

McGraw Ford

Length: 16 Miles (Old Federal Road to East Cherokee Drive) Class: I Time: 7-10 hours

Minimum Level: Numerous shoals within the McGraw Ford Wildlife Management Area make this run difficult at levels below 130 cfs at the Ga. 9 gauge near Dawsonville. If you run it below these levels be prepared to do some walking.

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

Launch Site: There is no developed launch site at Old Federal Road, although Forsyth County has acquired land surrounding Old Federal Road and is developing the property as Eagle's Beak Park. The plans include boat launches. Access is on the east side of the river at the corner of Nicholson Road and Old Federal Road. The launch site is extremely steep, but boats can be slid down the embankment or carried beneath the bridge to gain river access.

Directions: The launch is located off Old Federal Road, west of Ga. 369. From the intersection of Ga. 400 and Ga. 369 north of Cumming, go west on Ga. 369 (Browns Bridge Road) and proceed 8.5 miles to Old Federal Road on right. Turn right and proceed 0.3 mile to Nicholson Road on right. Turn right. Launch area will be on your left.

Take Out Site: The take out is located on river right opposite the Pilgrim's Pride chicken rendering plant within site of the East Cherokee Road bridge. A sandbar provides for easy take out. There is no developed launch or parking area.

Directions: From the intersection of Old Federal Road and Ga. 369, turn right (west) on Ga. 369 and proceed 7.5 miles to Ga. 20. Turn right on Ga. 20 and proceed 2 miles to East Cherokee Dr. Turn right on East Cherokee Driver and proceed 6.4 miles to Etowah River. Cross bridge. Access to take out will be on right.

Descriptions: This section is highlighted by the beautiful shoals in the McGraw Ford Wildlife Management Area that harbor much of the Etowah's fish diversity, including the federally protected Etowah darter. Along the way it flows over fish weirs, past significant Native American and gold mining sites and even lends its water to North Georgia's chicken industry at the Pilgrim's Pride rendering plant. The shoals of McGraw Ford are the primary obstacle to navigation, though the stretch between Old Federal Road and Settingdown Creek is frequently clogged with cross river strainers that require portages.

Outfitters:

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

Points of Interest:

Mile 55.5—(34°18'30.70"N 84°13'16.90"W)—Old Federal Road & Scudder's Inn—You'd hardly suspect it now, but this two-lane road was once the major thoroughfare by which early settlers entered the Cherokee Nation of North Georgia. A trading path as early as 1731, the old route evolved into the Federal Road through the efforts of various people rather than the federal government.

Among the most important were the Cherokee Indians who constructed portions of the road in exchange for the right to operate inns and stores as well as ferries on the more than 80 streams and rivers that the road traversed. In the 1820s, the going rate for a ferry crossing was \$1 for a wagon and four horses, 50 cents for a man and horse and one cent each for hogs, sheeps and goats. It remains unclear whether a ferry operated at this crossing of the Etowah. Of course, enterprising whites also moved in to profit off travelers, often resulting in conflicts with the Cherokee. A quarter mile east of the river here, American citizen Jacob Scudder operated an inn from 1817 to 1831 and refused to pay taxes to the Cherokee for that privilege. The Cherokee retaliated with fines and the seizure of some of his property. With the removal of the Cherokee and the advent of new roads, use of the Federal Road declined. Railroads further reduced the road's significance. It is believed that Ft. Campbell, a Cherokee removal fort that operated from April to June 1838, sat along the banks of the Etowah here. It was here that local Cherokees were rounded up before their forced migration west to Oklahoma.

Mile 56.8—(34°18'9.84"N 84°14'39.16"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 58.5—(34°18'14.79"N 84°15'53.24"W)—Woodhaven Bend—At this bend in the river you'll find a boat launch and pavilion, marking the start of this upscale subdivision that the Etowah winds around for the next two miles. The equestrian estate neighborhood was the vision of Robin Loudermilk, CEO of the Atlanta-based rent-to-own company, Aaron Rents. Ultimately, plans call for some 33 homes to occupy the 280-acre site, but unlike other subdivisions along the river, none are nestled on top of the river. That's because development of the property included the preservation of a 150-foot buffer along the river. All residents of the neighborhood have access to the river via walking paths and several boat launches—a development plan that better protects the river corridor and better serves the residents. Of course, residents have to pay for the pleasure of these river amenities. In 2004, the first homes in the subdivision started at \$800,000.

Mile 60.4—(34°17'54.71"N 84°16'19.59"W)—Yellow Creek Road Iron Bridge—The remains of the iron bridge mark this former route of Yellow Creek Road and the site of a tragic incident in 1905 involving the superintendent of the Franklin-Creighton Gold Mine. That incident likely precipitated the construction of the bridge. This account appeared in the April 28, 1905 issue of the *Rome News-Tribune*: "A terrible tragedy was enacted at Creighton Wednesday afternoon when Edward Axson, wife and baby were drowned in the Etowah river. Mr. Axson accompanied by his wife and child were going to a picnic a few miles distant from Creighton. He was driving a nettlesome span of horses. About one-fourth of a mile from the river the horses ran away. Instead of a bridge the river is crossed by means of a flat and this is always left on the bank directly in the path of the road. The horses dashed across the flat, carrying their human burden and plunged into the river, which was about 15 feet deep at this place. Mr. Axson sought to rescue his wife and child. He gathered them under each arm and struggled to gain the task, but it was too great a burden. The bodies of Mrs. Axson and baby were washed towards the dam and were found immediately. Mr. Axson's body was not found until late yesterday." This was of particular interest to Romans as Axson was a native son, the brother of Ellen Axson Wilson, wife of Woodrow Wilson who in 1913 would become the country's 28th president. The remains of the dam mentioned in this news story lie just around the bend.

Mile 60.5—(34°17'58.84"N 84°16'21.19"W)—Franklin-Creighton Gold Mine & and Other Historic Nuggets—The cross-river shoal at this location marks the site of a dam that helped power the Franklin-Creighton Goldmine—the history of which tells a series of tragic stories. In the early 1830s, an English immigrant, John Pascoe, established a mine near this site that proved quite successful, but he was a victim of his own prosperity. He died of mercury poisoning in 1853, the result of constant exposure to mercury in the gold ore processing operation. Rumors of gold bars being buried with him led to so many robbers digging up his grave at nearby Hightower Baptist Church that his coffin was removed and interred at an undisclosed location on his plantation. The legacy of mercury has lasted much longer than the gold. Even today, fish caught from the Etowah River have been found to contain unhealthy levels of mercury and some of it is believed to be the result of mercury's extensive use at mining operations during the 1800s. The other notable miner at this site was Mary G. Franklin, a widow who drew a forty-acre lot in the 1932 Land Lottery. Shortly after acquiring the property, she had dozens of offers for her holding. With her curiosity piqued, Mrs. Franklin decided she should investigate her new property. When she arrived, she found a score of men shoveling dirt and panning gold. Mrs. Franklin had the men removed and began working the lot herself, along with her family. Her efforts ultimately led to the development of one of the area's most successful mines. In 1882, Northern investors bought into her operation and expanded it. By 1896 the site held a complete mining plant with large stamp mill, a chlorination plant,

assay laboratory, blacksmith shop, stables, miners' cottages and the Etowah River dam with two large turbines to generate power for the site. In 1913, a mine shaft collapsed beneath the river, filling the mines with water and making further operation of the plant financially infeasible.

Mile 61.8—(34°18'7.65"N 84°17'12.18"W)—Shoals—This is the first set of three shoals on this run of river. In low water, pick your paths carefully to avoid walking. The shoals extend more than a quarter mile.

Mile 63.4—(34°19'8.26"N 84°18'22.40"W)—Fish Weir & Shoals—This set of shoals ends with a distinct V-shaped fish weir on the right side of the river.

Mile 63.5—(34°19'16.41"N 84°18'33.22"W)—McGraw Ford Wildlife Management Area—A state wildlife management area encompassing some 2400 acres, including some of the most picturesque paddling to be found on the Etowah, starts here on river right. The WMA extends four miles downstream to around Smithwick Creek and includes a patchwork of parcels on both sides of the river.

Mile 63.6—(34°19'18.02"N 84°18'37.77"W)—Shoals—This third and final set of shoals extends more than a quarter mile to Conn Creek.

Mile 64.5—(34°19'15.31"N 84°19'5.09"W)—Fish Weir—Perhaps one of the most distinctive weirs in Cherokee County. These V-shaped structures were built by the area's original inhabitants 500 to 1000 years ago. They worked simply. At the top of the V, a long line of "fisherman" would wade downstream spooking the fish to the point of the V. At the point, other fishermen would be waiting with a basket to capture the frightened fish.

Mile 66—(34°19'14.84"N 84°20'21.21"W)—Long Swamp Creek/Battle of Taliwa—Around 1755, where Long Swamp and the Etowah meet, the Battle of Taliwa was fought. Some 500 Cherokee Indians under the direction of Oconostota defeated a larger band of Creeks. Among the Cherokee warriors, there was at least one heroine, Nancy Ward or "Nan'yehi"—the 18-year-old wife of the Cherokee known as "Kingfisher" When Kingfisher was slain in the battle, she took up his gun and continued the fight. Reportedly, her courage led the Cherokee in a rout of the enemy. So complete was the defeat that the Creeks retreated permanently south of the Chattahoochee River, and Nancy Ward earned the title of honor: "Beloved Woman." Nancy later married Bryant Ward, a white man who took up residence amongst the Cherokees. She became an outspoken supporter of peace with white settlers. She died in 1822.

Mile 67.3—(34°18'37.62"N 84°21'0.37"W)—Fish Weir

Mile 67.7—(34°18'10.36"N 84°20'55.71"W)—Smithwick Creek and Island

Mile 70.4—(34°17'45.87"N 84°22'34.59"W)—Cherokee County Water & Sewer Intake—This large structure on river left is the intake facility for the Cherokee County Water and Sewerage Authority. CCWSA supplies about 14 million gallons a day (MGD) to 130,000 people. During periods of low flow, water releases from CCWSA's Hollis Latham Reservoir on Yellow Creek upstream ensure adequate flows for continued withdrawals. Like many water providers in Georgia, CCWSA saw a significant decline in water demand following the drought of 2007-2008. Prior to the drought, CCWSA pumped as much as 25 MGD, but since then drought-related watering restrictions and water conservation measures have helped reduced peak demand by about 7 MGD. More efficient use of water is good news for the river, the critters that live in it and downstream communities also dependent on the Etowah for their drinking water.

Mile 71.3—(34°18'4.30"N 84°23'36.27"W)—Pilgrim's Pride Rendering Plant—The facility on river left pumps about 14 million gallons of the Etowah each week to turn seven million pounds of chicken parts—feet, heads, entrails and such—into the makings of chicken feed and pet food. The facility's wastewater discharge is located downstream opposite the take out.

Mile 71.7—(34°18'2.44"N 84°23'48.70"W)—Shoal