

# Return to Eden— Paddle Georgia 2015

June 25—Ogeechee River

**Distance:** 12 miles

**Starting Elevation: 46 feet Lat: 32.1896°N Lon: -81.4159°W**

**Ending Elevation: 23 feet Lat: 32.0800°N Lon: -81.3851°W**

**Restroom Facilities:**

<b>Mile 0</b>	Dasher's Landing
<b>Mile 5.5</b>	Ogeechee Canoe & Kayak
<b>Mile 12</b>	Ga. 204

## **Point of Interest:**

**Mile 0—Dasher's Landing**—Our launch site sits near the former site of a fish camp started in the 1920s by Claude and Sally Dasher. The Dashers began with a bait shop, but by the 1930s, the business had expanded to include a restaurant, dance hall and gas station. The dance hall was a large wooden structure built on piers near the river, and just west of it along the road was a two-story brick building that served as the restaurant. Like many similar spots along the Ogeechee, the camp was a popular spot for family reunions and civic gatherings. In 1935 legendary Georgia Gov. Eugene Talmadge visited. The camp operated until the early 1970s.

**Mile 0.4—Shad, America's Lost Fish**—When Gov. Eugene Talmadge visited Dasher's Landing in 1935, there's a strong chance he dined on shad. From colonial days until the mid-1900s, this migrating fish, the salmon of the Atlantic coast, was a staple on the menus of east coast restaurants—including those along the Ogeechee. In fact, shad played such a pivotal role in the colonization of North America that Pulitzer-prize winning author, John McPhee, wrote an entire book about the fish, dubbing it "America's Founding Fish." It is said that George Washington's starving army at Valley Forge fed on the fish as they made their early spring spawning run up the Schuylkill River in 1778; a fortuitous gift from nature that helped sustain the Revolution. The fish would go on to become one of the most commercially valuable fish on the East Coast. The fish was held in such high esteem that some individuals went to great lengths to establish shad fisheries on inland waterways draining to the Gulf of Mexico. In 1848, a Dr. William Daniel who dwelled on the Savannah River, shipped what he believed to be fertilized shad eggs to Mark Cooper, who operated an iron furnace along the Etowah River near present day Cartersville, instructing Cooper to deposit the eggs in a nearby stream. Sadly, the shad's story is one of a fish that was partially loved to death. Beginning around 1900, annual harvests began to decline steadily. Fishermen in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia harvested 17.5 million pounds at the turn of the century, but by the 1970s that bounty had dwindled to 2 million pounds annually. The catch from the Ogeechee and Georgia's other coastal rivers declined similarly. In 2014, Georgia closed the commercial shad fishery on the Ogeechee. The demise of this iconic American fish is blamed on overfishing, pollution and dams that block routes to the fishes' ancient inland spawning grounds. While populations have declined, so has the American appetite for the fish. Though the fish's mild, sweet flesh was once a staple on American tables, (the fish's latin name means "savory") shad are considered too bony and oily for today's palates. Thus, due to its lack of commercial appeal in today's market, the loss of this fish has gone largely unnoticed (though shad roe is a delicacy stilled served in fine restaurants). A recovery program is currently underway on the Ogeechee, funded by lawsuits stemming from the 2011 fish kill caused by discharges from the King America textile plant. Georgia's Department of Natural Resources is in the midst of a five-year program in which they will stock 500,000 shad fry annually in hopes of restoring historic populations. Though the Ogeechee's commercial shad fishery is gone, recreational anglers still flock to the river during the fish's spring run. Shad, which can grow to two feet in length and up to seven pounds, are tremendous jumpers and fighters, earning them the nickname "poor man's tarpon."



**Mile 1.8—Cut Through & Eden**—On river right here is an oxbow that has been cut off. On river left due east one mile is the community of Eden. Originally a stagecoach stop, in the 1830s, it became a stop on the Central of Georgia Railroad. During the Civil War, Union and Confederate soldiers battled one another across the swampy mile-long stretch of land between today's launch site and the rail station at Eden. Union soldiers successfully crossed the Ogeechee on pontoons, pushing the rebels back toward Eden, but not without costs. In a story titled "A Soldier Saint" written in 1899 for the Iowa Historical Record, veteran Hiram Heaton, a soldier in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iowa Infantry, recalled the death of fellow soldier Lyman Steadwell. Hiram served with Steadwell and the two conversed on the south bank of the Ogeechee as the troops waited for the completion of the pontoon bridge: "He spoke of his army life: that he was glad he enlisted, that he had done the best he could and would still do his duty as far as he might be able to." Hours later, after crossing the river, Steadwell was shot dead. Wrote Hiram: "Lyman Steadwell was barely eighteen years old when his young life went out for the Union. In an unknown grave by the dark flowing Georgia River lies the dust of as pure minded a saint as ever walked this blood stained earth."

**Mile 4.9—CSX Shortline & Statesboro and Savannah Railroad**—The railroad trestle here operated by CSX is a portion of the company's 21,000 miles of rail stretching across 23 states and Canada. A railroad bridge at this location dates to 1890 with the construction of the Savannah & Western Railroad. This line also connected Savannah to Statesboro via a spur that connected with the Savannah & Western at Cuyler just west of the river here. Completed between 1897 and 1899, the Savannah & Statesboro line ran 32 miles from Cuyler to Statesboro and operated until 1933. In 1929, the 32-mile ride from Savannah to Statesboro took 2-3 hours.

**Mile 5.5—Ogeechee Canoe & Kayak**—Pit Stop and launch site for this Ogeechee River canoe and kayak outfitter.

**Mile 5.7—I-16**—This 167-mile freeway runs from Macon to Savannah and spans three of Georgia's major watersheds, the Ocmulgee (in Macon), the Oconee (in Dublin) and the Ogeechee. It was constructed between 1972 and 1978, and in 2003, the Georgia General Assembly named the road "Jim Gillis Historic Savannah Parkway" in honor of the former state senator and first highway commissioner for the state of Georgia. Jim Gillis, Sr.'s father was also a state senator and his sons, Jim, Jr. and Hugh both served in the legislature. Hugh was the longest serving member of the legislature when he retired in 2004. He served as a representative and senator from Soperton from 1941 to 2004. In his address to the Senate upon his retirement at the age of 85, he said, "I'm going to miss you, but it's time to go fishing."

**Mile 7.3—Swallowtail Kites**—Perhaps the most beautiful raptor of the southeast, these elegant fliers can be spotted soaring above riverside forests. They are easily identified by their pointed, swallow-like tail, white head and body, and black wings and tail. They rarely flap their wings in flight, but continuously use their graceful tail to make sharps turns, hold a heading or trace tight circles. They feed on insects, lizards, frogs and other tree-dwelling creatures, and unlike other raptors that find perches to devour their prey, the swallowtail often consumes its catch in flight. Look for them soaring above the floodplain forests. If you find one, enjoy the show; their aerobatics are a thrill to watch.



**Mile 12.1—Ogeechee Outpost**—Canoe and kayak outfitter operating from Morgan's Bridge.

**Mile 12.1—Morgans Bridge & The Great Ogeechee Raft Race**—Morgans Bridge is notable as the setting for one of the scenes in the 1962 movie, Cape Fear, starring Gregory Peck and Robert Mitchum. At that time, the original Morgans Bridge still stood, a bridge described as rickety, wooden and eerie—the perfect setting for the suspense thriller. Though many of the outdoor scenes were shot in the Savannah area, some of the pivotal scenes were instead shot outdoors in California because Mitchum had an aversion to Savannah. During his youth, he was charged with vagrancy and did time on a chain gang there. The bridge is also notable as the starting line for the Savannah Jaycees' Great Ogeechee Raft Race that was held annually during the 1970s. An imitator of Atlanta's "Ramblin' Raft Race" on the Chattahoochee, it was wildly popular, but like the annual debauchery on the Chattahoochee it came to an ignoble end. Too many drunks and too much brawling and litter prompted the Jaycees to shutter the event in the early 1980s. The new bridge here was built in the 1970s.

