

Dawson Forest

Length: 9 Miles (Ga. 9 to Kelly Bridge Road)

Class: I

Time: 4-7 hours

Minimum Level: This section of river can be run except in the most severe droughts. Levels of 60 cfs or greater at the Hwy. 9 gauge should provide sufficient flow.

River Gauge: The nearest river gauge is located at Ga. 9:
http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ga/nwis/uv?site_no=02389150

Launch Site: This Dawson County facility includes a canoe/kayak launch, ample parking and a portable toilet. Other amenities include a covered pavilion, informational kiosk and benches and swings overlooking the river.

Directions: The launch is located on Ga. 9 south of Dawsonville. From the intersection of Ga. 400 and Ga. 369 north of Cumming, turn left on Ga. 369 (Browns Bridge Road) and proceed one mile to Ga. 9. Turn right and proceed 7.8 miles to the Etowah River. Launch area will be on your left after the bridge.

Take Out Site: The take out is located on river right just before reaching Kelly Bridge. A privately-owned boat ramp, there is a nominal fee for the privilege of using the site (paid on the honor system at a drop box located on the gate into the parking area). The site includes a paved boat ramp, ample parking and a portable toilet.

Directions: From the Hwy. 9 Launch Site, turn right on Ga. 9 and proceed 1.6 miles to A.T. Moore Road on the right. Turn right and proceed 0.7 mile where A.T. Moore merges with Govan Road to become Kelly Bridge Road. Proceed from here 5.5 miles to Etowah River. Launch area will be on your right after the bridge.

Descriptions: Perhaps the most frequently paddled section on the entire length of the river, this nine mile trip winds almost entirely within the beautiful 10,000-acre Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area. The river here is intimate and shaded with several shoals. Though a wilderness feel emanates from the river's banks, the area was once teaming with people. From 1956 to 1971 government contractors worked on a top-secret project to build a nuclear-powered airplane. Today it is a haven for paddlers, hikers, bikers, hunters, anglers and horseback riders. The primary obstacles to navigation are cross river strainers that can occur frequently. All shoals are rated as Class I in difficulty.

Outfitters:

Appalachian Outfitters (Dahlonega) is the nearest canoe/kayak outfitter.

Points of Interest:

Mile 39.5—(34°21'27.05"N 84° 6'50.63"W)—Mountain Stewards Launch Site—Built in 2009, this Dawson County maintained launch site is another feather in the cap of a community that promotes itself as an outdoor recreation Mecca. Like many of the launches along the Etowah, its development was a cooperative effort between a local government, a private landowner and a non-profit organization like the Mountain Stewards, an organization dedicated to restoring and building recreational trails in North Georgia. The Stewards have designed and constructed numerous boat launches and between 2005 and 2010 opened up some 34 miles of canoe trails in North Georgia, including this site. The launch cost approximately \$10,000 to construct.

Mile 40.7—(34°21'40.66"N 84° 7'51.83"W)—Etowah Water & Sewer Authority Land Application System—On river right is the Etowah Water & Sewer Authority's wastewater treatment facility which treats about a half million gallons of sewage each day through a land application system. After sewage is given primary treatment, the effluent is then sprayed on the land surrounding the facility. The advantage of this system is that wastewater is not discharged directly to the river. The disadvantage is that less water is returned immediately to the river—an increasing concern as more and more people depend upon the river for drinking water. EWSA's future plans call for the development of a new facility that will treat up to 10 million gallons a day and return treated water directly to the river.

Mile 41.6—(34°21'21.94"N 84° 8'23.33"W)—Shoal Creek Road and the Georgia Nuclear Aircraft Laboratory—This spot marks the river's entry into the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area, a 10,000-acre tract of land that flanks the river on both sides for the next five miles. You'd hardly guess it from the looks of things today, but from 1956 until 1971, engineers with Lockheed

Aircraft Corp. tried to build a nuclear-powered airplane at this site for the US Air Force and conducted rather frightening tests on the effects of radiation. You'll see signs of Georgia Nuclear Aircraft Laboratory (GNAL), including the water intake structure just downstream of the bridge here. Abandoned bridge piers at several sites on the river mark the locations of roads and a railroad system that linked the lab's facilities which included a nuclear reactor, a cooling site and a hot-cell building. The compound even held an underground "shielded site", where employees sheltered when the reactor was operational, and an underground parking facility.

Although the plane was a bust, other radioactive material related research was performed at GNAL. In these tests a 10 mega-watt radiation effects reactor was used to expose various materials to radiation to study the effects. This reactor was housed in a large metal building with no protection for the surrounding area. In fact, low levels of radiation can still be found in three acres of the Forest. This area is restricted. When not in use, the reactor was submerged in a swimming pool-like structure filled with water from the Etowah. The land is now owned by the City of Atlanta which purchased it with intentions of building a second Atlanta airport. The Georgia Forestry Commission has managed the forest, which includes 27 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails, since 1975.

Mile 41.9—(34°21'22.51"N 84° 8'48.28"W)—Georgia Nuclear Aircraft Lab Railroad

Mile 43.6—(34°22'22.90"N 84° 9'39.33"W)—Shoal Creek: Reservoirs and Water Transfers—On river right here, Shoal Creek spills into the Etowah. Shoal Creek has been called the "epicenter" of the biodiversity in the Upper Etowah River basin because of its healthy fish populations, including the federally protected Etowah and Cherokee darters. About a quarter mile upstream is the proposed site of a dam that will inundate 1200 acres of the forest for a water supply reservoir. The project, which has been considered since the early 1990s, would create a pool designed to meet regional water needs, including those of Metro Atlanta. Water would be pumped from the Etowah to fill the reservoir and then piped some 40 miles to metro Atlanta through a process known as an "interbasin transfer." Such transfers involve moving water from one river basin to another without returning that water to the river of its origin. Water transfers have become one of the most controversial water management practices in Georgia because they deprive downstream communities of the use of the water and can threaten healthy flows. One scenario presented for the Shoal Creek Reservoir would send 100 million gallons a day to Metro Atlanta, an amount almost equal to the water flowing down the river during annual low-flow periods. A dam on Shoal Creek would eliminate some of the last high quality habitat for protected fish in the Etowah River Basin.

Mile 44.2—(34°22'6.03"N 84° 9'53.99" W)—Abandoned Bridge

Mile 45.2—(34°21'40.53"N 84°10'41.45"W)—Waterfall—A short walk up the small tributary on river left here will lead you to a beautiful waterfall.

Mile 45.7—(34°21'43.11"N 84°11'12.44"W)—Radioactive Rapid—The one shoal of significance on this section of river, it is marked by an island that splits the river's current. During low water, the preferred route is on far river left where you will descend over a pair of short shelves. High water makes a path around either side of the island possible. Those not wishing to paddle the rapid can portage, beginning at the head of the island.

Mile 46.6—(34°22'3.50"N 84°11'46.85"W)—Amicalola Creek—Sometimes referred to as the Amicalola River, this stream has its beginnings above Amicalola Falls. At 729-feet, Amicalola Falls is the tallest cascading waterfall east of the Mississippi. The river itself is a whitewater destination, best known for the aptly named "Edge of the World" rapid. Amicalola is a Cherokee word that has been translated as "tumbling waters."

Mile 47.2—(34°21'57.73"N 84°12'17.22"W)—Rock Face—The impressive rock bluff on river right provides a glimpse of the region's geologic history. On its course from the mountains to Rome, the river cuts through three distinct geological areas—Eastern Blue Ridge, Western Blue Ridge and Ridge and Valley. The Eastern Blue Ridge represents a 500-550 million year old intraoceanic volcanic arc similar to the present-day Philippines. The Western Blue Ridge comprises North American sedimentary rocks that were deeply buried and metamorphosed during accretion of the Eastern Blue Ridge and formation of the Appalachian Mountain system. The Ridge & Valley is underlain by unmetamorphosed North American sedimentary rocks that were folded during Appalachian mountain building.

Mile 47.7—(34°21'32.63"N 84°12'2.57"W)—Rock Island—A rock island splits the river here and creates a fun shoal between river left and the island. The massive eddy and pool on the downstream side of the rock is an excellent swimming hole.