

Jaunt to Jesup—Paddle Georgia 2012

June 19—Altamaha River

Distance: 15 miles

Starting Elevation: 43 feet **Lat:** 31°47'6.27"N **Lon:** 81°58'59.35"W

Ending Elevation: 32 feet **Lat:** 31°40'0.88"N **Lon:** 81°50'40.75"W

Restroom Facilities:

Mile 0	Upper Wayne County Landing
Mile 9	Oglethorpe Bluff Landing
Mile 15	Jaycees Landing

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Tar Landing—Upper Wayne County Landing sits near what is known as Tar Landing, the site of the first commercial turpentine mill in Georgia from 1858 to 1861. Here, casks of turpentine were loaded on to boats bound for Darien. Turpentine harvesting in the area's piney woods has supported generations of South Georgians. Originally, the gum from pines was of value in waterproofing and sealing wooden ships, thus the turpentine industry came to be known as the Naval Stores Industry. However, the product is also used as a thinner for paints and in lubricants, ointments, medicines, soaps and even crayons. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Georgia was the world leader in turpentine production, but today there are no commercial turpentine operations in the state. The last "Miss Spirits of Turpentine," (a beauty pageant sponsored by the Georgia-based American Turpentine Farmer's Association) was crowned in 1995 and in 2001 the last bucket of Georgia pine gum was drawn. Today, petroleum-based turpentines and gum from Brazil, Portugal, China, and Indonesia dominate the market.

Mile 2—Beards Bluff & Ft. James—On river left here is Beard's Bluff and the former site of Adamson's Fish Camp, a now defunct commercial operation that served the recreational needs of river users. Two hundred years ago the scene here was much different for this is one possible site of Ft. James, a frontier fort, built in the 1790s and maintained for about 20 years. Ft. James served as a trading and diplomatic post where military leaders settled disputes between early settlers and the Indian population. Its exact location is not known, though some historians place it at what is now Upper Wayne County Landing.

Mile 4.5—Strickland Bight (A Guide to the Altamaha's Bights, Rounds, Reaches & Other Odd Names of Navigation)—Fishing cabins crowd the low bluff at Strickland Bight—a common site on these oddly named bends. From here to Darien, the Altamaha is laced with names that conjure up images of steamboats and lumber rafts. The following is a guide to this unique lexicon so that as you travel down river you can, with the authority of seasoned rafter, refer to a "bend" as a "bight" and a "straightaway" as a "reach:"

Bight—A bend or curve in the shore of a sea or river

Round—A circling or circuitous path or course. Thus, you'll see this to label the circuitous routes the river takes through sinuous oxbows as in Marrowbone Round (just around the next bend...or round...or bight. If you prefer)

Reach—A straight portion of a river or stream as in Yankee Reach (just beyond Marrowbone Round)

Drift—A mass of matter (such as sand) deposited by wind or water, but the word "drift" is often used to label long, straight stretches of the Altamaha.

Swift—Webster's doesn't place a definition for swift suitable for its use on Altamaha River maps. It is safe to say a swift is a narrow passage where the river's flow is constricted and fast-moving, as when the river forms a new path, cutting off an oxbow.

Slough—Here's a word that just doesn't get any respect. Among Webster's definitions..."a place of deep mud or mire" and "a state of moral degradation or spiritual dejection" On the Altamaha, however, a slough is a backwater or inlet to the river. Of course, these are also sometime labeled as "lakes" on river maps. But, for sure the sloughs are also places of mud and mire (and a great place to find mussels!)

Mile 5.5—Marrowbone Round Cutoff—Poor Marrowbone Round...such a great name and thanks to the Altamaha's wandering ways, no longer a part of the river. A cutoff has left this sweeping "round" to become just another oxbow lake.

Mile 7—Yankee Reach

Mile 9—Oglethorpe Bluff

Mile 10—Alligators—Warning: when you set foot on the Altamaha, you are no longer at the top of the food chain. In these waters lurk creatures that are larger than you and can eat you. This is an unsettling thought, for sure, but occasionally, we need to be put in our place. During scouting trips, we ran into dozens of alligators, including a young four-footer basking on a log beneath Oglethorpe Bluff. That said, an unpleasant encounter with an alligator is unlikely. From 1980-2001, there were only eight reported cases of alligator attacks on humans in Georgia and none of these resulted in fatalities. Six of these incidents happened as a result of the human stepping on or otherwise contacting a submerged alligator. The remaining two incidents were a result of the alligator mistaking the human for prey.

We'll be paddling through their habitat during the nesting season (late June/early July) during which time the females build nests out of marsh grass and other vegetation and lay between 20 and 60 eggs. The mother then defends the nest against predators throughout the 65-day incubation period. Thus, should you happen upon something that looks like a nest, do not disturb it. You don't want to be caught on the wrong end of an angry mama gator.

These additional words of warning will help you avoid unpleasant alligator encounters: 1. Keep your distance—at least 60 feet from an adult alligator. They are extremely powerful and can move with a startling burst of speed on land over short distances. 2. Do not attempt to capture baby alligators. Mama may be watching you and decide to take action. 3. Keep children away from alligators. When they are hungry, alligators act on their hunting instinct. 4. Don't swim in areas that are known alligator habitats. Always be careful around water. Splashing can attract alligators that think a prey animal is injured...and last but not least, 5. Don't feed alligators...because it's just a stupid idea.

In defense of the alligator, this prehistoric reptile is one of our keystone species. They help maintain the population balance of certain prey species and they help shape and modify habitats. During times of severe drought, alligators are known to dig holes (gator holes) to concentrate water. This helps the alligator survive, and helps many other species of plants and animals in the area

Mile 11—Hughes Old River

Mile 12—Coon Island

Mile 14.5—Bugg's Bluff

Mile 15—Jaycees Landing & Jesup—This popular boat landing includes restrooms and bait and tackle store stocked with cold drinks. This landing received a recent upgrade as part of Gov. Sonny Perdue's much ridiculed "Go Fish Georgia" initiative. The "mega ramp" that allows multiple vehicles and boat trailers access to the landing was completed in 2011 at a cost of \$400,000. A marker overlooking the river next to the boat ramp honors the U.S.S. Altamaha, a World War II aircraft carrier named in honor of the river. The Altamaha and her crew of more than 900 seamen served in the Pacific during the war, hunting for Japanese submarines and harassing supply ships. Ironically, after serving the U.S. Navy in World War II, she was sold and eventually scraped in 1961...in, of all places, Japan. Jesup, the town that timber and railroads built, is located just four miles south of the landing on U.S. 25. On the way to our campsite, you will pass the Rayonier Pulp Mill, Wayne County's largest commercial employer, which converts pine pulp into the raw materials for oil and air filters, disposable diapers and even flat screen TVs. From Wayne County's beginnings, timber has driven the local economy, and still today half the wages earned in the county come from manufacturing—most of those are associated with the timber industry.