

Canton

Length: 16 Miles (East Cherokee Drive to Boling Park)

Class: I

Time: 7-10 hours

Minimum Level: This section of river suitable for running at all times, although during severe drought some shoals may be difficult to navigate.

River Gauge: The nearest river gauge is located at Canton:

http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ga/nwis/uv?site_no=02392000

Launch Site: Access to the river is on the north side of the river opposite the Pilgrim's Pride chicken rendering plant at a location known locally as Gober Beach. There is no developed launch or parking area, but a gentle slope to the river and wide sandbar make for a suitable launch.

Directions: The launch is located off Ga. 5 near Ball Ground. From Exit 24 on I-575 north of Canton, go south on Airport Road 0.5 mile to Ga. 5. Turn left on Ga. 5 and proceed 1 mile to East Cherokee Drive on right. Turn right and proceed 0.8 mile to river and launch area on left.

Take Out Site: The take out is located in the City of Canton's Boling Park on river right. There is not a developed boat launch at this location, but it is possible to take out up the river's steep bank adjacent to the picnic area located between the soccer fields and the tennis courts.

Directions: From launch site on East Cherokee Dr., return to Ga. 5. Turn left and proceed 1 mile to Airport Road on right. Turn right and proceed 0.5 mile to I-575. Take I-575 south to Canton and proceed 7.2 miles to Exit 16 (Ga. 20 west). Take Ga. 20 west 0.6 mile to redlight at Ga. 140/Ga. 20. Turn right and proceed 0.4 mile to Boling Park on left. Turn left and proceed 0.4 mile to picnic area on left.

Outfitters:

Lilydipper Outfitters in Canton is the nearest canoe/kayak outfitter.

Description: Though it passes through the heart of one of the country's fastest growing counties, the Etowah in Cherokee County remains surprisingly wild as it winds snake-like from East Cherokee Drive to Canton. Marked by six Native American fish weirs, this section of river, while a window to the past, runs headlong into 21st century demands including landfills, waters supply reservoirs and wastewater treatment plants. Though mostly flatwater, the river periodically quickens its pace over small shoals and fish weirs.

Points of Interest:

Mile 72.4—(34°18'0.99"N 84°24'13.01"W)—Blankenship Sand Company—The self proclaimed "cleaners of the Etowah," the Blankenship Sand Company dredges sand and silt from the river bottom here and downstream on the upper end of Lake Allatoona. The barge you see sucks sand and water from the river and pumps it on to the shore where it is separated for our use and enjoyment. The sand is used to make cement and finds its way into construction projects throughout the region—(the average house has 70 tons of sand in it). The sand is also utilized on ball fields and in parks—most notably, Etowah River sand has been used by the grounds crew at Turner Field in Atlanta. Workers at the operation often pull unusual items from the river bottom including dentures, wallets and other unmentionables.

Mile 73.9—(34°17'23.58"N 84°23'52.73"W)—Riggins Creek & Pine Bluff Landfill—About one mile upstream along Riggins Creek sits Georgia's largest landfill—Pine Bluff operated by Waste Management. Each day the landfill takes in around 4700 tons of municipal and industrial trash. Opened in 1993, the facility is expected to reach its capacity in 2025. Leachate and runoff from landfills—both contaminants and sediment—can, of course, pollute local streams, and, oh the waste! Each year, Georgians send to landfills 1.4 million tons of material that could be recycled. The value of that "trash" is estimated at \$223 million, including \$76 million in plastics and \$58 million in aluminum. Waste Management, does, however, recycle its decomposing trash at Pine Bluff. A pipeline connects methane gas captured at the landfill to the Pilgrim's Pride chicken rendering plant on the banks of the Etowah to fuel heating equipment at the facility. Pine Bluff is nearly a mile long and about a half mile wide. Edwards Creek, about 1.5 mile downstream, drains the western half of the facility.

Mile 74.1—(34°17'18.02"N 84°24'0.34"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 75.1—(34°16'39.20"N 84°24'25.32"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 76.6—(34°16'43.41"N 84°25'52.17"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 78.9—(34°16'8.10"N 84°25'56.17"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 80.6—(34°15'25.28"N 84°26'10.35"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 82.3—(34°14'57.29"N 84°26'35.09"W)—Sandbar & Strainer—A large sandbar extending from river left restricts the flow of the river to a small channel on river right that can be choked with strainers. Caution should be used when navigating through this obstacle.

Mile 83—(34°15'0.55"N 84°27'13.91"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 83.7—(34°15'4.75"N 84°27'57.54"W)—Hickory Log Creek and Dam—Several miles upstream from here on Hickory Log Creek sits the most recent effort in “drought-proofing” metro Atlanta—Hickory Log Dam & Reservoir. Completed in 2010, the 950-foot wide, 180-foot high dam on this creek is the largest in Georgia not built by the Corps of Engineers or Georgia Power. Originally, projected as a \$25 million project, by the time of its completion, costs had run over \$100 million. The reservoir is considered a “pump-storage” facility meaning that water is pumped from the Etowah to fill the reservoir during the winter months when flows are the highest and then released as needed to supplement flows during the summer months when flows on the Etowah are at their lowest, thus ensuring adequate river levels just downstream at the City of Canton’s water intake pipes. The reservoir is also intended to regulate flows to Lake Allatoona where the Cobb-Marietta Water Authority also withdraws water. From its inception, the project has stirred controversy and debate. The State of Alabama filed a lawsuit to stop the project because of concerns about flows being diverted from downstream communities. Within Georgia, water conservation advocates have clashed with dam builders in a debate over endangered species, healthy rivers and the efficient use of state tax dollars for water supplies. Dams, especially in the Upper Etowah River, destroy habitat for the federally protected fish like the Etowah, Cherokee and amber darters, and alter and disrupt natural flows critical to healthy rivers. And, the cost of such facilities is astronomical when compared with the cost of conservation measures. Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division estimates that conservation and efficiency measures cost from \$0.46 to \$250 for every 1000 gallons saved while building a reservoir can cost \$4000 for every 1000 gallons. The intake pumps used to fill the reservoir are located just downstream from the creek’s mouth, below the I-575 bridge.

Mile 84.9—(34°14'32.43"N 84°28'59.21"W)—Canton Cotton Mill—A bit of Canton’s history stands near the Etowah here. Built in 1924, the massive brick Canton Cotton Mill No. 2 once employed 550 people and processed up to 30,000 bales of cotton each year. In the 1930s, fully a third of the town’s population was employed in the textile industry. This mill operated until 1981, and in 2000, it was transformed into loft apartments. Today no textile industry exists in Canton.

Mile 85.3—(34°14'25.55"N 84°29'13.47"W)—Canton Water Intake/City of Canton—Canton was first incorporated under the name of Etowah in 1833, but the following year, the Georgia legislature approved the name “Canton.” Founders of the town had tried to establish a silk industry as found in Canton, China and thus wanted a name to promote their pursuits. Though the silk industry never developed, the town did ultimately develop a textile industry in its cotton mills. Cherokee County was once among Georgia’s top producers of cotton per acre, and Canton Textile Mills, located on the banks of the Etowah was one of the largest denim manufacturers in the South. Today, Canton is a growing bedroom community. In the first decade of the 21st century, Cherokee County consistently ranked among the top 35 fastest growing counties in the nation. Between 2000 and 2010, the county’s population grew by 51 percent to 214,000. A paddle down the Etowah during a rain will show you the impacts of their arrival: expect a river the color of the Piedmont’s red clay as dirt from massive land clearing projects for residential and commercial developments washes off these sites. This muddy river is bad news for the river’s fish. The dirt clogs up their gills, makes it difficult for them to find food and decreases their reproductive success. Want to know how it feels to be a fish looking for love in a muddy stream? Try throwing a bucket of mud in your bed! The mud also increases the cost of treating the river to drinking water standards. The Etowah provides Canton with its drinking water, taken from the river at this site.

Mile 86—(34°14'12.52"N 84°29'50.10"W)—Edgewater & Crescent Farm—Atop a high hill on river right here sits, “Edgewater,” the former home of Gus Coggins and his 400-acre Crescent Farm-- so named because the Etowah encircled the farm in a crescent shape. Coggins was a successful farmer, horsebreeder and businessman caught up in the unique social fabric of the post-Civil War south. Because former slaves could be employed cheaper than comparable white laborers, Coggins, like many businessmen, hired blacks instead of whites. This practice drew the ire of unemployed whites who began forming vigilante groups whose sole purpose was to punish white businessmen who hired blacks. The vigilante groups routinely burned his barns and stables. Historians believe that in response, Coggins constructed a massive stone barn (with materials harvested from the Etowah River) in 1906 to house his best horses. Today what came to be known as the “Rock Barn” still stands and is the home of the Cherokee County Historical Society—a visible reminder of the South’s culture of violence and fear in the decades following the Civil War.

Mile 87.5—(34°13'51.24"N 84°30'16.06"W)—City of Canton Wastewater Treatment Plant—Just below the Ga. 5 Bridge sits the City of Canton’s wastewater treatment plant. This facility can treat 2.35 million gallons of sewage a day. A biological phosphorus removal process along with a chemical addition and filtration allow effluent from this plant to meet requirements of reuse water systems. All water use at the plant itself is from this reuse water. Nevertheless, phosphorus discharges from this and other wastewater treatment plants in the Upper Etowah Basin contribute to high nutrient levels on Lake Allatoona which can lead to algal blooms and fish kills.