

Cypress Swamp Salsa– Paddle Georgia 2015

June 24—Ogeechee River

Distance: 13 miles

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

Ending Elevation: 46 feet **Lat:** 32.1896°N **Lon:** -81.4159°W

Restroom Facilities:	Mile 0	Ga. 119
	Mile 4.7	Coon Key Cove
	Mile 13	Dasher's Landing

Point of Interest:

Mile 0—Wrights Bridge—Though today locally known as “Steel Bridge,” at the time of the Civil War, the wooden span over the Ogeechee near here was known as Wright’s Bridge, and in December 1864, the Union Army crossed the river here in its advance on Savannah. Charles Wills, a Union soldier from Illinois recorded the following in his diary from this location: “Dec. 7, 1864—We have not moved today. Sgt. Breed of my company who was shot through the right lung in battle Nov. 22 died today. He has been hauled in an ambulance ever since and improved until the last two days. We were all sure that he would get well. There was no better soldier in the army. Every one liked him...Lieutenant Dorrance's servant captured a beautiful coal black squirrel with white nose and white ear tips. He is larger than any fox squirrel I ever saw.” It is likely that the fox squirrel was more common in the area in 1864 when vast stands of wiregrass and pines dominated the terrain. Fox squirrels prefer this more open habitat. The landing here was a common location for family reunions and community gatherings in the mid-1900s, and today remains a popular recreation spot.

Mile 2.2—Water Pennywort—On river left you’ll find a stand of this native aquatic plant which can grow into massive mats along the shores of streams, rivers and ponds. It is identified by its fleshy, disc-shaped leaves with deep clefts along their edges. There are several species of pennyworts in the Southeast, but they all perform an important role. They provide habitat and food for aquatic invertebrates that form the base of the river’s food chain. The plant’s seeds are also consumed by waterfowl.

Mile 2.5—Joe Cone Landing—This “landing” on river right is associated with Revolutionary War hero, Capt. William Henry Cone, and his family. For his service in the Revolutionary War, Cone was awarded a plantation here along the Ogeechee. The swampy surroundings would have been familiar to the old soldier as he served under famed Gen. Francis Marion, the “Swamp Fox,” whose guerilla war tactics frustrated the British in the American South. He and his men hid out in backwoods swamps, foraged for food and when opportunity arose, struck the British forces with vengeance. His service was immortalized in the movie “The Patriot” starring Mel Gibson. Capt. Cone, also a Baptist minister, would come to be known as the “Fighting Parson.” He and his descendants played a prominent role in the early history of Bulloch County. A son, Joseph Cone, served as sheriff from 1797-99; another son, Aaron, would expand on his father’s land holdings and establish a plantation known as Ivanhoe nearby. Another descendent, Peter Cone, served Bulloch County for many years in the Georgia Senate in the mid 1800s. In 1985, the Georgia General Assembly passed a resolution naming the Ga. 119 bridge over the Ogeechee as the William Henry Cone Bridge...though most locals still refer to it as “Steel Bridge”—a moniker that dates back to the mid-1900s when the original wooden bridge was replaced with a modern steel span.

Mile 3.5—Horseshoe Bend—No river is complete with out at least one “Horseshoe Bend.” This is the Ogeechee’s, but the U.S. Geological Survey maps haven’t kept pace with the river. The old horseshoe has been cut off and rendered an oxbow lake.

Mile 5.5—Blue Lake Slough—This slough on river right provides access (in adequate water levels) to a beautiful backwater area with an impressive stand of cypress trees.

Mile 5.9—Morgan Fish Camp—On river left here is property owned by Darrell Morgan. The memorial marker recognizes Morgan’s step-father and son who died within two months of one another in 2010. Darrell’s son, William Neil, died in a car wreck before his senior year at Effingham County High School. The family chose this spot for the memorial because it holds a special place in the history and lore of the family. Darrell explained: “That’s where we stayed. We hunted there; fished there. That’s where I went to get over losing my father and my son all within a month’s time.” The 500 acres has been in the family since the 1800s.

Mile 6.5—Bryan County—After passing the large slough on river right, your journey along Bulloch County’s northeast boundary ends and Bryan County begins. The coastal Georgia county claims a rich history that spans the stories of slaves and rice plantations, industrial era philanthropists, and a takeover by the federal government—all shaped by the region’s geography and the Ogeechee. When colonial Georgia was founded in 1733, the trustees prohibited slavery, primarily because they envisioned a society in which citizens earned a comfortable living instead of attaining personal wealth from the labor of others. This ban lasted until 1750 when the low country surrounding the Ogeechee stirred the economic hopes of planters. The area was well suited for the cultivation of rice—a cash crop that demanded scores of laborers. Between 1750 and 1755, Georgia’s slave population grew from 500 to 18,000, and extensive rice plantations were formed in the tidewater along the banks of the river. The establishment of the Ogeechee-Savannah Canal in the 1840s further expanded the rice/slave economy by providing an easy route to get the crop to markets in Savannah. By 1855, 3 million pounds of rice were produced annually at Bryan County plantations. This economy abruptly ended in the 1890s when hurricanes wiped out the region’s rice industry. Left behind were some of the most impoverished communities in the state. Then in 1925, auto-industry pioneer Henry Ford (like many northern industrialists of the early 1900s) began purchasing land along the Georgia coast, including some 85,000 acres on both sides of the Ogeechee. His philanthropy led to the establishment of agricultural operations, medical facilities, housing, churches, schools for blacks and whites and even a vocational trade school. In 1941, grateful citizens of Ways Station renamed their community Richmond Hill to honor Ford and his nearby home, “Richmond,” that overlooked the Ogeechee. Finally, in 1940, the U.S. Army entered the county to establish Ft. Stewart, taking over 280,000 acres and displacing some 4,500 residents. Cheap land and its proximity to the strategic port of Savannah attracted the Army.

Mile 6.8—Cut Through—Coastal plain rivers like the Ogeechee are dynamic, living beings. This location (as well as many others along our route) shows how the river constantly seeks a more direct route to the sea. Take the right arm of the river here and your trip will end abruptly at a large sandbar that was once part of the river’s main channel. Take the left arm around this “island” and you’ll cut off the long, sinuous oxbow to the right. The new route cuts a quarter mile off the river’s old route.

Mile 7.4—Nude Beach—A sign above the sandbar on river left designates this location as such, but please refrain, it’s against the law...sort of. Georgia laws prohibit “lewd exposures and appearances” in public places while nude, but don’t specifically prohibit nudity. The authors of this law likely had a long discussion about the difference between naked and nekkid, a distinction aptly described by *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* humorist Lewis Grizzard: “There’s a big difference between the words, ‘naked’ and ‘nekkid.’ ‘Naked’ means you don’t have any clothes on. ‘Nekkid’ means you don’t have any clothes on - and you’re up to something.”

Mile 12.5—Jenckes Bridge/U.S. 80—Above the present U.S. 80 bridge, the Department of Transportation is at work constructing a new span across the river, the latest development in nearly 200 years of bridges at this location. The original bridge here was built by “transportation baron” Ebenezer Jenckes. Jenckes is notable in local history because in the early 1800s, he initiated the construction of the Ogeechee-Savannah Canal. He also operated an important toll road running from Savannah to Springfield in Effingham County for which the state legislature permitted him to collect 25 cents for every two-horse wagon that passed. During the Civil War a brief skirmish was fought here as the Union Army approached Savannah in December 1864. A small group of Confederates held the east side of the river, and the bridge had been burned to prevent the advancement of the Union troops. Undaunted, the Union soldiers crossed on boats, secured a landing and advanced. An excerpt from Union General Elliott Rice’s diary gives a glimpse of the fighting conditions: “The country for nearly three-quarters of a mile (*on the east side of the river*) was nearly waist deep with water in the swamps and lagoons, through which the troops waded with a good will.” The attack resulted in the death of two Confederates and the capture of 20. The rest fled from Eden via railcars toward Savannah.

