

# Lake Jackson Jive—Paddle Georgia 2018

June 19—Yellow River

**Distance:** 6 miles

**Starting Elevation:** 549 feet **Lat:** 33.455909°N, **Lon:** , -83.879798°W

**Ending Elevation:** 528 feet **Lat:** 33.379068°N, **Lon:** -83.873335°W

**Restroom Facilities:**     **Mile 0**           Bert Adams Scout Camp  
                                  **Mile 6**           Walker Marina

## **Points of Interest:**

**Mile 0.1—Webb’s Bridge**—Now the Ga. 212 bridge, in the 1800s, the bridge that spanned the river here was known as Webb’s Bridge. Augustus James Webb, a farmer from the Rocky Plains area, and his wife, Talitha Wright, reared eight children in this portion of Newton County between 1846 and 1867.

**Mile 1.8—Lee Shoals**—Though not visible today, these shoals are noted in an 1885 Georgia Department of Agriculture publication as a potential location for developing water-powered industry. They were described as having a fall of 4 feet over a distance of 1,400 feet. It was one Yellow River shoal that never was harnessed. Others on the Yellow and its tributaries certainly were. The Commonwealth of Georgia: The Country; The People; The Productions gives a full description of Gwinnett, DeKalb, Rockdale and Newton counties, including the numerous industries, most of which were powered by water: “The four counties through which the river flows had in 1880 a population of 54,489... There were 233 manufacturing establishments of all kinds... producing articles valued at \$1,083,252. In addition to these there are... the Covington Cotton Mills at Cedar Shoals and the Sheffield Cotton Mills operating 3,160 spindles. Embraced in the manufacturing establishments above are 67 flour and grist mills, 44 saw mills... and the Rockdale paper mill is located on Yellow River.” Today 1.9 million people live in those same four counties.

**Mile 3—Allen Shoals**—Circa 1880s surveys of the river note that this shoal created a drop of 2 feet over a length of 400 feet and was once the site of a mill. The shoals now lie beneath the backwaters of Lake Jackson.

**Mile 3.9—Allen’s Bridge & John Williams**— In February 1921, this bridge (only its supports and a pier remain), then known as Allen’s Bridge, was the scene of one of the most horrific murders in Georgia history. Once exposed, the story laid bare the widespread and illegal practice of peonage on Georgia farms, a system that kept many blacks in slavery well into the 20th century. In the years following the Civil War, thousands of former slaves found themselves jailed, many on charges of vagrancy, for state laws required black men to be employed. An idle black man was sure to be incarcerated. With no means to post bail or pay their fines, these men languished in jail unless a “benefactor” paid their fine. The “benefactor” then took the freed prisoner and required him to work off the fine on the plantation. Common practice was to keep the men in debt slavery indefinitely. Such was the case on the plantation of John Williams in Jasper County. When federal investigators, tipped off to the illegal activity, paid Williams a visit and asked pointed questions of Williams and his black workers, Williams panicked. Fearing he would be discovered, he systematically killed 11 of his workers, forcing his black foreman, Clyde Manning, to commit the murders. The first two to die were chained together, weighted with sacks of rocks around their necks and forced over the rail of Allen’s Bridge. The completion of Lloyd Shoals Dam a decade earlier had turned these rivers wider and deeper, and to Williams’ line of thinking, the ideal place to dispose of bodies. Another of his men was chained and forced off the bridge over the South River the same night. Two more met a similar fate in the Alcovy arm of the lake the next evening. When the bodies were discovered, the trail ran back to Williams and Manning who were both arrested for murder. In that era, the murder of black men was not usually noted in newspapers, but the heinous nature of these crimes attracted national attention and the attention of prominent progressive white Atlantans who would pay not only for the defense of Manning but also for additional attorneys to assist the local prosecutor seeking conviction of Williams. At trial in Covington, an all-white jury found Williams’ guilty of murder. The verdict marked the first time since 1877 that a Southern white man was convicted of first-degree murder of a black man or woman. Even more compelling was the fact that he was convicted primarily on the testimony of a black man. While newspapers hailed the justice wrought in the Newton County Courthouse, and Gov. Hugh Dorsey issued an anti-peonage proclamation, little changed. Peonage persisted and it would be 45 years before another white man was convicted of murdering a black man in the South. Perhaps the most revealing story of the virulent racism of that era was a letter from Williams’ pastor in Monticello published in the *Atlanta Constitution*. Far from defending Williams, the pastor called for justice. Yet in the same breath he attacked the press for vilifying Jasper County as a den of peonage and murder. The man of the cloth concluded that Williams would get a “fair and impartial trial by a set of twelve men of the old Anglo-Saxon strain of blood, unmixed by any foreign element whatsoever, and I know of no better people on earth.”

**Mile 4.4—Lake Jackson**—At this bend, the river begins its spread behind circa-1911 Lloyd Shoals Dam. When it was built, the 100-foot-tall dam was among the largest in the U.S., and brought electric light to surrounding communities, but for many its construction was more curse than blessing, and in at least one instance, the curse was of biblical proportions. In the years immediately following the filling of the lake, the surrounding land was beset by a plague of frogs. Said one local resident: “I’ve seen so many frogs on this road out here that you could look down and see the black streak where a car, wagon or something went along and killed them.” More troublesome was an outbreak of malaria attributed to the expansive lake. Several residents died and others abandoned their farms and homes to escape the threat. Already angered by being forced to sell their prime farmland along the Yellow, South and Alcovy rivers, Newton County residents fought back against the Central Georgia Power Company with a local Grand Jury indicting the company for failure to clear the reservoir area properly, and other residents suing to have the reservoir drained. A letter to the editor published in the Covington News called the dam builders “norther capitalists” and railed, “This cruel corporation comes along and takes their (residents’) homes and orders them to move out. Those who have been brave to stay are paying for it with sickness and death. Where does justice and right come in, my people?... There is but one remedy. The reservoir must be drained.” Of course, it was not. Today the dam still stands, generating electricity for Georgia Power Co. The reservoir, with 135 miles of shoreline and a maximum depth of 98 feet, spreads over more than 4,700 acres of former farmland and forest, hosts hundreds of lakefront homes and serves as a recreational mecca for the area.

**Mile 5.3—Indian Fishery Shoals**—Buried beneath the water of Lake Jackson is this shoal, described in 1896 as having a fall of 12 feet over a length of 550 feet. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the falls powered a grist mill and cotton gin here.

**Mile 5.8—South River**—Probably no other river in Georgia has been more maligned—and continues to be—than the South. In the 1880s, it became the City of Atlanta’s first sewer when workers ditched the spring that gives rise to the river, lined it with rocks, covered it, and began piping to it the waste from the city’s affluent homes with flush toilets. By 1890, the city was home to 2,829 flush toilets, many of which emptied directly to the South. More than 100 years later, it still is plagued by sewer leaks and combined sewer overflows during storm events. Earlier this year, the South River Watershed Alliance asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to investigate the County’s failure to meet the requirements of a consent decree aimed at eliminating pollution of the river. The other problem stemming from this heavily-urbanized river is the large volume of floating litter it carries. The Jackson Lake Association recently secured a \$75,000 grant, and is in the process of raising another \$25,000 to install a floating litter trap (manufactured by Paddle Georgia sponsor, Storm Water Solutions) in the river to collect and remove this debris. Donations to the effort can be made at [www.jlha.org](http://www.jlha.org)

**Mile 6.5—Walker Marina & Alcovy River**—Our take out lies just one mile above the confluence of the Yellow and Alcovy rivers and the beginning of the Ocmulgee River. From here the Ocmulgee flows some 255 miles to join the Oconee and form the Altamaha, which winds 137 miles to the Georgia coast at Darien.