

Dawson Do-Si-Do

June 24

Distance: 15 miles

Starting Elevation: 1030 feet/N34 21.769 W84 07.916

Ending Elevation: 976 feet/N34 18.546 W84 13.272

Obstacles/Rapids: *****VERY IMPORTANT*****Strainers: Depending on water levels, these obstacles created by fallen trees that partially or wholly block the river's path, may be difficult to navigate. Some rules to live by...

1. Do not attempt to get in the water on the upstream side of these obstacles-especially in swift moving water. If you must get out to pull your boat over these obstacles, try to do so from the downstream side of the obstacle.
2. Do not approach these obstacles until the boat in front of you is safely through. Back paddle, find an eddy or move to the river bank to stop.

- Mile 0.25** **Sewer Authority Strainer**—The best route is on the far right side of the river next to the bank. Prepare to duck low.
- Mile 1** **Nuclear Intake Strainer**—Located at a former water intake (large concrete box structure on river left). This strainer blocks the entire river except for a narrow shoot on far river left. Again, duck and make yourself small and you should pass beneath.
- Mile 1.5** **Big Bad Blowdown**—Located just beyond a sharp bend to the right that follows an abandoned railroad bridge (concrete bridge piers on each bank of the river) This one large tree and accompanying detritus blocks the entire river. The best route is right down the middle. If water levels are low, it may be necessary to get out of your boat and pull the vessel over this blowdown. Though the water is shallow here and not very swift, please be careful getting out!
- Mile 2.5** **State Forest Strainer**—Located just downstream of second abandoned railroad bridge (concrete pier on each bank of the river)
- Mile 5** **Radioactive Rapid**—(**Rad Rapid**) A rock island/sandbar splits the river here. The first drop is at the top of the island; the second is at the bottom. Low water levels will force you to go left of the island and stay to the far left along the river bank. Through the first drop there is a narrow but straight shoot right next to the riverbank. Through the second drop you will follow the same route next to the river bank. Avoid going down the right side of the island. You'll likely get hung up on the ledges. If you don't want to run this rapid, pull up to the island and walk around it on the island.
- Mile 7** **Limbaugh's Rush**—You guessed it: stay to the right when you see this large rock island. Provided there's enough water, you can take the "moderate" approach and shoot between the two rocks located at the center of the river.
- Mile 11** **The Matrix Strainer**--Located beyond the rock bluff just downstream from the Riverbend Gun Club, this strainer consists of many partially submerged logs and limbs with several potential courses. The most likely route is down the center or to the right of center.

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Etowah Water & Sewer Authority
Mile 7.5 Kelly's Bridge
Mile 11 Riverbend Gun Club (questionable--look for instructions on day of paddle)
Mile 15 Nicholson Road

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Etowah Water & Sewer Authority—Fittingly, we begin our journey at the Etowah Water & Sewer Authority's wastewater treatment facility—a place where our dependence on the Etowah is most tangible. In addition to supplying 10 percent of Metro Atlanta's drinking water as well as supplies for Dawsonville and Rome, the Etowah serves as a waste repository for about a half million people. The EWSA facility treats about two million gallons a day through a land application system. After sewage is given primary treatment, the effluent is then sprayed on the land. The advantage of this system is that wastewater is not discharged directly to the river. The disadvantage is that less water is returned immediately to the river—an increasingly bigger concern as more and more people depend upon the river for drinking water as well as commercial and industrial applications.

Mile 1--Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area—Most of today's paddle flows through the 10,000-acre Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area. You'd hardly guess it from the looks of things today, but from 1956 until 1971, engineers with Lockheed Aircraft Corporation tried to build a nuclear-powered airplane at this site for the US Air Force. You'll see signs of this operation in the abandoned bridge piers at several sites on the river. Although the plane was a bust, other radioactive material related research was performed at Georgia Nuclear Aircraft Laboratory. In fact, low levels of radiation can still be found in three acres of the Forest. This area is restricted. The land is now owned by the City of Atlanta which purchased it with intentions of building a second Atlanta airport. The Georgia Forestry Commission manages the forest which includes 27 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails. Now, if we can convert the rest of our country's Cold War-era sites in the same manner...

Mile 6—Amicalola Creek—Sometimes referred to as the Amicalola River, this stream has its beginnings above Amicalola Falls. At 729-feet, Amicalola Falls is the tallest cascading waterfall east of the Mississippi. The river itself is a whitewater destination, and a local effort is underway to have 14 miles of the Amicalola (and 6.8 miles of the Etowah) designated a scenic river under Georgia's Scenic River Act. You'll hear more about this during our evening program on Sunday night.

Mile 8—Gold Mine Dredge—Just below Kelly's Bridge Road, you'll see a miniature dredge barge. This barge is used to suck sand and silt (and hopefully gold) from the river bottom. The Georgia Gold Prospectors Association operates two claims on the Etowah River. The group of 250 recreational prospectors holds regular outings on numerous claims in Georgia, including this one. The Etowah was the site of the country's first gold rush in 1828, and there's still gold in them thar hills. It's not uncommon for GGPA members to earn about \$32 a day using this dredge.

Mile 11—Riverbend Gun Club—Originally located on the Chattahoochee River in North Fulton County, the story of the Riverbend Gun Club is the story of Atlanta's sprawl. Upscale neighbors in North Fulton pushed their noisy neighbors north to Forsyth County where the suburbs moved in again, forcing RBGC to move further north to Dawson County. You'll likely hear some loud blasts—these are coming from the "Buffalo Rifles," original 1800s era black powder rifles. A special competition is scheduled for the day we'll pass through. Though the blasts sound awfully close, don't fret. All the shooting is on firing ranges facing opposite the river.

Mile 15—Remote Control Airplanes—First guns, now planes! If you hear a buzzing and see low flying planes, do not be alarmed, it is not the ghost of Lockheed's nuclear powered airplanes come to haunt the Dawson Forest. It's a local remote control plane airport where flying enthusiasts come to play with their flying machines over a pasture abutting the Etowah and Old Federal Road.

Mile 1-Mile 15—Endangered species--The section of the Etowah River you are paddling today is home to the endangered Etowah, Cherokee and Amber darters. These two to three-inch fish enjoy the fast-moving water and gravel, rock bottoms of the Etowah and its tributaries. Dams and sediment destroy their habitat. They are among the 30 endemic species (species found nowhere else in the world) that can be found only in the Upper Coosa River Basin.