Canton Cakewalk–Paddle Georgia 2017

June 19—Etowah River

Distance: 12 miles

Starting Elevation: 914 feet Lat: 34.29947°N Lon: - 84.39646°W
Ending Elevation: 850 feet Lat: 34.24636°N, Lon: - 84.47819°W

Restroom Facilities:
Mile 0 East Cherokee Drive
Mile 12.5 Etowah River Park

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Cherokee County Water & Sewerage Authority—Our sand and gravel launch site is known locally as Gober Beach, a popular gathering place for generations of Cherokee County residents. During the 1800s, the property was the site of Ray's Mill. For years, the property opposite Gober Beach was a chicken rendering plant where chicken parts were converted into a meal used to make pet food, but in recent years, the rendering plant closed and the property was acquired by the Cherokee County Water & Sewerage Authority which now operates a small wastewater treatment plant on the site. The plant discharges less than a million gallons of treated sewage to the river daily, but plans call for the plant to someday process as much as 15 million gallons a day.

Mile 0.6—Blankenship Sand Company—The self proclaimed "cleaners of the Etowah," the Blankenship Sand Company dredges sand and silt from the river bottom here and downstream on the upper end of Lake Allatoona. You'll see mounds of sand on river right. The sand is used to make cement and finds its way into construction projects throughout the region—(the average house has 70 tons of sand in it). The sand is also utilized to condition ball fields—most notably, Etowah River sand was used by the grounds crew at Turner Field in Atlanta. Workers at the operation often pull unusual items from the river bottom including dentures, wallets and other unmentionables.

Mile 2–Riggins Creek & Pine Bluff Landfill—About one mile upstream along Riggins Creek sits Georgia's largest landfill—Pine Bluff operated by Waste Management. Each day the landfill takes in around 4700 tons of municipal and industrial trash. Opened in 1993, the facility is expected to reach its capacity in 2025. Leachate and runoff from landfills—both contaminants and sediment—can, of course, pollute local streams, and, oh the waste! Each year, Georgians send to landfills 1.4 million tons of material that could be recycled. The value of that "trash" is estimated at $223 million, including $76 million in plastics and $58 million in aluminum. Waste Management, does, however, recycle its decomposing trash at Pine Bluff, capturing methane released from the landfill for use as energy elsewhere. Pine Bluff is nearly a mile long and about a half mile wide. Edwards Creek, about 1.5 mile downstream, drains the western half of the facility.

Mile 2.1—Rhododendron & Fish Weir—At this sharp bend in the river is a picturesque rock bluff framed by *Rhododendron maximum*. Great laurel or rosebay rhododendron, as it is commonly called, is partial to somewhat shaded, cool, moist well-drained sites like those found on this north-facing slope. Its showy white blooms come out in late May and early June here and adorn much of the bluff, lending credence to the plant's latin root name "rhododendron" which translates to "rose tree." When not in bloom, it is identified by its large (4-10 inches in length) leathery leaves that remain green year round. In fact, these tough leaves can remain on the shrub for up to eight years and even when they drop, they decompose slowly. Though quite beautiful, all parts of the plant are highly toxic. A fish weir is located just downstream of this rock bluff.

Mile 4.5—Marietta & North Georgia Railroad—Now part of the CSX rail system, the tracks visible on river right date to the early1880s when a rail line connecting Marietta with Canton was extended to Ball Ground. Like most railroads in the post-Civil War era in Georgia, the line was built using convicts leased from the state of Georgia. Following the war, Georgia legislators determined that the best use of state prisoners was to lease them to private companies who would presumably be responsible for caring for and feeding these inmates in exchange for the work they performed. The convict lease system was immediately profitable for both the state and the private companies, largely because the convicts were cared for worse than if they had been slaves, and in fact, most of the convicts were former slaves. From the beginning, the system was controversial. Popular Georgia Gov. John B. Gordon in 1886 labeled the system in "conflict with humanity" and noted its impacts on ordinary working people: "It places convict labor…in direct competition with the honest labor of the state." Yet, despite opposition at the highest levels of government, the system persisted mainly because it was a cash cow for the state. Said one newspaper editorial of the era: "Some of the legislators are coming to the conclusion that while morality is a very good thing, it don't go very well with a low tax rate." The convict lease system persisted until 1908 when reformers successfully lobbied the General Assembly to abolish the practice. Nevertheless, the lease system is credited with helping rebuild the state's transportation system and thus reviving the state's economy following the devastation wrought by the Civil War.

Mile 10.3—Sandbar & Strainer—A large sandbar extending from river left restricts the flow of the river to a small channel on river right that can be choked with strainers. Caution should be used when navigating through this obstacle.

Mile 11.4—Hickory Log Native American Site (Wal-Mart)—Atop the ridge on river right is a Wal-Mart, but in the thousands of years leading up to the store's construction in the late 1990s, the land was for years an important dwelling place for Native Americans. Archaeological surveys conducted prior to the store's construction revealed 48 graves and thousands of artifacts. The artifacts tell the story of Native American occupation of the site from 200 B.C. to the time of the Cherokee removal in the 1830s. Where a 1,000 years ago a wooden fort once protected those people now sits the Wal-Mart gardening center. Times change.

Mile 11.7—Hickory Log Creek and Dam—Several miles upstream from here on Hickory Log Creek sits the most recent effort in "drought-proofing" metro Atlanta—Hickory Log Dam & Reservoir. Completed in 2010, the 950-foot wide, 180-foot high dam on this creek is the largest in Georgia not built by the Corps of Engineers or Georgia Power. Originally, projected as a $25 million project, by the time of its completion, costs had run over $100 million. The reservoir is considered a "pump-storage" facility meaning that water is pumped from the Etowah to fill the reservoir during times of high flows and then released as needed to supplement flows during the low flow periods on the Etowah, thus ensuring adequate river levels just downstream at the City of Canton's water intake pipes. The reservoir is also intended to regulate flows to Lake Allatoona where the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority (CCMWA) also withdraws water. From its inception, the project has stirred controversy and debate. The CCMWA is currently embroiled in a lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because the federal agency has denied the Authority the right to increase its water withdrawal from Lake Allatoona as a result of the "increased flows" generated by releases from Hickory Log. The Corps contends that Hickory Log does not create any new water; it merely diverts water that would otherwise flow into the lake already and thus, CCMWA cannot claim this water as their own. The state of Georgia has sided with CCMWA. The outcome of the case is still pending; seven years after its completion, the reservoir is still not being used as it was originally intended. Should the lawsuit prove unsuccessful, CCMWA has said it would need to construct a lengthy and very expensive pipeline to transport water directly from Hickory Log Reservoir to its treatment facilities in Cobb County. The headaches and costs associated with the Hickory Log project suggest that water efficiency measures might have been the way to go in the first place. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division estimates that conservation and efficiency measures cost from $0.46 to $250 for every 1000 gallons saved while building a reservoir can cost $4000 for every 1000 gallons. The intake pumps used to fill the reservoir are located just downstream of the I-575 bridge.

Mile 12—I-575—Completed between 1979 and 1990, this 31-mile highway cuts through the heart of Cherokee County and is largely responsible for the county's unbridled growth as a metro Atlanta bedroom community. In 1990, the county claimed a population of 90,000. Today, 236,000 people live here.