

Looper's Bend Lindy– Paddle Georgia 2016

June 19—Conasauga River

Distance: 16 miles

Starting Elevation: 697 feet **Lat:** 34.7922 **Lon:** -84.8573°W

Ending Elevation: 677 feet **Lat:** 34.7141°N **Lon:** -84.9304 °W

Restroom Facilities:	Mile 0	Private Take Out
	Mile 11.4	Private Boat Ramp
	Mile 16	Looper's Bend Private Take Out

Points of Interest:

Mile 0.7—Carpet Industry—Atop the bluff on river left here (and hidden by foliage), the large manufacturing building is the Beaulieu Specialty Fabrics facility, the only real riverside evidence you'll find of the industry that forms the backbone of northwest Georgia's economy. In 2015, about 80 percent of the world's carpet was produced within 30 miles of Dalton; Beulieu and the area's other flooring manufacturers employ nearly 25 percent of Whitfield County's workforce. Today's economic engine all began as a tiny cottage industry. In 1895, Catherine Evans Whitener created a tufted bedspread as a wedding gift for her brother using a nearly forgotten technique in which tufts of cotton thread are stitched to fabric to create intricate, fuzzy decorative patterns. Soon, Whitener had more requests for her chenille bedspreads than she could make and began teaching other women how to tuft. By 1920, thousands of residents in northwest Georgia were employed hand stitching bedspreads. U.S. 41, which ran through Dalton and Calhoun, carrying northern tourists south to Florida, soon became known as "Peacock Alley" because of the spreadlines along the roadway displaying the most popular chenille designs—elaborate peacocks. Eventually, of course, the hand-tufting became mechanized, giving rise to chenille bathrobes, rugs and "tank sets"—those plush toilet seat covers once commonplace in home bathrooms. As sewing technology advanced, tufted carpets followed. Unfortunately, for the southern manufacturers the lower quality, cotton carpets couldn't compete with woven wool carpets. Those manufacturers derided Dalton's products as "glorified bedspreads." That all changed with the advent of nylon in the 1950s. Northwest Georgia's upstart carpet manufacturers began producing wall-to-wall carpet as durable as wool...and for a fraction of the cost. Suddenly, American consumers could cover their floors without breaking the bank, and by 1970, the demand for tufted carpet had grown four fold, ushering in the era of shag carpet. During the 1960s, only television, aircraft and computer sales surpassed the carpet industry's growth.

Mile 1.5—Dalton Utilities Dam & Portage—The rock dam blocking the river here serves to elevate water levels so that Dalton Utilities can withdraw from the river to serve its more than 34,000 customers in Dalton as well as Whitfield, Murray and Catoosa counties. Dalton Utilities originally tapped the Conasauga here in 1963, pumping up to 25 million gallons a day (MGD). In 1969, the facility was expanded to treat up to 50 MGD, then in 1990, with Dalton still growing, a 500-million gallon reservoir was constructed adjacent to the treatment plant to provide off-river storage. But, this addition was still not enough to meet the growing demand of Dalton's carpet industry, especially during periods of severe drought. In 1995, a second pump-storage reservoir designed to hold 1.2 billion gallons was built off river about 10 miles upstream. Located in the upper reaches of the Coosa River basin and without the benefit of a nearby large water body, Dalton and the water intensive textile industry have been forced to become innovative when it comes to water efficiency. During recent years, Shaw Industries, the largest carpet manufacturer in the world, has reduced its water use by 30 percent and has set a goal of achieving 50 percent reductions by 2030. The water conservation progress in Dalton mimics that of the entire state. Between 1980 and 2010, Georgia's population grew by more than 75 percent, but the state's total water use dropped by 30 percent to 4.7 billion gallons per day from a peak of 6.7 billion gallons in 1980.

Mile 2—U.S. 76 & Treadwell—Just downstream from the bridge on river left around 1870, Smith Treadwell established a milling operation. His wooden mill stood three stories high and utilized two undershot mill wheels 20-feet high and 12-feet wide to grind wheat and corn. The river also powered a cotton gin and sawmill. It operated into the 1930s when high water caused irreparable damage. A ferry operated upstream of the mill; later replaced by a covered bridge, a steel bridge and finally the current U.S. 76 bridge.

Mile 4—Felkers Island—The tail of this small island and a slough is visible on river right here.

Mile 6.4—Town Branch & Spring Place—About two miles upstream on this small creek in 1801, Moravians established a mission amongst the Cherokee Indians at Spring Place, so named because of seven limestone springs that fed Town Branch. At the request of their Cherokee guests, the German-speaking missionaries taught the native children English, a skill some Cherokee leaders believed would help them in future dealings with the U.S. and Georgia governments. Over a period of nearly 30 years, the mission housed and taught 114 children, but in 1832, the state of Georgia gave away the mission property, along with thousands of other acres of Cherokee land, through a land lottery. Rather than fight to keep their property and dwellings, the Moravians simply left.

Mile 7—Tibbs Bridge & Shoal—This bridge bears the name of Col. William Henry Tibbs, a noted businessman and Confederate politician and cavalry commander from Dalton. Before permanently settling in Dalton in the mid-1800s, the adventurous Tibbs worked as a hog driver, carpenter, stagecoach driver and blacksmith, ranging from Lynchburg, Tennessee to St. Louis and New Orleans. In Dalton he operated a successful hotel and worked as director of the Dalton and Morganton Railroad while also serving in the Confederate Congress and leading a cavalry unit. The first bridge here was built in the 1880s. On river left beneath the circa 1980 bridge, look for piles of crumbled shale that sometimes hold trilobite fossils. Beneath and just downstream of the bridge is a shoal.

Mile 8.3—Coahulla Creek—This large tributary entering on river right originates far to the north near Cleveland, Tennessee. In fact, 35 percent of the creek's 113,000-acre watershed is in Tennessee. What's a "watershed" you ask? A watershed is an area of land that drains to a specific water body. When assessing the health of creeks, scientists examine the land surrounding that creek as much as they do the creek. Agricultural activities, land development and timber harvesting all impact the health of the stream draining the watershed. Coahulla Creek has been identified by scientists as "polluted" due to impaired fish populations—problems that are linked to land-based activities that send large amounts of sediment to the stream disrupting fish feeding and spawning. According to Ken Krakow in [Georgia Place Names](#), Coahulla may be a form of Ka'lahu, the name of a Cherokee chief known as All Bones.

Mile 10—Fincher Bluff—On river left is this impressive bluff and ridge that rises more than 200 feet above the river bed.

Mile 11.2—Airport Road/Browns Bridge—From 1890 until the late 1970s, Brown's Bridge spanned the river here—a notable local structure because rather than taking a straight course across the water, the narrow, one-lane steel truss span included a 30-degree turn midway across the river, making the crossing tricky for larger vehicles. Prior to its construction, travelers crossed the river on Smokes Ferry just upstream from the current bridge or Zants Ford just downstream.

Mile 13.3—Holly Creek—Upstream, this creek is known for its beauty and biodiversity. In 2005, the Nature Conservancy preserved a 270-acre tract along the creek to protect federally endangered and threatened species including the blue shiner and a host of mussel species including the Coosa moccasinshell, finelined pocketbook and Georgia pigtoe.

Mile 14.9—Drowning Bear Creek—This tributary entering on river right derives its name from a local Cherokee Indian known as Drowning Bear, who according to a 1914 account by Lucian Lamar Knight, was a "mighty hunter." During the late 20th century, the creek received the brunt of pollution from Dalton's carpet mills. A 1973 documentary film reported that pollution of the creek was so severe that "nothing could live in it." Shocking footage shows blue-gray wastewater spilling into the creek, during a time when the city's waste received no treatment before entering area streams. In the early 1970s, Dalton Utilities began constructing the city's first wastewater treatment facility; today, the company operates three primary treatment facilities and what is considered one of the largest sewage land application systems in the country. Some 9,800 acres within Looper's Bend, on river left, is sprayed with partially treated sewage where plant and soils absorb nutrients and complete the treatment process. Passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972 was instrumental in eliminating pollution of this creek and the Conasauga River.

