"Georgia's canoeing and kayaking bible"—*Georgia River Network*

CANOEING & KAYAKING GEORGIA

3RD EDITION

Suzanne Welander
Bob Sehlinger

MENASHA RIDGE PRESS
Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS *(continued)*

Canoeing & Kayaking Georgia

USING THE RIVER-LOCATOR MAP

Use the locator map on page x to find Georgia river segments grouped by difficulty level into six categories:

- **Tidal and Smoothwater Rivers** have the calmest waters and easiest paddling.
- **Class I Rivers** are generally smooth, with occasional areas of fast current and/or a rare Class I shoal.
- **Mild Whitewater** comprises mostly smooth stretches punctuated by spots of Class I and II difficulty. Rapids of higher difficulty may also be present, but these can usually be portaged.
- **Moderate Whitewater** presents a more consistent difficulty level, with Class II or Class III rapids. Again, rapids of higher difficulty (where present) can generally be portaged.
- **Challenging Whitewater** includes Class III–IV creeks and rivers, some with continuous whitewater and some with a drop-and-pool character. Portaging is generally possible, but it may be difficult and require additional gear.
- **Expert Runs** are Class V rivers and creeks, many in extremely remote settings where portages and rescues can be very difficult.

All categories may include dams or blockages that required portaging. See "Rating the River" (page 2) to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulty classes and the skills required. The numbers on the map correspond those in the River-Locator Map Key (pages ix and xi) and also reference each river's page number within the book. Read the full river description to tailor your trip to meet your needs.

This book lets you tailor any multitude of trips of varied character and length, but these suggested runs can get you started. Distances, recommended water levels, character, and other trip-planning details are listed in each river's description.

In the lists that follow, difficulty ratings in parentheses—for example, "Class I–II **(II+)**"—indicate occasional areas of greater difficulty that are not generally characteristic of the run. See "Rating the River" (page 2) for more information.

NOVICE MOVING WATER

These easily accessible runs are pleasant and uncomplicated.

- **Chattahoochee River (Metro Atlanta)** from Johnson Ferry Road to Powers Island; Class I
- **Chestatee River** from Appalachian Outfitters to Lumpkin Launch; Class I+
- **Hudson River** from US 29 to Broad River Outfitters; Class I–II
- **Chattooga River (section II);** Class I–II (II+)
- **Etowah River (Dawson Forest section)** from GA 9 to Kelly Bridge Road; Class I+
- **Ocmulgee River** from GA 96 to Twiggs County Road 90; Class I
- **Tallapoosa River** from US 78 to Lazy River Rentals on Doe Valley Drive; Class I+
- **Withlacoochee River** from Knights Ferry to Nankin; Class I+
- **Yellow River** from Five Forks Trickum to US 78; Class I+

CLASSIC WHITEWATER

The following runs are favorites of Georgia's whitewater paddlers.

- **Amicalola Creek (upper);** Class I–II+
- **Broad River;*** Class II (III)
- **Cartecay River;*** Class II–III
- **Chattahoochee River (Metro Atlanta)** from Powers Island to Paces Mill; Class II
- **Chattahoochee River (upper);*** Class II (II+)
- **Chattooga River;*** Class II to Class IV–V
- **Etowah River (upper);** Class II–IV
- **Flint River*** from GA 16 to GA 36; Class II
- **Hiwassee River, TN;*** Class II
- **Ocoee River, TN;** Class III–IV
- **Tallulah Gorge;** Class V
- **Toccoa River;*** Class II (II+)

**Outfitter service available; see Appendix B (page 412) for details.*

REMOTE WILDERNESS

These runs are isolated and far from roads.

- **Canoochee River (Fort Stewart section);** Class I
- **Chattooga River;** Class II–V
- **Conasauga River** above US 411; Class II–IV+
- **Jacks River;** Class III–V
- **Lazer Creek;** Class I–II
- **Little River Canyon, AL;** Class III and Class IV–V
- **Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge;** Class I
- **Overflow Creek;** Class V
- **Toccoa River (USFS section);** Class II (II+)

OTHER SECLUDED RUNS

These trips are forested and private, but they're not as remote as the ones in the previous list.

- **Alapaha River;** Class I–II
- **Amicalola Creek;** Class I–II+ and Class III–IV
- **Broad River** from GA 77 to GA 17; Class I
- **Chattahoochee River** above Helen; Class III–IV
- **Little River of Southern Georgia;** Class I
- **Little Ocmulgee River** from Scotland to Towns; Class I
- **Ocmulgee River** from Lloyd Shoals Dam to Wise Creek; Class II (III)
- **Ocmulgee River** below Macon; Class I
- **Ogeechee River** near Louisville; Class I
- **Suwannee River** from Suwannee Sill to Fargo; Class I
- **Warwoman Creek;** Class III+
- **West Fork of the Chattooga River;** Class I–II

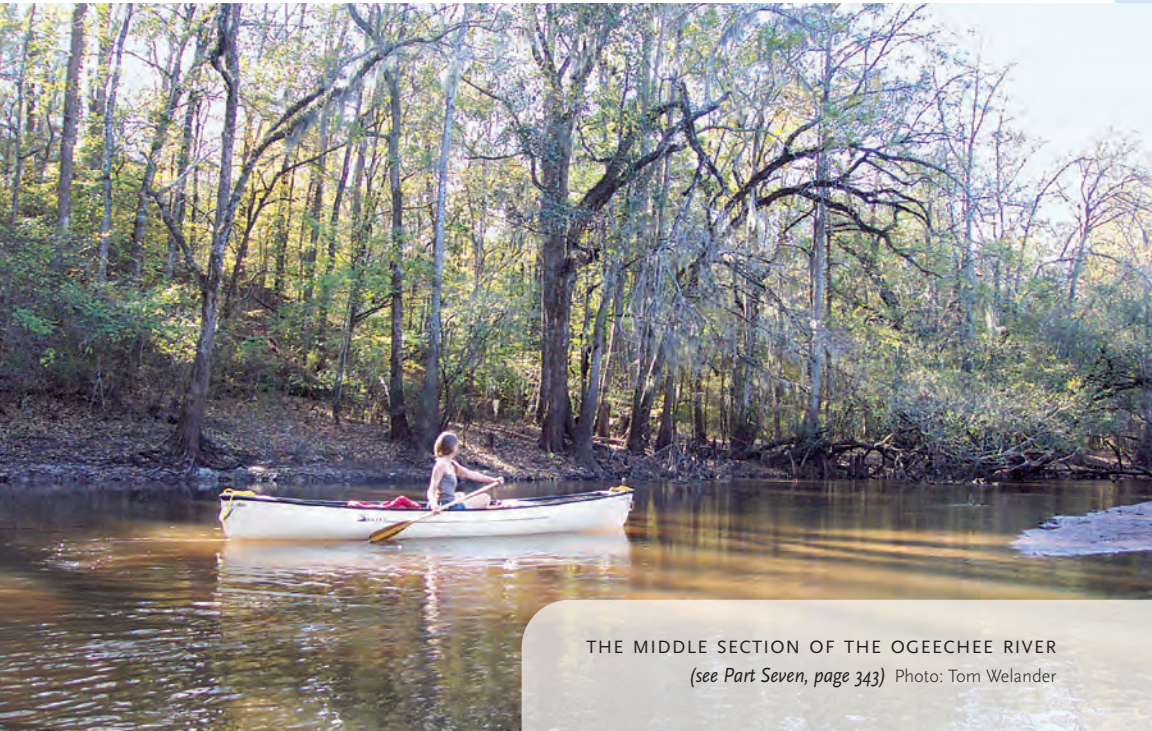
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guidebook is packed with the details paddlers need to plan a trip on Georgia's rivers, as well as a noteworthy few in neighboring states. River profiles are grouped into chapters by their watershed: **Savannah, Tennessee, Coosa, Chattahoochee, Flint, Altamaha,** and other streams to the **Atlantic Ocean** and the **Gulf of Mexico.** Each chapter begins with the rivers in the upper reaches of the watershed and moves downstream.

Each river's description is broken into segments (also called sections) according to difficulty level. These river sections can be very long, encompassing many potential river trips. An **at-a-glance table** accompanies each river section. The table includes the river's difficulty class; the length of the section in miles; the amount of time needed to paddle the entire section; river gauge(s); the minimum water level required for paddling; and the gradient—the drop in elevation from the top to the bottom of the section.

This book uses the **International Scale of River Difficulty** to assess the waterway's typical difficulty *under normal conditions*. (See "Rating the River," page 2, for an explanation of these classifications.) Ratings in parentheses indicate the presence of more-difficult features uncharacteristic of the rest of the run. In a few cases, the letter *T* is used instead of the typical numerical classification; this indicates that the river's dominant current is dictated by ocean tides.

The **river descriptions** convey what paddlers will encounter moving sequentially from the highest to the lowest access point. The locations of rapids, scenery, hazards, and other specific features of note are described. In some cases, a description of the common line through notable



THE MIDDLE SECTION OF THE OGEECHEE RIVER
(see Part Seven, page 343) Photo: Tom Welander

PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP

In addition to evaluating your own skills and equipment, you must reckon with two related external factors when planning a paddling trip: water level and weather forecasts.

RIVER-LEVEL INFORMATION

Throughout this guidebook, the water levels adequate for paddling are provided for each river section. This includes both how the water level is measured and where that information can be found: online, by phone, or using a visual gauge.

WEBSITES

The first step for most paddlers planning a trip is to check river levels online. The USGS and American Whitewater websites can send you email and text push alerts when a stream hits a water level you specify.

US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY By far the largest single source for Georgia streamflow data is the USGS; see waterdata.usgs.gov/ga/nwis. Gauge readings can be displayed on a map or in table form. The map is color-coded, making it easy to spot higher- or lower-than-average flows. Click on a location to see a week's worth of data for that gauge so that you can tell if the river is coming up or going down. In addition, users can review data over longer time periods; this is helpful for seeing how quickly levels typically fall after peaking. USGS gauge information can also be used to estimate water levels for neighboring rivers that lack online gauging stations.

TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY Water levels for the unregulated (undammed) streams that flow north into the TVA's jurisdiction are listed at tva.com/environment/lake-levels/valley-stream-flows. Release schedules for rivers downstream of TVA dams are found at tva.com/environment/lake-levels (click "Recreation Release Schedules").

AMERICAN WHITEWATER AmericanWhitewater aggregates gauge data reported by the USGS and TVA into a table that lists most of the whitewater runs in the state; see american whitewater.org/content/River/view/river-index. Entries are color-coded when they are running (or not) according to paddler-specified minimum and maximum flows. In some cases, flows in streams without online gauges are estimated using data from nearby streams that do. Each run has a page where users can find detailed descriptions, photos, and paddler discussions.

SCHEDULED DAM RELEASES The annual recreational-release schedule for the **Tallulah River** and **Tallulah Gorge** is available at gastateparks.org/tallulahgorge. Release schedules for the **Ocoee River** in Tennessee, along with other TVA rivers, are posted at tva.com/environment/recreation/recreation-release-schedules.

TW'S RIVER RESOURCES This website (twrr.org) consolidates links to many paddling resources, including the ones listed above, on a single page.

MOBILE APPS

The following apps are available for iOS and Android users.

AMERICAN WHITEWATER This app provides paddlers with free and easy access to American Whitewater's database of whitewater runs in Georgia. Use filters to narrow your search by river difficulty, distance, and runnability conditions.

GEORGIA WATER TRAILS RIVER GUIDE Developed by the Georgia River Network (see page 18), this resource helps you plan trips on Georgia's established and developing water

AUGUSTA CANAL

OVERVIEW Built in 1845, the historic Augusta Canal is the site of one of Georgia's first official water trails. The trail travels the oldest continuously used industrial canal in the American South. Gently flowing water moves in long segments through a wide, 40-foot channel that stays snug with the nearby Savannah River for the first half of the trip. The canal provides a beautiful vantage for viewing the natural sites of the area, as well as the historic sites that follow as the canal enters downtown Augusta. Visit the Augusta Canal Discovery Center before or during your trip to learn more about the canal's history.

MAPS Augusta East, Augusta West, Martinez (USGS); Columbia, Richmond (County); Augusta Canal Trail (see **augustacanal.com/visit-activities.php#canoes**)

Savannah Rapids Park to Augusta

Class	I
Length	7.3 mi
Time	2 hr
Gauge	Web
Level	2,000–3,000 cfs
Gradient	1 fpm

DESCRIPTION The canal's current flows toward Augusta at a speed of 6 knots. The highest put-in is below the headgates of the canal near Augusta's Canal Diversion Dam in Savannah Rapids Park **(A).** Downstream access points include Lake Olmstead **(B),** Enterprise Mill **(C),** and the lowest take-out at the Old Turning Basin at 13th Street **(D).** Set a shuttle at one of these locations, or use the level towpath on the north side of the canal to return to the dam by bike or foot. You'll be using the same paths that mules used to pull cargo boats through the canal. For a workout, paddle back upstream.

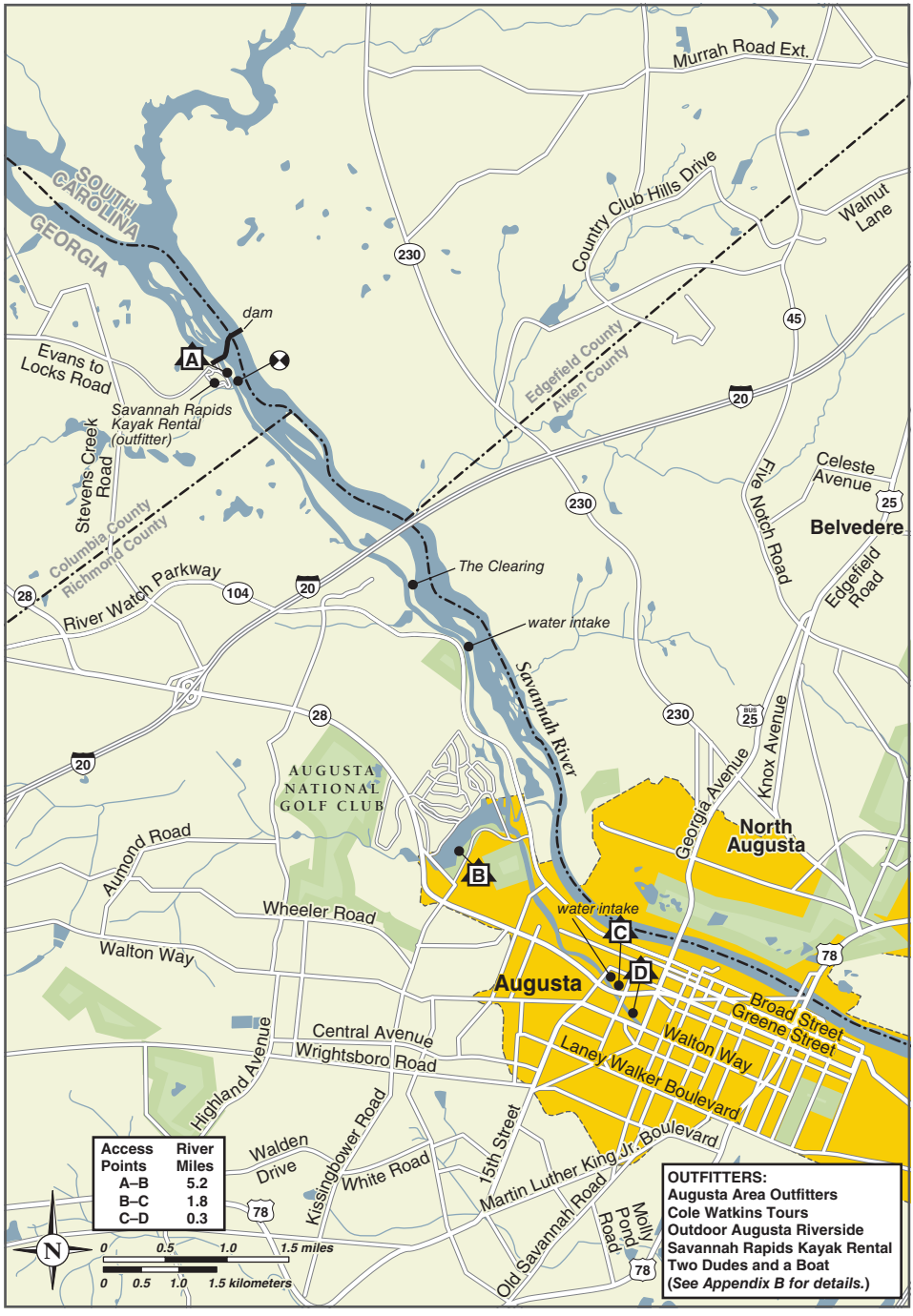
Once on the water, catch the scenic waterfall where Reed Creek cascades into the canal. There are multiple low points along the way that paddlers can utilize for breaks, to access the area's hiking trails, visit the Savannah's shoals (by foot) at the Clearing, or to use as midrun access points. Along the way you'll pass the Augusta Water Works on the left; stay clear of the intake gates here.

The take-out at Julian Smith Park is located 0.7 mile off the canal up Lake Olmstead. The bulkhead gate that connects the lake with the canal is also used by the open-air Petersburg tour boat; the boat will sound its horn twice before entering so that paddlers can stop and let the Petersburg boat pass.

Trips proceeding into the historic mill section that follows must give wide berth to the intake gates for the historic King, Sibley, and Enterprise Mills. The canal was originally built to facilitate transportation and generate power—which it still does today. Textile manufacturing and other industries in Augusta were made possible by the power generated here. The canal and its mills were registered as National Historic Landmarks in 1978.

Paddlers can take out over the canal's low banks on the left at Enterprise Mill, on the far side of the boat docks, and at the end of the trail at the site of the Old Turning Basin, near 13th Street where the canal terminates in the final gate. Visit the Augusta Canal Discovery Center at Enterprise Mill (closed Sundays) to learn the history of the canal; for more information, call 706-823-0440 or see augustacanal.com/about-discovery-center.php.

Augusta Canal



GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	33.55017	-82.03845
B	33.49243	-82.00513
C	33.47645	-81.98254
D	33.47265	-81.97909

Hazards include slippery banks, water intakes, and canal gates. Currents are strong at the water intakes located at the Augusta Water Works and the mill; these areas should be avoided.

SHUTTLE NOTES The entrance to the take-out at Lake Olmstead is on Milledge Road. Turn right after entering Julian Smith Park, and proceed to the parking lot and launch site.

GAUGE The USGS does report levels for the canal, but it rarely varies from the typical 2,000–3,000 cfs flow.

BRIER CREEK

OVERVIEW An intimate stream of primeval beauty, Brier Creek's headwaters rise from springs near the fall line west of Augusta. Unlike most Georgia rivers of its latitude, Brier Creek threads a tightly winding path through dense vegetation reminiscent of the Coastal Plain. Shallow, sloping banks of red clay cradle the stream; trees festooned with Spanish moss arch overhead. The creek's channel periodically divides into subchannels that stream out of the low banks and braid through the swampland. By the time it passes near Waynesboro, Brier can average 30–50 feet wide but retains its swampy ways all the way to the mouth where it dissolves one last time into an extensive lowland swamp at the confluence with the Savannah River.

MAPS Keysville, Storys Millpond, Idlewood, Alexander, Girard, Hilltonia, Jacksonboro Bridge, Brier Creek Landing (USGS); Burke, Screven (County)

GA 56 to Tuckahoe WMA

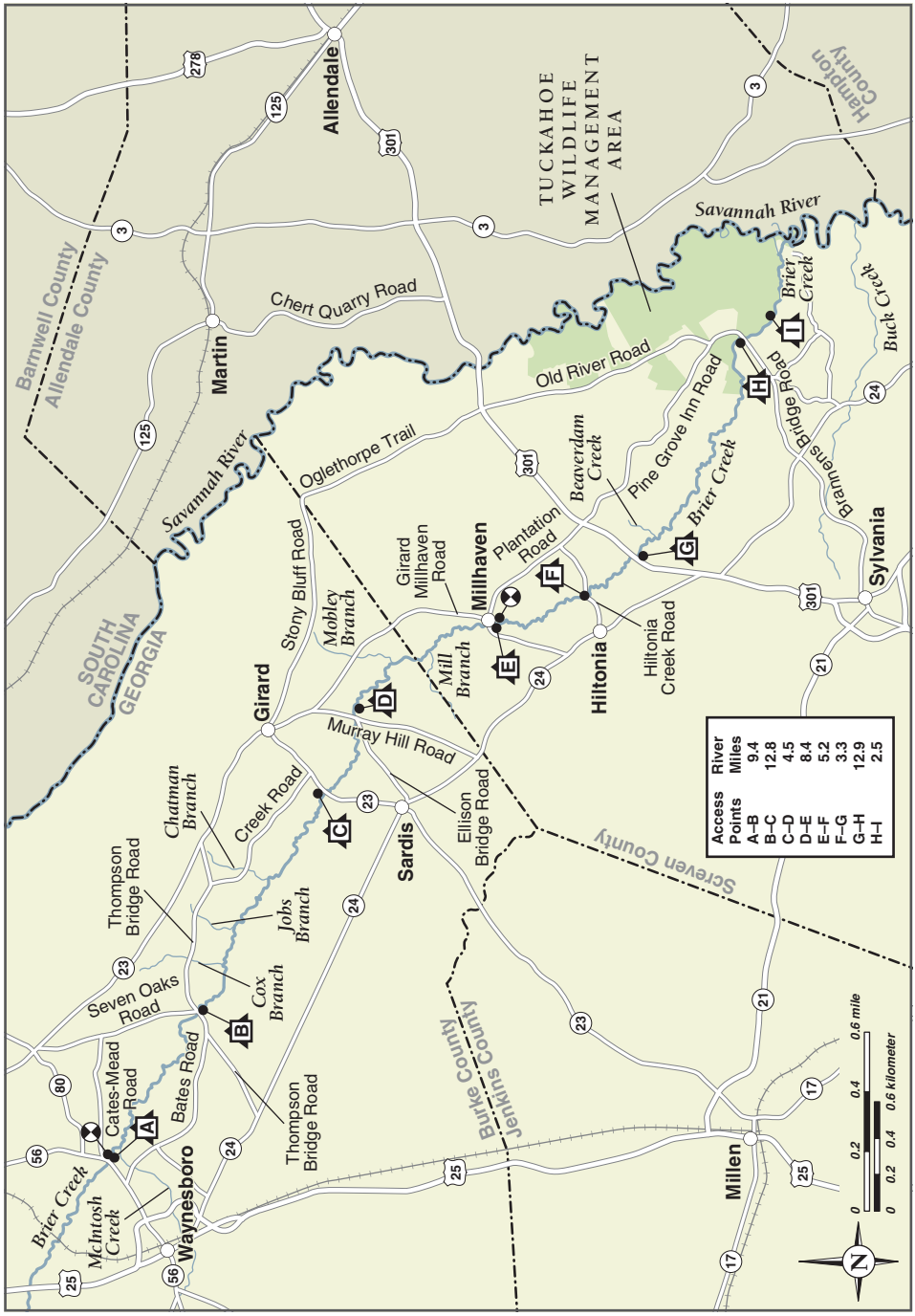
Class	I
Length	53.8 mi
Time	8 days
Gauge	Web
Level	225 cfs
Gradient	2 fpm

DESCRIPTION Runnable downstream of the GA 56 bridge **(A)** except during dry weather, the current on Brier Creek is generally slow as it flows beneath a luxurious canopy of bald cypress, sycamore, willow, and sweet gum. Graceful Spanish moss mysteriously drapes trees at streamside, adding to the primitive atmosphere. The channel from GA 56 to Thompson Bridge Road **(B)** was largely problem-free when the river was running at 7.3 feet on the Waynesboro gauge in 2017, before Hurricane Michael. Paddlers should remain ever vigilant for fallen trees blocking the stream.

The creek winds through a narrow floodplain, defined on the outside edges by steep banks that can rise up to 100 feet above the river's level. The banks nearest the creek are low, barely separating the creek from the mossy floor of the wooded valley. These low banks are easily topped when there's more water in the creek.

The surrounding swamp land expands and contracts for the creek's entire course to the Savannah, despite the growing width of the channel. Swamp bottomlands are

Brier Creek


Allendale
Martin
Barnwell County
Allendale County
SOUTH CAROLINA
GEORGIA
Savannah River
Chert Quarry Road
Oglethorpe Trail
Stony Bluff Road
Mobley Branch
Girard
Girard Millhaven Road
Millhaven
Plantation Road
Mill Branch
Beaverdam Creek
Pine Grove Inn Road
Brier Creek
Hiltonia
Hiltonia Creek Road
Old River Road
TUCKAHOE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
Savannah River
Brier Creek
Buck Creek
Hampton County
Bridge Road
Brannens
Sylvania
Murray Hill Road
Creek Road
Chatman Branch
Thompson Bridge Road
Seven Oaks Road
Jobs Branch
Cox Branch
Sardis
Ellison Bridge Road
Screven County
Burke County
Jenkins County
Cates-Mead Road
Bates Road
Thompson Bridge Road
Brier Creek
McIntosh Creek
Waynesboro
Millen
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
Access Points
River Miles
A–B 9.4
B–C 12.8
C–D 4.5
D–E 8.4
E–F 5.2
F–G 3.3
G–H 12.9
H–I 2.5
0 0.2 0.4 0.6 mile
0 0.2 0.4 0.6 kilometer
N

particularly wide below Thompson Bridge Road and GA 23 **(C).**

Farther downstream, the section that starts at Millhaven shows the impact of extreme-weather events. Post–Hurricane Michael, many fallen trees block the stream. Poison ivy abounds; leafy vines wrap the fallen trees that block the stream, complicating paddling and portage. Snakes enjoy their new habitat over the river. Wildlife in this section is indeed plentiful: cormorants hide by diving underneath the water; egrets and turtles are easily spotted; hornets' nests dangle from trees; catfish thrash at the banks.

Approaching its mouth at the Savannah River below Brannens Bridge Road **(H),** the creek dissolves into lowland swamps and bogs. The boat ramp in the Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area **(I),** on river left, is the last public access on the creek. The next downstream public access is Poor Robins Landing on the Savannah River, 12 miles beyond the confluence. There is no public access at the confluence of Brier Creek and the Savannah.

Hazards to navigation consist primarily of deadfalls that require portaging.

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	33.11827	-81.96360
B	33.07411	-81.87797
C	33.01328	-81.74867
D	32.99819	-81.70440
E	32.93339	-81.65068
F	32.88536	-81.63576
G	32.86087	-81.61317
H	32.81038	-81.48438
I	32.79136	-81.46076

GAUGE The USGS provides flow for gauging stations on the creek at Waynesboro and farther downstream at Millhaven. In the upper sections, a level of 7 feet at Waynesboro is ample. The upper creek tends to be consistently above minimum during the winter and early spring. Measured at the Millhaven gauge, 225 cfs is a great moderate level for a trip in the middle sections of the creek—at this level, the sandbars are covered, but higher ground remains dry for campsites. The lower creek is runnable year-round, except in extreme droughts.

BRIER CREEK'S SHADED BANKS
Photo: Suzanne Welander

SOUTH CHICKAMAUGA CREEK

OVERVIEW South Chickamauga Creek is a long, winding, valley-floor stream in the Valley and Ridge Region in the northwest corner of the state. It flows through the impressive Ringgold Gap into the town of Ringgold, then veers north into Tennessee, where it threads through metro Chattanooga and enters the Tennessee River. As it weaves between the steep ridges that border the valley, the creek passes caves, springs, sinks, bluffs, farmland, golf courses, Civil War historical sites, wildlife sanctuaries, and the picturesque old Swanson Mill at Graysville, Georgia. Access is improving, as local organizations are developing a water trail that celebrates this peaceful waterway. In metro Chattanooga, 12 miles of the South Chickamauga Creek Greenway share the stream's serene beauty.

MAPS Ringgold, East Ridge, East Chattanooga (USGS); Catoosa, GA, Hamilton, TN (County)

Ringgold to Tennessee River

Class	I (II)
Length	31 mi
Time	2 days
Gauge	Web, visual
Level	180 cfs
Gradient	3 fpm

DESCRIPTION South Chickamauga Creek is a pleasant and calm valley stream; this section passes through the center of Ringgold. Access is easy here, in most cases using locations established for that purpose. Expect to encounter small rapids, and be prepared to portage the pipeline that crosses the river downstream of US 41 **(C).** The 3.1-mile trip, putting in at **(A)** and taking out at the canoe launch at Ringgold High School **(D),** makes maximum use of the easiest launch sites.

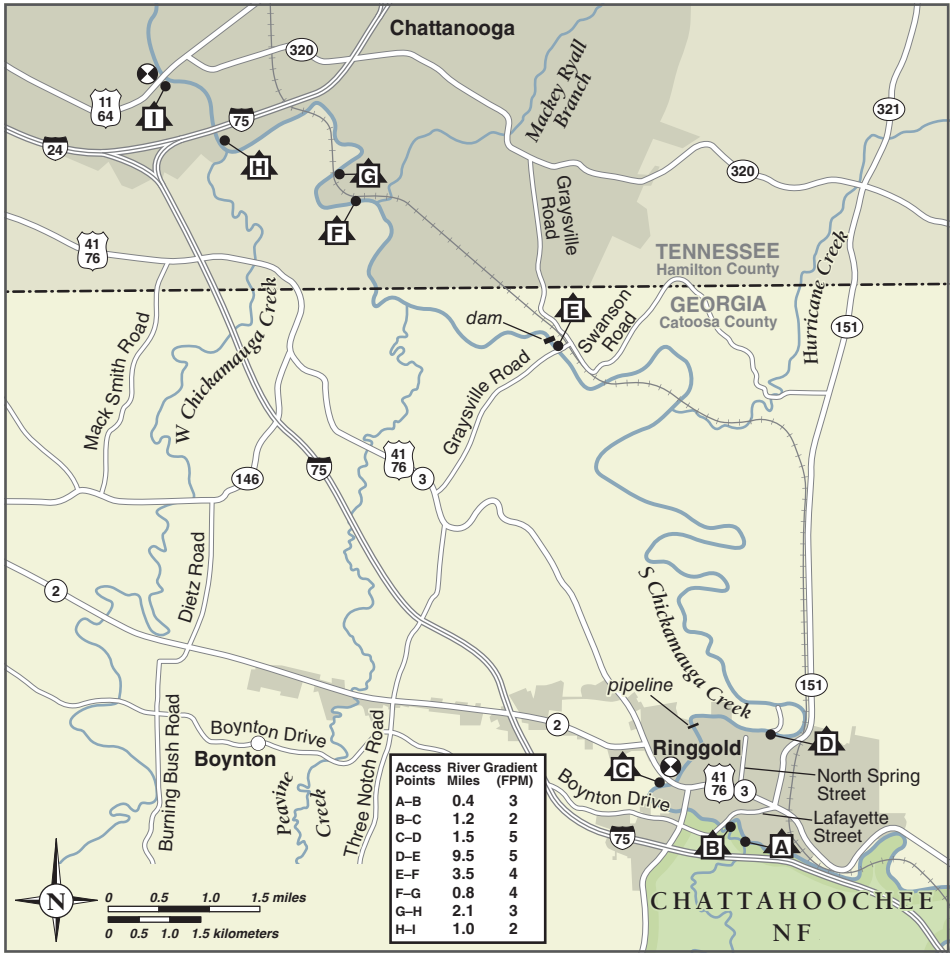
Leaving Ringgold, the forests around the creek deepen, and the creek's bluish hue derived from the limestone bedrock intensifies. The creek loops through several large hairpin turns; a channel bypasses the first meander at the high school launch. Mild rapids and channels that narrow and braid around gravel bars are pretty and require some maneuvering. Rapids all have recovery pools should they be needed.

A developed launch site with parking is located at the Graysville bridge **(E),** on the right side of the creek. The historic Swanson Mill is on the opposite bank, and the mill's dam is 100 feet below the bridge. The dam is most easily portaged from the island. As with all lowhead dams, do not attempt to run it, and take care to avoid the recirculating water falling off the dam's face. This is the last access point in Georgia.

Below the Graysville, forested seclusion continues. The creek's longest rapid (Class II) is halfway to the next access point, near the golf course. The creek bounces over shallow ledges as the channel braids around midstream vegetation. The best route here is on the left; other routes open up depending on the level.

Audubon Acres, home of Chattanooga's Audubon Society, provides canoe launches on the creek at **(F)** and **(G).** Visitors planning on using these launch sites must check in first; there is a small usage fee for nonmembers. The lower access next to the railroad tracks is the most convenient for paddle craft, as visitors can leave their vehicles here. The sanctuary

South Chickamauga Creek



Access Points	River Miles	Gradient (FPM)
A–B	0.4	3
B–C	1.2	2
C–D	1.5	5
D–E	9.5	5
E–F	3.5	4
F–G	0.8	4
G–H	2.1	3
H–I	1.0	2

also has 5 acres of hiking trails, one of which traverses the creek on a swinging bridge.

Development begins to encroach on the surrounding views as you near Chattanooga, but for an urban waterway the creek continues to feel remarkably remote. The city is rapidly developing the paved South Chickamauga Greenway Trail, which can be used for bike loops in some sections. Paddlers making the trip farther into Tennessee can choose from many developed and some undeveloped launch sites in the 14 remaining miles to the Tennessee River, including the canoe launch at Camp Jordan **(H)** at the confluence of South and West Chickamauga Creeks. One mile farther brings you to US 11/64 **(I).** While there's no official launch site here, parking in the area is ample, it's easy enough to get to the creek on the other side of the levee, and the miniature-golf recreation center here may make a worthy diversion. Beware of two pipelines that cross the creek downstream of US 11/64—both require a portage—and the rock jumble in the canal just downstream. If there's enough water, paddlers can opt for the right fork, which uses the creek's original channel.

SHUTTLE NOTES Midrun access at Audubon Acres is located at 900 N. Sanctuary Road, Chattanooga, TN 37421, a short drive from the mill. Call 423-892-1499 for more information.

GAUGE The USGS reports current and historical data for the gauge on the South Chickamauga in Ringgold. The TVA provides point-in-time stream flow data for South Chickamauga Creek downstream at Chickamauga, Tennessee, at tinyurl.com/TVAStreamflows. The minimum runnable water level is 180 cfs; the maximum is flood stage. A staff gauge is located on river left, upstream from the bridge at US 11; levels using this gauge are unknown.

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	34.91065	-85.11197
B	34.91434	-85.11617
C	34.91887	-85.12601
D	34.92598	-85.11099
E	34.97743	-85.14479
F	34.99705	-85.17803
G	35.00211	-85.18151
H	35.00471	-85.19967
I	35.01445	-85.21040
J	35.04910	-85.21410
K	35.08414	-85.22618
L	35.08845	-85.26219

BEAR CREEK

OVERVIEW Bear Creek plunges off the slopes of Lookout Mountain and winds through the scenic gorges at Cloudland Canyon State Park. Not that you'll have time to take your eyes off of the river: Bear Creek is a steep, fast ride down some of the best Class V creek water in the state.

MAPS Durham (USGS); Dade (County)

Cloudland Canyon

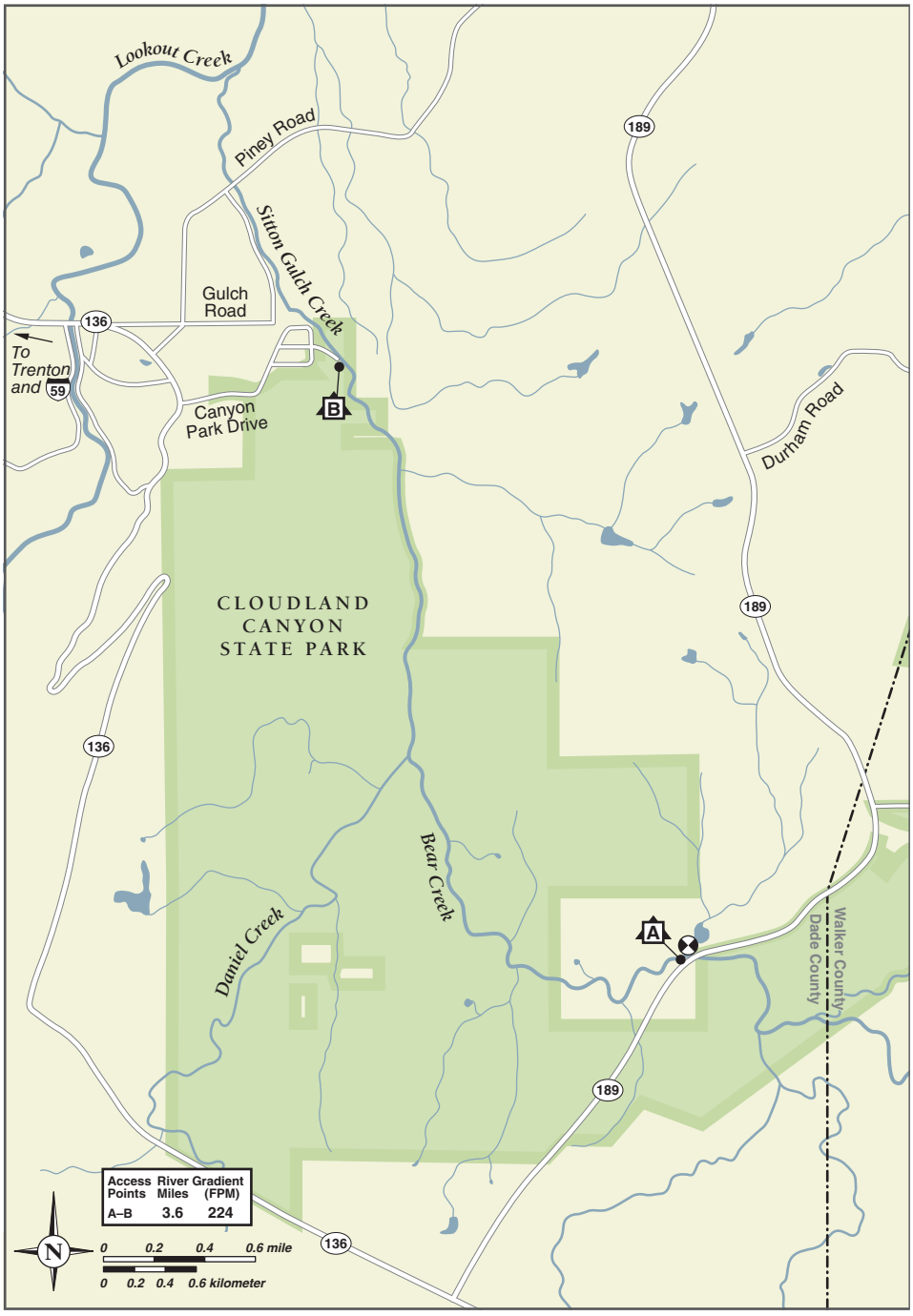
Class	V
Length	3.6 mi
Time	2.5 hr
Gauge	Visual
Level	9 in
Gradient	224 fpm

DESCRIPTION For a short period, access at Bear Creek was denied by the State of Georgia, on the grounds that it was too dangerous and the accompanying cost of rescue too high. Enter American Whitewater, which negotiated passage for paddlers through Cloudland Canyon State Park. There have been no recent access issues here, but be well aware of the skill level required before paddling this creek—*this run is for advanced boaters only.*

At the put-in, the creek barely appears worthy of its Class V rating. After a warm-up of quick and continuous Class II–III water, Bear starts to roar. No fewer than 14 significant drops are packed into the middle of the run as the gradient crescendos to a peak of 475 feet per mile. Technically a drop-and-pool stream, the water runs quickly from one rapid to the next. Be on the lookout for wood in the creek, particularly at the major drops.

The first significant rapid is Surrealistic Pillow (Class 5.0). Choose the far-right slot at medium levels, avoiding the undercut and the log in the main channel. Portaging is the best option when the water is low. Surrealistic kicks off a series of technical drops separated by Bear's signature fast water. The largest—the Class 5.2 Stairway to Heaven—falls 45 feet in three stages. The second stage

Bear Creek


Lookout Creek
Piney Road
189
Sitton Gulch Creek
Gulch Road
136
To Trenton and 59
Canyon Park Drive
B
Durham Road
CLOUDLAND CANYON STATE PARK
189
136
Bear Creek
Daniel Creek
A
Walker County
Dade County
189
136
Access Points
River Miles
Gradient (FPM)
A–B
3.6
224
N
0 0.2 0.4 0.6 mile
0 0.2 0.4 0.6 kilometer

drops 15 feet onto a bone-crushing slab of rock. The daunting portage is down the steep slick shelves on river left.

Should you need it, a break in the cliffs, on river left at the top of Stairway, leads up to a picnic area in the park; turn right at the top of the hill, and follow the faint path out. To minimize the risk of getting lost in the woods, case the park before your run to get a sense of where this path ends.

After Stairway, the next significant drop is Big Bang, Class 5.2. The only portage here is a jump into the chest-deep pool on river left; you can also run it with a right boof close to the bank on river right. A few more technical rapids, including the Class 5.0 Momentary Lapse of Reason and the Class 5.2 must-make center slot at Armageddon, are encountered before Daniel Creek enters from the left. A half-mile hike up Daniel Creek yields more rapids and a trail to a staircase leading up to the park.

Below the confluence with Daniel, Bear Creek becomes Sitton Gulch Creek. Technical rapids continue in quick succession, requiring frequent scouting for lines and wood. The last big one is Omega, where a sneaky lead-in to a condensed series of off-angle holes leads to a nasty river-left sieve that swallows half the creek's flow.

—*Suzanne Welander with Clay Wright*

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	34.82820	-85.45943
B	34.86084	-85.48471

SHUTTLE NOTES To find the take-out from GA 136, turn east onto Canyon Park Drive and follow the signs 0.6 mile to the Sitton Gulch Trailhead. Visually confirm adequate flow here—if it looks like you can barely scrape down to where the old road meets the creek, there's sufficient water for the entire run. To get to the put-in, backtrack to GA 136 and turn left to head up the hill. In about 4 miles, turn left at the flashing yellow light, cross Daniel Creek, and pass the entrance to Cloudland Canyon State Park, on the left about a mile after the previous turn. In another 0.9 mile, turn left onto GA 189 and proceed 1.6 miles to the bridge over the creek.

GAUGE A gauge is painted on the river-right, downstream side of the bridge at the put-in. The absolute minimum is 9 inches; 12–18 inches is optimal. A USGS gauge is located on Lookout Creek near New England, a short distance downstream of the confluence with Sitton Gulch Creek. Recommended levels using this gauge are unknown.

COOSA RIVER

OVERVIEW The Coosa River is formed at the confluence of the Etowah and the Oostanaula Rivers in downtown Rome. As it chugs along toward Alabama, the Coosa skirts the southern edge of the dramatic fingerlike ridges of Georgia's Valley and Ridge geological region. The river leaves the industrial development of Rome behind and the surrounding land reverts to gentle farmland hills before industry reappears on a dramatic scale. At the end of this run, the river's migrating channels carved oxbow lakes and cutoffs more typical of a Coastal Plains stream. This last section is now submerged by Lake Weiss, where it's possible to explore the past and current channels.

MAPS Rome North, Rome South, Livingston, Rocky Mountain, Melson, Chattoogaville (USGS); Floyd (County)

Rome to Weiss Lake

Class	I
Length	27.3 mi
Time	Up to 4 days
Gauge	Web
Level	8 ft
Gradient	1 fpm

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	34.25707	-85.18075
B	34.20007	-85.25793
C	34.25173	-85.38073
D*	34.16568	-85.39618

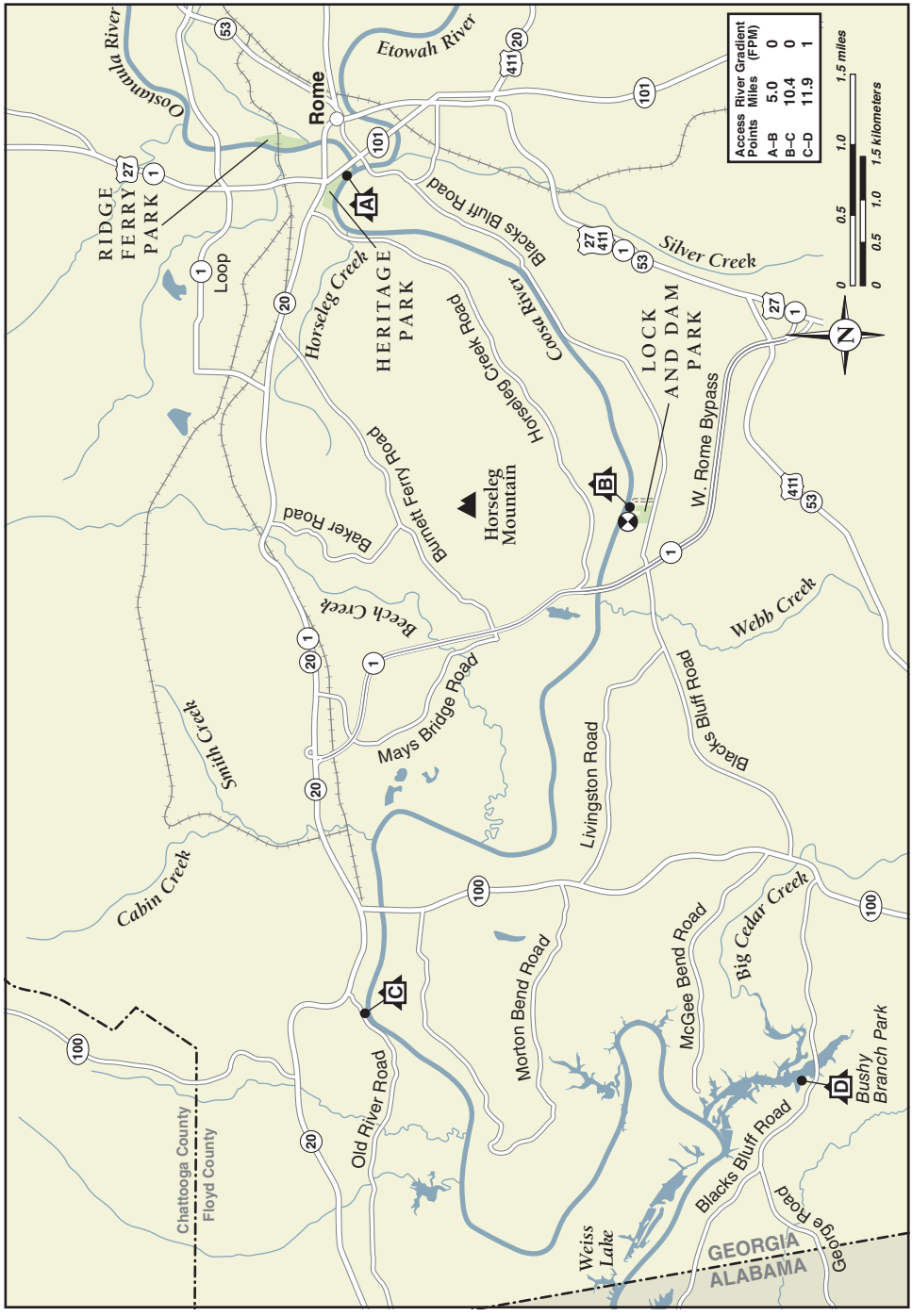
**In Weiss Lake*

DESCRIPTION With its tributaries, the Coosa River Basin is the most biologically diverse river system in North America. The rivers of its headwaters start deep in the heart of Chattahoochee National Forest and stretch as far north as Tennessee. The Coosa itself is one of the major rivers of Alabama. The river is impounded throughout virtually its entire length, creating eight large lakes and attendant power-generation capabilities. Fourteen miles of the river's run in Georgia remain free-flowing.

The river's channel is wide and straight between its bends below Rome. After you put in at Heritage Park **(A),** the first few miles flow past suburban residential developments, golf courses, a sewage treatment plant, a county prison, and a small quarry. The ridge of Horseleg Mountain borders the river on the right side of its broad valley. Closer to the river, Black's Bluff rises 300 feet above the river on the left, downstream of the prison. The Nature Conservancy preserves a 263-acre tract at the bluff. This limestone rock outcrop supports a remarkable diversity of uncommon native plants among its north-facing limestone cliffs, boulders, and caves. Blacks Bluff Preserve is open to the public during daylight hours. Hiking trails can be accessed via the preserve's entrance.

Seven miles downstream from Rome is an inoperable lock and dismantled dam at **(B).** The locks were formerly used to open the upper reaches of the river to the large commercial riverboats that found it difficult to negotiate the shoals that were in this area. The remains of the dam create a rare park-and-play spot on the river where the river flows over the remainder of the dam. Hazards at low levels include sharp rocks and exposed rebar on the left side. If you're passing through from upstream and want to avoid the turbulence, the dam can be portaged on the left. At higher

Coosa River


Oostanaula River
Etowah River
Rome
RIDGE FERRY PARK
Loop
HERITAGE PARK
Horseleg Creek
Horseleg Creek Road
Coosa River
Black Bluff Road
Silver Creek
LOCK AND DAM PARK
W. Rome Bypass
Burnett Ferry Road
Baker Road
Horseleg Mountain
Beech Creek
Mays Bridge Road
Smith Creek
Cabin Creek
Livingston Road
Webb Creek
Blacks Bluff Road
Morton Bend Road
McGee Bend Road
Big Cedar Creek
Old River Road
Bushy Branch Park
Blacks Bluff Road
Georgia Road
Weiss Lake
Chattooga County
Floyd County
GEORGIA
ALABAMA
A
B
C
D
Access Points
River Miles
Gradient (FPM)
A–B 5.0 0
B–C 10.4 0
C–D 11.9 1
0 0.5 1.0 1.5 miles
0 0.5 1.0 1.5 kilometers
N

levels, the waves wash out into an obvious downstream channel. The boat ramp here is the last access before the river enters the pool of Weiss Lake. Camping is available here; there is a fee for parking and launching.

Proceeding downstream of Lock and Dam Park, the river corridor becomes increasingly agricultural. Beech Creek enters the stream on the right, 7 miles below Lock and Dam Park. After the creek, you pass an International Paper factory, closely followed by Georgia Power's Plant Hammond—a large coal power plant whose smokestacks dominate views for miles. The plant no longer burns coal, but the sensitive process of eliminating the toxic sludge from the plant's coal ash ponds will continue for years. As a result of the industry on the river—including past PCB contamination—restrictions on eating certain types of fish persist. Check the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' *Guidelines for Eating Fish from Georgia Waters* for updated information.

Two more boat ramps are located at Old River Road **(C)** and Brushy Branch Park **(D).** In this area, the river makes a sharp U-turn around Fosters Bend. Almost all of the land within Fosters Bend is under cultivation. Below the bend, large oxbow lakes and swamps appear. The pool of Weiss Lake inundates the area so that these former meanders are now separated from the river by natural levees. Occasional gaps invite paddlers to explore by boat. The Coosa's channel finally melts into Weiss Lake as a thin peninsula of forested levee peters out.

Brushy Branch Park, **(D),** located 2 miles up Dry Creek, is not visible from the main channel of the river. The park makes a good launch point for an out-and-back trip to explore the lake and return to the park. A navigational map of Weiss Lake may be helpful, as the main channel can be difficult to discern.

GAUGE The river is generally runnable, but be wary of the 30,000 cfs flows that happen in the winter. Lowest flows are in the summer, but there's still plenty of water. Flows vary up to 2,000 cfs during the day as the river reacts to power-generating flows released from Allatoona Dam upstream on the Etowah. Check the current level online at the USGS gauge on the Coosa River (Mayo's Bar) near Rome. Call the Army Corps of Engineers at 706-334-7213 for information about dam releases upstream on the Etowah before you put in.

BIG CEDAR CREEK

OVERVIEW A waterway of the Valley and Ridge geologic zone of Georgia, Big Cedar Creek winds through the same sedimentary limestone, sandstone, and shale that form the fingerlike ridges of northwest Georgia. With the attendant influence on the soils, the plant life surrounding Big Cedar is more similar to that of an Alabama river than of the metamorphic bedrock rivers of Georgia's mountain region. Today, the glades of large eastern red cedar that inspired the creek's name are mostly gone, supplanted by longleaf pines and mixed hardwoods that reassert themselves after the privet thickets near Cedartown recede. Flowing to the northwest out of Polk County, the character of the rapids near Chubbtown is also reminiscent of Alabama whitewater. This pretty Class I–II creek ends in the backwaters of Weiss Lake, a huge Coosa River impoundment on the Georgia–Alabama border.

MAPS Cedartown West, Livingston, Melson (USGS); Polk, Floyd (County)

TESNATEE CREEK

OVERVIEW A surprisingly beefy tributary of the Chestatee River north of Atlanta, Tesnatee Creek provides an excellent Class II trip when water conditions are favorable. The creek is wider than many rivers. Hemlocks drape over the stream in places, and drifts of mountain laurel cluster with rhododendrons at the banks, making for a spectacular late-spring display during bloom time. Occasional 20- to 30-foot-high rock faces add to the scenic beauty of this short run. Rapids are mostly Class I–II, with one larger rapid (easily portaged) pushing Class III difficulty.

MAPS Cleveland, Dahlonega (USGS); White, Lumpkin (County)

Town Creek Road to Chestatee River

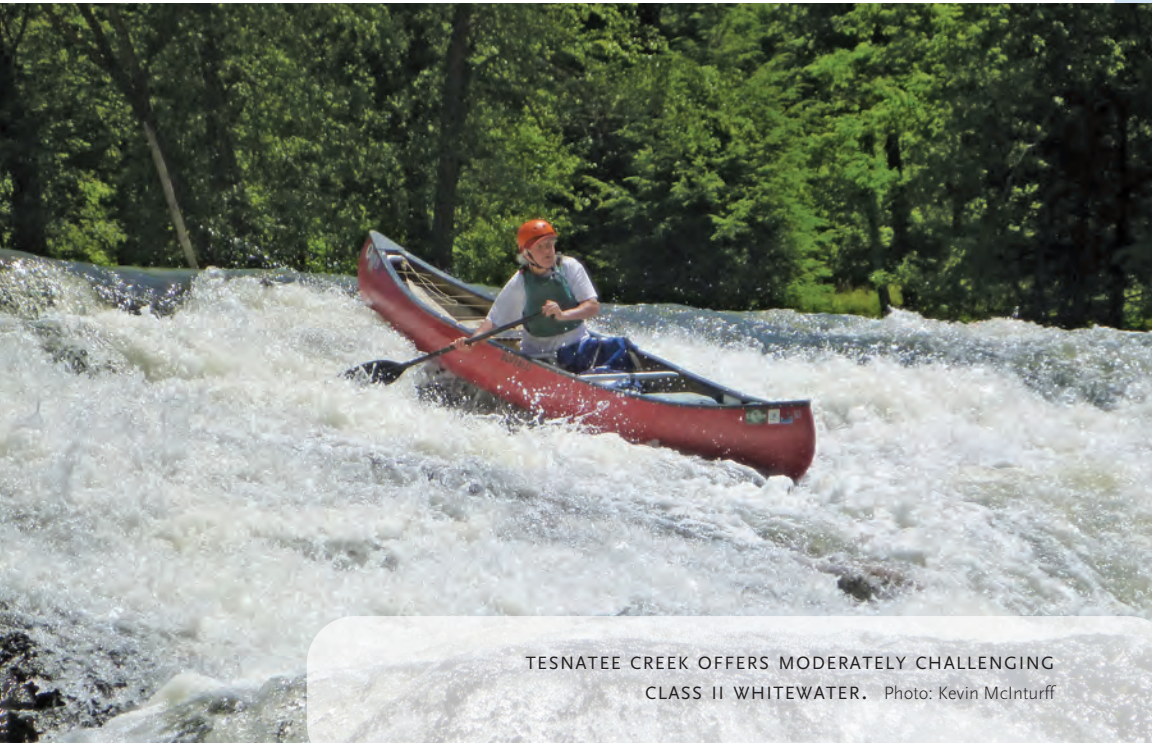
Class	I–II (III)
Length	7.2 mi*
Time	4 hr
Gauge	None
Level	N/A
Gradient	25 fpm

**Includes 1.6 mi on the Chestatee River*

DESCRIPTION Only 7 miles of this stream near Cleveland are navigable. The average gradient is more than 25 feet per mile, so the pace is usually lively. Most of the rapids do not exceed a Class II difficulty at normal water levels.

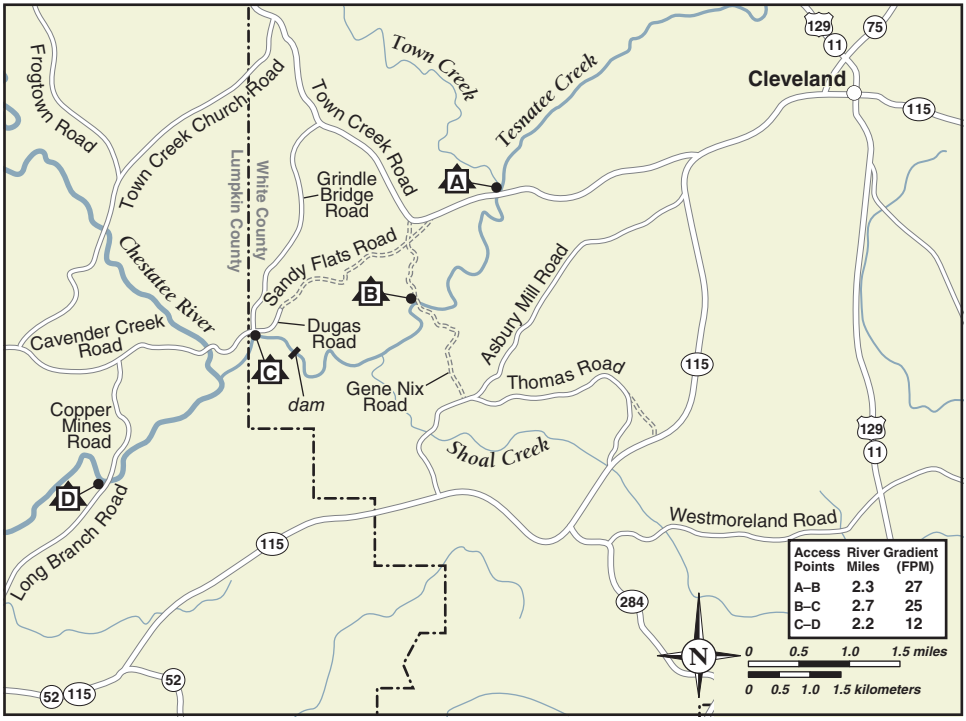
There is one artificial hazard: a dam that is part of a refurbished power plant located about 2.3 miles below the bridge at Gene Nix Road **(B).** The easiest portage around the dam is on the right. Tesnatee Falls, a 20-foot drop that falls in intervals, is immediately below the dam. If running the falls, scout right and portage the dam on the left to set up for the run, avoiding the rock outcrop on the far right.

Soon thereafter, the Chestatee River joins from the right. An easy paddle upstream on the



TESNATEE CREEK OFFERS MODERATELY CHALLENGING CLASS II WHITEWATER. Photo: Kevin McInturff

Tesnatee Creek



Chestatee takes you to the base of scenic Class V Grindle Falls. The final take-out is located 1.6 miles down the Chestatee. Trails that lead to the road are on either side of the bridge.

Copper Mine Rapid is located just downstream of the bridge. If you choose to run it, use the trail on the left to return upstream to the bridge. A detailed description of Copper Mine is in the first section of the Chestatee River (see next profile).

SHUTTLE NOTES The highest access is just off Town Creek Road **(A),** at the business on the north side of the road; if you're driving eastbound, look for the turn-off on your left before you cross the river. Ask permission before you put in.

GAUGE None. Use USGS levels for the Chestatee River near Dahlonega to get a rough idea of feasibility, and scout the river at access points before putting in. A level of 650 cfs on the USGS Chestatee gauge has proved to be a nice level for the Tesnatee.

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	34.58343	-83.82240
B	34.56862	-83.83583
C	34.56467	-83.86315
D	34.54365	-83.88725

**Includes 1.6 mi on the Chestatee River*

LAZER CREEK

OVERVIEW Lazer Creek, a stream of significant size, flows northeastward off of Pine Mountain in the west-central part of the state near Thomaston. The paddling is mostly flatwater, interrupted at long intervals by interesting Class I and Class II shoals. The creek has a deep-wilderness feel due largely to the Big Lazer Wildlife Management Area, which borders it. Paddlers have surprised solitary wild hogs sitting in this stream. Lazer Creek flows into the Flint River at Hightower Shoals.

MAPS Roland, Lincoln Park (USGS); Talbot (County)

Sunrise Road to Flint River

Class	I–II
Length	9.8 mi*
Time	5 hr
Gauge	None
Level	N/A
Gradient	7 fpm

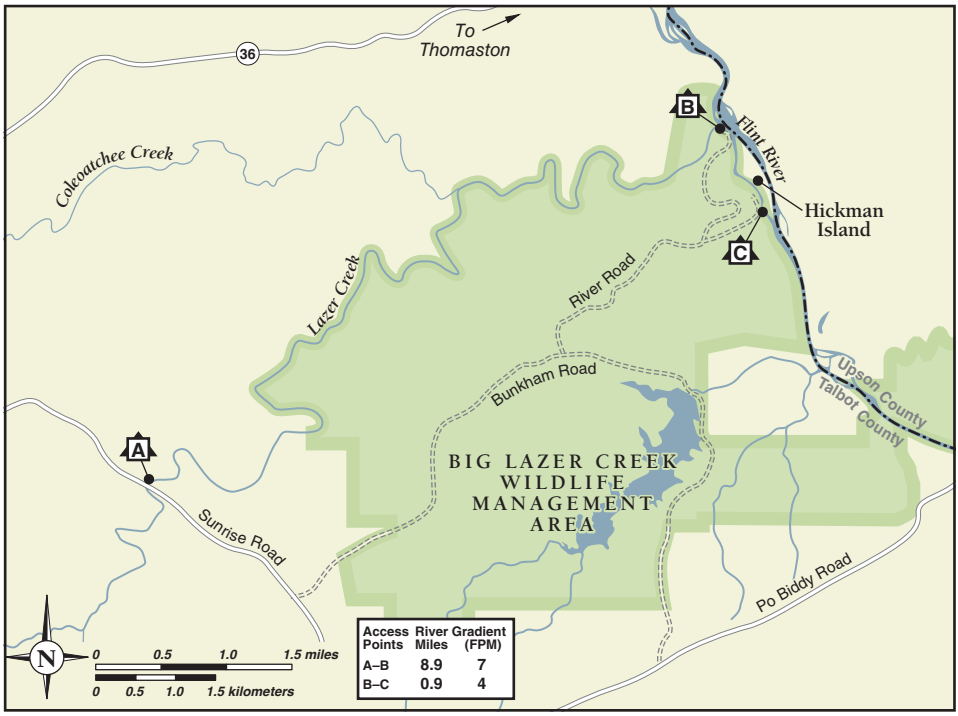
**Includes 0.8 mi on the Flint River*

DESCRIPTION Lazer Creek starts out on a narrow and intimate sandy streambed; by the end of the run, the stream's width increases to 80 yards across. The trip is almost entirely a placid paddling experience except when quartzite ledges cross the stream, creating shoals of Class I and II difficulty. The creek's banks are thickly overgrown, hiding any sign of human activity. Hills rise to 200 feet over the water in some sections—surprisingly mountainous territory for this part of the state.

Two solid Class II rapids in the second half of the run deliver whitewater excitement guaranteed to wake anyone lulled by the prevailing flatwater and beauty of the surrounding terrain. The first is Big Shoals,

ONE OF LAZER CREEK'S FLATWATER STRETCHES
Photo: Suzanne Welander

Lazer Creek



a river-wide stair-step ledge whose first drop may be as much as 5 vertical feet, depending on the line chosen. Toward the bottom of this ledge, Lazer's largest tributary, Coleoatchee Creek, enters on the left. The second noteworthy rapid occurs within eyeshot of the take-out on the creek; portage route here is on the left.

Lazer Creek remains a virtually undisturbed wilderness thanks largely to the Big Lazer Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which borders the stream on the right for much of this run. Car camping is available in the WMA, where there are multiple outdoor-recreation options, including a fishing area and a shooting range that you might hear while on the river. Be mindful of hunting seasons if you're camping; the game calendar at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources website provides dates (see georgiawildlife.com/hunting/hunter-resources).

Paddlers can choose to end their trip at the take-out on the creek or the launch site around the bend on the Flint. Both WMA access points solved the erosion problems caused by people driving to the confluence—a lovely spot that can now be reached only by boat.

In addition to the designated car-camping areas, the WMA also offers camping on mile-long Hickman Island, in the Flint River just downstream of the mouth of Lazer Creek. If you're using the WMA take-out around the corner on the Flint River, stick to the

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	32.77285	-84.47380
B	32.80782	-84.40418
C*	32.80088	-84.39683

*Includes 0.8 mi on the Flint River

right-side channel of Hickman Island. The take-out is near the end of the island, 0.8 mile from the confluence. Stay alert for the landing; the river's current through this channel can be fast. The next access is 3-plus miles ahead at Po Biddy Road.

Hazards consist of the shoals themselves, which should be scouted, and occasional hornets' nests hanging from overhead branches. Lazer Creek is remarkably free of deadfalls and strainers in this section.

SHUTTLE NOTES Reaching the take-out involves unmarked roads in the WMA, where cell phone coverage is spotty. From Sunrise Road, enter the WMA by heading east on Bunkham Road; the signed turnoff is about 1.6 miles north of Po Biddy Road and 4 miles southeast of GA 36. A little less than 3 miles ahead, turn left onto River Road. The designated camping area is at this intersection. (If you reach the reservoir in the WMA, you've gone too far.) Follow River Road until it forks. The left fork leads to the canoe launch that's on Lazer Creek **(B);** the right fork leads to the launch on the Flint River **(C).**

GAUGE There is no gauge for Lazer Creek. The seam in the pilings of the bridge on river right at the put-in can be used to judge feasibility—3 feet below the seam has proved to be ample flow. You can get down the creek when it's running 54 inches below the seam, but the shoals are better suited for hiking at this low level. The creek is most likely runnable if the Flint is running more than 8.5 feet at GA 36. Avoid the creek when the Flint is above 11 feet.

POTATO CREEK

OVERVIEW *The sleek, blue C-1 completes the ferry above the big waterfall, spins, and plunges over the edge into the huge exploding hole at the base. A satisfied smile crosses the boater's face as he punches the hole and clears the rapid; eddying to the right, he watches as three more boats surge over the falls and plummet into the hole.* Now, you might think it's flat down south of Atlanta, but that's not entirely true. A series of faults cross Georgia, creating spectacles like Potato Creek. Maxing out with a gradient of 100 fpm in a nearly 1-mile stretch, Potato Creek is intense.

MAPS Thomaston, Roland, Lincoln Park (USGS); Upson (County)

Hannah Mill Road to GA 36

Class	III–IV
Length	4.7 mi
Time	3.5 hr
Gauge	Visual
Level	0 ft
Gradient	28 fpm (100)

DESCRIPTION Put in at Hannah Mill Road (A) for the 1.6-mile Class II warm-up that precedes the 3-mile whitewater stretch that begins at GA 74 **(B).** The bottom drops out about a half click below the GA 74 bridge with a remarkable 40-foot horizon line. The entire drop is divided by an island two-thirds of the way down. Both sides are runnable, but river left is the usual route, avoiding the undercut rock three-quarters of the way down. On river right, a big vertical drop—Oh! Cool—plummets into a pool and is followed by several smaller drops. A small pool below the island allows for regrouping and a good view downstream.

SPRING CREEK

OVERVIEW Exotic and lovely, Spring Creek is the southernmost tributary of the Flint River, tucked into the southwestern corner of the state. The creek's clear waters are largely spring fed, in contrast to the other Coastal Plain streams. When high water subsides following the spring rains, the stream is crystal clear and reveals a mesmerizing array of underwater plant life, spring "boils," and a bottom that is often solid limestone, sometimes pitted by erosion with jagged cutting edges.

MAPS Colquitt, Boykin, Bronson, Desser, Reynoldsville (USGS); Miller, Decatur (County)

Colquitt to Lake Seminole

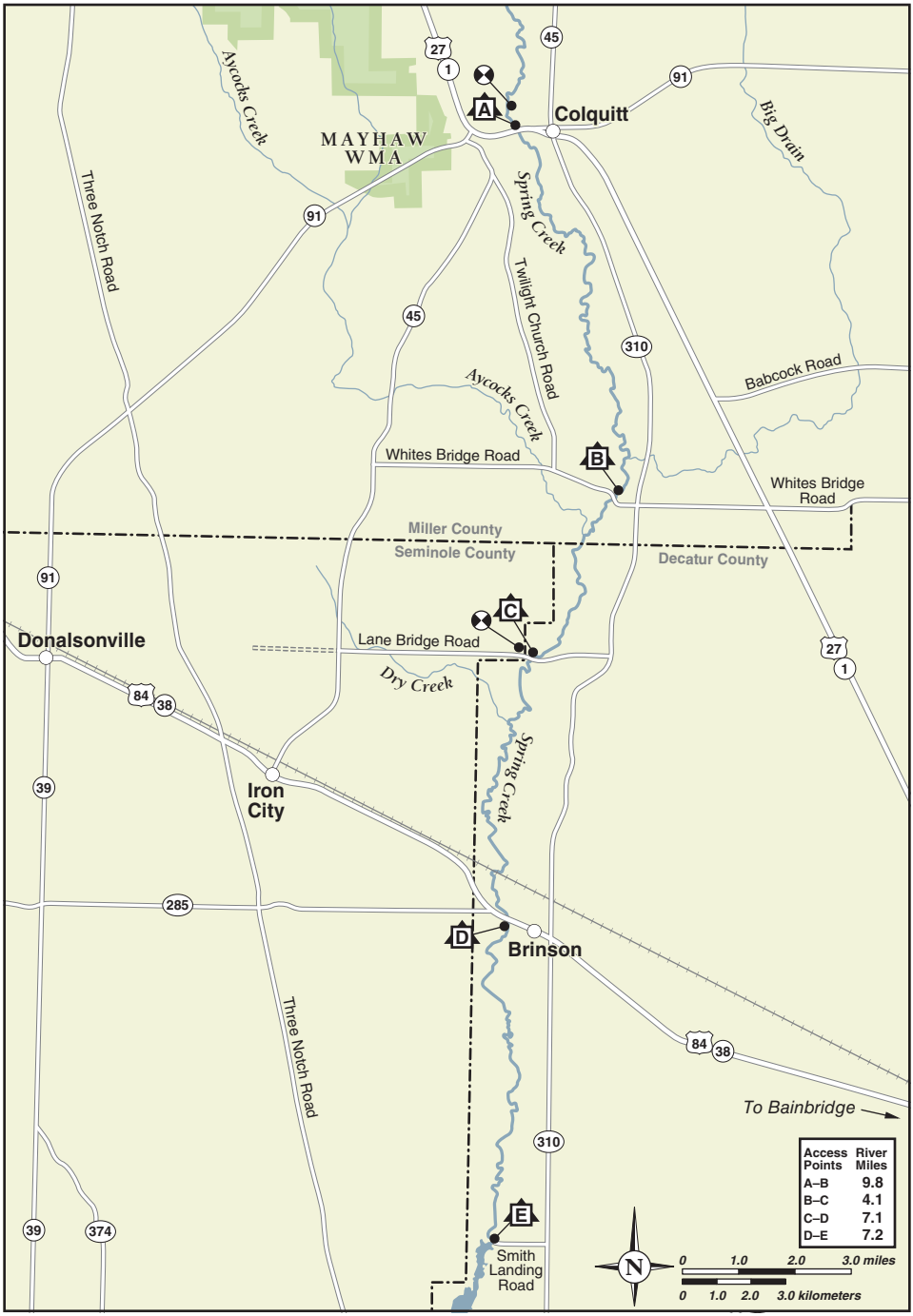
Class	I (+)
Length	28.2 mi
Time	3 days
Gauge	Web
Level	125 cfs
Gradient	2 fpm

DESCRIPTION With headwaters in Clay and Calhoun Counties, Spring Creek flows directly south to join the Flint River within Lake Seminole. The highest access listed here is US 27 in Colquitt **(A).** You won't be able to miss the amazing murals in town, but in any case, make sure you seek them out while you're in the area.

High-water runs are normally the best way to enjoy the uppermost reaches of the creek, but it may be some time before the upper reaches recover from the extreme blow dealt by Hurricane Michael in 2018. In times when the tree blockages aren't severe, a high-water

SPRING CREEK HOSTS A DIVERSE ARRAY OF PLANT LIFE.
Photo: Suzanne Welander

Spring Creek



run of 4,500 cfs in the uppermost 9.6-mile stretch of river can provide a straightforward swamp paddle trip.

Spring Creek feels quite private. Signs of seasonal recreation—a hammock, a gazebo, a deck—intrude briefly on the solitude, and in any case aren't occupied when the water is high. Even with the creek out of its banks, the channel is easily discerned and largely unobstructed. Approaching Whites Bridge Road **(B),** the flooded creek spreads through the trees to the west, moving into nearby pastureland. *Note:* Access at this point has reportedly been challenged by a cattle rancher in this area—watch out for a wire fence across the creek upstream of the bridge at Whites Bridge Road.

The likelihood of encountering blockages from downed trees lessens below Clarence Lane Road **(C).** The activity above the surface is as mesmerizing as what's going on below; Spanish moss graces cypress trees that tower over—and sometimes stand within—the stream's corridor. Banks rise high from the stream, thereby eliminating much of the usual wet floodplain flora. Planer trees, pines, and hardwood forests surround the water. Limestone outcrops add to the wilderness beauty of the partially shaded stream, and small shoals and rocky shallows enliven the paddling. Fish and mollusks are plentiful and can be observed from a canoe.

The stream remains intimate and diminutive even after you encounter the lake pool,

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	31.17106	-84.74266
B	31.07960	-84.71507
C	31.04032	-84.73925
D	30.97525	-84.74562
E*	30.89509	-84.75023

**In Lake Seminole*

near the Seaboard Coast Line rail crossing just upstream of US 84 **(D).** From here, the run remains interesting as the creek slowly widens to become Lake Seminole Waterfowl Management Area. Except in the spring and in the lake pool of Lake Seminole, the water is too shallow for powerboat traffic but is perfect for paddle craft. Its level of difficulty is Class I (+), with numerous deadfalls being the primary hazard to navigation.

SHUTTLE NOTES Access is easy at all points and becomes progressively more developed and less contested proceeding downriver.

GAUGE The USGS website provides data for two gauges on Spring Creek: one near Colquitt at the top of this run, and another at Iron City midway through. Using the Iron City gauge, runnable levels commence at 125 cfs. If not choked by hurricane deadfall, Spring Creek is usually runnable upstream of US 84 November–June and all year below US 84.

Ultimately, the movement is about establishing relationships with the state's waterways. Rivers move people—not just down a path, but toward real change.

And when rivers change people, the people become inspired to change the rivers, protecting them and preserving them so that the next generation can venture on the water and say, "Someday, when I have a family, I'm going to do this with them."

***Joe Cook** is the former executive director and advocacy and communication coordinator for the Coosa River Basin Initiative. He coordinates the Georgia River Network's annual Paddle Georgia event (see page 18) and is the author of six paddling guidebooks for GRN, including the* Ocmulgee River User's Guide (UGA Press, 2021) *and* Oconee River User's Guide (UGA Press, 2019).

TOWALIGA RIVER

OVERVIEW Spectacular High Falls in Monroe County kicks off this whitewater run through a pleasantly scenic area of middle Georgia. The character of the upper river is delightful, reminiscent of a mountain stream but located much farther south. The current slows in the lower river where there are no rapids but plenty of sandbars. The river passes through an intimate forested valley as it flows south out of Henry County before emptying into the Ocmulgee above Juliette.

MAPS High Falls, Indian Springs, Forsyth, Berner, East Juliette (USGS); Monroe (County)

High Falls State Park to GA 42

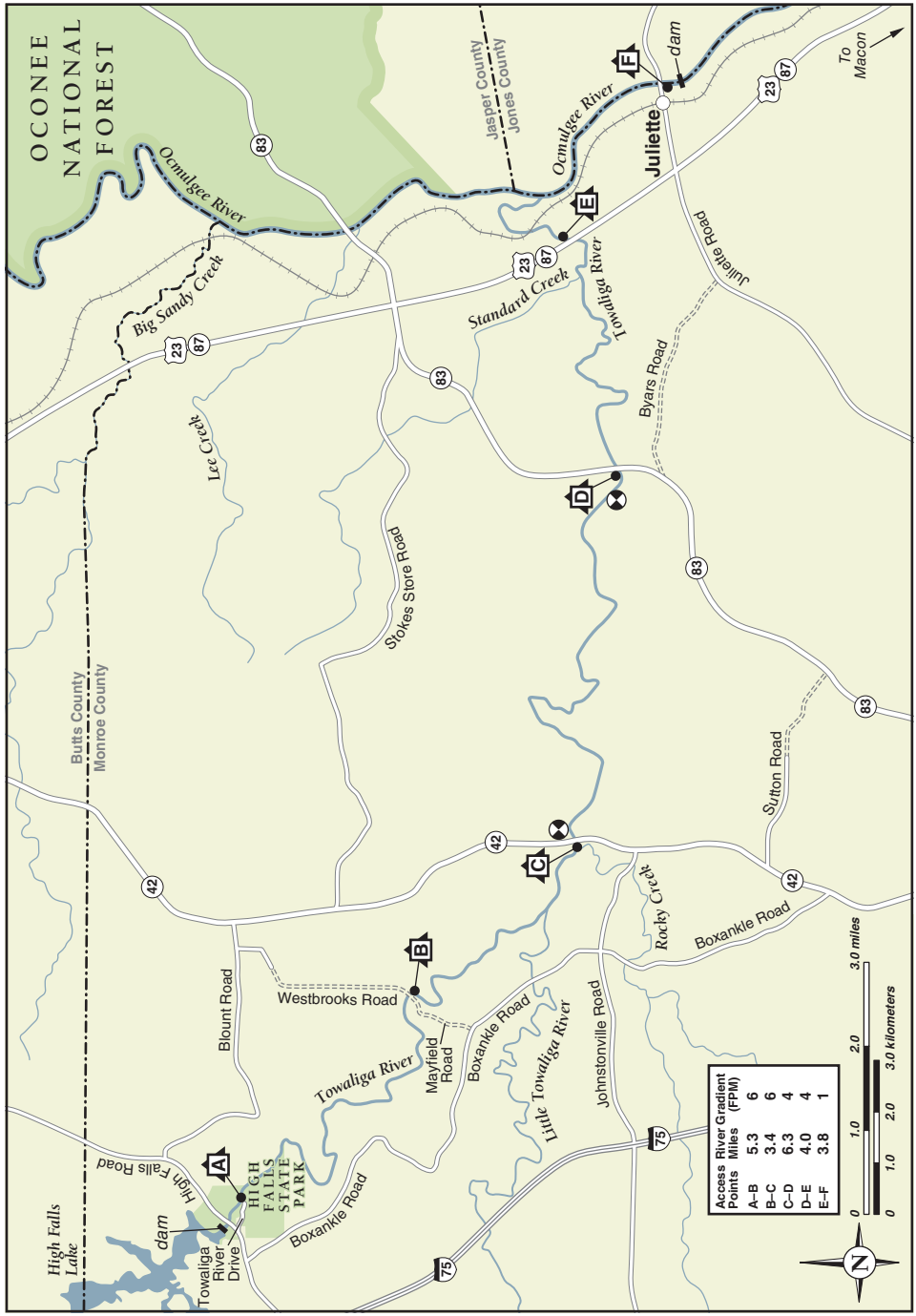
Class	I–II (III)
Length	8.7 mi
Time	4 hr
Gauge	Visual, web
Level	1 ft
Gradient	6 fpm

DESCRIPTION The upper section starts with a bang: Towaliga's High Falls at High Falls State Park. The main drop of the falls is below the High Falls Road bridge downstream of the dam. The river immediately downstream of the dam is fenced off and thus off-limits. However, a trail along the left bank provides a number of possible put-ins immediately below the falls, depending on which of the subsequent rapids you are willing to tackle. The river here broadens to 300 feet, with large ledges and boulder rapids continuing for several hundred feet. These rapids are technical in low water, but due to the width of the stream, they create numerous sneak routes at higher levels. In any event, they would not exceed Class III difficulty.

Easy put-in access below most of these rapids is on river right below the falls. Once on the water, paddlers quickly encounter a rapid at an island where the river bends to the left. The left side of the island has the best flow and route options. It's not much compared with High Falls, but the 4-foot vertical drop looks dramatic. Use the park's hiking trail on the left to portage and scout.

From the falls, the river narrows first to 80 feet and then shortly thereafter to its average width of 45–60 feet. The current is moderate to swift, and usually runs brown with a high

Towaliga River



concentration of sediment. Hills rise sharply from the streamside as the Towaliga runs through 4–6-foot reddish clay banks. Riverside housing is virtually continuous at first and doesn't fade until past Mayfield Road **(B).** Count on seeing examples of aggressive buffer removal by some landowners.

Delightfully bouncy rapids and ledges are interspersed with long pools overhung by white oak, sweet gum, red maple, hickory, sycamore, and beech. The occasional rapids approach low Class II in difficulty and get easier as you proceed downstream. The run gets even more scenic below Mayfield Road as large, rounded boulders appear and the houses disappear.

Dangers in this section, other than the rapids mentioned, are limited to deadfalls.

The Little Towaliga River enters on the right below Mayfield Road. This tributary has more rapids than the main Towaliga; access is easy at Rocky Creek Road.

SHUTTLE NOTES Consider leaving your car outside the gate at Towaliga River Road **(A)** if you won't be back until late; the gate can close at dark.

GAUGE A gauge is painted on a support of the GA 42 bridge. A level of approximately 1 foot is good and correlates with 470 cfs/4.2 feet on the USGS gauge at GA 83 near Juliette. The USGS has another gauge at the GA 42 bridge, but recommended paddling levels using this gauge are unknown. The river most frequently runs from late November to May.

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	33.17665	-84.01453
B	33.14892	-83.97358
C	33.12162	-83.94342

A VERDANT STRETCH OF THE TOWALIGA RIVER
Photo: Suzanne Welander

GA 42 to Ocmulgee River

Class	I
Length	14.1 mi*
Time	8 hr
Gauge	Web, visual
Level	Unknown
Gradient	4 fpm

**Includes 2.1 mi on the Ocmulgee River*

DESCRIPTION The hills start to recede gradually as you approach GA 42 **(C).** For the next 12 miles, the river runs with only an occasional riffle as the gradient flattens, dropping sediment that collects into sandy bars, beaches, and bottoms. Fallen trees snag on these shallow bars, sometimes blocking the river. Winding hairpins characterize the river's course to the Ocmulgee.

On the banks, catalpa, ash, and birch become more common, and the river continues to be well shaded. The greatest obstacle of this section is attributable to the forest itself, which at times appears to be falling in slow motion into the streambed. It's also the source of beauty along this secluded section. Portaging around trees slows forward progress, as does the sandy river bottom that keeps you guessing where the deepest channel lies.

The last take-out on the Towaliga is at US 23 **(E),** 1.7 miles before the confluence. It's 2.1 miles farther for the next take-out on the Ocmulgee at Juliette Park **(F)** on the right, between the Juliette Road bridge and the dam. Access is much easier in Juliette than from the right-of-way next to US 23, but stick to the right side of the Ocmulgee above the dam. The river there is very wide.

Hazards in this section are many downed trees blocking the river channel.

GAUGE See preceding section. Minimum levels for paddling this section are unknown. More water would make for a more comfortable trip on the lower section, but this section should be avoided in high water due to excessive strainers.

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
C	33.12162	-83.94342
D	33.11485	-83.87047
E	33.12257	-83.82601
F*	33.10701	-83.79631

**Includes 2.1 mi on the Ocmulgee River*

LITTLE OCMULGEE RIVER

OVERVIEW The Little Ocmulgee is a small blackwater river that flows southeast between its heavyweight neighbors the Oconee and main Ocmulgee Rivers. White sandbanks of moderate height frame the stream's burgundy-red water. The river meanders through a pristine forest draped with Spanish moss. After Alligator Creek's confluence, the river's channel becomes wider, straighter, and more defined to its confluence with the main Ocmulgee just upstream of the larger river's confluence with the Oconee.

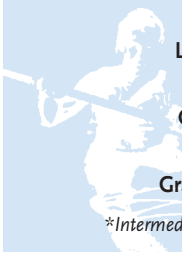
MAPS Scotland, Jordan, Lumber City, Hazelhurst North (USGS); Wheeler, Telfair (County)

THE GEORGIA COAST

OVERVIEW No paddling guide for Georgia would be complete without mention of the Atlantic coastal waters. Ranging from the mouth of the Savannah River at the South Carolina border south to the mouth of the St. Marys River at the Florida state line, the 100-mile Georgia coast remains one of the largest undeveloped wilderness areas east of the Mississippi River. The **Georgia Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail,** a section of the more-than-800-mile Southeast Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail, offers paddlers the opportunity to explore an unbroken trail of tidal marshes and rivers that extends along the coasts of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

MAPS Nautical Charts 11,506–11,512 (NOAA); Savannah, Fort Pulaski, Isle of Hope, Wassaw Sound, Raccoon Key, Burroughs, Oak Level, St. Catherines South, Seabrook, Shellman Bluff, Doboy South, Ridgeville, Altamaha Sound, Darien, Brunswick East, Jekyll Island, Dover Bluff, Kingsland Northeast, Cumberland Island North, Cumberland Island South, Harrietts Bluff, Saint Marys, Fernandina Beach, FL (USGS); Southeast Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail (see **secoastpaddlingtrail.com**)

St. Marys to Savannah



Class	T*
Length	100 mi
Time	5–7 days
Gauge	Web, phone
Level	Tidal
Gradient	0 fpm

**Intermediate–advanced difficulty*

DESCRIPTION A chain of 13 barrier islands anchors the outer edge of Georgia's coastal region, shielding the expansive marshes, smaller islands, and hammocks that stretch from the interior sides of the barrier islands to the mainland. Within this marshy coastal zone, thousands of miles of potential paddling trips wind through a labyrinth of rivers, sounds, and convoluted tidal creeks. The number and type of trips available are limited only by the paddler's imagination—one access point can be the debarkation point for many different routes. Trip styles range from the serene exploration of smaller sloughs and creeks to a wild ride in the surf. Wide expanses of undeveloped terrain make for excellent camping trips.

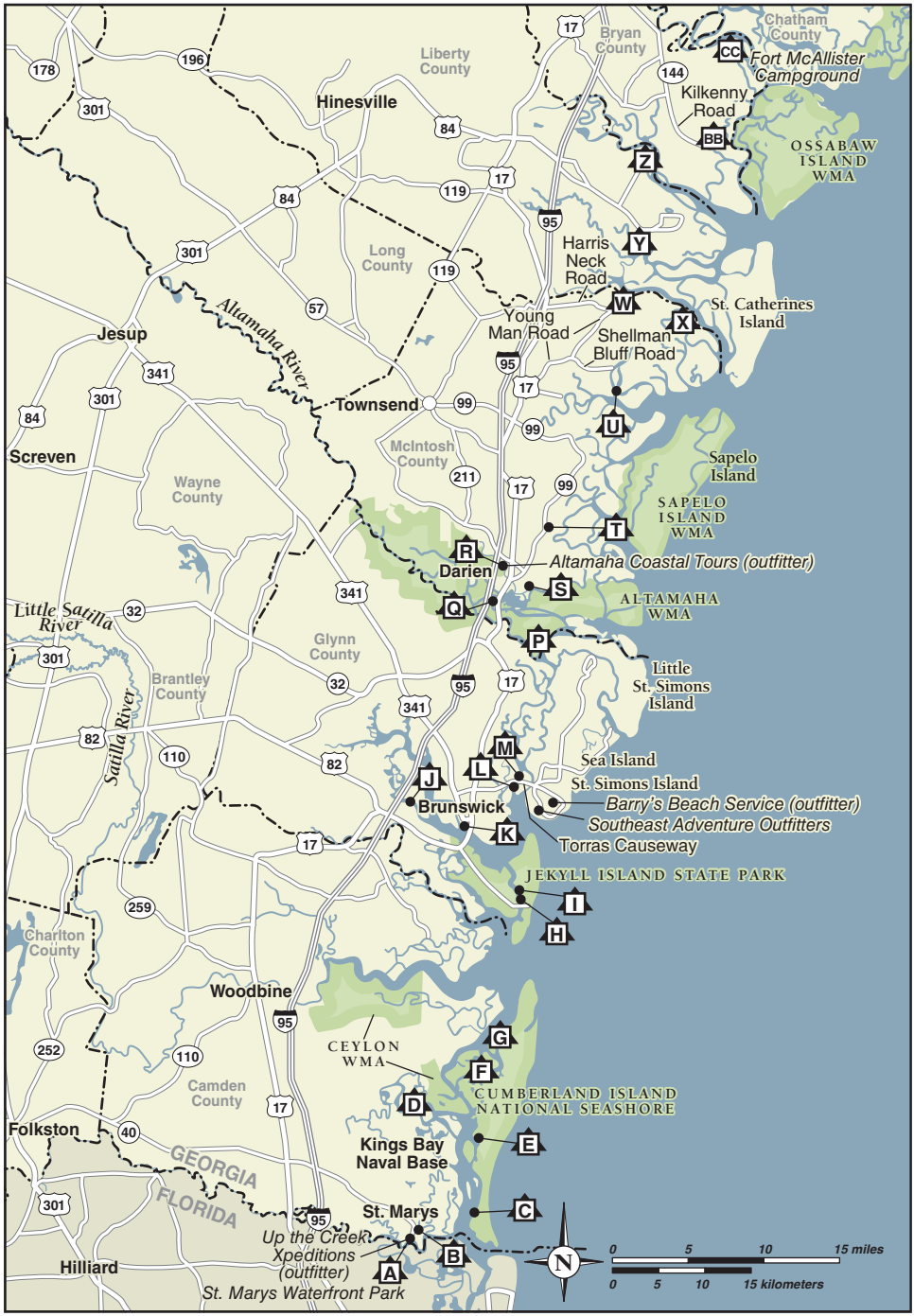
Wildlife abounds in the coastal ecosystem. Acres and acres of lime-green grasses form on the lowest-lying land, providing habitat for raccoons, mink, and rice rats. Birds, including the willet, great blue heron, and snowy egret, feed in the marshes. Shrubs and trees grow on the higher land of the islands and hammocks. Here, laurel oak, red bay, and sprawling live oak trees draped with Spanish moss canopy an understory of palmettos. Larger islands are home to feral pigs, deer, armadillos, and wild horses.

Marine life is diverse and abundant. Tidal creeks and sloughs provide sheltered nurseries for young fish, shrimp, and crabs. Oyster beds cluster in the muddy zone between the high and low tide. Gregarious dolphins swim beside paddlers, announcing their arrival with a blast of air. Surfacing sea turtles, river otters, and jumping fish all make appearances above the plane of the water, seemingly with little regard for the paddler who has ventured onto the topside of their turf.

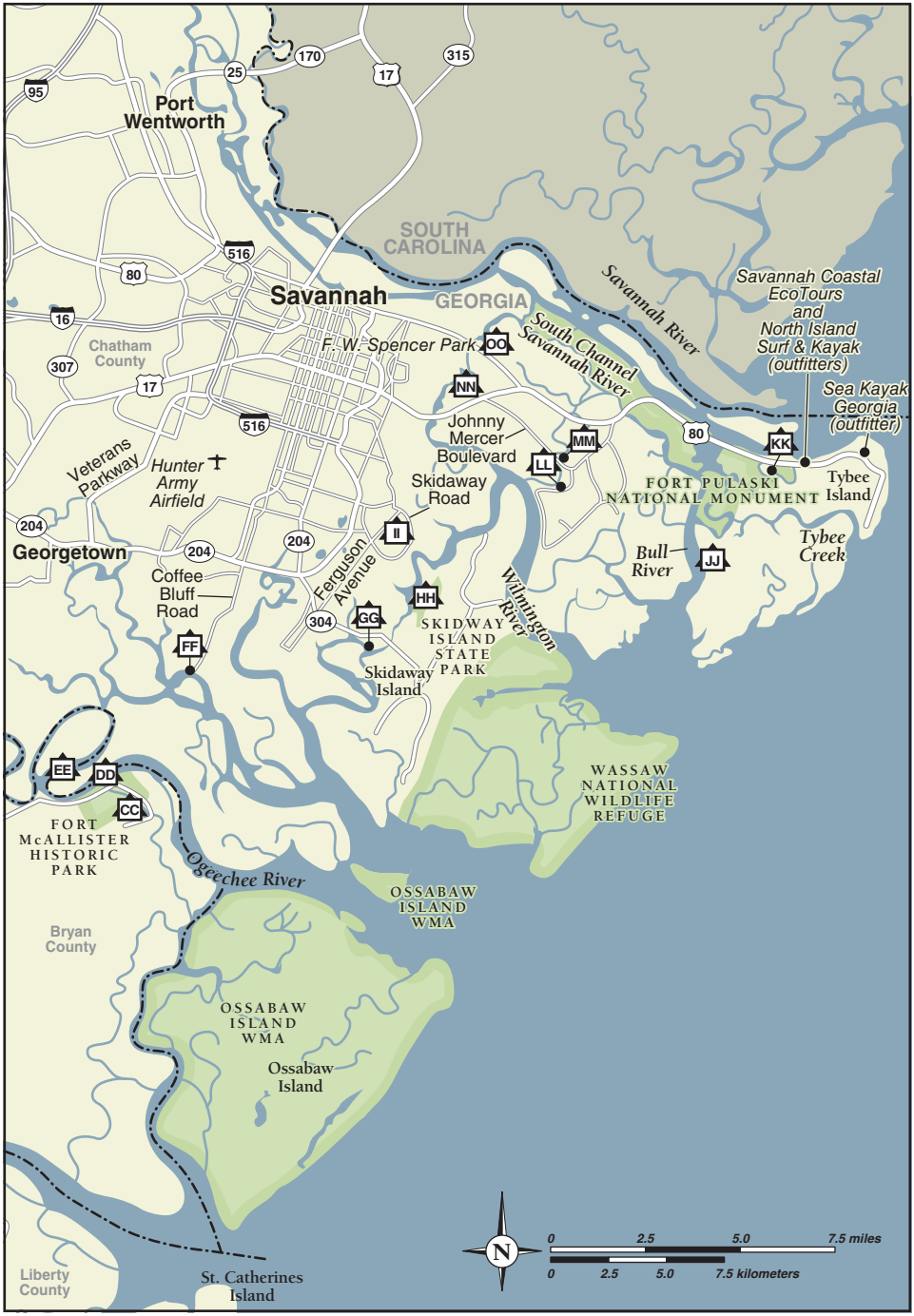
While much of the terrain is wilderness, many of the waterways are not. Powerboats

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 370)

The Georgia Coast *(St. Marys to Fort McAllister)*



The Georgia Coast *(Fort McAllister to Spencer)*



(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 367)

and sailboats are common, but they typically avoid the smaller sloughs and creeks. Large intracoastal barges can be encountered in the Intracoastal Waterway, which winds through the coastal region.

Compared with traditional river trips, paddling among the tidal islands and marshes requires comprehensive planning and research before heading out. Tidal currents, feasible routes, high-land access points, and available freshwater options all require consideration in trip planning. Coastal outfitters and experienced paddlers will happily provide you with advice on all of these counts. Check secoastpaddlingtrail.com/plan-your-trip for some trip-planning suggestions.

Georgia's portion of the Southeast Coastal Paddling Trail is mostly intermediate to advanced in difficulty. The tidal amplitude is the largest in the Southeast. If you're new to coastal paddling, a guided trip is the best way to get started. For a list of coastal Georgia outfitters offering guided trips, see Appendix B (page 412). Visit secoastpaddlingtrail.com/plan-your-trip/georgia for more information.

When planning a trip, gathering local knowledge of tides and suggested routes is a highly recommended starting point. The timing and strength of tides vary by area; working with the local tidal pattern can make the difference between a pleasant trip paddling with the flow or an arduous slog with potentially dangerous consequences when working against it. As such, tidal patterns dictate the best launch and return times. Local information can also help you avoid getting stranded in tide-dependent channels that are transformed at low tide into impassable, muddy channels laced with oyster beds full of sharp, cutting shells.

NOAA charts and USGS quadrangle maps are useful in planning a trip. NOAA

EXPLORING A TIDAL MARSH ON THE GEORGIA COAST
Photo: Savannah Coastal EcoTours

chart numbers 11,506–11,512 encompass the Georgia coast; a free online index is available to help determine which charts you'll need to order. These charts are also available in marine stores. USGS maps can be found at some outfitters, most surveying supply stores, and online at store.usgs.gov. Use the index map to locate the quadrangle(s) needed for your trip.

Trace your route on paper before getting on the water. Navigation while paddling the Georgia coast is sometimes complicated by the lack of differentiating vertical landmarks. You may be looking for the entrance to a creek a half mile away and all you can see is a solid-green line of marsh. Having important bearings, distances, and landmarks noted in advance on your chart will expedite your trip.

The Southeast Coast Paddling Trail includes access at high-land points, ramps, and undeveloped launches. The trail's interactive online map (tinyurl.com/GeorgiaCoastAccess) can filter access points by type of lodging: camping, hotel, RV camping, or none. (*Note:* The interactive map is intended for general planning purposes only.) Local knowledge is also invaluable in planning where to land and where to camp. Island access (for camping or day visits) is actively controlled by a variety of different jurisdictions; some islands are restricted wildlife preserves, and others are privately owned. Camping, where available, is excellent but requires that you plan in advance and secure the required permissions before leaving, particularly for Cumberland Island. Simply showing up can jeopardize future access for all paddlers. Contact info for each access point is included in the online trail map.

Four of the 13 barrier islands—Tybee, Sea Island, St. Simons, and Jekyll—are accessible by car and highly developed. Of these, Jekyll and St. Simons Islands offer traditional hotel lodging; Jekyll also has a developed campground.

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	30.71991	-81.55028
B	30.73303	-81.53873
C*	30.76421	-81.47094
D	30.84528	-81.55992
E*	30.80590	-81.45210
F*	30.85467	-81.46712
G*	30.89674	-81.44467
H	31.04396	-81.42092
I	31.04224	-81.42273
J	31.15229	-81.54699
K	31.80639	-81.37339
L	31.17022	-81.42345
M	31.16773	-81.41552
O	31.17156	-81.40871
P	31.30813	-81.40051
Q	31.33686	-81.44844
R	31.36801	-81.43705
S	31.36022	-81.41002
T	31.40540	-81.39224
U	31.56733	-81.32129
W	31.62159	-81.26236
X	31.61013	-81.20998
Y	31.69514	-81.27131
Z	31.76437	-81.27890
BB	31.78897	-81.20241
CC	31.88032	-81.18006
DD	31.89000	-81.21000
EE	31.88879	-81.20332
FF	31.93709	-81.15408
GG	31.94713	-81.06689
HH	31.96000	-81.05000
II	31.97996	-81.05657
JJ	31.97021	-80.92000
KK	32.01411	-80.88413
LL	32.01371	-80.98546
MM	32.02110	-80.99254
NN	32.03677	-80.04645
OO	31.05954	-81.02307

**Camping reservations required*

The family who owns Little St. Simons Island operates an upscale lodge there.

SHUTTLE NOTES Two tide-dependent coastal trips are included in this book. See Cathead Creek (opposite) and Crooked River (page 375) for details.

GAUGE The Georgia coast is runnable year-round. The timing for trips changes every day with tidal flows. at tinyurl.com/GeorgiaTides for a list of NOAA's tidal gauging stations. Click on a station for real-time levels and forecasts for the following 31 days.

COASTAL CAMPING OPTIONS

Little Tybee, one of the least disturbed of Georgia's barrier islands, is home to rare and endangered migrating birds. It is owned by the state and managed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Permits are not required for camping.

Ossabaw Island, Georgia's third-largest barrier island, shelters rare and biologically diverse native plant and animal communities. The island was acquired by the State of Georgia under very specific guidelines. Designated as a Georgia Heritage Preserve, the island has been set aside for scientific and cultural study; trips to the island should meet these criteria—that is, have specific research or educational goals related to the unique natural history of the island. Camping permits, visits, and tours are provided; groups should consist of at least six people. Visit ossabawisland.org for more information and applications for day-use and camping permits.

The state also owns much of **Sapelo Island,** the fourth-largest of Georgia's barrier islands. Pioneer camping for groups of 15–25 people (for a minimum of two nights) is available at the Cabretta Beach facility at the Reynolds Mansion; for reservations and more information, visit gastateparks.org/reynoldsmansion. Hog Hammock, on the south side of the island, is a Gullah community that has maintained the customs and language of its African ancestors, who worked the plantations once located on the island. Check airbnb.com and vrbo.com for lodging options.

At 17.5 miles in length, **Cumberland Island** is the largest of Georgia's barrier islands. Cumberland Island National Seashore preserves the native maritime forests, dune fields, marshes, mud flats, and tidal creeks in addition to the ruins of the Dungeness mansion, the mansion at Plum Orchard, and the Settlement. The National Park Service controls access to the patchwork of public lands spread throughout the island by issuing camping permits and ferry tickets. Camping options include developed campgrounds and remote backcountry sites in the wilderness areas. Competition for permits is fierce, and reservations are released on a six-month rolling basis at Recreation.gov (see tinyurl.com/CampCumberland for details). See nps.gov/cuis for additional campsite information. Those not paddling to the island will need to make a reservation for the Cumberland Island Ferry (888-817-3421, 912-882-4335, or cumberlandislandferry.com).

To say that the maritime forests and marshes of the Georgia coast are merely special would be misleading. They are, in fact, a magical, fragile ecosystem that shields the inner coast from the brutal vagaries of the sea. Deference to the natural environment and the regulations that preserve it is not just recommended but necessary to ensure the continued health of this unique environment. That so much of this region remains undeveloped is truly remarkable—no other eastern state can boast a similar expanse of wild coastal lands.

ALAPAHA RIVER

OVERVIEW Junglelike in its remoteness and luxurious with exotic vegetation, the dark reddish-brown waters of the Alapaha wind through a swampy wonderland teeming with wildlife. Signs of habitation are rare along the river's course; only a few isolated cabins intrude on the remote tranquility. Convoluted twists and turns with sandbars typify the upper reaches of the river. Later, the river channel narrows and deepens, producing a fast current. In these sections, paddlers will find the largest concentration of rapids in South Georgia. Underlying strata of limestone creates shoals that reach Class II in intensity.

MAPS Enigma, Alapaha, Tenmile Bay, Willacoochee, Hastings Fish Pond, Lakeland, Naylor, Howell, Statenville, Jennings (USGS); Irwin, Tift, Berrien, Atkinson, Lanier, Lowndes, Echols, Hamilton, FL (County); Alapaha River Water Trail (see **wwals.net/arwt**)

Five Bridges Road to Lakeland

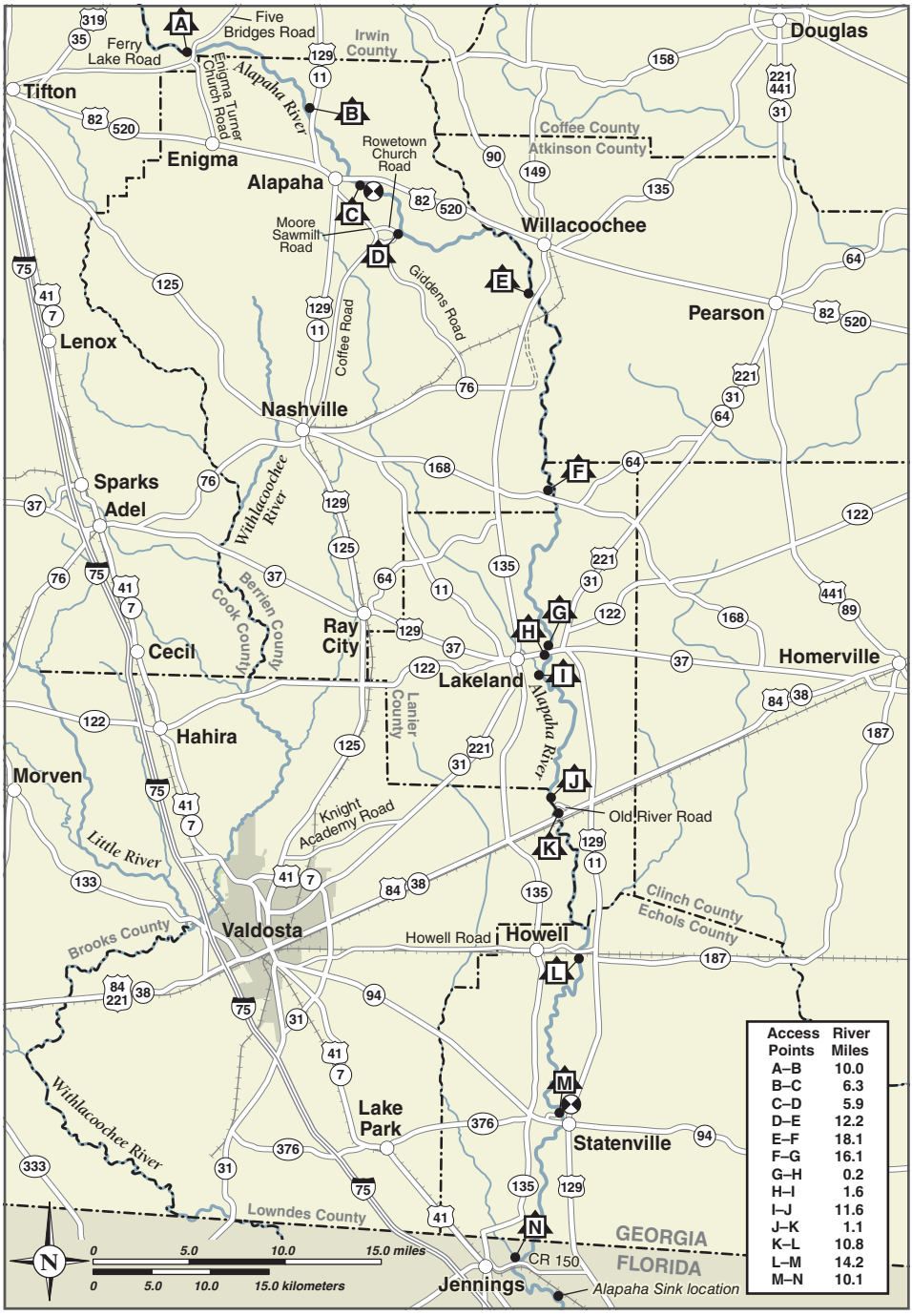
Class	I
Length	68.6 mi
Time	6–7 days
Gauge	Web, phone
Level	8 ft
Gradient	1 fpm

DESCRIPTION The Alapaha River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located upstream of this section where the "river" is a loose collection of lakes. Established in 2016, the WMA protects the extensive sandhill habitat found here. The WMA has a boat ramp that can be used to explore Deserter Lake.

The uppermost sections of the river from Five Bridges Road **(A)** to US 82 **(C)** are a swamp; passage is challenging and requires a minimum of 11 feet on the USGS Alapaha gauge. The stream alternates between lengthy shallow passages that flow through the

THE CLASS-1 ALAPAHA RIVER IS WELL SUITED TO FAMILY PADDLING Photo: Suzanne Welander

Alapaha River



floodplain, where little to no channel is discernible, to lakelike pools, where the channel coalesces wide and deep before disintegrating into swamp and requiring paddlers to choose—again—which of the available downstream channels is best.

The following section includes a swamp prairie, terrain typical of the Okefenokee save for the lack of groomed canoe trails that make prairie paddling easy in Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Given the terrain and obstructions, consider this section an overnight trip. Suitable campsites are difficult but not impossible to find. Read "Considerations for Swamp Paddling" (page 6) for additional suggestions, and keep in mind that the passage of hurricanes can create mazes of fallen trees that persist for years.

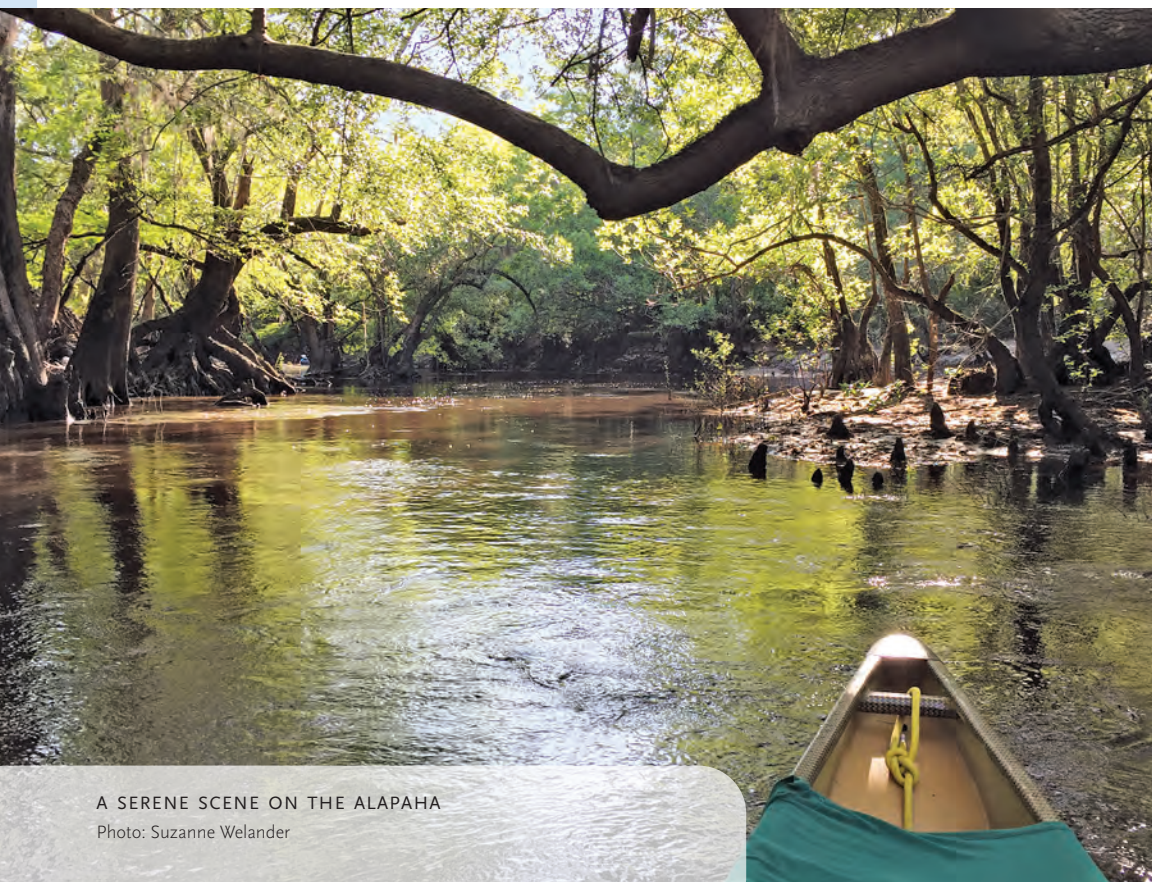
The **Alapaha River Water Trail** starts at Sheboggy Boat Ramp at US 82 **(C),** where the river's flow coalesces into a reliable channel. The trail includes convenient access at Rowetown Church Cemetery **(D);** call 229-686-4512 well in advance to arrange to use this private launch site.

The river's character remains intimate and tree shaded from Sheboggy Landing to the confluence with the Alapaha's largest tributary,

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
A	31.47904	-83.34467
B	31.42978	-83.24617
C	31.38563	-83.19336
D*	31.33906	-83.14979
E	31.30338	-83.05332
F	31.15726	-83.03990
G	31.04592	-83.04334

**Arrange access in advance (see Description)*



A SERENE SCENE ON THE ALAPAHA
Photo: Suzanne Welander

the Willacoochee River, 11.5 miles downstream. After the confluence the river's width increases to 45–60 feet, but twists and turns do not abate. There are two landings on the river at GA 135 **(E)** near the town of Willacoochee: during high water, access is easier on the Willacoochee side of the bridge; in low water, use the Nashville Landing on the other side.

The river follows a course of extreme and seemingly endless loops and tight turns to the town of Lakeland **(G).** Sandbars are at their most prolific in this region, providing excellent swimming and camping spots. The river's low, sandy banks are relatively newly formed. Trees—pine, water oak, laurel oak, sweet bay, birch, and the occasional live oak—growing on the banks are in a perpetual slow-motion migration into the riverbed, creating a lush canopy that shades the dark-brown waters from the sun. Sweet gum, cypress, and Australian pine occasionally take up residence midstream. Debris collects on the midstream trees, making downstream progress in this section technically challenging at best, a dangerous struggle at worst. The current is normally moderate on the Alapaha, but the river comes up quickly after a good rainfall to create a fast current at high water. With the density of trees crowding the banks, high water creates dangerous conditions for novices or anyone caught outside of a boat.

The Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge is on the opposite side of the town of Lakeland. The lake is not accessible from the river, but it makes a good side trip. Paddlers can explore the 1,000-acre lake embedded in the wider 4,000-acre protected wildlife area, including evening paddling trips during the full moon.

SHUTTLE NOTES To reach the lowest takeouts in this section, at Lakeland Boat Ramp **(G)** and Pafford's Landing **(H),** use the frontage road on the west side of the river on US 221. Take the frontage road to the boat ramp or the right fork to reach Pafford's Landing, which is restricted to human-powered craft only.

GAUGE Using the USGS gauge on the Alapaha River near Alapaha, the paddleable range on the water trail is 7.7 feet (minimum) to 10.6 feet (maximum). Local outfitters can provide advice over the phone. The river is most often running in the winter and spring.

Lakeland to Florida

Class	I–II
Length	49.6 mi
Time	4 days
Gauge	Web, phone
Level	2 ft
Gradient	2 fpm

DESCRIPTION Sandbars continue to be present at the start of this section as the river's winding ways persist. Camping is permitted on the sandy beaches at Pafford's Landing **(H),** a quarter mile downstream of the boat ramp at US 129. It's not long before the current gets faster as the river straightens and flows in the center of a broad, forested swamp corridor. Sandbars peter out when the gradient increases after you pass underneath the Southern Railroad bridge next to US 84 near Naylor. Use the Naylor Boat Ramp off US 84 **(K)** to access the river here instead of the treacherous, sandy cliffs on river left by the railroad bridge.

From time to time, sand bluffs up to 10 feet high and populated with pine encroach on the bottomland, making for good campsites in absence of sandbars or during periods of higher water. A good camping spot that was a designated stop along an earlier incarnation

of the Alapaha River Water Trail sits a little more than 2 hours below Howell Road **(L),** on the river-right bluff. In this section, the river's channel also begins to narrow; by the time it reaches Statenville, the stream looks like a large creek.

The Alapaha's rapids appear more frequently below US 84 (though one rapid, complete with a surfing wave, is upstream between Lakeland and Naylor). The rapids can be complicated, especially at lower water levels requiring precise boat placement. The section below Statenville/GA 94 **(M)** has seven of these drops, including the most complicated: Jennings Defeat, shortly below the Georgia–Florida state line. Keep your footing if portaging; the limestone bedrock at these rapids can be sharp where it's exposed at the banks.

Shortly after passing below the state line, the river enters the Upper Alapaha Conservation Area, which protects both sides of the river to the confluence with the Alapahoochee River and the left side below that. If the water level's right, paddle upstream through the Alapahoochee's narrows to the waterfall at Turket Creek and farther upstream to Class II Devil Shoals.

The first take-out in Florida is at Sasser Landing **(N),** on County Road 150. Be aware that the Alapaha Sink is located downstream of this landing. In low-water periods, the Alapaha Sink and its partner, the Dead River Sink, gobble the entire river, leaving an exposed, sandy river bottom to the river's intermittent confluence with the Suwannee River miles downstream. The underground river emerges at the Alapaha Rise on the Suwannee a bit upstream of the surface confluence. The sinks can be reached from hiking trails in the Suwannee River Water Management District's Jennings Tract.

GPS Coordinates

ACCESS	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
G	31.04592	-83.04334
H	31.04243	-83.04203
I	31.02512	-83.04801
J*	30.93666	-83.04064
K	30.92582	-83.03931
L	30.82772	-83.01828
M	30.70444	-83.03282
N	30.60086	-83.07318

**East bank only*

ENTRANCE ROAD LOCATIONS		
TO H	31.04541	-83.04758
TO J	30.93166	-83.01913
TO N	30.59954	-83.06981

GAUGE The USGS website provides data for the Alapaha River at Statenville, near the end of this section. Using this gauge, 2.0 feet is a good minimum for below Lakeland; maximum 6.0 feet.

ALAPAHOOCHEE RIVER

OVERVIEW This South Georgia beauty rises from the lake country south of Valdosta and heads south into Florida, where it meets the Alapaha River. The Alapahoochee delivers an intimate, wild experience through a miniature canyon, cradled by lush overhead vegetation and including some unusual natural wonders: a 10-foot waterfall, a creek littered with shark teeth, and one of South Georgia's most challenging rapids. The Alapahoochee is part of the **Alapaha River Water Trail.**

MAPS Statenville, Jennings, FL (USGS); Echols, Hamilton, FL (County); Alapaha River Water Trail (see **wwals.net/arwt**)

GEORGIA'S COMPREHENSIVE PADDLING GUIDEBOOK

Since 1980, paddlers have relied on ***Canoeing & Kayaking Georgia*** to provide the detailed logistical information needed for successful river trips of any length across the entire state. This definitive new edition verifies and updates all distances, gradients, descriptions, and access points. Another 145 river-miles have been added to 9 waterways covered in previous editions, and alternative put-ins on tributary streams are provided for longtime favorites.

Inside You'll Find

- **4,000+ miles of paddling trips from the Chattooga River to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, including four new Class I and II waterways**
- **Outings for all experience levels, from smoothwater to challenging whitewater**
- **Important details needed to prepare for trips: gauges, mileages, GPS coordinates for access points, and websites**
- **Easy-to-reference descriptions of 18 developed Water Trails**
- **"Best of" lists of Georgia's top runs for families, camping, whitewater, and more**

Canoeing & Kayaking Georgia is the complete guide to the state's rivers in a single reference book.

MENASHA RIDGE PRESS
Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982
an imprint of AdventureKEEN