

Dam to Dam Do-Si-Do – Paddle Georgia 2010

June 24 –Broad & Savannah Rivers

Distance: 14 miles

Starting Elevation: 200 feet

Ending Elevation: 160 feet

Obstacles:

Mile 12 Stevens Creek Dam—The portage location is on river right just before the dam.

Mile 14 Augusta Canal Dam—Our take out for the day is on river right—just to the right of the canal headgates. Avoid approaching the headgates and the lowhead dam. Strong currents can carry you into the headgate structure or over the dam.

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0 Porta Toilet at Clarks Hill Dam Boat Ramp

Mile 7 Flush toilets at Riverside Park. To get to the park paddle up “Little River” marked by buoy on river right before reaching Ga. 28 (Furrys Ferry Bridge). Paddle up Little River to the third buoy and turn left into an outlet to a backwater area. Follow signs to boat ramp. Toilets are located at the end of the parking area at boat ramp. It’s a 0.5 mile paddle, but hey, it’s flush toilets!

Mile 14 Flush toilets at Savannah Rapids Pavilion

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Clarks Hill Dam— Our journey for the day starts in the shadows of Clarks Hill Dam, built between 1946 and 1954. Congress originally authorized the dam and reservoir for the purposes of hydropower, flood control and navigation, but later added to recreation, water supply, water quality and fish and wildlife management to the list. Students of the ongoing water wars between Georgia, Alabama and Florida will note that congressionally authorized uses of Lake Lanier on the Chattahoochee do NOT include water supply and that omission is at the heart of legal battles between the states.

With its seven, 55,000 horsepower turbines, Clarks Hill Dam generates 700 million kilowatt hours of electricity each year, and its 1,000,000 cubic yards of concrete and more than three million pounds of reinforcing steel hold back a wall of water 180 feet high—keeping Augusta safe from floods. It is a marvel of mid 20th century engineering and undoubtedly an economic calling card for area communities. Lincoln County advertises itself as “Georgia’s Freshwater Coast.”

But beneath the gee whiz facts and the 71,000 acres of water, is the story of the people who once inhabited the land along the old Savannah. More than 2000 parcels of land were purchased by the Corps, forcing many families to sell and relocate. Some 1600 graves were removed and relocated before construction of the dam. Some landowners sold their eroded farmland and picked over timberland willingly; others left begrudgingly. Many were black tenant farmers who once the reservoir was completed would have access to the lake from segregated parks--Mistletoe and Keg Creek in Georgia and Baker Creek and Hickory Knob in South Carolina.

Named originally for the small South Carolina community of Clarks Hill, the Dam and Reservoir got a new name in 1988 as South Carolina legislators introduced and passed a bill in Congress to rename the lake in honor of Sen. Strom Thurmond, the long-time South Carolina Senator and former South Carolina Governor. Georgians were outraged. Georgia legislators made an unsuccessful attempt to change the name back to Clarks Hill, and ultimately the Georgia General Assembly passed a resolution making Clarks Hill the official state name for both the dam and reservoir. Thus, Georgia maps still refer to it as Clarks Hill. Of course, Georgia legislators took no issue with the naming of Richard Russell Dam & Reservoir just upstream. Russell is perhaps Georgia’s most famous Senator.

Mile 3—Sumter National Forest—From Clarks Hill Dam to Stevens Creek, the Long Cane District of the Sumter National Forest parallels the river on the South Carolina side. The District encompasses 120,000 acres. With the exception of a small riverfront development near Furrys Ferry Road Bridge, you’ll find the Carolina shore wooded and wild.

Mile 4—Germain Island—Begin looking for golf balls! The Champions Retreat Golf Course extends from the Georgia coast on to Germain Island and the fairways parallel the Savannah and “Little River”. The “Island Course” was designed by Arnold Palmer; Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus chipped in on the designs of the 18 other holes. Development of this community created a stir when the original plans showed homes and septic tanks located on the island. Developers ultimately abandoned these plans and developed only a portion of the island as a golf course. “Little River” is not actually a river, but rather a channel of the Savannah created by the massive two and a half mile long island. It is possible to hug the Georgia side of the river and paddle through Little River rather than following the main channel of the Savannah (this being a more direct route to the day’s pit stop).

Mile 7—Ga. 28 Georgia/South Carolina Border—This being the first Paddle Georgia to follow a course adjacent to a neighboring state, a word about state lines is in order. The stateline between Georgia and South Carolina runs down the center of the river, providing citizens on both states with access to the river; such is not the case with Georgia’s western border. When Georgia ceded its lands west of the Chattahoochee to the federal government in 1802, it did so only with the agreement that the stateline run along the western bank of the river. When Alabama became a state in 1819, its citizens found their access to the river limited. Lawsuits ensued, but ultimately, the Supreme Court sided with Georgia and to this day the welcome to Georgia signs sit on the western bank of the river. Of course, recently Georgia has made a bid to “correct” an inaccurate survey that placed the Tennessee-Georgia border further south than it should have been. Had the original 1818 survey been correct, Georgia would now have a portion of the Tennessee River flowing within its borders and an abundant supply of water for North Georgia. Thus, Georgia’s water grabs began from its birth and continue to this day.

Mile 12—Stevens Creek Dam—Built from 1912 to 1914 as a hydropower facility, Stevens Creek Dam is now operated by South Carolina Electric and Gas and generates 94 gigawatt hours of electricity each year. It also helps regulate the releases from Clarks Hill Dam upstream and water levels on its “run-of-the-river” reservoir can fluctuate as much as five feet daily. The second oldest of the Savannah’s six mainstem dams, it was a precursor to the great dam building era in the U.S. that stretched from the 1940s through the 1970s. When its turbines first went into operation, it was one of the sole sources of electricity in the area. Through the 1940s, dams produced more than 30 percent of our nation’s electricity. Today, hydroplants like Stevens Creek generate only seven percent of the nation’s supply. While the days of massive multi-purpose dams and reservoirs are likely over in Georgia, smaller water supply reservoirs still pose a threat to river systems, landowners, aquatic species and downstream communities. Worldwide, we will likely see many new dams. The U.S Geological Survey reports that two-thirds of the economically feasible hydro-power potential across the globe remains untapped, especially in Latin America, Africa, India and China. Stevens Creek includes a lock for passage of boats that functioned until the 1950s. Caution: Stevens Creek is a lowhead dam, meaning there is a risk of being washed over the dam—an outcome sure to result in serious injury or death. DO NOT approach the dam.

Mile 13—Stallings Island—Just below Stevens Creek Dam sits Stallings Island, one of the most significant archaeological sites in the Southeast. More than 3000 years ago, the 16-acre island was a gathering spot for a prehistoric culture that was drawn here by the abundance of freshwater mussels in the Savannah River. On the island, archaeologists have discovered a pile of mussel shells 12 feet tall, 500 feet wide and 1500 feet long, but Stallings is best known as the “birthplace” of pottery. Potsherds found on the island date back some 3700 years and are believed to be the oldest pottery in North America. The dawn of pottery—vessels to store foods and cook them—brought about sweeping cultural change. Traditional hunter/gatherer cultures morphed into settled societies that depended upon horticulture as much as what they could hunt and find on the landscape. The Island is owned by the Archaeological Conservancy which attempts to protect the island from looters and preserve the archaeological sites. To that end, local caretakers routinely patrol the site and keep a number of goats and donkeys on the island to control vegetation.