 feet

Obstacles/Rapids: No major obstacles on this section of river. The primary navigational hazards are strainers along the edge of the river and debris piles at bridges.

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0 Porta Toilet at Ga. 140 Boat Ramp

Mile 13 Flush Toilets at Ridge Ferry Park & Chieftain's Museum—The boat dock at Ridge Ferry leads to flush toilets in the park—tan building with water fountain at the top of the dock ramp.

Mile 15 Porta Toilets and flush toilets at Heritage Park

Points of Interest:

Mile 1—Corps of Engineers Wing Dams—If water levels are right (meaning low!) you will have seen these curious rock dams further upstream—the remnants of a 1870s effort by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to improve navigation on the Oostanaula. While today these efforts seem wasteful, remember that in the 1870s, before the dawn of modern road construction methods, stacking up rocks in rivers to get from one place to another made a lot more sense than cutting a road through wilderness and moving giant bales of cotton on water was infinitely easier than towing it overland with draft animals.

Mile 2.5—Armuchee Creek—A great paddling stream in its own right, Armuchee Creek's headwaters flow in part from nearby Rocky Mountain where Paddle Georgia sponsor Oglethorpe Power operates a pump storage hydro-electric facility. During peak hours, water stored in a 220 acre reservoir is released through a 570 foot shaft and a 1,935 foot tunnel via turbines into another 600-acre lower reservoir. At night the water is pumped back to the upper reservoir using excess power generated at coal and nuclear power plants. OPC supplies wholesale electric power to thirty-eight of Georgia's forty-two electric membership corporations (EMCs), with a service area that covers 37,000 square miles, or 65 percent of the state. In creating the power facility, Rocky Mountain's broad, flat peak was leveled and excavated to make way for the reservoir. The lower reservoir is a popular recreation area for local residents.

Mile 4—UGA Farm & Jones Bend—On river left from near mile 2 all the way through Jones Bend to Woodward Creek is the 905-acre University of Georgia's Northwest Georgia Research & Education Center—used primarily for beef cattle breeding research. Last year, the Coosa River Basin Initiative was successful in getting the research facility to fence their livestock away from Woodward Creek—a stream that is polluted with high bacteria levels due in part to cattle having access to the stream. UGA recommends that farmers fence streams, but in this case, the state-operated farm was not following its own recommendations. In December, the Center installed 7,000 feet of fence and creek crossings to better protect Woodward. The effort began when a fisherman complained of cow poop in his stream, illustrating that change begins with individual shouts as much as collective roars.

Mile 4—Island—The first of two islands on this stretch of river. This is a great place to grab a snack or rest on the gravel bar at midstream and let the cool water wash you. Mussel shells and other detritus are commonly found on the island.

Mile 7.5—Island—This high-banked island sits at the mouth of Dozier Creek.

Mile 8.5—Native American Fish Weir—The only known fish weir on the Oostanaula in Floyd County, and a beauty. The rock wall on river left is still in tact, but the wall extending upstream on river right was partially removed during the Corps of Engineers 1870s navigational improvements. Some of the Corps wing dams can be seen just downstream of the weir during low water. If the water is up, you won't see either rock structure, but trust us, it's there!

Mile 9—Beaver Dam Creek—This unassuming and un-named tributary at river right is worthy of exploration, given adequate water levels. Paddle up it to find a five-foot high, 30-foot wide beaver dam that creates an expansive pond. Within the pond is the quintessential beaver lodge. This bit of engineering is a real sight to behold. Beavers once roamed this country by the millions, creating thousands upon thousands of acres of wetlands that helped keep our water clean and created habitat for countless other animals. The loss of our beaver population has been called one of the "first major shifts" in North America's water cycle. It's also been said that of all the Earth's inhabitants, the beaver is most like humans...no other creatures do more to alter their environment.

Mile 11—Berry College—The property at river right is owned by Berry College. With 26,000 acres, Berry boasts of the world's largest contiguous college campus—most of it is managed timberland, wildlife management area and farmland. The school operates a beef and dairy cow facility and has a thriving pre-vet program. Deer are believed to outnumber students.

Mile 12—Floods!—After three years of drought, rain returned to Northwest Georgia this winter. In January, heavy rains swelled the Oostanaula and sent a pile of trees and other detritus downriver. The debris collected against the piers of the Rome Bypass Bridge, creating a massive dam that pushed the river's flow hard to the west bank. Below the bridge you can see the havoc wrought by this dam—a massive chunk of land washed down river. Water levels above the bridge were three to five feet higher than below the bridge. Department of Transportation personnel eventually dislodged the logs, only to send them downstream where you'll see many of them piled against a railroad bridge at Ridge Ferry Park

Mile 13—Chieftain's Museum—The historic home of Major Ridge, a Cherokee leader at the time of their removal. Major Ridge fought alongside Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812 and it was there that he earned the rank "Major" and soon began using the title as his first name. Andrew Jackson, the President, would ultimately drive Ridge and his fellow Cherokee from their lands in the 1830s. Ridge signed the Treaty of New Echota, selling all Cherokee lands to the U.S. in exchange for land in present-day Oklahoma. Angered by the treaty and the suffering that ensued, fellow Cherokees murdered Ridge in 1839. Ironically, as a Cherokee Tribal Council member, Ridge pushed a law through Council sentencing to death any individual who sold tribal lands. Ridge operated a thriving plantation along the Oostanaula as well as a river ferry. Paddlers can take out just below the abandoned water intake structure to visit the Museum. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for seniors and \$2 for children.

Mile 14—The City of Rome—population 36,000 and North Georgia's only "river town." The Oostanaula joins the Etowah in downtown Rome to form the Coosa which flows on to Alabama and Mobile Bay. From here to the Bay, it's a journey of about 600 miles. Rome's downtown grew up around the rivers. The 100 Block of Broad Street is known as the "Cotton Block" because this is where cotton from surrounding farms was brought to ship down river. Frequent flooding of downtown prompted the construction of the levee system in 1939. You'll see the levee on river right as you enter town. While the levee proved ineffective at preventing floods in the downtown district, the construction of Allatoona Dam in 1952 finally remedied that problem. Floods were so troublesome for the city that merchants in the Cotton Block ultimately abandoned their first floors and brought in fill dirt to raise the level of Broad Street. Today, what you think are first floors of many historic buildings are actually second floors. You'll pass under several bridges as you come into town—most notably right at the river's confluence with the Etowah—a historic Central of Georgia rail bridge. The "swing bridge" once rotated on its central pier to allow steamboats to pass. Upstream you passed the city's water intake structure. Rome uses about eight million gallons a day from the Oostanaula, but like Calhoun, it is looking to shift its primary intake to the Etowah for water quality reasons.

Mile 15—The Dixie—Lying along the banks of the Etowah and Coosa rivers is the remains of the paddlewheeler, The Dixie. The wood structure of the boat can still be discerned in low water. The boat caught fire in 1914. Portions of The Dixie were later recovered and can now be seen at the Rome History Museum located at 305 Broad Street. The Museum will be open until 5 p.m. Admission prices are \$4 for adults, \$3 for seniors and \$2 for children.