

Tailwaters Tango– Paddle Georgia 2014

June 21—Chattahoochee River

Distance: 15 miles

Starting Elevation: 915 feet Lat: 34.0984°N Lon: -84.1097°W

Ending Elevation: 912 feet Lat: 34.0015°N Lon: -84.2347°W

Restroom Facilities: **Mile 0** Settles Bridge
 Mile 9.1 Abbotts Bridge Unit CRNRA
 Mile 15 Jones Bridge Unit CRNRA

Points of Interest:

Mile 0—Settles Bridge Unit Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA)—Built in 1896, this Pratt metal truss bridge was typical of that period and based on a design patented by Thomas and Caleb Pratt in 1844. It was abandoned as a thoroughfare from Gwinnett to Forsyth counties in the 1950s. Facilities at this park include a parking area and canoe/kayak launch.

Mile 0.7—Fish Weir—Built by Native Americans, the linear rock shoal here (only visible in low water) was once used to capture fish. Traditionally, a line of people would walk in the shallow water upstream of the dam, spooking fish to the point of the dam where a basket awaited to collect the fish. The National Parks Service has documented 11 historic fish traps within the 48 miles between Buford Dam and Peachtree Creek. We'll float over several of them during the next three days.

Mile 2—Proposed Re-regulation Dam—In 1986, Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to construct a dam at this site to assure water supply to metro Atlanta and meet minimum flow targets downstream. However, studies predicted both high costs and environmental impacts and in 1989, the Corps scuttled it in favor of reallocating more of Lake Lanier for metro's water supply. That decision touched off the water war dispute between Georgia, Alabama and Florida that remains unresolved to this day.

Mile 3.5—Trout Sluice—The pipe on river right is used by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to stock 200,000 rainbow, brown and, on occasion, brook trout each year between Buford Dam and Peachtree Creek.

Mile 4.1—Bank Robbery Getaway—Now spanned by the modern steel and concrete bridge on McGinnis Ferry Road, this is the site of a great bank robbery getaway in the early 20th century. Two thieves who'd just robbed a Gwinnett County bank made their escape across the bridge here. Upon reaching the Fulton County side, they reportedly stopped, hopped out and tossed the timber planks of the bridge into the river, rendering the bridge impassable and securing their escape from Gwinnett County authorities. A boat ramp and parking area provide access to the river on river right upstream of the bridge.

Mile 4.6—State Record Brown Trout—Near this site on November 12, 2001, Charlie Ford of Rome caught the state-record brown trout. The fish weighed 18 pounds, 6 ounces...and really, it should have never been found in the Chattahoochee. Brown trout are not native to Georgia waters and were never found on the river here prior to 1957 when Buford Dam was completed. But, the cold water coming from the bottom of Lake Lanier has created a haven for state-stocked brown and rainbow trout, and thus one of the most popular spots in the state for anglers wanting to catch them. The stocking program began in 1962, and the Chattahoochee has proven to be highly hospitable, especially to brown trout. A DNR study, begun in 2005, determined that a sustainable wild population of reproducing brown trout had been established in the river and in 2011 DNR announced that it would cease stocking the fish between Buford Dam and the Ga. 400 bridge near Roswell.

Mile 5.8—Abandoned Gwinnett County Water Intake—The structure on river left is a former water intake for Gwinnett County. This site was abandoned when the county moved its primary water withdrawal upstream to Lake Lanier. Lake Lanier serves the county's 824,000 residents with about 75 million gallons a day.

Mile 7.1—Rogers Bridge—Rogers Bridge is named for John Rogers, an early settler of the area who married Sarah Cordery, the daughter of a Cherokee mother and European father in 1802. Together, John and Sarah raised 12 children along the river here, maintaining a 325-acre farm and operating a ferry across the river. According to local historian Don Shadburn, Rogers and his family originally lived on the east side of the river, but around 1819 moved their home down river on logs and reconstructed it on the west bank in Cherokee territory. The home still stands today in the town of Johns Creek. Rogers Bridge was the last operating metal truss bridge between Buford Dam and Atlanta, carrying cars across the river into the late 1970s.

Mile 9.1—Abbotts Bridge Unit CRNRA—Our pit stop for the day, complete with flush toilets, located up the boat ramp! The park also has picnic tables and shelters.

Mile 11.2—Fish Weir

Mile 13—Medlock Bridge Unit CRNRA—No toilets at this unit of the recreation area, but the park does have walking trails along the river and picnic areas. Paddle Georgia 2005 alumni will remember this site as one of our crowded launch sites/take outs.

Mile 13.9—Dean Gardens—On river right stands Dean Gardens, a 32,000 square-foot neoclassical mansion built between 1988 and 1992 by Larry Dean, a man who made a mint developing data processing software. In a river corridor flush with upscale homes, this one stands alone. It cost \$25 million to build as Dean spared no expense (he appointed one bathroom with an \$80,000 24K gold sink). Shortly after its completion, Dean and his wife divorced and soon thereafter the mega-mansion went on the market where it stayed for more than 15 years. Once listed at \$40 million, the estate sold in 2010 to actor/director/comedian Tyler Perry for \$7.6 million who soon announced that he would raze the estate and build a new home on the site. Before leaving, Dean sold off the estate's contents (including the gold sink). Both men were attracted to the site largely because of its proximity to the river. In 2011, the Atlanta Business Chronicle reported: "one of the biggest selling points for Dean Gardens was not the house, but the land on which it sits. The property, which includes 1,200 feet of Chattahoochee River frontage, could qualify for as much as \$10 million in tax breaks by setting up a conservation easement that bars development of the acreage's green spaces."

Mile 14.3—Fulton County Water Intake—This pumping station on river right supplies water to Fulton County residents. Fulton (including the City of Atlanta) uses about 180 million gallons a day. Local water planners expect that demand to grow beyond 280 million by 2050. The 15-county metro Atlanta area pumps about 450 million gallons a day (MGD) from the Chattahoochee and returns about 300 MGD via the area's many sewer treatment facilities. To provide some perspective, during the height of the 2008 drought, average flows on the Chattahoochee at Peachtree Creek in Atlanta dipped to just 608 MGD. So, while the region has experienced abundant rains recently, more droughts and the pressing need for water efficiency and conservation efforts looms. When it comes to water, metro Atlanta is a victim of its own prosperity and geography. The booming city of the South is located at a high elevation just 80 miles from the mountain spring that starts the Chattahoochee, and no other major city in the U.S. must depend upon a smaller river for its primary water supply. Unlike other metropolitan areas on the Atlantic seaboard that grew up around ports on large bodies of water (think New York, Philadelphia and Boston), Atlanta owes its origins and prosperity to a railroad terminus (and later an airport). In fact, among the country's other major metro areas, only Denver, Colorado sits at a higher elevation than Atlanta. With 5.5 million thirsty residents, many a pundit has quipped that Atlanta doesn't have a water problem; instead it has a people problem.

Mile 15---Jones Bridge Unit CRNRA—The rusting bridge just upstream of our take out location on river right dates to 1904 when it connected Gwinnett with the now defunct Milton County. It had a short life. It fell into disrepair in the 1920s and with the Great Depression gripping the country in the 1930s neither of the county governments could pay for repairs. In 1945 a crew arrived at the site (with a crane and other heavy equipment) and began dismantling the bridge. Questioned by local residents, the men claimed to be working for Gwinnett County. Gwinnett officials did not discover the ruse until half the bridge was gone. The thieves, cashing in on the high steel prices during World War II, were never apprehended. The Jones Bridge Unit of the CRNRA lies on river right, while Gwinnett County's Jones Bridge Park occupies the left bank. Our take out for the day is the first boat ramp on river right. A short walk downstream along trails will take you to restrooms and shuttle buses.