

# St. Peters Bluff Slide— Paddle Georgia 2015

June 23—Ogeechee River

**Distance:** 10 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 75 feet **Lat:** 32.3932°N **Lon:** -81.5343°W

**Ending Elevation:** 52 feet **Lat:** 32.2972°N **Lon:** -81.4498°W

<b>Restroom Facilities:</b>	<b>Mile 0</b>	Beasley Landing
	<b>Mile 2.2</b>	Flat Ford Landing
	<b>Mile 10.4</b>	Ga. 119

## **Point of Interest:**

**Mile 0—Beasley Landing**—Our launch site for the day has been in the Beasley family for three generations. Donny Beasley, the current owner, recalls his father, Joseph Beasley, cutting the road to the river in the 1950s, an undertaking that took several years, but paid dividends as a place for family and friends to recreate. On summer Sunday afternoons, dozens would gather at the landing after church for swimming...but no fishing. The elder Beasley believed strongly that Sunday was a day reserved for rest. Work—including hunting and fishing—was strictly forbidden. Today, the landing is used for baptisms by nearby Lane Primitive Baptist Church where the Beasley family attends. The theme for the church’s vacation Bible school this summer: “Gone Fishing.”

**Mile 1.3—House Falling In River**—Bank erosion is a natural process on rivers, but it can be accelerated by human activities. For example, when woody, deeply-rooted river bank vegetation is removed in favor of grasses, bank stability is weakened. Unfortunately, the solution to erosion problems such as this is often to armor the bank with rock and other debris. While this solution may protect a portion of the bank, armoring often increases the velocity of the river, resulting in accelerated erosion upstream or downstream of the protected site. Today, many professional stormwater managers are turning away from bank armoring and toward more natural engineering that stabilizes banks using native plants and instream structures that dissipate the force of the river.

**Mile 2.4—Flat Ford Road Bridge**—The bridge pilings here mark the site of the Flat Ford Bridge which spanned the river in the late 1800s. During that era the bridge and surrounding land was a popular spot for community fish fries. A notice published in the July 6, 1893 issue of the *Bulloch Times* announced: “There will be a at Flatford Bridge July 15, the grandest Basket Picnic of the season. Will have on hand a first class band of music and all kinds of refreshments for sale. Everybody is invited to come.”

**Mile 3.5—Bald Cypress Trees**—An impressive stand of cypress trees can be found on river left. Cypress, unlike evergreen conifers, lose their leaves each fall in a brilliant display of tan, cinnamon and fiery orange. This characteristic and their state of winter undress lends the tree its common name “bald” cypress. Slow-growing, cypress can live for hundreds of years and play an important role in riverine ecosystems. Seeds from the cypress are food for wild turkey, wood ducks, song birds and squirrels, and bald eagles and other raptors like to nest in their top branches. Cypress also help stabilize river banks and soak up floodwater. The “knees” that we associate with these trees are a mystery. Botanists have debated for years the function of these knees without reaching consensus. The most popular theory is that the knees are pneumatophores, specialized roots that provide air for cellular respiration in root systems of trees growing in poorly aerated soils like that found in swamps. Lumber cut from old cypress is highly prized because of its resistance to rot and decay.

**Mile 4.8—St. Peters Bluff**—This bluff rises some 50 feet above the river and stretches upstream some four miles to Flat Ford. Given adequate water a slough on river right is worthy of exploration.

**Mile 5.5—Alderman Landing**—This historic river landing bears the name of a family that came to Bulloch County around 1815. Revolutionary War veteran, David Alderman and wife, Jemina Hall, and some of his 14 children migrated from North Carolina and established a farm and grist mill near present day Statesboro. 200 years later, the Aldermans are still tilling the soil, growing timber, pecans, wheat, soybeans, cotton, and peanuts. In 2013, the farm was recognized with a Centennial Heritage Farm Award from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

**Mile 5.8—Willows**—Watch out for the willow here! This is one of many locations along the Ogeechee where willow trees narrow the river’s channel. It is certainly one of the most common trees along the river. Before you curse it, consider its importance. It’s food for more than 18 different animals, including beavers, butterflies and birds (like yellow-bellied sapsuckers); it stabilizes river banks and prevents pollution from entering rivers and streams; and, should you find yourself experiencing a headache as you navigate these tight spaces, you’ll be happy to know that chewing on a few green twigs will release a chemical called salicin, a kind of natural aspirin. Its wood was also once used extensively for making artificial limbs because it is lightweight, doesn’t splinter easily and holds its shape.

**Mile 9.3—Shrimp Creek**—Don’t be misled by the name of this creek on river left. You’ll find no shrimp. The creek’s name comes from John Frederick Schrimpf, a colonist that was granted land along the creek and river here in the 1769. Schrimpf and his family were among “Georgia’s Salzburgers,” a group of German-speaking protestant colonists that fled their homeland of Salzburg (present day Austria) when, in 1731, the Catholic prince and archbishop of Salzburg expelled some 20,000 protestants from the country. The group fled to neighboring Germany and found favor with King George II of England who offered the refugees a place in the new Georgia colony. Some 300 accepted and made the journey to the new world in 1734. Given marginal land along the Savannah River, the Salzburgers endured much deprivation. Crops and livestock could not be sustained in the swampy land and within the first two years, 30 of the settlers died from dysentery. Eventually, they were provided with better land and once established, their community of Ebenezer thrived. With aid from the colonial government, they built Georgia’s first water-driven grist mill, established sawmills and stamping mills for processing rice and barley and established Georgia’s first Sunday school and first orphanage. The surname “Schrimpf” is a German nickname for someone with a conspicuous scar, from Middle High German “schrimpf” which means “scratch,” or “cut.” It may also be a nickname for a small person, from a noun derivative of “schrimpfen,” meaning “to shrink or diminish.”

**Mile 9.7—Bridge Pilings**—The wood spires ascending from the water likely supported a 19<sup>th</sup> century bridge. The pilings may have once supported Wright’s Bridge or later “Cone Bridge.” A 1904 Bulloch County map shows “Cone Bridge” crossing the river near this location. The modern Ga. 119 bridge, known locally as “Steel Bridge” because the circa-1930s bridge was constructed of the material, sits less than a mile downstream.

**Mile 10.4—Steel Bridge Landing**—What today is a simple boat landing at Ga. 119 on the Effingham County side of the river was, in its day, an important gathering place for residents of Effingham and Bulloch counties. The landing included a store where anglers could purchase groceries, a picnic pavilion and a dance hall—all built upon pilings keeping the structures safe from the river’s floods. During the 1800s and through the 1940s, school and church groups and family reunions commonly used the facilities. Long-time residents remember the landing as a place for swimming and family fun. They recall a river that was “deeper and cleaner” than today and a steel bridge that served as a diving platform into the Ogeechee’s cool, black water. During the 1950s, the landing took on a more unsavory reputation as a place for the drinking and dancing. Today, you’ll still find families gathering at the landing, but the impact of the 2011 fish kill still lingers. It seems the catastrophe not only soiled the river; it soiled a part of the region’s cultural history. In an article for the Effingham Herald, Susan Exley of the Historic Effingham Society, wrote: “Citizens want their children to have the opportunity to make memories at Steel Bridge as have our previous generations.”

