

Tunneling For Gold

Length: 8 Miles (Castleberry Bridge Road to Ga. 136) Class: I-II Time: 3-6 hours

Minimum Level: This section includes numerous shoals that require sufficient flows to navigate. Levels of 100 cfs or greater at the USGS gauge at Ga. 9 west of Dahlonega should provide sufficient flow. Below 100 cfs, expect to do some walking.

River Gauge: The nearest river gauge is located at Ga. 9 west of Dahlonega upstream from Castleberry Bridge: http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ga/nwis/uv?site_no=02388900

Launch Site: There is no developed boat launch at this site. Pull offs on the north and south sides of the highway just west of the river provide limited parking. Launch site is upstream of the bridge and requires a short carry to the water's edge.

Directions: The launch is located on Castleberry Bridge Road north of Dawsonville. From the intersection of Ga. 400 and Ga. 136 north of Dawsonville, go west on Ga. 136 and proceed 0.1 mile to Auraria Road on right. Turn right and proceed 6.6 miles to Castleberry Bridge Road on left. Turn left and proceed one mile to Etowah River. Pull off will be after the bridge.

Take Out Site: The take out is located on river right below the Hwy 136 bridge. There is no developed boat launch or parking area at this site. Parking area on the side of Ga. 136 is 0.1 mile from the river.

Directions: From Castleberry Bridge Road parking area, return to Auraria Road. Turn right and proceed 6.6 miles to Ga. 136. Turn right on Ga. 136 and proceed 0.9 mile to parking area on right side of highway west of the bridge.

Descriptions: This eight-mile section runs through the heart of the area's gold mine history. Frequent shoals, Class I and borderline Class II, highlight the first three miles of the run, but this section is best-known for the quarter-mile "mining" tunnel that diverts most of the Etowah through a ridge, cutting off a mile-long loop of the river. Below the mining tunnel, the river's pace slows as it enters the upper reaches of the valley known as Big Savannah where the ruins of former hamlets haunt the river banks.

Outfitters:

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

Points of Interest:

Mile 23.2—(34°28'19.89"N 84° 2'14.79"W)—Guy Rivers Cave & Shoal—Just below Castleberry Bridge is the "cave" of the gold robber, Guy Rivers. Local legend holds that Guy earned his keep by stealing gold during the heyday of the region's gold rush. High on the bluff here, you'll see an overhanging rock that forms a cave-like structure. This, it is said, is where Guy hid his ill-begotten loot. The legend of Guy Rivers persisted for years, but historians now agree that the tale is fictional.

Mile 23.7—(34°28'16.39"N 84° 2'23.15"W)—Shoal

Mile 23.8—(34°28'9.63"N 84° 2'13.35"W)—Shoal

Mile 24.4—(34°27'57.14"N 84° 2'11.97"W)—Shoal

Mile 24.6—(34°28'2.67"N 84° 2'20.16"W)—Shoal

Mile 25.4—(34°27'37.63"N 84° 2'38.98"W)—Gold Mining—The Weekend Gold Miners Club owns about 136 acres on river left here. Prospectors have mined this land since the gold rush of 1828; today hobbyists still try their luck. The Club includes some 600 members who pay \$20 monthly membership fees for the right to use the property. It is not uncommon to see club members in the river using a dredge to sift through the sediment on the river bottom.

Mile 25.7—(34°27'15.69"N 84° 2'44.31"W)—Shoal

Mile 26.3—(34°27'0.75"N 84° 2'55.96"W)—Shoal & Island

Mile 26.6—(34°26'53.97"N 84° 2'58.08"W)—Mining Tunnel—On river right here you'll find what is perhaps the most talked about feature on the Etowah—a cut that channels the bulk of the Etowah's flow through a two-tenths of a mile tunnel. The flow re-enters the main channel of the river a mile downstream. The tunnel was begun in the 1890s in an effort to drain the Etowah to mine gold in the main channel that loops around this ridge, but wasn't completed until 1932 when dynamite and jackhammers

were used to finish the task. The gold deposits that were the expected reward of this ambitious endeavor never materialized. Today, a ride through the tunnel is a much sought after novelty, but one that should be undertaken with great care and only in medium to low flows. It should not be attempted if the proverbial “light at the end of the tunnel” cannot be seen or is obstructed. A small ledge in the middle of the tunnel provides added excitement. Local outfitters advise against it, saying “an entire outfitter store could be stocked with the gear lying at the bottom of that tunnel.”

Mile 26.7—(34°26'55.91"N 84° 3'2.12"W)—Shoal—An island blocks the river just below the entrance to the tunnel and is followed by a series of small shoals. Since much of the river’s flow is diverted here, these shallow shoals can be particularly nettlesome.

Mile 27.1—(34°26'52.24"N 84° 3'22.16"W)—Calhoun Creek & Reservoir—In 2011, a plan surfaced to build a water supply reservoir just upstream on this creek, bringing to three the number of proposed reservoirs within a 16-mile stretch of the Etowah in Dawson County. This proposal was unique in that its proponents were a private reservoir development company hoping to take advantage of a new law adopted by Georgia in 2011 facilitating private-public reservoir partnerships. Like the proposed Russell and Shoal creek reservoirs downstream, this project would rely on water pumped from the Etowah River and it would also destroy habitat for the federally protected Cherokee darter. As proposed the project would supply 47 million gallons a day to Metro Atlanta. By contrast, studies by the Atlanta-based water protection group, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, have shown that an aggressive toilet replacement program could save as much as 50 million gallons a day in Metro Atlanta.

Mile 27.5—(34°26'44.78"N 84° 3'4.74"W)—Tunnel Outlet—If you choose to run the tunnel, you’ll come out here.

Mile 28.3—(34°26'26.15"N 84° 2'32.67"W)—Powerlines

Mile 30.1—(34°25'26.10"N 84° 1'25.20"W)—Dog Hobble—On river right here is a good place to see dog hobble, a plant common to stream banks in the Southern Appalachians. Like its close relatives rhododendron and mountain laurel, this member of the heath family is an evergreen making it easy to identify during the winter months. In the early spring, it produces clusters of small, white bell-shaped blossoms. Its common name is derived from its dense tangle of arching branches that make traveling through it a chore. Hunters will tell you that bears run through stands of dog hobble to distance themselves from pursuing hounds. The leaves and flower nectar are highly poisonous to both humans and animals.

Mile 30.8—(34°24'52.58"N 84° 1'10.64"W)—Landrum/Bamboo—The wooden structure on river right is the remains of Jenkins Mill and the community of Landrum. Landrum is one of four settlements that formed along the banks of the Etowah in Dawson County’s “Big Savannah” valley during the 1800s. The mill, which was built prior to 1900, harnessed the river’s power to grind corn. Rock bridge piers just downstream mark the original crossing of the river in Landrum. Like the mill, the bamboo stand next to it is another imprint of man on the landscape. Bamboo is a non-native introduced species, and the Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council includes it on its list of threats to Georgia’s natural areas. Bamboo can quickly take over habitat of native species and significantly alter ecosystems. It should not be confused with native river cane, a smaller cousin of the invasive bamboo. Zoo Atlanta, however, is making good use of Georgia’s invasive bamboos; the Zoo feeds them to its pair of giant panda bears who eat up to 220 pounds of the stuff each day.