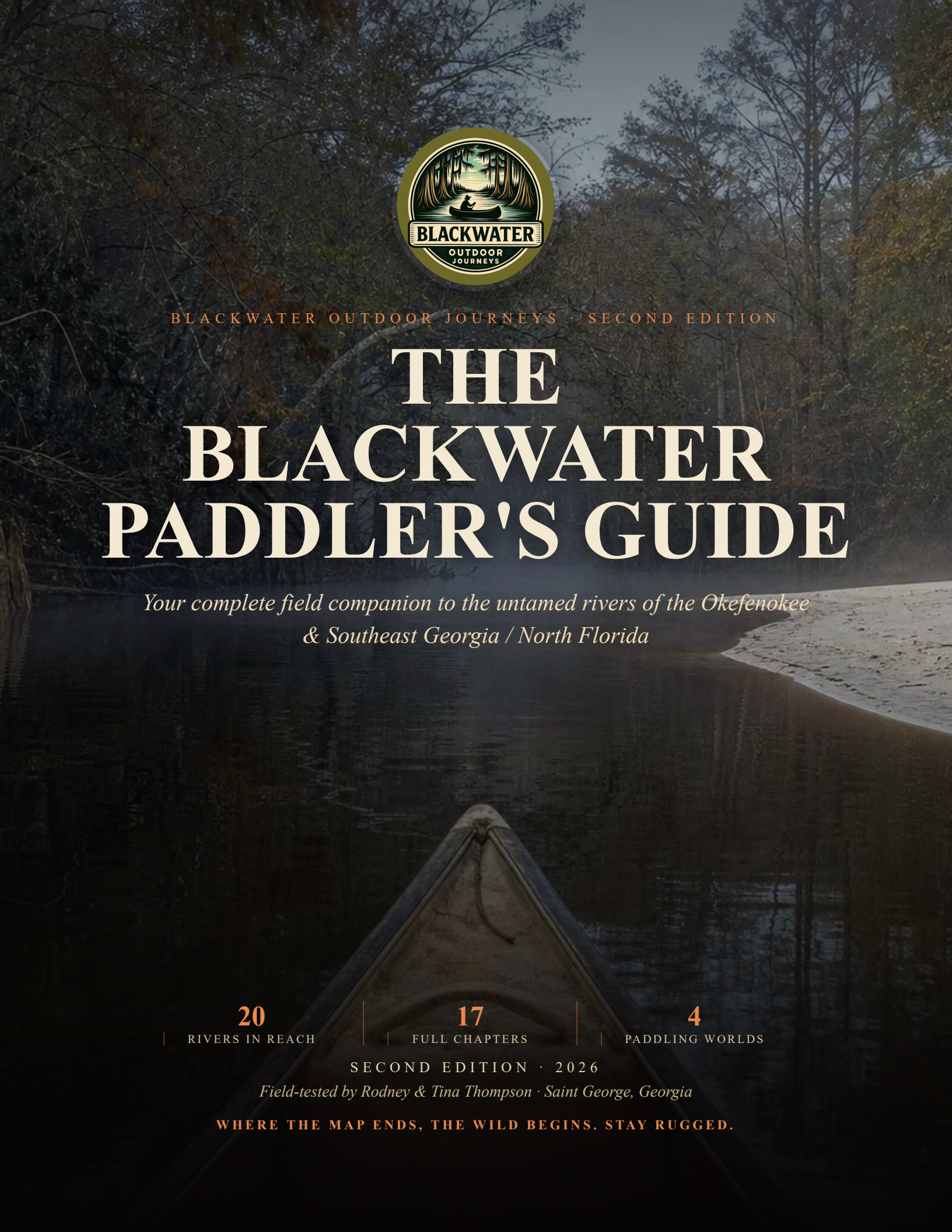


BLACKWATER OUTDOOR JOURNEYS · SECOND EDITION

THE BLACKWATER PADDLER'S GUIDE

Your complete field companion to the untamed rivers of the Okefenokee & Southeast Georgia / North Florida

20 RIVERS IN REACH | **17** FULL CHAPTERS | **4** PADDLING WORLDS

SECOND EDITION · 2026

Field-tested by Rodney & Tina Thompson · Saint George, Georgia

WHERE THE MAP ENDS, THE WILD BEGINS. STAY RUGGED.

FROM RODNEY & TINA

Welcome to the Blackwater Country

This guide is the result of hundreds of miles in the boat — the Okefenokee's dark prairies, the sugar-sand bars of the Satilla, the spring-fed glass of the Santa Fe, and the salt marsh where the rivers meet the sea.

When I built the first version last October, we'd paddled a handful of these waters. Since then we've run more rivers, learned more, and mapped more of this corner of the South than I ever expected. This edition is everything we know about paddling the blackwater country around home — organized so you can spend your energy on the water, not on wondering what's around the next bend.

Every chapter follows the same field pattern: what the river feels like, the best known runs with real named landings and mileage, shuttle and outfitter notes, the USGS or tide gauge and its seasonal range, hazards, camping, and a field note from Rodney where we've spent first-hand time. Every number here is sourced — but a river is a living thing, so the one job we can't do for you is read the gauge and the trend on the morning you launch.

Where the map ends, the wild begins.
— Rodney & Tina

EST. JUNE 2025 · SAINT GEORGE, GEORGIA

The Story of Blackwater Outdoor Journeys

"I didn't start this to chase an algorithm. I started it to stop time."

Blackwater Outdoor Journeys is a documentary archive of real canoe expeditions through the blackwater rivers of the Deep South — filmed by Rodney and Tina Thompson out of Saint George, Georgia. Unstaged, unhurried, and real.

In June 2025 I launched the channel with a single camera. After losing one of my sons, I realized how many adventures had already faded into memory, and I swore that would not happen again. What began as an archive for my family has become a record for anyone who has felt the pull of dark water and tall cypress.

Saying the blessing on a Satilla sandbar.

THE MISSION

We film real trips through the blackwater country of the Deep South and tell them the way they happened, so they outlast memory. For our family first. For the people who can't get out here. And for the next paddler standing at the put-in we once stood at.

THE VISION

To build the deepest film record the blackwater country has ever had. One of the biggest outdoor channels in the country, still rooted in the small-town family values of Saint George. An archive that holds what happened and opens what's next.

WHAT WE STAND BY

Honest film. No staging. Nothing doctored. Mistakes stay in the cut. If the water was high, you see it high.

The river decides. When the river says no, we turn back. Everybody comes home. No shot is worth the boat.

A seat in the canoe. These films are for the people who can't make the put-in. Health, age, distance. If you can't get out here, you ride with us.

The place comes first. The swamp was here before the canoe and it will be here after. We film wildlife where it lives, at a respectful distance.

Family in the boat. This started as a record for our family. It still is. Tina is in the canoe, not on the bank.

THE SYSTEMS BEHIND EVERY EXPEDITION

Camping Wilderness Skills

Every film shows the trip. **Camping Wilderness Skills (CWS)** is where the gear, skills, and trip-planning systems behind those trips actually live — built for people who are done winging it.

15 FIELD GUIDES

160+ course modules, from your first overnight to leading a self-reliant expedition — navigation, canoe, hunting, survival, first response, and more.

THE FIELD MANUAL

Every course in one 582-page searchable book. Flip through it like a real book, or search any word and jump straight to the page in the field.

THE CWS APP

Trip planner with offline satellite maps, live weather and USGS river gauges, GPS tracking, and an AI Coach that knows your route and skill gaps.

THE CAMPFIRE

A real crew of hikers, paddlers, and hunters who share what actually holds up in the field. Post a question, and people who've done it answer.

One membership, everything included: all 15 courses, the 582-page Field Manual, the full app with AI Coach, THE CAMPFIRE, and a live weekly call with Rodney every Wednesday. $19 a month or $190 a year. **campingwildernessskills.com**

GET IT ON Google Play

Download on the App Store

COMING SOON

CONDITIONS & CLOSURES — VERIFIED JULY 30, 2026

- **Suwannee:** Woods Ferry River Camp closed. Holton Creek River Camp closed. Suwannee River State Park campground closed for upgrades.
- **Santa Fe:** O'Leno State Park River Trail closed. River Rise Preserve burn ban in effect.
- **Ichetucknee:** Midpoint Tube Launch closed for repairs; capacity closures remain possible.

Always recheck closures the day you launch. Conditions on blackwater change with every rain.

START HERE

How to Use This Guide

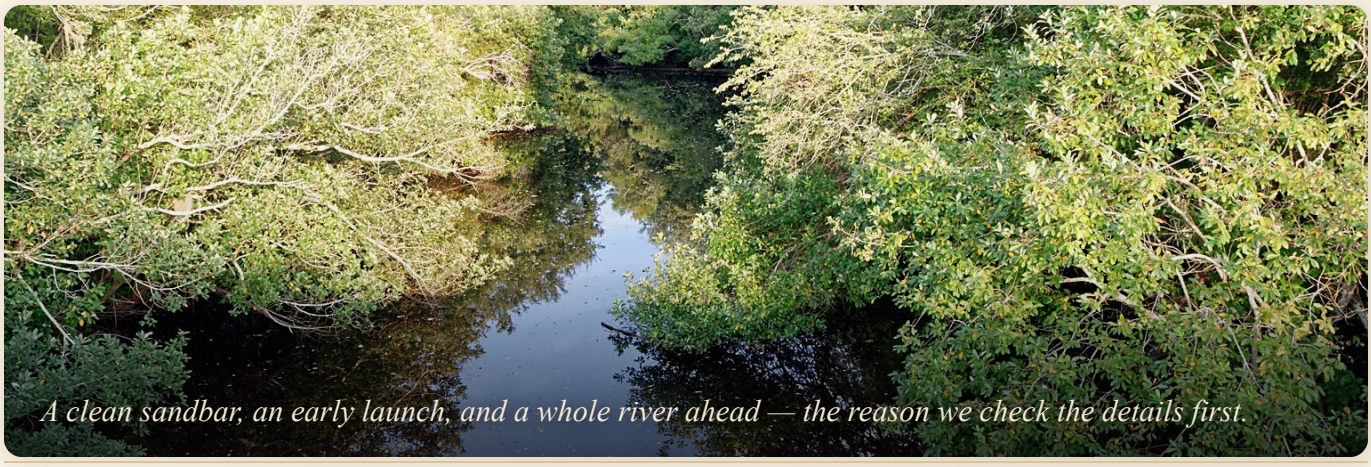
Every chapter follows the same field pattern — what the river feels like, the best known runs, shuttle and outfitter notes, gauge information, hazards, camping, and a BWJ field note where we've spent first-hand time. Read the whole chapter before you commit to a shuttle.

The difficulty labels tell you what kind of water you're reading:

EASY FLATWATER | MOVING WATER | SHOALS / CLASS I–II | EXPERT | TIDAL

THE ONE NUMBER WE CAN'T PRINT

Every gauge, landing, and mileage in this guide is real and sourced — but the **day's water level** is the one number no book can give you, because it changes with every rain. Each chapter names the exact USGS or tide gauge and its seasonal range; your job is to read that gauge and the trend the morning you launch. Never launch at flood, and remember private frontage stays private even when the water is public.

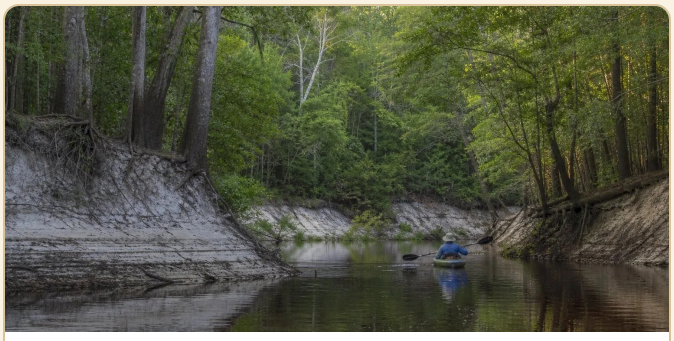


A clean sandbar, an early launch, and a whole river ahead — the reason we check the details first.

THE REGION

Four Paddling Worlds

Saint George sits in reach of four very different paddling worlds. You can drag over a shallow sandbar one weekend, cross a wind-blown prairie the next, and paddle clear spring water or a tide-driven marsh after that — all within a day's drive. That mix is what makes this corner of the South special.



Tannic Blackwater Rivers

Tea-colored water over white sugar sand — the Satilla, St. Marys, Alapaha and Little Satilla. Slow, remote, beginner-friendly, and lined with sandbars for camp.

The Okefenokee Wilderness

Dark prairies, cypress islands, and marked canoe trails through one of the largest blackwater swamps in North America. Permit-only overnights on raised platforms.

Florida Spring Runs

Gin-clear, 72° water over eelgrass and limestone — the Santa Fe, Ichetucknee and Silver. A completely different world an hour south of the tannin.

Coastal Salt Marsh

Where the rivers meet the sea — the Crooked, Cathead and the tidal lower Altamaha. Spartina grass, tide-timed paddling, and big open sky.

GOOD FIELD CALLS

Universal Safety & Navigation

- File a float plan with someone on shore, and know the take-out and shuttle before the boat touches water.
- Wear the PFD instead of storing it.
- Check weather, lightning, rainfall, gauge stage, trend, and the flood forecast.
- Give strainers and deadfall room — never let current pin the boat.
- Carry enough water for heat and delay; the Okefenokee standard is at least one gallon per person per day.
- Never feed or approach alligators. Give nests and young a wide berth.
- Carry a satellite messenger or PLB where cell service is unreliable.
- Pack a whistle, backup light, paper map, and a second navigation method.

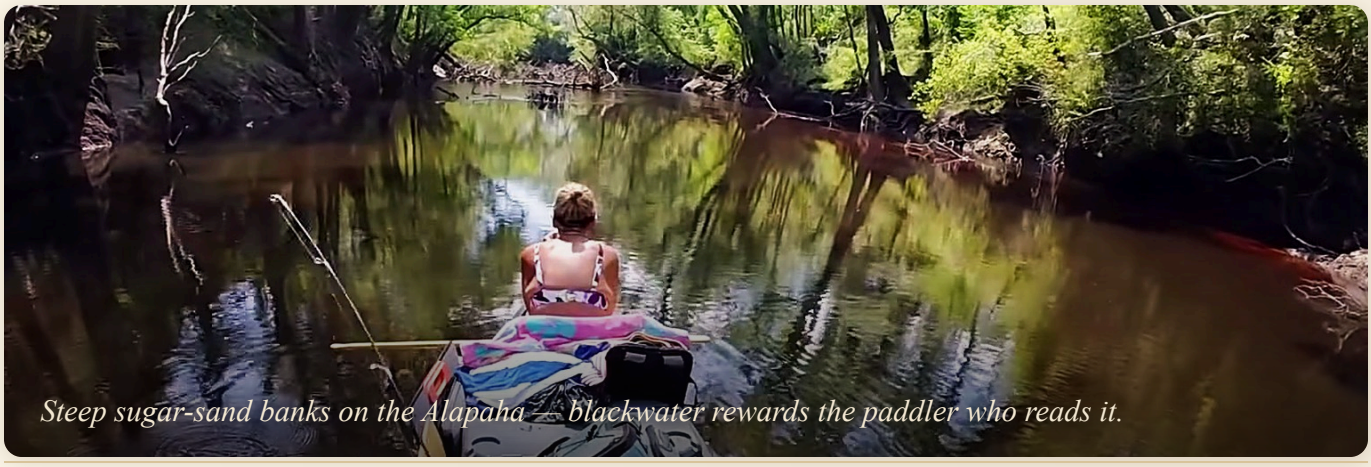
READ THE WATER · BLACKWATER 101

Tannins from decaying leaves stain the water like tea. It can be clean while still looking dark — usually acidic and low in nutrients. That dark surface hides depth changes, submerged wood, and shifting sand.

Watch the **V of current** around obstructions and read the smooth tongue through a bend. Give outside banks and strainers room. One foot of water-level change can turn a dragging trip into a fast one — or cover hazards that were visible the week before.

RODNEY'S PADDLE TIP

Tie the spare paddle where you can reach it from the boat. A spare buried under camp gear is not a spare when the current takes the first one.



Steep sugar-sand banks on the Alapaha — blackwater rewards the paddler who reads it.

BOAT-READY

The BWJ Gear Checklist

The kit we actually load. Adjust for season and river — but nothing in the Safety & Navigation column is optional on remote blackwater.

SAFETY & NAVIGATION

- [ ] PFD, whistle, throw line
- [ ] Paper map, compass, offline map
- [ ] PLB or satellite messenger
- [ ] Headlamp + backup light
- [ ] First-aid and repair kit

SHELTER & SLEEP

- [ ] Hammock or tent, rain fly, insulation
- [ ] Dry sleep clothes
- [ ] Bug net where needed

FIRE & COOKING

- [ ] Stove + backup ignition
- [ ] Legal fire kit and wind plan
- [ ] Cook pot, cup, spoon, cleanup bag

WATER & FOOD

- [ ] Drinking water + treatment backup
- [ ] Extra meal and high-energy snacks
- [ ] Bear-resistant storage where required

PRIMITIVE SKILLS / BUSHCRAFT

- [ ] Fixed blade or folding saw where legal
- [ ] Cordage, tape, repair wire
- [ ] Small tarp and emergency blanket

PERSONAL / CLOTHING

- [ ] Sun shirt, hat, rain layer
- [ ] Spare socks and warm layer
- [ ] Sunscreen first, then repellent (DEET, Picaridin, or OLE)

CAMERA / POWER

- [ ] Dry-bagged camera + batteries
- [ ] Power bank and charging cables
- [ ] Lens cloth and backup card

LEAVE IT WILD

Leave No Trace on Blackwater

- Pack out everything.
- Camp only where legal and above the waterline.
- Keep soap out of the river.
- Follow local human-waste rules.
- Respect assigned platforms and permits.
- Do not cut standing trees or strip deadfall that still serves the riverbank and habitat.

BEFORE LAUNCH

Permits, Access & Gauges

Gauge stage is height in feet at that station. **Flow** is discharge in cubic feet per second. Neither number travels cleanly from one river to another — a rising trend after rain may matter more than the raw number.

"Too low" means dragging, exposed rock, or blocked access. **"Ideal"** is a documented planning range, never a promise. **"Flood"** means strong current, debris, lost sandbars, and fewer exits — not a target.

Okefenokee overnights require an advance permit. State parks may charge launch, parking, or camping fees. Private frontage stays private even when the water is public — when access is not confirmed, pause and call the managing agency.

HOW THE RIVER CHAPTERS ARE LABELED

Each chapter carries a difficulty and a water type, a stat ribbon (distance, season, permit, length), the best known runs with real named landings and mileage, the USGS or tide gauge and its seasonal range, wildlife, hazards, camping, and a green BWJ field note from Rodney. The numbers are sourced — but the river writes the final word, so read the gauge and the trend the day you launch.

A platform camp on the Okefenokee prairie — leave it exactly as you found it.

CHAPTER ONE · THE HOME WATERS

CORE RIVERS

Seven rivers within a short shuttle of Saint George — the waters we run most, filmed and field-noted first-hand.

OKEFENOKEE SWAMP · SUWANNEE · ST. MARYS · SATILLA · ALTAMAHA · OCONEE · OCMULGEE · ALAPAHA · WITHLACOOCHEE

CORE RIVERS

OKEFENOKEE SWAMP

EASY BUT STRENUOUS | SWAMP WILDERNESS

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~45 mi west to the Suwannee Canal (east) entrance at Folkston; ~60 mi to Okefenokee State Park (west entrance, Fargo).	Cooler months are the season: 1-4 night trips are available May through February, but only 1- and 2-night trips during the March-April peak. Water level governs everything -- low water exposes peat blowups and stumps and can close trails outright.	Overnight Wilderness camping requires a permit, one party per platform per night, booked by phone with a Recreation.gov profile already created -- not booked online. Permit line 912-496-3331, Tuesday-Thursday 7-10 AM ET. Man-powered boats only overnight; no motors. Day use allows a motor under 10 HP. Launch deadlines and on/off-water times vary by entrance -- check with the entrance you are using.	Nearly 120 mi of designated Wilderness water trails inside a 407,000+ acre refuge.

Open peat prairies, cypress forest, blackwater lakes and narrow trail channels cut through the largest blackwater swamp in North America. Most of the refuge is designated Wilderness. Overnight paddlers sleep on wooden platforms out in the swamp with no land in reach -- seven platforms and two islands, one party per site per night.

THE RUNS

Suwannee Canal Recreation Area → Cedar Hammock (Yellow Trail) *The refuge's easiest overnight, in Mizell Prairie. Best first platform trip for families or newer paddlers.*	~3 mi · 1 night
Okefenokee State Park → Mixons Hammock (Brown Trail) *An easy paddle across Billys Lake to an island site with a fire ring. The shortest overnight approach in the swamp.*	~2 mi · 1 night
Suwannee Canal Recreation Area → Coffee Bay day-use shelter (Orange Trail) *Down the historic Suwannee Canal to a day-use shelter. No permit needed for a day trip; stretch your legs and turn around.*	~6 mi one way · day trip
Kingfisher Landing → Bluff Lake (Green Trail) *Eight miles in to the platform, paddling across Bluff Lake at the end. Dark-sky camp.*	~8 mi · 1 night
Suwannee Canal Recreation Area → Canal Run (Orange Trail) *The canal run, ending at a platform with an adjacent hammock and fire ring. Seven more miles out to Okefenokee State Park if you continue west.*	~10 mi · 1 night
Kingfisher Landing → Maul Hammock (Red Trail) *A long, remote day. Look behind you entering Maul Hammock Lake to spot the platform.*	~12 mi · 1 night
Billys Lake → River Narrows → Suwannee River Sill (Brown Trail) *Current in the River Narrows can make the return harder than the way in. No permit needed to cross the Sill.*	~5 mi to the Sill, ~3 mi more along it · day trip
Kingfisher Landing → Floyds Island → Okefenokee State Park (Green Trail) *The classic crossing: eight miles to Bluff Lake, about nine more through Territory and Chase Prairies to Floyds Island, then nine to the state park. A quarter-mile portage across Floyds Island is required on a through trip.*	~26 mi · 2–3 nights

CAMPING

Seven overnight platforms (Bluff Lake, Big Water, Cedar Hammock, Canal Run, Monkey Lake, Round Top, Maul Hammock) and two island sites (Floyds Island, Mixons Hammock). Every overnight site has a pit toilet. Campfires are permitted only where a fire ring is provided -- Canal Run, Floyds Island and Mixons Hammock. Everywhere else, cook on a stove.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Okefenokee Adventures at the Main/East Entrance (Suwannee Canal Recreation Area), 912-496-7156 -- canoe, kayak and jon boat rental plus guided trips. Okefenokee State Park at the West Entrance near Fargo, 912-637-5274. Overnight parties leaving a vehicle overnight on the west side must park at Okefenokee State Park, not the Sill lot, which is day-use only.

GAUGE & WATER

There is no single paddling gauge for the swamp. Water level is managed and reported by the refuge, and trail conditions change with it -- in June 2026 five of seven color trails were impassable. Call 912-496-3331 (Tue-Thu, 7-10 AM ET) and confirm current trail status before every trip. Never treat a published trail as open.

WILDLIFE

American alligator in numbers, sandhill cranes, wading birds, barred owls, red-shouldered hawks, otter, black bear, and carnivorous plants -- pitcher plants, sundews and bladderwort -- along with water lilies, golden club and spatterdock on the open prairies.

HAZARDS

Peat blowups, stumps and encroaching vegetation in low water; narrow closed-in channels between prairies; wind exposure on the open prairies; alligators; heat, biting insects and sun with no shade on the prairie runs; and no potable water anywhere -- drinking or filtering swamp water is not recommended. Carry 4-6 quarts per person per day. There is no cell coverage across most of the interior.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

Book early and call first. One party gets each platform each night, the permit is a phone call on a Tuesday-through-Thursday morning window, and the water level decides whether the trail you booked is even passable -- in June 2026 five of the seven color trails were impassable. Cedar Hammock at three miles is the honest first trip; Maul Hammock at twelve is not. And there is no water out there. Whatever you drink, you carried.

SOURCES USFWS -- Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness Canoe Guide, 2023 edition (trail descriptions, difficulty, overnight site detail) · USFWS -- Okefenokee NWR 'Visit Us / Trails' page (current trail inventory) · Refuge permit line 912-496-3331 (Tue-Thu 7-10 AM ET) -- conditions and reservations · Verified against the above on 2026-08-28

The Trails & The Platforms

COLOR-DESIGNATED TRAILS

Green Trail — moderate to difficult
Kingfisher Landing to Bluff Lake is eight miles. Beyond Bluff Lake the trail runs through Territory and Chase Prairies to Floyds Island (about nine miles), then nine more miles of marsh and cypress to Okefenokee State Park via Billys Lake. Narrow closed-in channels between the prairies get hard in low water.

Overnight sites: *Bluff Lake (platform), Floyds Island (island), Big Water (platform)*

Orange Trail — easy to moderate to Canal Run; difficult beyond it
Follows the historic Suwannee Canal, dug in the late 1800s to drain the swamp. Coffee Bay day-use shelter is six miles in. Canal Run Shelter is a ten-mile paddle from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area. Past Canal Run the trail narrows for five miles to Billys Island, then two miles down Billys Lake to Okefenokee State Park.

Overnight sites: *Canal Run (platform); Coffee Bay is day-use only*

Red Trail — difficult
Kingfisher Landing to Maul Hammock is a long day -- twelve miles. The lakes along the Red Trail fish well.

Overnight sites: *Maul Hammock (platform)*

Purple Trail — moderate
Connects to the Orange Trail through Chase Prairie and back to the Blue Trail. The difficulty is the vegetation, which can slow progress badly across the prairie.

Overnight sites: *Round Top (platform)*

Pink Trail — moderate
Starts off the Suwannee Canal / Orange Trail and heads south into Chesser Prairie, then Grand Prairie, ending at Monkey Lake. Some of the most iconic open prairie in the refuge. Worth paddling out to Buzzards Roost from Monkey Lake.

Overnight sites: *Monkey Lake (platform)*

Yellow Trail — easy
Runs north of the Suwannee Canal into Mizell Prairie. Cedar Hammock platform sits three miles from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, which makes it the best choice for less experienced paddlers and families with children.

Overnight sites: *Cedar Hammock (platform)*

Blue Trail — moderate
A connector -- it links the Orange Trail with the Green Trail. No overnight site on this trail.

Overnight sites: *None*

Brown Trail — easy to Mixons Hammock; moderate through the River Narrows
An easy two-mile paddle across Billys Lake reaches Mixons Hammock, only two miles from Okefenokee State Park. To reach the Suwannee River Sill is five miles through the River Narrows, then three more along the Sill. There can be current in the Narrows that makes the return harder. A permit is no longer required to cross the Suwannee River Sill.

Overnight sites: *Mixons Hammock (island)*

OVERNIGHT PLATFORMS & ISLAND SITES

Bluff Lake *(Platform · Green Trail)*
Accessed from Kingfisher Landing -- eight miles. Paddle across Bluff Lake to reach the shelter. Dark-sky stargazing.

Big Water *(Platform · Green Trail)*
At the north end of Big Water Lake. Seasonal fishing, and the best sunrise and sunset views in the refuge. Eleven miles remain to Okefenokee State Park, through cypress forest past Minnies Lake day-use shelter.

Floyds Island *(Island · Green Trail)*
A quarter-mile trail crosses the island east to west; a through trip requires portaging across it. An old hunting cabin stands partway along. Fire ring on site.

Cedar Hammock *(Platform · Yellow Trail)*
Three miles from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area in Mizell Prairie, with open views. The easiest overnight in the refuge and the right first trip for families.

Canal Run *(Platform · Orange Trail)*
On the edge of the historic Suwannee Canal among pines, cypress and loblolly bays hung with Spanish moss. Ten miles from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area, seven from Okefenokee State Park. Adjacent hammock has a campfire ring.

Monkey Lake *(Platform · Pink Trail)*
In Grand Prairie, on the edge of Monkey Lake, backed by scrub-shrub. Paddle out to Buzzards Roost for wildlife viewing and fishing.

Round Top *(Platform · Purple Trail)*
In Chase Prairie, with a 360-degree view of the swamp. One of the best stargazing and sunrise/sunset sites in the refuge.

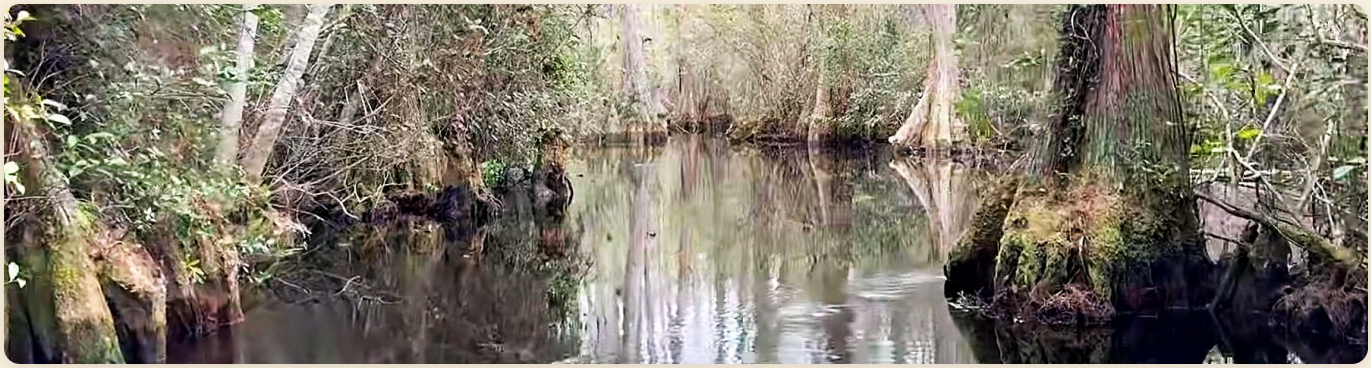
Maul Hammock *(Platform · Red Trail)*
On the left edge of Maul Hammock Lake -- look behind you as you enter the lake or you will paddle past it. Twelve miles from Kingfisher Landing and one of the most remote sites on the overnight trails.

Mixons Hammock *(Island · Brown Trail)*
Two miles from Okefenokee State Park across Billys Lake -- the shortest overnight approach in the refuge. Fire ring on the island.

VERIFIED Trail names, difficulty, distances and overnight-site detail confirmed against the USFWS Okefenokee Wilderness Canoe Guide (2023) and the refuge trails page. Trail status changes with water level — confirm on 912-496-3331 (Tue–Thu, 7–10 AM ET) before every trip.

FEATURED TRIP PLAN

1-Night Beginner: Suwannee Canal → Cedar Hammock (~3 mi, Yellow Trail)



DAY BY DAY

1 Day 1 — ~3 mi to the platform. Confirm trail status on the permit line before you drive. Launch from the Suwannee Canal Recreation Area at the east entrance, paddle north of the canal into Mizell Prairie, and reach Cedar Hammock with the whole afternoon left. Open prairie views, pit toilet on the platform, no fire — cook on a stove.

2 Day 2 — ~3 mi back out. Sunrise over the prairie, pack out everything, and be off the water inside the entrance's posted time.

FOOD PLAN

Day 1 lunch: wraps and trail mix. Dinner: stove-cooked one-pot meal (no fire ring at Cedar Hammock). Day 2 breakfast: oatmeal and coffee on the stove.

WATER & COOKING

4–6 quarts per person per day, carried in. There is no potable water in the refuge and filtering swamp water is not recommended.

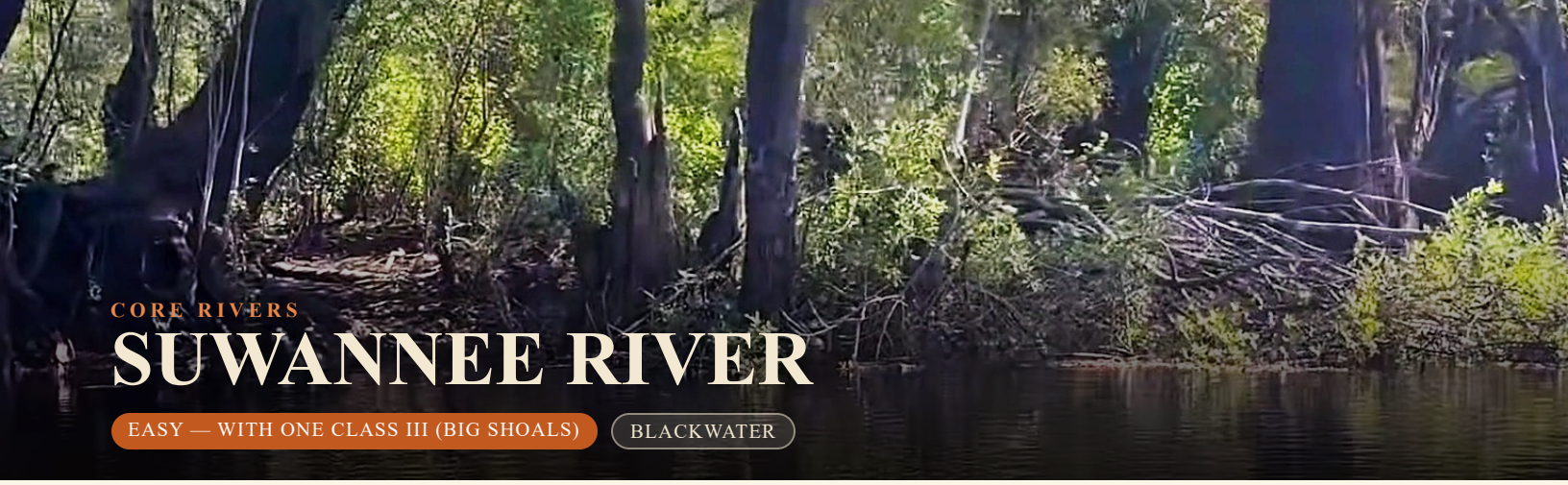
PACK FOR THIS TRIP

- [ ] PFD, whistle, throw line
- [ ] Dry bags + boat repair
- [ ] Tent/hammock + rain fly
- [ ] Bag rated for the season
- [ ] Propane stove + cookware
- [ ] Headlamp + backup light
- [ ] First-aid & repair kit
- [ ] Map, compass, offline GPS
- [ ] Water per the plan above
- [ ] Sunscreen, then repellent

RODNEY'S PRO TIP — THE PADDLE

The right paddle is the right material — wood for comfort or carbon fiber for light weight — and the right length for **you**, not the canoe. Tie your spare where you can reach it from the seat.

Every trip plan assumes the full BWJ gear checklist (page 8), a checked gauge, a float plan left on shore, and camp only where it's legal and above the waterline.



CORE RIVERS

SUWANNEE RIVER

EASY — WITH ONE CLASS III (BIG SHOALS) · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~35–70 mi west/southwest to Fargo, White Springs, and the upper-river ramps.	Late fall through spring. Winter brings the best chance of manatees downstream; summer thunderstorms can spike levels fast.	No river-wide permit. River-camp platforms and state-park sites are reserved through the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail / Florida State Parks. 2026 closures: Woods Ferry and Holton Creek River Camps and the Suwannee River SP campground.	~246 mi from the Okefenokee to the Gulf of Mexico.

Born in the Okefenokee near Fargo, then running past limestone bluffs, blue springs, and white sandbars all the way to the Gulf. Mostly easy blackwater on the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail, with screened river-camp platforms — plus one genuine Class III at Big Shoals, Florida's only Class III whitewater.

THE RUNS

Fargo Ramp (US-441) → Big Shoals State Park *Cypress tunnels and the Holton Creek reach; camp near Okefenokee State Park.*	~26 mi · 2 days
Big Shoals → White Springs Ramp *Scout and PORTAGE the Class III at Big Shoals unless the level and your skills clearly say run it.*	~8 mi · day trip
White Springs → Woods Ferry River Camp *Limestone bluffs and shaded hammocks. NOTE: Woods Ferry River Camp is CLOSED in 2026 — confirm your camp before launch.*	~12 mi
Branford (US-27) → Fanning Springs State Park *Spring-lined lower river; stops at Little River, Troy, and Fanning springs.*	~22 mi · 2 days

CAMPING

Screened river-camp platforms (Woods Ferry, Holton Creek — both closed for 2026), state parks (Suwannee River SP, Lafayette Blue, Fanning), and sandbars. Reserve platforms ahead.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

American Canoe Adventures (White Springs) and local liveries run shuttles on the upper river; state parks along the Wilderness Trail rent and shuttle seasonally.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02315500 (White Springs) is the reference for BIG SHOALS: the drop is a clean run at roughly 55–65 ft on that gauge, washes out above ~65 ft, and gets rocky and technical below ~55 ft — a marked portage trail is always there, and you should portage at low water or if you're not solid in Class III. Downstream, use USGS 02319500 (Ellaville / Suwannee River SP) and USGS 02320500 (Branford; period-of-record mean ≈7,400 cfs — highest in March, lowest in Nov). Live stages: the SRWMD portal at mysuwanneeriver.org.

WILDLIFE

Suwannee bass, turtles, manatees in winter downstream, limestone-bluff swallows, wading birds, and gators.

HAZARDS

Big Shoals (Class III) — scout or portage; limestone outcrops and strainers; motorboats near ramps and springs; flood current after heavy rain; changing camp closures.

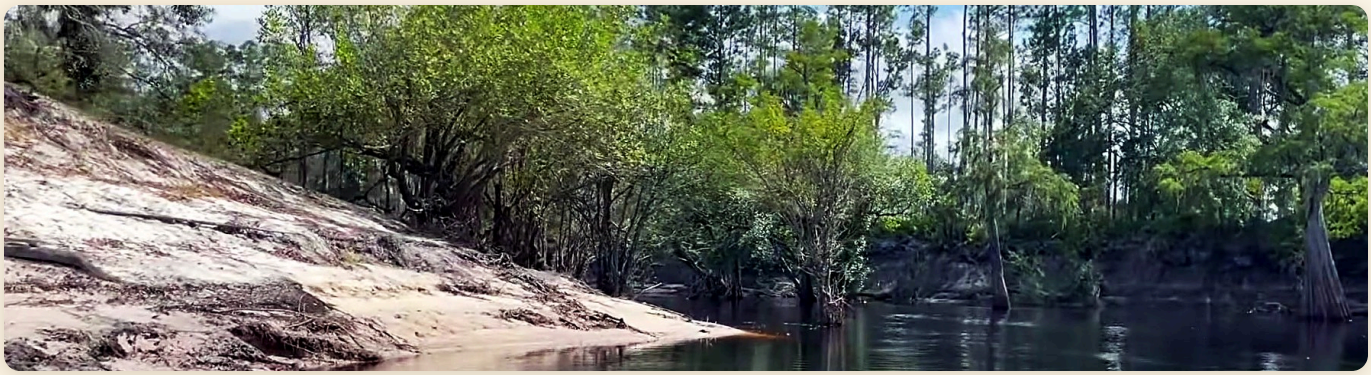
BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

Big Shoals is the real deal — Florida's only Class III, and it does not care that the rest of the Suwannee is a gentle float. Get out and look at it. There's a portage trail for a reason, and at low water the rocks are exposed and mean. The spring-fed lower river below White Springs is the reward: gin-clear boils feeding tea-black water.

SOURCES Florida State Parks — Suwannee River Wilderness Trail · American Whitewater — Big Shoals · USGS 02315500 / 02319500 / 02320500 · SRWMD (mysuwanneeriver.org)

FEATURED TRIP PLAN

2-Day: Fargo → Big Shoals (~26 mi)



DAY BY DAY

1 Day 1 — Launch 9 AM from Fargo Ramp, paddle the cypress tunnels and Holton Creek reach, lunch on a sandy bank, camp near Okefenokee State Park.

2 Day 2 — Early breakfast; paddle to Big Shoals State Park, PORTAGE the Class III shoals, optional hike to the Big Shoals overlook.

FOOD PLAN

Day 1 lunch: tortilla wraps, trail mix. Dinner: foil-packet meal, s'mores. Day 2 breakfast: pancakes. Lunch: crackers & peanut butter. Snacks: protein bars, jerky.

WATER & COOKING

1 gallon per person per day; treat spring water only if you know the source. Confirm the White Springs gauge before committing to Big Shoals.

PACK FOR THIS TRIP

- [ ] PFD, whistle, throw line
- [ ] Dry bags + boat repair
- [ ] Tent/hammock + rain fly
- [ ] Bag rated for the season
- [ ] Propane stove + cookware
- [ ] Headlamp + backup light
- [ ] First-aid & repair kit
- [ ] Map, compass, offline GPS
- [ ] Water per the plan above
- [ ] Sunscreen, then repellent

RODNEY'S PRO TIP — READ THE BAR

Camp on a **high** sandbar, well above the current waterline. Blackwater can come up a foot overnight after rain upstream and swallow a low bar while you sleep.

Every trip plan assumes the full BWJ gear checklist (page 8), a checked gauge, a float plan left on shore, and camp only where it's legal and above the waterline.

CORE RIVERS

ST. MARYS RIVER

EASY FLATWATER · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
Home river — launches right at St. George; runs to the coast ~50 mi east.	Runnable most of the year in the middle course; late fall through spring gives the most dependable water. The upper river drops low in summer droughts.	No river permit. Primitive camping on high sandbars (camp above the waterline) and at Traders Hill Recreation Area (Charlton County). Private frontage stays private.	~130 mi total, forming the Georgia–Florida line from the Okefenokee to the Atlantic.

The signature home river — it runs right past St. George. Tea-colored water, white sugar-sand bars, cypress and hardwood banks, remote through much of its middle course. Slow current, no rapids, and beginner-friendly for most of its length before it turns tidal near the coast.

THE RUNS

St. George Public Boat Ramp (GA Hwy 185) → Traders Hill Rec. Area (Folkston) *Rodney's home run. Cypress-lined blackwater; camp on a high sandbar near mile 12.*	~22 mi · 2 days
Traders Hill → Camp Pinckney Landing (GA Hwy 40) *Easy, scenic blackwater with good sandbar lunch stops. Watch for submerged logs.*	~10 mi · day trip
Camp Pinckney → St. Marys Waterfront Park *Lower river turns tidal and salt-marsh near St. Marys — carry a tide chart and time the current.*	~20 mi · 2 days

CAMPING

Elevated sandbars along the middle river; Traders Hill Recreation Area has amenities. Camp above the high-water line.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

St. Marys River Outfitters / Scotts Landing · 904-845-4440 (rentals & shuttle).

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02231000 — St. Marys River near Macclenny, FL. Blackwater and rain-driven, so read the stage, the trend after rain, and the flood forecast together rather than any one number. The middle course carries paddling water most of the year; the upper river above Macclenny gets bony in a dry summer. Never launch at flood. Two more live gauges cover the Georgia side: USGS 02231175 at Ferry Landing near Folkston, which is the reading for the Traders Hill stretch, and USGS 02228500 on the North Prong at Moniac, upstream toward the St. George and Boy Scout Landing water. Read the one nearest your put-in, not just Macclenny.

WILDLIFE

Alligators, deer, otters, wood ducks, barred owls, ibis, hawks, turtles, redbreast and bass.

HAZARDS

Submerged logs and strainers, shifting sandbars, heat and remoteness, and — on the lower reach near St. Marys — tidal current and wind. Carry a whistle and backup light; cell service is limited.

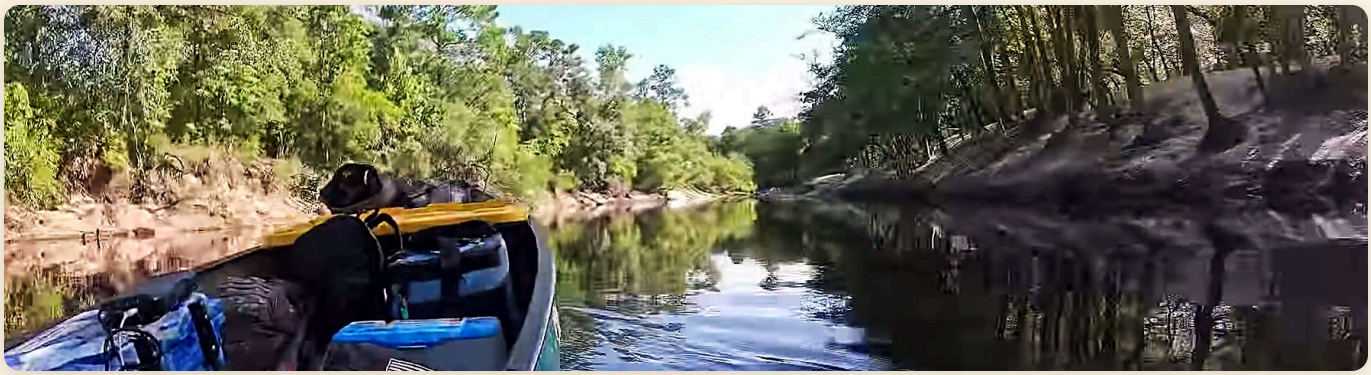
BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

This is home water. We put in at St. George and run to Traders Hill in two easy days, camping on a high sandbar the first night. Watch the outside of the bends for strainers, and don't trust a sandbar that's barely above the water — the river can come up overnight after rain upstream.

SOURCES St. Marys Riverkeeper · USGS 02231000 · Charlton County Parks (Traders Hill)

FEATURED TRIP PLAN

2-Day Home Run: St. George → Traders Hill (~22 mi)



DAY BY DAY

1 Day 1 — ~12 mi to a sandbar camp. Launch 9 AM from St. George, paddle cypress-lined blackwater, lunch on a sandy bank, camp on a high sandbar by late afternoon.

2 Day 2 — ~10 mi to Traders Hill. Early breakfast, depart by 9 AM through wider sections, lunch near Camp Pinckney Landing, arrive Traders Hill mid-afternoon.

FOOD PLAN

Day 1 lunch: turkey wraps, trail mix. Dinner: foil-packet potatoes & sausage, s'mores. Day 2 breakfast: pancakes, coffee. Lunch: crackers & peanut butter. Snacks: protein bars, dried fruit, jerky.

WATER & COOKING

1 gallon per person per day. No treated refill points — bring it all.

PACK FOR THIS TRIP

- [ ] PFD, whistle, throw line
- [ ] Dry bags + boat repair
- [ ] Tent/hammock + rain fly
- [ ] Bag rated for the season
- [ ] Propane stove + cookware
- [ ] Headlamp + backup light
- [ ] First-aid & repair kit
- [ ] Map, compass, offline GPS
- [ ] Water per the plan above
- [ ] Sunscreen, then repellent

RODNEY'S PRO TIP — THE EXIT

Know your take-out and shuttle before the boat touches water. On remote blackwater you finish the day you start — there's no bailout in the middle.

Every trip plan assumes the full BWJ gear checklist (page 8), a checked gauge, a float plan left on shore, and camp only where it's legal and above the waterline.

CORE RIVERS

SATILLA RIVER

CLASS I FLATWATER · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~40–70 mi north/northwest to the Waycross–Atkinson landings.	Winter and spring give the most dependable water. Summer exposes broad sandbars but can run shallow.	No permit. Primitive camping is customary on high sandbars — camp above the waterline and pack out everything.	~260 mi, entirely within Georgia.

The quintessential Georgia blackwater — deep tea-colored water, huge white sugar-sand bars, cypress and pine, remote and lightly developed. One of the longest rivers contained entirely within Georgia, and a sandbar-camper's dream.

THE RUNS

Ava Strickland Landing → Deep Bend Landing (Atkinson) *Shaded channels and big sandbars; camp on a high bar near mile 6.*	~12 mi · 2 days
Jamestown Landing (Waycross) → US-84 Landing (Blackshear) *Beginner blackwater with cypress and pine; sandbar lunch around mile 5.*	~9 mi · day trip
Still Lake Fishing Club → Burnt Fort Landing *Remote lower river with tidal influence beginning near Burnt Fort.*	~10 mi (of a 23-mi run)

CAMPING

Sandbars are the campsites — pick a high one, well above the current water level, and leave no trace.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

No river-wide livery — arrange your own shuttle between landings. The Satilla Riverkeeper publishes the current landing list and levels.

GAUGE & WATER

Two gauges, per the Satilla Riverkeeper: USGS 02226500 (near Waycross) governs the upper landings — ideal paddling 6–10 ft, flood 17 ft; USGS 02228000 (near Atkinson) governs the lower landings — ideal 4–9 ft depending on section, flood 13 ft. Never launch at flood; the Satilla loses its sandbars and gains dangerous current fast.

WILDLIFE

Alligators, deer, hogs, beaver, barred owls, hawks, swallow-tailed kites, redbreast, bass, and catfish.

HAZARDS

Strainers, shifting or hidden sandbars, flood current, heat, remoteness, alligators, and private frontage. Watch for snakes and ticks on the bars — wear long pants.

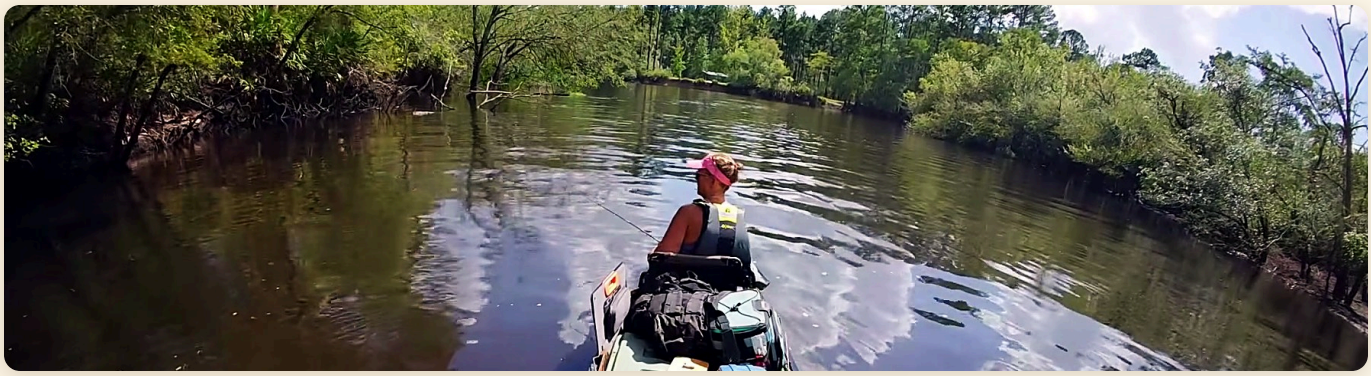
BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

The Satilla is the sandbar river. In normal water it's about as friendly as blackwater gets — but check the Riverkeeper's gauge ranges before you go, because when it floods it turns into a different animal and the bars you'd camp on vanish. Camp high.

SOURCES Satilla Riverkeeper — river gauges & safety · USGS 02226500 / 02228000 · Georgia Rivers (Satilla Water Trail)

FEATURED TRIP PLAN

2-Day: Ava Strickland → Deep Bend (~12 mi)



DAY BY DAY

1 Day 1 — ~6 mi to a sandbar camp. Launch 9 AM, paddle shaded channels, lunch at mile 4, set camp on a high bar.

2 Day 2 — ~6 mi to Deep Bend Landing. Sunrise and breakfast, depart 9 AM through wider sections, lunch at a sandbar or oxbow, arrive mid-afternoon.

FOOD PLAN

Day 1 lunch: wraps & trail mix. Dinner: foil-packet meal, s'mores. Day 2 breakfast: oatmeal, coffee. Lunch: tuna wraps. Snacks: protein bars, jerky.

WATER & COOKING

1 gallon per person per day. No refill — bring it all.

PACK FOR THIS TRIP

- [ ] PFD, whistle, throw line
- [ ] Dry bags + boat repair
- [ ] Tent/hammock + rain fly
- [ ] Bag rated for the season
- [ ] Propane stove + cookware
- [ ] Headlamp + backup light
- [ ] First-aid & repair kit
- [ ] Map, compass, offline GPS
- [ ] Water per the plan above
- [ ] Sunscreen, then repellent

RODNEY'S PRO TIP — READ THE BAR

Camp on a **high** sandbar, well above the current waterline. Blackwater can come up a foot overnight after rain upstream and swallow a low bar while you sleep.

Every trip plan assumes the full BWJ gear checklist (page 8), a checked gauge, a float plan left on shore, and camp only where it's legal and above the waterline.

CORE RIVERS

ALTAMAHA RIVER

FLATWATER / TIDAL LOWER REACH · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~65–90 mi north to the Baxley–Jesup landings and Doctortown (US-1).	Runnable year-round thanks to its size. Spring and fall are most comfortable; summer brings heat and afternoon storms, and the lower reach needs tide planning.	No permit for the water trail. Sandbar and WMA camping along the corridor (Bullard Creek, Griffin Ridge, Altamaha WMAs — follow posted WMA rules and seasons).	138-mi water trail with 29 public access points, Lumber City to the Atlantic.

Georgia's largest free-flowing river — "Georgia's Amazon." Formed where the Oconee and Ocmulgee meet near Lumber City, it runs wide, brown, and powerful to the coast through bottomland forest, sloughs, and finally salt marsh. Big-water flatwater with real current, remote camps, and a tidal, motor-trafficked lower reach.

THE RUNS

Jaycee Landing (Jesup, US-301) → Altamaha Regional Park *Popular access with a bait shop and ramp; classic big-river bottomland paddling.*	day-trip section
Everett City → Two-Way Fish Camp (Darien) *Tidal salt-marsh finish into Darien — time the current and wind; dolphins near the coast.*	~15 mi tidal · plan by tide
Altamaha Regional Park → Doctortown Landing (US-1) *Wide river, sloughs, and swallow-tailed kites in summer. Watch motorboat traffic.*	day-trip section

CAMPING

Sandbars on the middle river and designated WMA areas along the corridor; state-managed landings for access. Camp above the waterline; the lower reach has few dry camps once you're in the marsh.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Altamaha Coastal Tours (Darien) — rentals, shuttles, and guided marsh trips on the lower river.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02226000 — Altamaha River at Doctortown, GA. Because it drains most of central Georgia, the Altamaha almost always has paddling water — the number you watch for is FLOOD, not low water. High flows bring strong current, buried sandbars, and debris; the lower reach below Jesup is tidal, so plan that stretch around the tide, not just the gauge.

WILDLIFE

Swallow-tailed kites, sturgeon, alligators, wading birds, otters, and dolphins in the tidal reach. One of the most biodiverse river corridors in the Southeast.

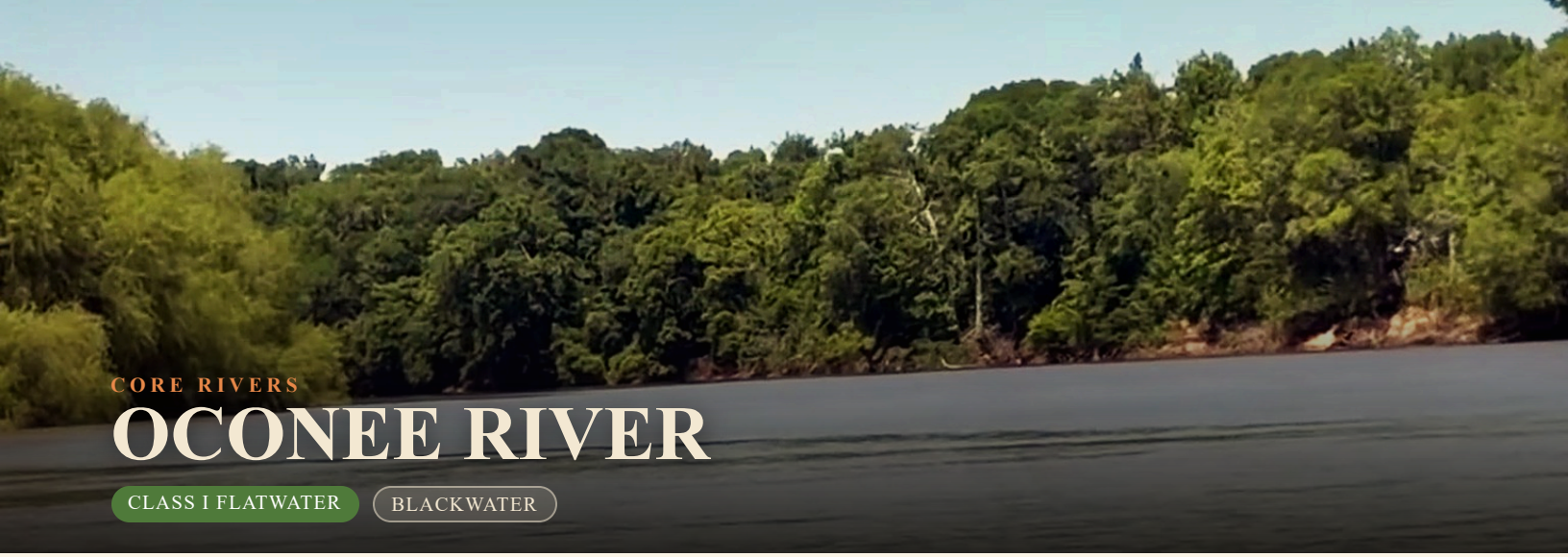
HAZARDS

Motorboat traffic on the lower river, tidal current and wind below Jesup, strong current and debris at high water, alligators, heat, and easy-to-miss sloughs — stay with the main channel.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

The Altamaha is big, and beginners underestimate it because it's flat. The current is real, the river is wide, and the lower end is tidal — get the tide wrong below Jesup and you'll be paddling upstream against it. Charlotte's, Jaycee, and Altamaha Regional Park are your reliable ramps up top; Two-Way Fish Camp is the take-out into Darien.

SOURCES Georgia Rivers — Altamaha Water Trail · Altamaha Riverkeeper · USGS 02226000



CORE RIVERS

OCONEE RIVER

CLASS I FLATWATER · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~120 mi north to Dublin; ~160 mi to Milledgeville.	Best in spring and early summer. Flow below Sinclair Dam is release-dependent -- check the dam schedule as well as the gauge.	No permit. Beaverdam Wildlife Management Area provides a public landing on the lower river; WMA rules apply there.	~220 mi; about 143 mi of free-flowing river from Sinclair Dam to the Ocmulgee confluence.

Below Sinclair Dam the Oconee runs free for about 143 miles to the Ocmulgee confluence, dropping out of the piedmont into the coastal plain. Wide, sandy and increasingly remote as it goes south, with the character shifting from red-clay piedmont water to true coastal-plain river below Dublin.

THE RUNS

Sinclair Dam → Dublin / East Dublin — ~66 mi · multi-day
Published figure for the full run from the dam to the Dublin landings. Intermediate access points are not yet verified.

Oconee River Greenway (Milledgeville) → downstream landings
The Greenway boat ramp is the standard Milledgeville put-in. Downstream access points below it need verifying against a published landing list before mileages are stated.

Blackshear Ferry Landing → Buckeye Park Landing (Dublin / East Dublin)
Blackshear Ferry sits at the Country Club Road bridge in Dublin; Buckeye Park is at the end of Boat Ramp Road in East Dublin.

CAMPING

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Oconee Outfitters, 133 E. Hancock St., Milledgeville, 478-452-3890. Outfitters also serve the Athens area upstream and the Forks area where the Oconee and Ocmulgee meet.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02223000 at Milledgeville governs the upper free-flowing section, 02223500 at Dublin the middle, and 02224500 near Mount Vernon the lower river above the confluence. Releases from Sinclair Dam move the upper river independently of rainfall.

WILDLIFE

Alligators on the lower river, deer, hogs, otter, wading birds and hawks; bass, catfish and redbreast.

HAZARDS

Sinclair Dam releases can raise the upper river quickly -- check the release schedule, not just the gauge. One abandoned diversion dam sits near Milledgeville. Strainers and long gaps between verified access points.

SOURCES Georgia Rivers (garivers.org) -- Oconee River basin and outfitters · Altamaha Riverkeeper -- free-flowing length below Sinclair Dam · USGS gauges 02223000 (Milledgeville), 02223500 (Dublin), 02224500 (near Mount Vernon) · Partially verified 2026-08-28 -- segment mileages and landing list still to be confirmed

CORE RIVERS

OCMULGEE RIVER

CLASS I FLATWATER · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~110 mi north/northwest to Macon; the lower landings near Lumber City are ~85 mi north.	Runnable year-round. Spring gives the most reliable water; late summer drops it and exposes the sandbars.	No permit. Several landings allow overnight parking and primitive camping -- Dodge County Landing, Mile Branch Park and James Dykes Memorial Park among them. The two Macon landings are daylight-only.	~255 mi from Macon to the Altamaha confluence; the mapped water trail covers Macon to Lumber City.

A big, wide coastal-plain river with sandbars, sweeping bends and long remote stretches between landings. The Ocmulgee Water Trail runs from Macon to the Oconee confluence at Lumber City, where the two rivers form the Altamaha -- at 240+ miles it is the longest continuous water trail in Georgia.

THE RUNS

Westlake Landing → James Dykes Memorial Park *Ends inside the Ocmulgee WMA at a landing with tent and RV camping, a pavilion and no fee -- the best overnight-friendly takeout on the upper trail.*	~8.4 mi · day trip
Dodge's Lake Landing → Mobley Bluff Landing *The longest gap between landings on the trail. Treat it as an overnight, not a day trip, and carry water.*	~20.1 mi · 2 days
Amerson Waterworks Landing → Spring Street Landing (Macon) *The in-town run through Macon, with direct access to the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail at the takeout. Both landings are daylight-only, no overnight parking.*	~4.0 mi · day trip
Knowles Landing → Westlake Landing *Twiggs and Houston county river. Westlake's access road is dirt and often impassable after rain -- check it before you shuttle.*	~8.0 mi · day trip
Uchee Shoals Landing → Mile Branch Park (Hawkinsville) *The shortest hop on the trail. Mile Branch Park has restrooms, showers, tent camping and overnight parking -- a good base.*	~1.1 mi · short day trip
Mile Branch Park → Sandy Hammock Landing *A full day on open river. Sandy Hammock is reached by 1.5 miles of dirt road off GA 230.*	~14.2 mi · long day
Dodge County Landing → Half Moon Landing (Abbeville) *Dodge County Landing allows overnight parking and primitive camping and is genuinely remote -- no services nearby.*	~8.6 mi · day trip
McRae's Landing → Lumber City Landing *The last easy run before the Oconee comes in and the Altamaha begins. Lumber City Landing sits just off US 341.*	~3.4 mi · short day trip

CAMPING

Sandbars and a handful of landings with improved camping. Mile Branch Park has restrooms and hot showers; James Dykes has tent and RV sites with no fee; Dodge County Landing is primitive and remote.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

No river-wide livery. Shuttle between the numbered public landings yourself; the Ocmulgee Water Trail partnership publishes the landing map and signage is now posted at the public river landings.

GAUGE & WATER

Four USGS gauges bracket the Macon-to-Lumber-City stretch: 02213000 at Macon, 02215000 at US 341 in Hawkinsville, 02215260 at Abbeville, and 02215500 at Lumber City. Check the gauge nearest your put-in before committing to a long segment -- some of these runs are 20 miles with no exit.

WILDLIFE

Alligators in the lower reaches, deer, hogs, otter, wading birds, hawks and owls; largemouth bass, catfish and redbreast.

HAZARDS

Long unbroken gaps between landings -- the Dodge's Lake to Mobley Bluff segment is over 20 miles with no exit. Several access roads are dirt and impassable when wet, and Flat Tub's ramp sits in a slough that may be unusable in high water. Strainers, motorboat traffic near town landings, heat and no shade mid-river.

SOURCES Ocmulgee Water Trail official guide map, Georgia Rivers (garivers.org) -- landings, counties, river miles, facilities · Mileage between landings per the 1997 DNR Fishing Guide to the Lower Ocmulgee River and the 2011 Multi-Region River Corridor Feasibility Study, as published on that map · USGS gauges 02213000, 02215000, 02215260, 02215500 · Verified 2026-08-28

CORE RIVERS

ALAPAHA RIVER

MOVING WATER — SEASONAL · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~55–80 mi west to the Willacoochee–Statenville area.	Winter and early spring after rain. This is a rain-dependent river — it can be unrunnable for much of a dry year, so watch the gauge and recent rainfall closely.	No permit. Primitive sandbar and bluff camping; confirm access at the launches and camp on high ground.	~150 mi from central Georgia to the Suwannee.

A wild, sandy, seasonal blackwater river that runs hard after rain and disappears into the limestone aquifer in dry spells — parts of the bed can go bone-dry. When it's up, it's fast, twisting, sandbar-lined, and gorgeous.

THE RUNS

GA-135 Bridge (Willacoochee) → Statenville River Access — ~24 mi · 3 days
The classic multi-day: blackwater channels, oxbows, bluff camps, Tenmile Creek confluence.

US-129 → Sheboggy Boat Ramp (US-82) — ~1.4 mi · short
Short, easy access run — a good level check before committing to a longer stretch. Put-in ~31.430, -83.246; Sheboggy 31.386, -83.192.

CAMPING

High sandbars and bluff tops on the multi-day run. Camp well above the water — this river rises fast.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

No outfitter — self-shuttle. WWALS Watershed Coalition (Suwannee Riverkeeper) publishes access points and level guidance.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02317500 — Alapaha River at Statenville, GA. WWALS / Suwannee Riverkeeper planning guidance at Sheboggy: roughly 7.7 ft local stage is a low-but-runnable floor and about 10.6 ft is a high ceiling; below that it's dragging or dry, above it is pushy. The Alapaha only holds paddling water a handful of weeks to months a year — never assume it's running without checking.

WILDLIFE

Deer, otters, herons, hawks, owls, turtles, and gators in the lower reaches.

HAZARDS

Fast current and strainers when it's up; a rapidly changing level; long dry stretches when it's down; remoteness and limited cell service.

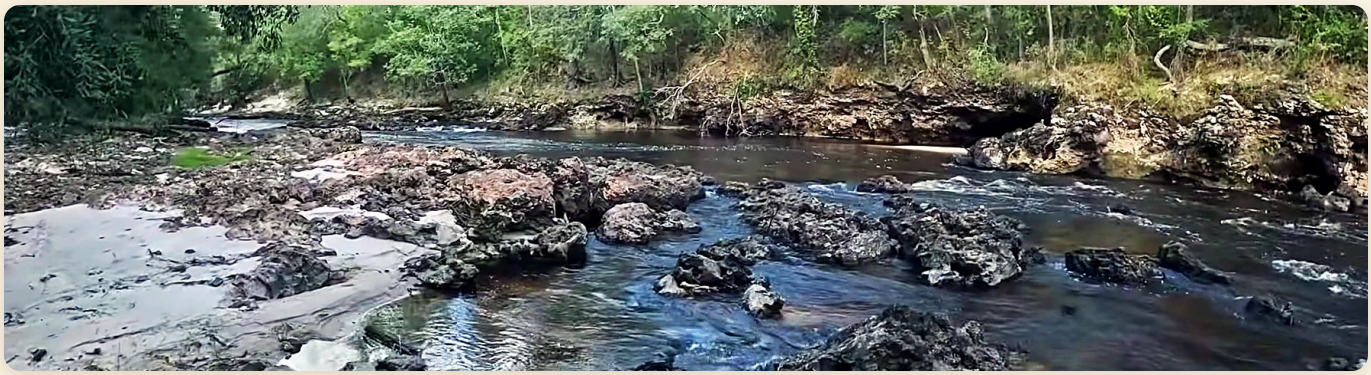
BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

The Alapaha is a river you catch, not schedule. It runs with the rain and then sinks into the ground. Use the short US-129 to Sheboggy stretch to read the water before you commit three days to it — if the gauge at Statenville is in the WWALS range and rain's been through, it's on.

SOURCES WWALS Watershed Coalition / Suwannee Riverkeeper · USGS 02317500

FEATURED TRIP PLAN

3-Day: GA-135 → Statenville (~24 mi)



DAY BY DAY

1. Day 1 — ~10 mi to a sandbar camp through blackwater channels; lunch on a shaded bend.
2. Day 2 — ~8 mi through forested stretches; lunch at an oxbow, camp on a bluff top.
3. Day 3 — ~6 mi through wider sections to Statenville River Access.

FOOD PLAN

Day 1: turkey wraps; sausage & potatoes dinner. Day 2: pancakes; pasta dinner. Day 3: oatmeal; tuna wraps. Snacks: jerky, protein bars.

WATER & COOKING

1 gallon per person per day.

PACK FOR THIS TRIP

- [ ] PFD, whistle, throw line
- [ ] Dry bags + boat repair
- [ ] Tent/hammock + rain fly
- [ ] Bag rated for the season
- [ ] Propane stove + cookware
- [ ] Headlamp + backup light
- [ ] First-aid & repair kit
- [ ] Map, compass, offline GPS
- [ ] Water per the plan above
- [ ] Sunscreen, then repellent

RODNEY'S PRO TIP — THE PADDLE

The right paddle is the right material — wood for comfort or carbon fiber for light weight — and the right length for **you**, not the canoe. Tie your spare where you can reach it from the seat.

Every trip plan assumes the full BWJ gear checklist (page 8), a checked gauge, a float plan left on shore, and camp only where it's legal and above the waterline.

CORE RIVERS

WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER (SOUTH GA / NORTH FL)

EASY — WITH LIMESTONE SHOALS · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~85–95 mi west to Valdosta/Troupville and the FL-line ramps.	Late winter and spring after rain up top; the spring-fed Florida reach near Madison Blue holds water more steadily.	No permit. Primitive camping in Twin Rivers State Forest and on sandbars; Madison Blue Spring SP nearby for day use.	~97.7 mi (≈70 mi Georgia, ≈27.7 mi Florida).

The northern Withlacoochee — draining out of south Georgia past Valdosta and across the Florida line to meet the Suwannee at Ellaville. Tannic and flashy up top, then limestone bluffs, shoals, and blue springs as it nears the Suwannee. Not to be confused with the central-Florida river of the same name.

THE RUNS

CR-150 → Madison Blue Spring SP → Suwannee River SP — ~22 mi · 2 days
Limestone outcrops and Madison Blue Spring; optional spring swim; ends at the Suwannee confluence.

CR-145 Bridge (FL line) → CR-150 Bridge (Pinetta) — ~10 mi
Through Twin Rivers State Forest; high-sandbar and forest-edge camping.

Troupville Boat Ramp (Valdosta) → State Line Boat Ramp — Georgia section
Blackwater through the Little/Withlacoochee confluence country; WWALS publishes the access table.

CAMPING

Twin Rivers State Forest access and high sandbars; Madison Blue Spring State Park for a day stop and swim.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

No full-time livery — self-shuttle. WWALS Watershed Coalition (Suwannee Riverkeeper) maintains the access list and levels.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02319000 — Withlacoochee River near Pinetta, FL (CR-150), just above the Suwannee confluence. Tannic and flashy: it rises sharply after Georgia rain and drops low in drought. Read the trend after rain, not just the number, and never launch at flood. Also on the SRWMD portal (mysuwanneeriver.org).

WILDLIFE

Eagles, wading birds, turtles, gators, and — in the spring-fed lower reach — the occasional manatee.

HAZARDS

Limestone shoals and outcrops, flashy current after rain, strainers, and low water in drought. Limited cell service.

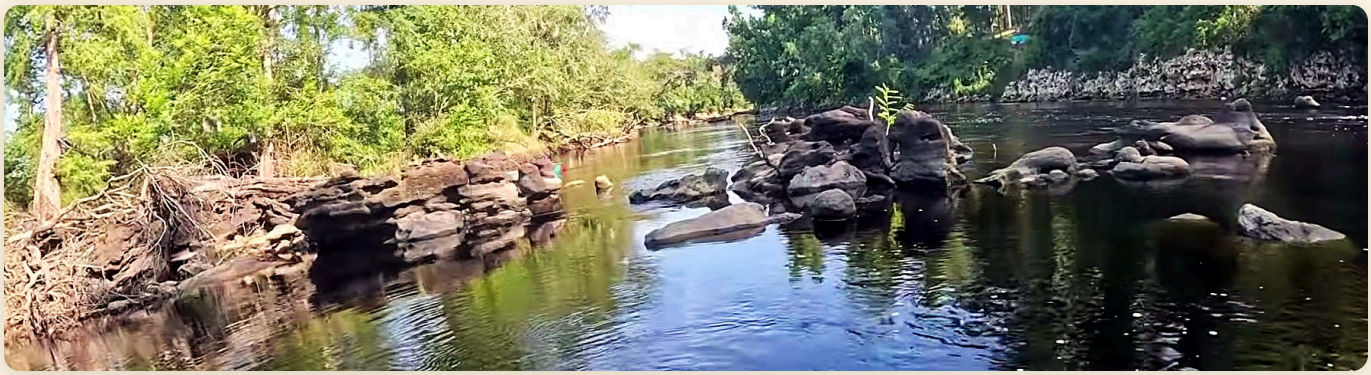
BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

This is the Withlacoochee that feeds the Suwannee — not the central-Florida one. Up top it's tannic and rain-fed; by the time you reach Madison Blue Spring the limestone and clear water take over. Watch the Pinetta gauge; it comes up fast when Georgia gets rain.

SOURCES WWALS Watershed Coalition / Suwannee Riverkeeper · USGS 02319000 · Florida State Parks — Madison Blue Spring

FEATURED TRIP PLAN

3-Day: CR-145 → Suwannee River SP (~32 mi)



DAY BY DAY

1. Day 1 — ~10 mi CR-145 to CR-150 through Twin Rivers State Forest; lunch near Pinetta, camp on a high sandbar.
2. Day 2 — ~12 mi past limestone outcrops to Madison Blue Spring SP; optional spring swim, camp nearby.
3. Day 3 — ~10 mi through scenic bluffs to Suwannee River State Park at the confluence.

FOOD PLAN

Day 1: wraps, foil-packet dinner, s'mores. Day 2: pancakes, pasta dinner. Day 3: oatmeal, tuna wraps.

WATER & COOKING

1 gallon per person per day; the springs are a swim stop, not a guaranteed refill.

PACK FOR THIS TRIP

- [ ] PFD, whistle, throw line
- [ ] Dry bags + boat repair
- [ ] Tent/hammock + rain fly
- [ ] Bag rated for the season
- [ ] Propane stove + cookware
- [ ] Headlamp + backup light
- [ ] First-aid & repair kit
- [ ] Map, compass, offline GPS
- [ ] Water per the plan above
- [ ] Sunscreen, then repellent

RODNEY'S PRO TIP — THE EXIT

Know your take-out and shuttle before the boat touches water. On remote blackwater you finish the day you start — there's no bailout in the middle.

Every trip plan assumes the full BWJ gear checklist (page 8), a checked gauge, a float plan left on shore, and camp only where it's legal and above the waterline.

CHAPTER TWO · WORTH THE SHUTTLE

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

Eight more rivers within reach — spring runs, tidal marsh, and blackwater creeks that round out the region.

ALAPAHOOCHEE · LITTLE SATILLA · OLUSTEE CREEK · CROOKED · SANTA FE · ICHETUCKNEE · CATHEAD CREEK · BLACK CREEK

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

ALAPAHOOCHEE RIVER

EXPERT — CONDITION-DEPENDENT · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~50–55 mi west to the GA-135 area near Statenville.	Only in a narrow high-water window after significant rain — otherwise too low or too dangerous.	No permit. Confirm access; camp on high ground only if you must overnight.	~15 mi from GA-135 to the GA-150 area near Jennings, FL.

A small, tight, condition-dependent blackwater river near the Alapaha — an expert-only run that requires the right water and solid moving-water skills. Narrow, snaggy, and unforgiving when it's up.

THE RUNS

GA-135 → GA-150 area (near Jennings, FL) — ~15 mi · expert, high water only
Tight, snaggy blackwater; strong moving-water skills and scouting required. Not a beginner run.

CAMPING

No developed camping; this is a run-and-done expert stretch.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

None — self-supported, expert paddlers only.

GAUGE & WATER

There's no active real-time gauge on the Alapahoochee itself (the former USGS 02317608 site near GA-135 is not a live station). Use the Alapaha at Statenville (USGS 02317500) together with recent local rainfall as a proxy, and treat this as an expert, scout-as-you-go run — never a casual float.

WILDLIFE

Gators, wading birds, turtles, and songbirds in dense canopy.

HAZARDS

Strainers and deadfall in fast, narrow water; few exits; no reliable gauge. Expert judgment required — when in doubt, don't.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

The Alapahoochee is the one on this list I'd only send an experienced moving-water paddler down, and only with the right water. No live gauge means you're reading rain and the Alapaha at Statenville, then scouting on the ground. If it's pushy and snaggy, walk away.

SOURCES WWALS Watershed Coalition / Suwannee Riverkeeper · USGS 02317500 (Alapaha proxy)

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

LITTLE SATILLA RIVER

MOVING WATER · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~45–60 mi north to the Offerman / Patterson area.	Winter and spring after rain; it drops low and snaggy in a dry summer.	No permit. Primitive sandbar camping; camp high and pack out everything.	Lower blackwater river of ~50 mi feeding into the Satilla.

A smaller, wilder cousin of the Satilla — narrow tea-colored blackwater with tight bends, deadfall, and white sandbars. Remote and lightly traveled, best in moderate water.

THE RUNS

Public bridge-to-bridge sections (Offerman / Patterson area) — day sections
Narrow blackwater with deadfall and tight bends; scout access and camp on high sandbars.

CAMPING

High sandbars; the river is narrow, so good bars are the campsites.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

No livery — self-shuttle. Confirm public access at the bridge landings.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02227500 — Little Satilla River near Offerman, GA. Blackwater and rain-driven: it runs after winter and spring rain and gets shallow and log-choked in drought. Watch the stage and the trend after rain, and never launch at flood.

WILDLIFE

Gators, deer, otters, wading birds, and turtles.

HAZARDS

Deadfall and strainers in the tight bends, shallow snaggy water at low levels, remoteness, and limited cell service.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

The Little Satilla is for paddlers who like it tight and wild. It needs decent water — in a dry spell you'll be dragging over logs — so catch it after the winter rains.

SOURCES USGS 02227500 · Georgia Rivers

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

OLUSTEE CREEK

MOVING WATER — HIGH WATER ONLY · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~50–65 mi south/southwest toward the Santa Fe confluence.	Only after solid rain — it's a high-water-only creek that's dry or unrunnable much of the year.	No permit. Confirm access; much of the surrounding land is private or state forest.	Small tannic creek; ~6–7 mi to the Santa Fe confluence.

A narrow, twisting, canopy-shaded blackwater creek feeding the Santa Fe — a technical small-water run that's only worth doing when levels are up. Deadfall, tight bends, and no room for error at speed.

THE RUNS

Lower Olustee Creek → Santa Fe River confluence — ~6.8 mi · high water only
Tight, canopy-shaded, technical small water; scout deadfall and only run it up.

CAMPING

No developed camping on the creek; base out of the Santa Fe / High Springs area.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Adventure Outpost (High Springs) has guided the area in high water; self-shuttle otherwise.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02321896 — Olustee Creek near Providence, FL. A small, flashy, rain-driven creek: it needs a recent rise to be runnable and is a drag-fest or dry otherwise. Watch this gauge and recent rainfall closely — this is a catch-it-when-it's-up run, not a scheduled trip.

SOURCES USGS 02321896 · Adventure Outpost (High Springs)

WILDLIFE

Canopy songbirds, wading birds, turtles, and gators near the Santa Fe.

HAZARDS

Deadfall and strainers in tight bends, insufficient water outside short windows, and few exits. A skills-and-timing run.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

Olustee is a 'catch it after a big rain' creek. When it's up it's a fun, tight technical run into the Santa Fe; when it's down it's a hike. Respect the deadfall — a strainer in fast, narrow water is the real danger here.

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

CROOKED RIVER

TIDAL · TIDAL / COASTAL

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~45–55 mi east to Crooked River State Park (near St. Marys).	Year-round; spring and fall are most comfortable, with fewer bugs and milder wind.	Crooked River State Park entry fee; launch from the park ramp. Cumberland Island NPS rules apply if you range that far.	Tidal estuary; day loops of ~3–6 mi from the park.

A coastal tidal river and salt-marsh maze near Cumberland Sound, launched from Crooked River State Park. Spartina grass, winding creeks, and big open sky — a completely different world from the blackwater, and one that lives and dies by the tide.

THE RUNS

Crooked River State Park ramp → Cherry Point marsh loop — ~4–5 mi round trip · plan by tide
Sheltered marsh-creek loop from the park; time it around slack and the returning tide.

CAMPING

Crooked River State Park campground and cabins; no marsh camping.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

No rental at the park — bring your own boat. Nearby St. Marys / Cumberland outfitters run guided coastal trips.

GAUGE & WATER

There's no streamflow gauge here — this is tidal water. Plan by the NOAA tide tables for the Cumberland Sound / St. Marys entrance area: paddle out on the ebb and back on the flood, and respect the wind, which fights the tide and kicks up chop in the open marsh.

WILDLIFE

Dolphins, manatees, wading birds, ospreys, fiddler crabs, and the occasional gator up the freshwater creeks.

HAZARDS

Tidal current and wind are the whole game — a wind-against-tide chop can build fast in the open marsh. Mud flats at low tide, boat traffic in the sound, and easy-to-lose creek mouths. Carry a tide chart and a compass.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

Marsh paddling is all about the tide. Ride the ebb out and the flood back, and never fight both wind and tide at once. Get it right and it's the most peaceful water in the region; get it wrong and it's a grind.

SOURCES Georgia State Parks — Crooked River · NOAA Tides & Currents — Cumberland Sound

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

SANTA FE RIVER

EASY · SPRING-FED

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~75–90 mi southwest to High Springs and the US-27 area.	Year-round on the spring-fed lower river; the upper river is tannic and best after rain. Summer brings heavier tubing traffic near the springs.	State-park fees at O'Leno / River Rise; private frontage on parts of the lower river. 2026 note: O'Leno River Trail closed and River Rise under a burn ban — confirm before launch.	~75 mi to the Suwannee.

Two rivers in one: a tannic upper Santa Fe that literally disappears underground at O'Leno and re-emerges three miles later at River Rise, then a spring-jeweled lower river fed by Poe, Rum Island, Ginnie, and Blue springs. Easy, clear, and one of Florida's finest paddles.

THE RUNS

US-27 Ramp (High Springs) → Rum Island County Park — ~7.7 mi · day trip
Classic lower-river spring run past Poe and Rum Island springs; clear water over limestone.

River Rise (O'Leno State Park) → US-27 — day trip
Where the river re-emerges from underground; tannic to clear transition. O'Leno SP fees apply.

CAMPING

O'Leno State Park campground; day-use spring parks (Rum Island, Poe) along the lower river.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Santa Fe Canoe Outpost · 386-454-2050 · and Adventure Outpost · 386-454-0611 (High Springs) — rentals and shuttles.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02322500 — Santa Fe River near Fort White (the lower, spring-augmented river, steadier at roughly 600–1,000 cfs) — plus USGS 02321500 — near Worthington Springs for the tannic upper river, which drops low and disappears at O'Leno in dry spells. The lower river below River Rise carries paddling water essentially year-round.

WILDLIFE

Springs, turtles, alligators, otters, herons, and manatees that range up from the Suwannee in winter.

HAZARDS

Submerged limestone and strainers, stronger current after rain, crowded spring zones and powerboats on the lower river, and private property. The upper river can vanish underground — know where you are.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

The lower Santa Fe is where you take someone to fall in love with paddling — clear water, spring boils, and easy current. Just remember the upper river disappears at O'Leno for a reason; don't try to connect the two by water.

SOURCES Florida State Parks — O'Leno / River Rise · USGS 02322500 / 02321500 · SRWMD Lower Santa Fe MFL

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

ICHETUCKNEE RIVER

EASY · SPRING-FED

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~70–75 mi southwest to Ichetucknee Springs State Park.	Year-round. Summer is crowded with tubers (and the tube launch has capacity limits); fall through spring is quiet and clear.	Ichetucknee Springs State Park entry fee. Summer tube-launch capacity closures possible; 2026 note: the midpoint tube launch has been closed for repairs. Day use only — no overnight.	~6 mi from the head spring to the US-27 take-out; the state-park paddle is ~3.5 mi.

A gin-clear, 72°F spring run through Ichetucknee Springs State Park — eelgrass waving over white sand, turtles, and a gentle, near-constant current. One of the most beautiful short paddles in the South, and essentially always runnable.

THE RUNS

North (head-spring) Launch → South Take-out (Ichetucknee Springs SP) — ~3.5 mi · 1.5–2 hr
The classic clear-water run inside the park; no camping, day use only.

South Take-out → US-27 (Hildreth) toward the Santa Fe — ~2.5 mi
Lower run out of the park toward the Santa Fe confluence; quieter, still clear.

CAMPING

No camping on the run itself; nearby state forest and private campgrounds for overnights.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Rentals and shuttle at the south entrance (Ichetucknee Springs SP concession). Confirm seasonal hours.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02322700 — Ichetucknee River near Hildreth. As a first-magnitude spring run it holds a near-constant flow (median around 356 cfs / ~212 million gallons a day), so there's no 'too low' to worry about — it's a stable, gentle float in every season. No live-reading gymnastics needed here.

WILDLIFE

Turtles, otters, wood ducks, wading birds, and a stunning underwater world of eelgrass and springs. No feeding wildlife.

HAZARDS

Very little — it's a gentle float. Cold spring water, occasional deadfall, and heavy tuber traffic in summer. Protect the fragile spring bottom: no touching or standing on vegetation.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

The Ichetucknee is the payoff paddle — no gauge stress, no rapids, just glass-clear spring water. Go on a cool-season weekday and you'll have it nearly to yourself.

SOURCES Florida State Parks — Ichetucknee Springs · USGS 02322700

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

CATHEAD CREEK

TIDAL · TIDAL / COASTAL

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~75–80 mi northeast to Darien.	Year-round; spring and fall are best for weather and birds.	No permit; public launch at Darien. Respect private docks and oyster leases.	Tidal creek; ~6–10 mi out-and-back from the Darien area.

A tidal blackwater creek winding through the Altamaha delta near historic Darien — cypress and tupelo giving way to salt marsh. Quiet, birdy, and tide-driven, an easy paddle out of the Darien waterfront when you time it right.

THE RUNS

Darien waterfront / Cathead Creek public launch → creek out-and-back — ~6–10 mi · plan by tide
Tidal cypress-to-marsh creek near historic Darien; time it around the tide.

CAMPING

No creek camping; lodging and camps in and around Darien.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Altamaha Coastal Tours (Darien) and Southeast Adventure Outfitters run guided delta trips and shuttles.

GAUGE & WATER

No streamflow gauge — plan by the NOAA tide tables for the Darien River / Altamaha delta. Launch to ride the tide out and back, and watch the wind across the open marsh stretches.

SOURCES Altamaha Coastal Tours · NOAA Tides & Currents — Darien River

WILDLIFE

Wading birds, ospreys, alligators up the freshwater reach, and dolphins in the delta.

HAZARDS

Tidal timing, wind on the marsh, boat traffic near Darien, and mud at low tide. Carry a tide chart.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

Cathead is a lovely, easy delta paddle if you go with the tide — and a slog if you don't. Base out of Darien, check the tide, and let the water do the work.

REGIONAL ADDITIONS

BLACK CREEK — NORTH FORK

MOVING WATER · BLACKWATER

FROM ST. GEORGE	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS	LENGTH
~65–80 mi east/southeast to the Middleburg (Clay County) area.	After rain in the cooler months; low and slow in drought.	No permit; public ramps. Respect private frontage along the creek.	Tannic creek; popular ~ day-run sections above Middleburg.

A classic North Florida blackwater creek in Clay County — tannic water, white sand, and cypress, with a flashy current that responds fast to rain. The lower North Fork turns tidal near Middleburg.

THE RUNS

Indian Ford Recreation Area → Middleburg Public Ramp — day trip

Tannic creek through cypress; the lower end near Middleburg (ramp at ~3788 Main St) is tidal.

CAMPING

No developed creek camping; Clay County parks (e.g., Camp Chowenwaw) for day use and nearby facilities.

OUTFITTERS & SHUTTLE

Self-shuttle; Clay County parks provide the public ramps. Camp Chowenwaw Park offers nearby access and day use.

GAUGE & WATER

USGS 02246000 — North Fork Black Creek near Middleburg, FL. Flashy blackwater with low baseflow and sharp storm spikes; paddlers often cite roughly 2.25–2.5 ft as a comfortable level. Below Middleburg the creek is tidal, so factor the tide on the lower reach. Check the stage and recent rain before you go.

WILDLIFE

Gators, otters, wading birds, turtles, and bass.

HAZARDS

Flashy current after storms, deadfall, and tidal influence with boat traffic near Middleburg. Limited camping.

BWJ FIELD NOTE — FROM RODNEY

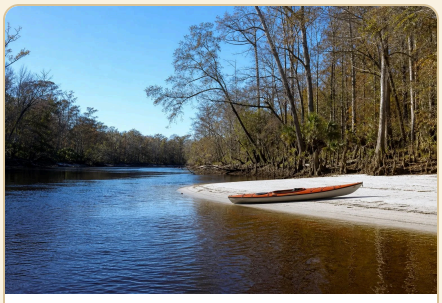
North Fork Black Creek is a pretty tannic run when it's up around 2.25–2.5 feet on the Middleburg gauge. Below that it gets thin; way above it and the current gets pushy. Mind the tide on the lower end.

SOURCES USGS 02246000 · Clay County Parks (Camp Chowenwaw / Middleburg)

APPENDIX

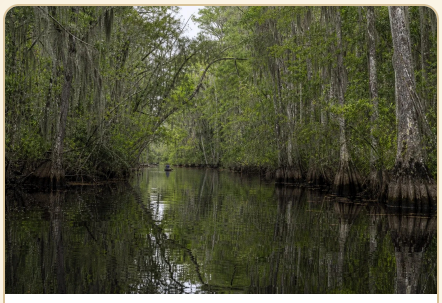
Worth the Drive

A little farther out, but worth the shuttle. These three sit just beyond the core region — each with its gauge, access, and character below so you can plan the drive with confidence.



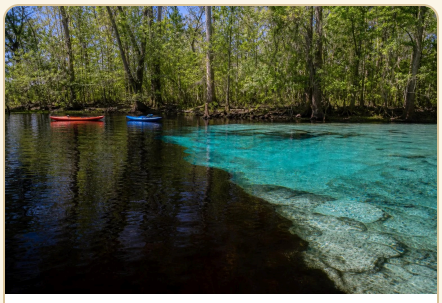
Ohoopee River

A bucket-list Georgia blackwater river with brilliant white sandbars and dark, sand-bottomed water. Gauge: USGS 02225500 (near Reidsville) — rain-driven, best after winter/spring rain and low in drought. Remote, lightly developed, and a sandbar-camper's favorite.



Ebenezer Creek

A designated National Natural Landmark near Rincon — a stunning tupelo-cypress blackwater swamp creek off the Savannah River. The upper creek is freshwater and jungle-like; the lower reach is tidal, so plan by the Savannah-area tide. Paddleable year-round with tide awareness.



Silver River / Ocklawaha

A first-magnitude spring run near Ocala — crystal water, wild rhesus macaques, and near-constant flow (USGS 02239501; historically ~820 cfs, now ~550 cfs). The ~5-mi Silver River run drops into the Ocklawaha (USGS 02240500 at Eureka). Stable and paddleable year-round.

THE BWJ STANDARD

Every river in this guide carries a real USGS or tide reference and named public access — not a "check the map and hope." Levels change with every rain, so we give you the gauge and the seasonal range and let the water make the final call. When we say a run, we mean a run we'd put our own family on.

QUICK REFERENCE

River Comparison

RIVER	TYPE	DIFFICULTY	BEST SEASON	PERMIT / ACCESS
Okefenokee Swamp	Swamp Wilderness	Easy but strenuous	Cooler months are the season: 1-4 night trips are available May through February, but only 1- and 2-night trips during the March-April peak	Overnight Wilderness camping requires a permit, one party per platform per night, booked by phone with a Recreation
Suwannee River	Blackwater	Easy — with one Class III (Big Shoals)	Late fall through spring	No river-wide permit
St. Marys River	Blackwater	Easy Flatwater	Runnable most of the year in the middle course; late fall through spring gives the most dependable water	No river permit
Satilla River	Blackwater	Class I Flatwater	Winter and spring give the most dependable water	No permit
Altamaha River	Blackwater	Flatwater / Tidal Lower Reach	Runnable year-round thanks to its size	No permit for the water trail
Oconee River	Blackwater	Class I Flatwater	Best in spring and early summer	No permit
Ocmulgee River	Blackwater	Class I Flatwater	Runnable year-round	No permit
Alapaha River	Blackwater	Moving Water — seasonal	Winter and early spring after rain	No permit
Withlacoochee River (South GA / North FL)	Blackwater	Easy — with limestone shoals	Late winter and spring after rain up top; the spring-fed Florida reach near Madison Blue holds water more steadily	No permit
Alapahoochee River	Blackwater	Expert — condition-dependent	Only in a narrow high-water window after significant rain — otherwise too low or too dangerous	No permit
Little Satilla River	Blackwater	Moving Water	Winter and spring after rain; it drops low and snaggy in a dry summer	No permit
Olustee Creek	Blackwater	Moving Water — high water only	Only after solid rain — it's a high-water-only creek that's dry or unrunnable much of the year	No permit
Crooked River	Tidal / Coastal	Tidal	Year-round; spring and fall are most comfortable, with fewer bugs and milder wind	Crooked River State Park entry fee; launch from the park ramp
Santa Fe River	Spring-fed	Easy	Year-round on the spring-fed lower river; the upper river is tannic and best after rain	State-park fees at O'Leno / River Rise; private frontage on parts of the lower river
Ichetucknee River	Spring-fed	Easy	Year-round	Ichetucknee Springs State Park entry fee
Cathead Creek	Tidal / Coastal	Tidal	Year-round; spring and fall are best for weather and birds	No permit; public launch at Darien
Black Creek — North Fork	Blackwater	Moving Water	After rain in the cooler months; low and slow in drought	No permit; public ramps

Difficulty and type are planning starting points, not promises — every run depends on the day's gauge, weather, and confirmed access. Recheck the current riverkeeper or state-park map before you finalize mileage and shuttle.

PRINT THIS PAGE

Trip Planner

PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST

- [ ] Route and legal access confirmed
- [ ] Take-out and shuttle confirmed
- [ ] Gauge stage, trend and flood forecast checked
- [ ] Weather and lightning plan checked
- [ ] Float plan sent to shore contact
- [ ] PFD, whistle and spare paddle aboard
- [ ] Map, compass and offline navigation packed
- [ ] Water, food and delay margin packed
- [ ] First aid, repair kit and backup light packed
- [ ] Camping permit or legal site confirmed
- [ ] Closures and burn bans rechecked
- [ ] Leave No Trace plan set

FIELD NOTES

River: _____

Date: _____ Gauge/trend: _____

Put-in: _____

Take-out: _____

Shore contact: _____

Return time: _____

THE RULE

If any line above is still blank when it's time to launch, you're not ready to launch. The wild doesn't grade on effort — it grades on preparation.

EST. JUNE 2025 · SAINT GEORGE, GEORGIA

Why This Archive Exists

"I didn't start this to chase an algorithm. I started it to stop time."

That is still the whole point. Every trip we film is a trip that now exists somewhere other than memory, which is the one place I have already learned things can slip away. A canoe on blackwater does not care about view counts. It cares whether you read the current right, whether your camp holds through the night, whether you and the person paddling with you come home.

Three reasons. For my family, so these trips outlast my memory. For the people who cannot get out there. And for the paddlers planning their own runs, so they can learn from what we got right and what we got wrong.

A camera does what memory cannot always do on its own. It holds a trip exactly as it happened: the light on the water at the first paddle stroke, the sound of the boat sliding off a sandbar, the exact bend in the river where the day turned hard or turned good.

Not everyone who loves this water can get to it. Health, age, distance, all of it keeps people off the river who would be out here in a heartbeat if they could. For those people, these films are a window.

And every river guide, every field note, every hard lesson we post exists so the next paddler does not have to learn it the same expensive way we did. We do not edit around our mistakes. If a route was wrong, if a camp was miserable, if the water rose faster than we planned for, that stays in the film and gets written down.

Saying the blessing on a Satilla sandbar, over fish we caught that same evening.

WHO'S IN THE CANOE

Rodney Thompson — paddler, filmmaker, and the voice behind the channel. Grew up reading these rivers before he could read a map.

Tina Thompson — co-paddler and trip partner, up front through every gator gauntlet.

THE WATER WE PADDLE

The Okefenokee Swamp, the Suwannee, the St. Marys, the Satilla, the Altamaha, the Withlacoochee and the Alapaha — and now the Oconee and the Ocmulgee, down to where they make the Altamaha at Lumber City. Reliving what happened. Opening what's next.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Where These Pictures Came From

Every photograph of a river we have paddled is a still frame from one of our own films — the Okefenokee, Suwannee, St. Marys, Satilla, Altamaha, Oconee, Ocmulgee, Withlacoochee and Alapaha, along with the story and chapter pages. Nothing in this guide is stock photography and nothing is generated.

For the waters we have not yet filmed we have used photographs shared by other people under Creative Commons licences. They are listed here in full. Each has been cropped and colour-graded to sit with the rest of the book; where a licence is ShareAlike, the adapted image is offered under that same licence.

USED FOR	PHOTOGRAPH	BY	LICENCE
Santa Fe River	Santa Fe River High Springs east03	Ebyabe	CC BY-SA 2.5
Ichetucknee River	Ichetucknee River 1	Michael Rivera	CC BY-SA 4.0
Black Creek, North Fork	Black Creek	Subwayatrain	CC BY-SA 4.0
Crooked River	Salt marsh Georgia US	Trish Hartmann	CC BY 2.0
Cathead Creek	Laurel Island aus der Vogelperspektive	Phoenix2810	CC BY-SA 3.0
Little Satilla River	Satilla River, south of Douglas, GA, US	Bubba73 (Jud McCranie)	CC BY-SA 4.0

Full source URLs for each photograph are published at blackwateroutdoorjourneys.com/paddlers-guide. Licence terms: creativecommons.org/licenses.

TWO RIVERS STILL WITHOUT A PHOTOGRAPH

The Alapahoochee and Olustee Creek carry placeholder artwork. We have not paddled either with a camera yet. When we do, they will be replaced with the real thing, the same as every other river in this book.

KEEP MOVING

The films show the trip. The community teaches the systems. This guide points the bow. Take all three to the water.

WATCH THE JOURNEYS

Documentary canoe expeditions through the blackwater rivers of the Deep South — filmed by Rodney & Tina.

YouTube · @blackwateroutdoorjourneys
blackwateroutdoorjourneys.com

LEARN THE SKILLS

Camping Wilderness Skills — 15 field guides, the 582-page Field Manual, the trip app with AI Coach, and THE CAMPFIRE community.

campingwildernessskills.com
One membership — $19/month or $190/year

GET IT ON Google Play Download on the App Store

App Store coming soon

THE MISSION

We film real trips through the blackwater country of the Deep South and tell them the way they happened, so they outlast memory. For our family first. For the people who can't get out here. And for the next paddler standing at the put-in we once stood at.

THE VISION

To build the deepest film record the blackwater country has ever had. One of the biggest outdoor channels in the country, still rooted in the small-town family values of Saint George. An archive that holds what happened and opens what's next.

WHAT WE STAND BY

Honest film. No staging. Nothing doctored. Mistakes stay in the cut. If the water was high, you see it high.

The river decides. When the river says no, we turn back. Everybody comes home. No shot is worth the boat.

A seat in the canoe. These films are for the people who can't make the put-in. Health, age, distance. If you can't get out here, you ride with us.

The place comes first. The swamp was here before the canoe and it will be here after. We film wildlife where it lives, at a respectful distance.

Family in the boat. This started as a record for our family. It still is. Tina is in the canoe, not on the bank.

Affiliate disclosure: some gear links may earn BWJ a commission at no added cost to the buyer. Gear never replaces practical sense, a checked gauge, or a solid exit plan.

BLACKWATER OUTDOOR JOURNEYS
Where the Map Ends, the Wild Begins. Stay Rugged.

SAINT GEORGE, GEORGIA · EST. 2025
SECOND EDITION · 2026