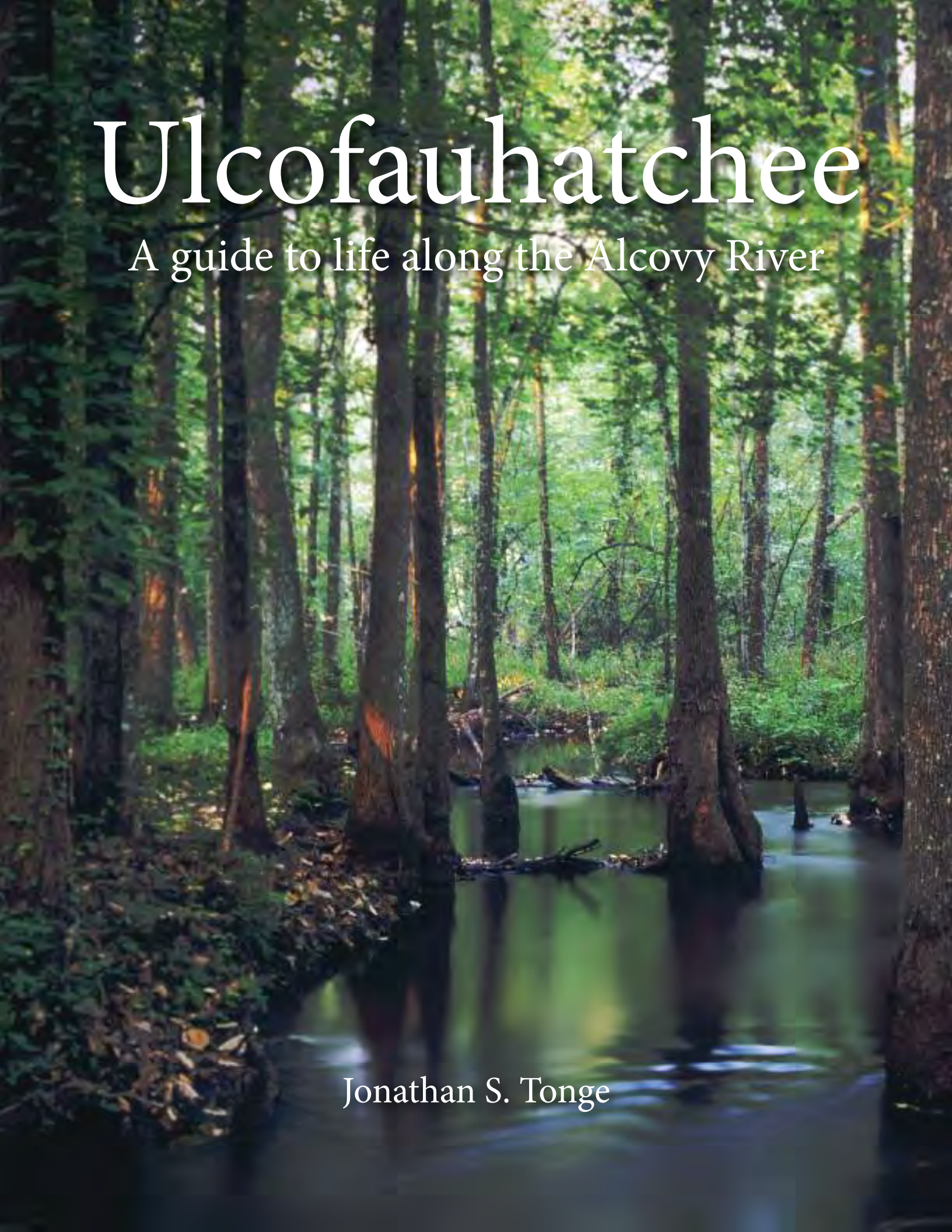


A photograph of a forest stream with tall trees and reflections in the water. The scene is lush and green, with sunlight filtering through the canopy. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding trees and foliage. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

Ulcofauhatchee

A guide to life along the Alcovy River

Jonathan S. Tonge

ULCOFAUHATCHEE

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FIVE STAR RESTORATION PROGRAM PARTNERS

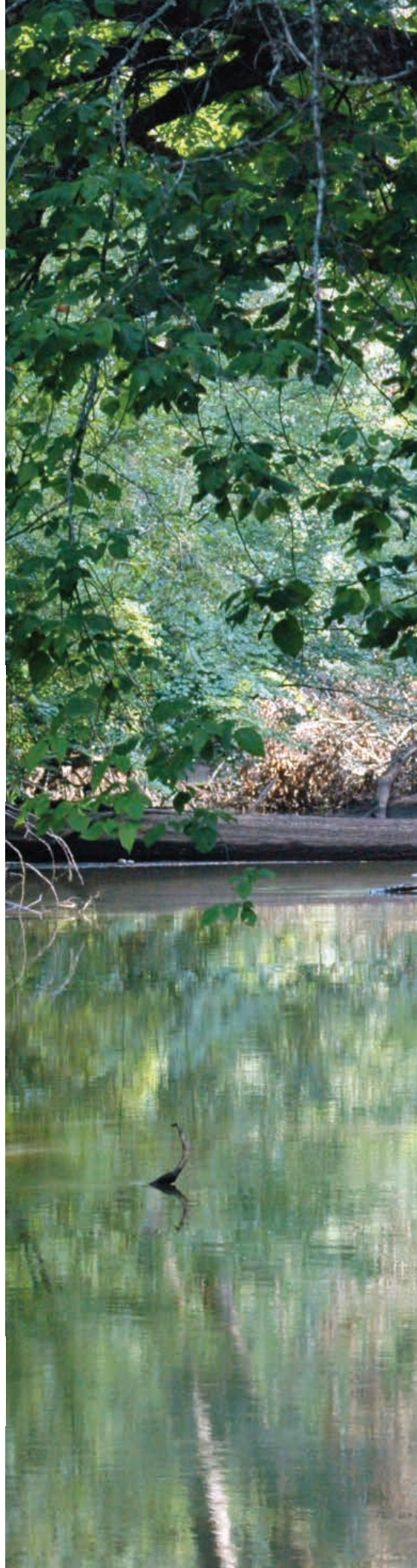
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
National Association of Counties
Wildlife Habitat Council
Environmental Protection Agency
Southern Company

ALCOVY RIVER AT EAST END WETLANDS RESTORATION PARTNERS

Georgia Wildlife Federation
The Conservation Fund
Newton County
Keep Covington/Newton Beautiful
GA DNR Wildlife Resources Division
GA DNR Environmental Protection Division
Oxford College of Emory University
Georgia FFA-FCCLA
Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council
Georgia River Fishing
Newton County Master Gardeners
Air Conditioning Specialist, Inc.



GEORGIA WILDLIFE FEDERATION



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On the cover: Tupelo gum swamps on the Alcovy River at the Alcovy Conservation Center in Covington, GA. Photo courtesy Cameron D. Barham. All photos copyright Georgia Wildlife Federation unless otherwise noted.

To encourage the intelligent management of the life sustaining resources of the earth - its essential water resources - its protective forests and plant life - and its dependent wildlife - and to promote and encourage the knowledge and appreciation of these resources, their interrelationship and wise use, without which there can be little hope for a continuing abundant life.

Georgia Wildlife Federation, 1936



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Where the Pawpaw Lilies Blow



Photo: Hank Ohme

Botanists and farmers may know the flower; do others? And does someone ask what it has to do with music? I am coming to that. Early in the season, when the smooth gray-green stems are pulsing with sap, when the tender yellow-green leaves are just unsheathing and not over an inch in length, the pawpaw lilies blow. I never heard any one else call them lilies, but I will persist in it; they are lilies and most exquisite ones. The flowers hang lily fashion, their petals are thick, of velvety lily texture, and look at their formation! Those outside are beautifully veined and curled, of the loveliest wine-red; the inside smaller, slightly lighter in color, and set across the meeting of the outer ones, and a yellow-green pistil, pollen dusted in the heart.

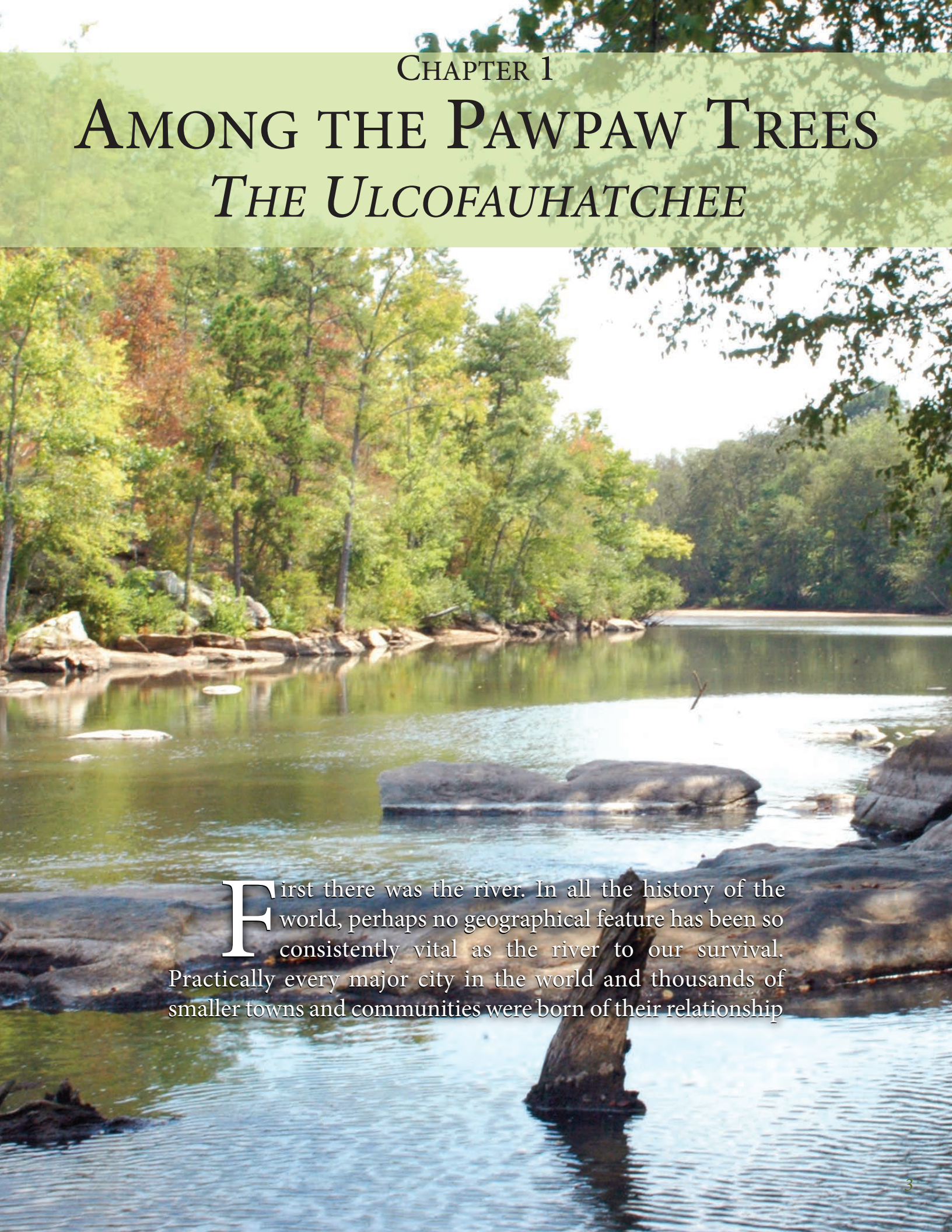
I can say almost positively that Japan does not produce this tree. If she did, long ago her artists would have seized upon its magnificent possibilities for decoration. The height of simplicity so loved by them can be found in the smooth stems, the long, tender golden leaves, and the tinkling wine-colored lilies nodding in clusters over bushes so large that, where undisturbed in the forest, they attain the size of trees. Sometimes the flowers hang singly, sometimes in pairs, and most often from four to six grow in a head, so that by crowding their faces are upturned, and their full beauty displayed in wondrous fashion. They are of sweet odor, and the bees come swarming around them, with their low, bumbling, humming music, from early morning until dark. If only I were a poet, how glad I would be to transcribe for them the song that they awake in my heart!

Its name should be, "Where the Pawpaw Lilies Blow." I would tinge the sky with the purple of red bud, fill the air with the golden haze of tree bloom, and perfume it with the subtle odor of tree pollen. In deep shadow the earth should lie covered with a crust of late snow, and in the sun with the whiter snow of bloodroot bloom.

The velvety maroon-colored lilies should distil their perfume as the wind rocked them, and among the branches the slender, graceful, bronze-backed cuckoo should prophesy April showers as he searched for food. From a nearby pool with crazy laughter a flock of loons that had paused in migration for a drink should arise from the water and plow the northward air with their sharp beaks; and an opossum should nose among the leaves for frozen persimmons. And he who breathed this enchanted air and saw these things should learn that in all nature he would find no greater treat than to linger where the pawpaw lilies blow. I offer this gratis to anyone who has the genius to use it rightly.

With the falling of the flowers the artistic possibility of the plant only begins, for there follow large leaves of varied shadings, prominently veined and finely shaped for conventionalizing, and in clusters beneath them the pawpaws, that must be seen to know how beautiful they are. Five and six to a cluster they hang, when young the skin a cold blue-green; with ripeness they take on a pale yellow shading, and the "bloom" of the fruit becomes like frosted velvet. The pulp is bright yellow and good to eat if you are fond of rich sweets. The seeds are large, black, and resemble those of the melon. If not gathered, the fruit hangs until winter, turns to the purple wine color of ripe Concord grapes, falls to the ground, and in the spring the seeds sprout and produce new plants.

- Music of the Wild, Gene Stratton-Porter, 1910



CHAPTER 1

AMONG THE PAWPAW TREES

THE ULCOFAUHATCHEE

First there was the river. In all the history of the world, perhaps no geographical feature has been so consistently vital as the river to our survival. Practically every major city in the world and thousands of smaller towns and communities were born of their relationship

to these flowing arteries of life. Providing drinking water and fertile planting grounds, fish and game to eat and commercial transportation, modern civilization was built on the back of the river.

The story of the Alcovy River is the story of Newton County. Originally serving as the western boundary of the county, the river was known in the Muskogean language as the Ulcoufahatchee, which means “river among the Pawpaw trees,” a name that is still fitting these hundreds of years later. The early native fruit has largely been forgotten in the modern Southern diet, but is making a comeback among specialty fruit enthusiasts. The trees lining the well-preserved Alcovy River floodplain serve as a staple in the diet of native raccoons, fox, squirrels and birds.

More so than any other river in North Georgia, the Alcovy is a reminder of the ancient past. It is one of the few landscapes in the state that represents ecology normally found either in North or South Georgia. It is an ecological meeting ground, where species remain from a time when Covington was only 60 miles from the ocean, the bottom of North America. For example, Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), typical from northern Georgia up to Maine, is found along the Alcovy, as are Tupelo Gum trees (*Nyssa aquatica*), common to the coastal plains. Amphibians such as the Bird Voiced Tree Frog (*Hyla avivoca*) and the burrowing Mole Salamander (*Ambystoma talpoideum*) have also found a disjunct home in the swamps of the Alcovy.

The enduring presence of the Tupelo Gum is perhaps the starkest reminder that the land which we inhabit is not the land which we inherited. The confluence of Cornish Creek and the Alcovy River on the Georgia Wildlife Federation's Alcovy Conservation Center is the location of the northernmost pure stand of Tupelo Gum in the Piedmont region. This natural river swamp is believed to have remained largely intact ecologically for thousands of years. The swamp is thought to be a relic from the time when the oceans receded, exposing South Georgia and the coastal islands, leaving behind a remarkable small swamp in the Piedmont region of Georgia, largely populated with coastal plant and animal species.

The Alcovy River is also widely touted as one of the cleanest of all the Piedmont rivers. This is due in no small part to the hardwood swamps of the river. The swamps act as a filter to the river system, depositing silt over a large area, cleaning the river. This improves the quality of the water without the need for expensive treatment facilities. Essentially, they act as natural settlement and oxidation basins which purify the water, reducing the amount of phosphorus and bacteria.

The Alcovy traverses more than 40 miles in Newton County, twisting and turning from east of Lake Varner to Lake Jackson. It is

perhaps one of the most varied 40 miles of river in the state. Miles of river flow slowly past Tupelo Gum swamps in the north and give way to white water shoals that fall 90 feet in elevation over the final 6 miles to Lake Jackson.

Four tributaries serve the Alcovy River and together cover the eastern half of Newton County. Flat Creek flows out of Walton County as does Cornish Creek, which forms Lake Roy L. Varner before joining the Alcovy. Stroud's Creek also originates in Walton County and joins the Alcovy near the Alcovy River Trestle. To the east, Bear Creek splits into an east and west branch, between Highway 11 and Dixie Road, before flowing into the Alcovy.

Further demonstrating the ubiquitous nature of man's relationship to rivers are the routes we take around them.

Centralizing our communities near the water, they make overland travel more difficult, so historically, roads have avoided them until crossings became necessary. Indian trails generally avoided rivers, streams and swamps, following ridges and drainage divides for easier travel. The Hightower Trail was an example of this. Traveling through Newton County and then forming what is still the boundary of Gwinnett county, the trail was picked up by the settlers and later used as the basis for roads and the coming railroad.

The Alcovy's name has transitioned much like the surrounding landscape itself, being modernized and Anglicized. The suffix “hatchee” in Ulcoufahatchee simply means “river.” The prefix

“Ulcofa” endured several interesting spellings by the new settlers of Georgia. As early as 1820, the state of Georgia referred to the river as the “Alcofauhatchee.” By the end of the 19th century, though, “Alcova” was the most widely used, shifting over to “Alcovy” in the first half of the 20th century.

After the railroads came in the 1840s, communities like Starrsville and Hayston sprung up around sites where the tracks crossed the river and its tributaries. Including Dixie and Alcovy Station, these communities were all at one time vibrant, independent areas with their own schools, churches, stores and farm-related businesses. As always, the life of a community, large and small, sprang from the water. The Brick Store Community is unique solely for its being situated furthest from the river. Even so, the corn grown near the Brick Store Community was taken to Henderson Mill on the river, a day's journey by horse.

The river powered many mills. Factory Shoals Recreation Park is now a tribute to the site where the Webbville-Newton Factory anchored a mill community and housed cotton, saw and gristmills. Close by was White's Factory (cotton) and Jones' Grist Mill, both on the west side of the river. In the 1860 census, there were 600 people listed as being served by the Newton Factory Post Office.

“The Alcovy Swamp is symbolic of those ancient environments that spawned the life that colonized the land and came to rule the world.”

The Alcovy River, by Dr. Charles H. Wharton, 1973

Just 10 years later, after the decimation of the Civil War, the number was closer to 160. The Factory Park area is the location where the Alcovy drops most dramatically, resembling more a mountainous river than one in the Piedmont. These shoal areas were key to providing power from the river for the saw and grist mills and were normally the first industrialized areas in a frontier setting. The park is now open to the public for camping, hiking and fishing and the shoals are a popular spot for kayaking.

Such culturally significant sites were also of strategic historical import. Several of the mills were burned during the war, leaving Henderson Mill as the only original building still standing. Now a private residence, Henderson Mill was further upstream from the larger cluster of mills in the Factory Shoals area. There are still remnants of the buildings and their foundations along the banks of the shoals. The Georgia Railroad from Augusta to Atlanta was extended from Madison into Atlanta in 1840, creating the Alcovy Trestle, a site that was later burned by the Stoneman Raiders in Sherman's March to the Sea. The original stone abutments are still visible beneath the modern railroad bridge.

The Alcovy River has been a source of food for as long as people have lived around it. Fishing continues to be a popular sport in Newton County, though much of it is now done in the man-made lakes fed by the Alcovy. As far back as 1820, the state of Georgia was taking an interest in the preservation of the rivers and their fisheries. On Dec. 21st, 1820, the General Assembly made it "unlawful for any person to place any obstruction to the passage of fish in the Ocmulgee and its principal branches, from its mouth... to...the high shoals of the Alcofauhatchee, the Snapping shoal of the South river, and the Cedar shoal on the Yellow river." In 1874, Newton County appointed three "Fish Commissioners," to uphold this law.

Unfortunately, this spirit of conservation was largely ignored during the middle of the 19th century, one of the most ecologically destructive periods of American history. In reaction, American conservationism came on strong near the end of the century with such champions as President Theodore Roosevelt and Aldo Leopold. The Alcovy River came into its own in conservation history during a landmark battle in the 1960s. In his seminal 1973 essay on the subject, *The Alcovy River*, Dr. Charles H. Wharton chronicled the fight to save the river from dredging and channelization.

This was a critical battle for the environmental movement of the time. Georgia already had plans in the works for 167 watersheds to be dredged, destroying both the natural river habitat and the floodplains around them. The fight for the Alcovy River in towns nearby, Atlanta and before Congress in Washington D.C. drew national attention, sparking a movement to end the destructive practice outright. The battle for this small, swampy river in rural Georgia was the tipping point that changed conservation tactics across the country and modernized the way the federal government thought about our watersheds.

The Alcovy River and its surrounding habitat have come under threat several times since then. The Georgia Wildlife Federation has made protection of our "home" river a top priority. For the past 20 years, the Georgia Wildlife Federation has partnered with The Conservation Fund and Newton County to establish the Alcovy River Greenway, a protective corridor created through gifts of land, easements, landowner cooperation and land acquisition. Thus far, these efforts have protected hundreds of acres along the Alcovy River, including the headquarters of the Georgia Wildlife Federation, the Alcovy Conservation Center.

Driving through modern-day Newton County, one could be forgiven for not realizing the importance of this river to the fast-growing region. There are no riverwalks as on the Ocmulgee in Macon and no shops along the water as on the Savannah in Augusta. Indeed, there are only a few locations for boaters and recreational users to access the river easily and frequently in Newton County. The Alcovy River is protected by forward-thinking county ordinances restricting development along the river to be 150 feet away, much more than the typical 25-foot buffer to



Lake Roy L. Varner was created as a reservoir from Cornish Creek, a tributary of the Alcovy River. The lake provides the majority of Newton County's drinking water. Photo: GWF

development found on other rivers in the state. The Alcovy River Greenway acts as an important flyway and corridor for migratory birds as well as a protective habitat for hundreds of other plant and animal species.

As a result of such protective measures, the Alcovy River is a surprisingly clean and tranquil river to traverse in Newton County. The view from the river is largely free of development, unlike the Alcovy's origin in Gwinnett County. Also, much of the angling in Newton County is now done at one of the man-made reservoirs, Lake Jackson in the south and Lake Varner in the north. Lake Roy L. Varner reservoir is named for the lake's chief proponent, longtime county commissioner Roy Varner. The 820-acre reservoir was completed in 1992 and provides 70 percent of the drinking water in Newton County and 40 percent of the drinking water in Walton County. In conjunction with the Cornish Creek Water Treatment Facility, the Alcovy's water is pulled from the river to the reservoir and into the treatment plant. At maximum capacity, the reservoir will produce up to 35 million gallons of drinking water each day.

Modern realities such as growing populations in need of clean drinking water and expanding commercial and industrial areas bring to the forefront the importance of smart, science-based management of our natural resources. Preserving the wild areas upon whose regenerative resources we have built our modern societies is a mandate we cannot afford to ignore. Fortunately, modern science may be the only thing that has kept pace with modern development. Wildlife management practices today are light-years ahead of where they began when the Georgia Wildlife Federation first pushed the state of Georgia to hire professional

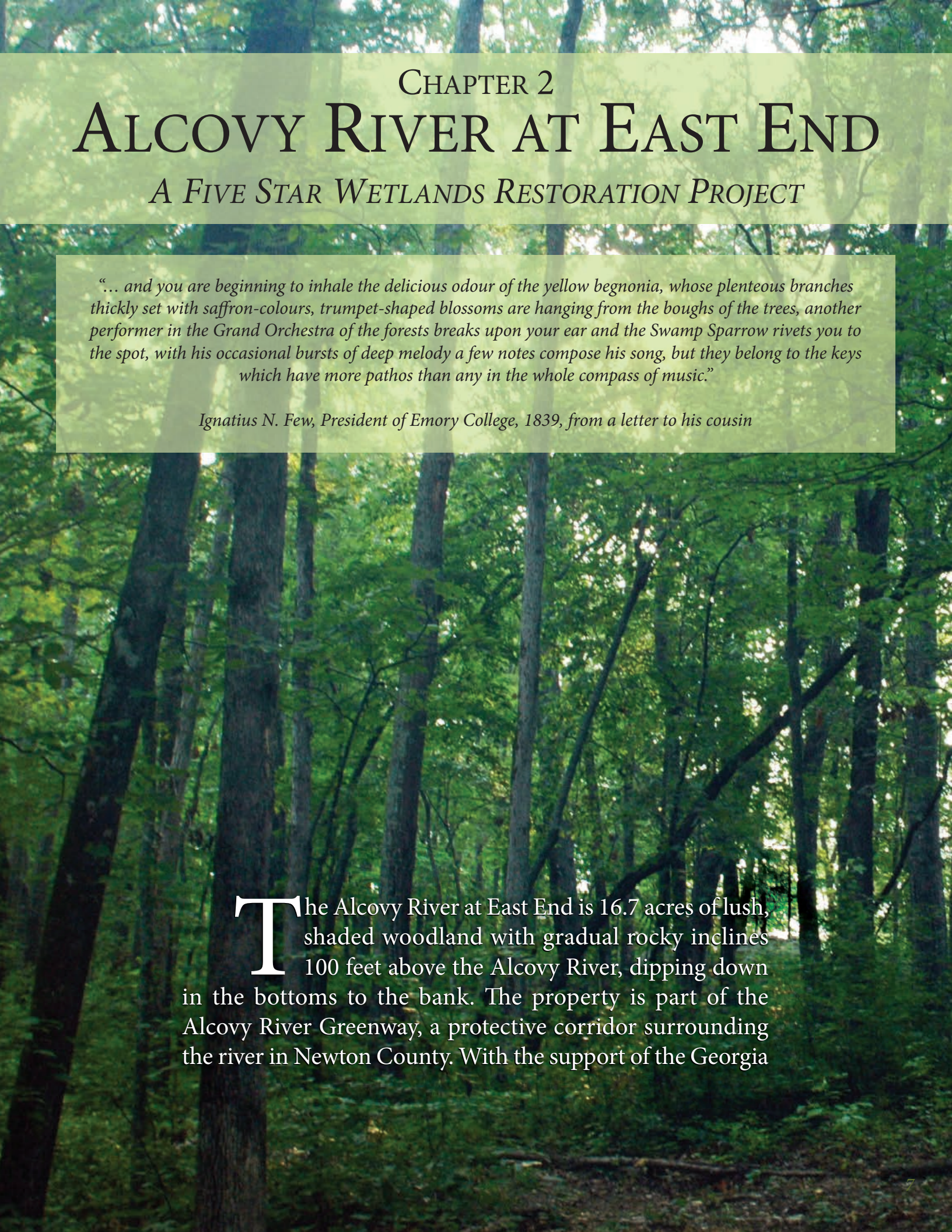
wildlife biologists to manage the state's wildlife resources in the 1930s. Unfortunately, while the science and techniques of wildlife management are vastly improved, the funding and prioritizing of resources continues to be a struggle between competing interests.

A positive advance was made in modern wildlife management in 2005 when the state of Georgia adopted their State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). The Wildlife Resources Division worked with federal, state, and local agencies and conservation organizations for three years to develop the plan, based on many more years of research and data. The Georgia Wildlife Federation has served on the steering committee for SWAP since its inception and continues to promote the implementation of this plan. The SWAP consists of five major priority actions: prescribed fire, protection of aquatic and wetland resources, public land protection, private lands incentives programs and the control of invasive exotic species.

The spread of invasive plant and animal species is the root of much destruction to native ecosystems. Releasing an exotic pet fish into the wild away from its natural habitat or transporting algae on the bottom of a boat from one lake to another can quickly have unforeseen consequences. It is this story of modern life, transportation and convenience that makes the existence of a habitat like the Tupelo Gum Swamp on the Alcovy River such a marvel. To see this rare and seemingly out of place ecosystem survive the march of modern progress and development virtually untouched just miles from a heavily industrial area for possibly thousands of years is a sight that will connect you to the earth in a way that makes even the most ancient of human relics but drops in a bucket of time beyond imagination.



When the water is high, the shoals at Newton Factory Recreation Park are a popular destination for kayakers. This southern section of the Alcovy River drops dramatically in elevation, about 90 feet in six miles. *Photo: GWF*



CHAPTER 2

ALCOVY RIVER AT EAST END

A FIVE STAR WETLANDS RESTORATION PROJECT

“... and you are beginning to inhale the delicious odour of the yellow begonia, whose plenteous branches thickly set with saffron-colours, trumpet-shaped blossoms are hanging from the boughs of the trees, another performer in the Grand Orchestra of the forests breaks upon your ear and the Swamp Sparrow rivets you to the spot, with his occasional bursts of deep melody a few notes compose his song, but they belong to the keys which have more pathos than any in the whole compass of music.”

Ignatius N. Few, President of Emory College, 1839, from a letter to his cousin

The Alcovy River at East End is 16.7 acres of lush, shaded woodland with gradual rocky inclines 100 feet above the Alcovy River, dipping down in the bottoms to the bank. The property is part of the Alcovy River Greenway, a protective corridor surrounding the river in Newton County. With the support of the Georgia

Land Trust Service Center, which manages the Georgia Wetlands Trust Fund, the Georgia Wildlife Federation purchased East End as mitigation in 2002. The Conservation Fund previously acquired the property in 1997 when it was placed on the open market and threatened with development. At the time, it was a favorite dumping ground for construction debris. With the help of the Five Star Restoration grant and all of the Five Star partners, East End is now a special gathering place for the community.

Winding trails, bordered with slender felled trees, meander around the natural slope of the land, leading you past an outdoor classroom and around the peaked horn of the property. Members of Boy Scout Troop 222 assisted in the trail's construction and maintenance. Atop the rock formations at the peak of East End is a view of the mature hardwood forests of oak, maple, hickory and elm with the occasional loblolly pine and the descending slope to the river. Surrounded by bird calls, the bellow of frogs and the high whine of insects, the setting is surprisingly still. The intermittent car passing on East End Road is the only sign of your proximity to civilization, a reminder that this is indeed an oasis, surrounded by modernity.

Education has long been a primary part of the GWF's mission, and East End exemplifies the myriad possibilities in combining natural habitat with low-impact resources such as the outdoor classroom. East End has already proven to be a unique learning environment for the study of riparian buffers and wetland ecosystems. The GWF will also protect the area for potential archaeological study. The diverse nature of the property – large rock



Students from Oxford College of Emory University work to remove invasive species from East End during a Rivers Alive event. *Photo: GWF*

formations atop steep, shaded hills descending to the river – could be indicative of prehistoric rock shelters.

On the rocks, you are eye-to-eye with the younger trees and shaded from the heat by the canopy. You can see clearly into the native habitat of red-tailed hawks, red-bellied woodpeckers, swamp sparrows and common songbirds. Descending along the south edge of the steep slope above the bank of the Alcovy, the ground is a soft crunch of fallen leaves and decaying plant life, interspersed with smaller rocks dotting the hillside. Young native trees, replanted during the Five Star Restoration, aspire to the height of their forebears in the canopy.

The Georgia Wildlife Federation followed the State Wildlife



A native Cedar Waxwing among the berries of an invasive Chinese privet. *Photo: Hank Ohme*

Invasives

Invasive species such as the Chinese privet pictured at left have had an enormous impact on the native ecology of East End and river systems throughout the South. Spreading rapidly, the plant and its berries are now a preferred food of many bird species, who in turn spread the seeds far and wide. The privet thrives and grows thickly, choking out native plants.

Thought to have been introduced in the 1850s as an ornamental hedge, Chinese privet is known as an especially tenacious plant that is able to thrive in a variety of environments, growing in concrete cracks and river floodplains in full sun or shade.

Hundreds of hours were spent at East End removing Chinese privet and other invasive plants. The Georgia Wildlife Federation worked with the Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council to develop a management strategy for the removal and control of this noxious weed. Keeping the privet and other invasive species at bay on the East End property will be an ongoing and long-term project.

Action Plan (SWAP) to improve the East End habitat. The goal of SWAP is “keeping common species common”, species such as the Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*), a small bird that migrates to Georgia in the winter. This diminutive and elusive bird depends upon the healthy wetland habitat of the East End swamps. Controlling exotic invasive species is an important management tool to reach this goal. It is much easier to support and promote the existence of current native species than it is to reintroduce or restore them after they have been overtaken by exotics. Much of the restoration work has centered on the removal of the invasive Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*) that is likewise striving to choke out its competitors. Additionally, native shrubs, trees and forbs were planted to stabilize the riparian zone and enhance biodiversity. Controlling the invasive species on the property will be an ongoing task. Volunteers have already spent hundreds of hours removing privet and Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*).

The bank levels off into a low, natural floodplain. The air is muggier here, drenched in the water of the Alcovy. The previous year's storms proved too much for some of the elder trees along the bank, finally succumbing to the drastic angle and soft soil of a life spent dangling over the water, witnessing flood and drought, wind and rain, before its own roots break free. The grasses grow taller as you descend to the bottoms and native cane struggles to reassert its natural right to the land.

On the west side of the property, near the canoe launch, the landscape flattens and vegetation becomes denser, pushing into the pathways. After a season of merciless heat and drought, the canoe launch is surrounded by thick mud, requiring a suctioned 20-foot drag to hit the water. The river is protected by a wide zone of non-development to maintain the integrity of the primary water source of Newton County, a farsighted and practical safeguard to the river's health. However, this keeps the Alcovy largely out of sight, making recreation on this tranquil river something of a secret. With so few access points, the Alcovy is most used by kayakers on the shoals section near Factory Shoals Recreation Park. However, the river is a quiet wonder from the northernmost access point at Alcovy Trestle Road to East End.

At times the river is impassable due to the large, fallen trees, stretched toward each other bank to bank, succumbing to the water in between, providing shaded homes to the fish underneath. Removing all trees from the river, not just the ones blocking the surface, greatly disrupts



Crossvine, which attracts hummingbirds, grows native on the East End property and throughout Georgia. In 1839, Ignatius Few referred to the plant as a “yellow begonia.” Photo: Hank Ohme

the natural aquatic habitat and fishing resources. Anglers in Newton County have been opposed to such measures for more than 100 years.



Counselors from the FFA's Wildlife Camp canoe down the Alcovy River from East End during a training event hosted by the Georgia Wildlife Federation and Georgia River Fishing. Photo: GWF



Duck boxes were erected for migrating ducks at East End. Photo: Hank Ohme



GWF President and CEO Jerry McCollum speaks to instructors from the FFA Wildlife Camp at East End. Photo: GWF

Appropriations have been made by the general government for the Oconee and Ocmulgee rivers. Fishermen in the eastern portion of the county say they don't want any appropriation to clean the logs out of the Alcova, for that would ruin the river for good fishing purposes.

Georgia Enterprise, Covington, March 9, 1883

On the East side of the property, half a mile away, the bank of the river is drier, the air wet but not heavy, the ground less swampy and vegetation sparse. The shaded forest floor is a deposit of leaves and debris and harder-packed ground between the tupelo gum. The dry floodplain itself is evidence of the length of time since the river has been high enough to breach the bank. The hillside is also steeper, making the sloping trail narrower, winding back and forth to make a slower descent.

The restoration of East End is a glimpse of what is possible through partnership and the dedicated efforts of many. The relatively small property is an ecologically significant and useful site, adding an access point to the Alcovy River and educational facilities with a minimal impact on the natural habitat. This increases the community's recreational opportunities to enjoy the natural world that flows by every day while also adding to the awareness of the need to protect much more than the 16 acres of East End. The Five Star Restoration program has allowed East End to shine as a guiding light to the future of community conservation projects. Protecting our water resources and habitats will take



Dr. Eloise Carter of Oxford College teaches wetland plant identification. Photo: GWF

much more than the efforts of the 11 dedicated Five Star Partners, requiring us all to work together toward a common goal. Whether for recreation, education, or conservation, the end result of such an effort would not be for the benefit of many, but for the benefit of us all.

Wetlands

Wetlands once were considered useless, disease-ridden wastelands. Now we understand that wetlands provide many benefits to humans and our environment. They are transition areas between dry land and deeper water and act as water purifiers, filtering out pollutants and sediments. They also prevent flooding downstream by providing storage space for excess water flow, performing this task free of charge. They are spawning ground for fish, protective habitat for migratory waterfowl, quiet refuges for human-shy mammals, and home to the wide variety of reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates that need wetlands habitat to survive.

Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. Alcovy River at East End is considered a forested swamp, often inundated with floodwater from nearby rivers and streams. The forested swamp is critical to the survival of wetland-dependent species like Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*), River Otters (*Lutra canadensis*) and Prothonotary Warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*). Common forested swamp trees found at East End include the Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), Overcup Oak (*Quercus lyrata*) and the Tupelo Gum (*Nyssa aquatica*).



Photo: Hank Ohme

5-Star Restoration

A Community of Stewardship

The Five Star Restoration is a partnership program. As important as the specific environmental restoration work is, equally important is the larger goal of empowering communities to embrace natural resource stewardship.

The grant for the wetlands restoration of the Georgia Wildlife Federation's East End property brought together a dozen different organizations in Newton County with hundreds of members and their own goals of conservation and education. Together, the resources and commitment of these partners protected a mile and a half of frontage along the Alcovy River while developing the property into a model low-impact, place-based education facility.

The Newton County Board of Commissioners continue to be a steadfast partner in smart conservation practices that benefit the entire community. The resources of the government and the helpful availability of staff provided assistance in the East End project every step of the way. Newton County's forward-thinking water policies have helped protect the Alcovy River.

The Conservation Fund works in partnership with community, government and corporate organizations to help meet their conservation goals. Bringing together economic and environmental concerns, The Fund has protected parks, working forests, agricultural lands and other natural features across the country.

Keep Covington/Newton Beautiful is a hands-on organization that brings together hundreds of volunteers each year for the Rivers Alive cleanup. The volunteer-based group focuses on local education events and helped remove debris and trash from the East End property.

Oxford Institute for Environmental Education at Oxford College of Emory University works to train teachers in developing their own environmental education programs through the use of on-site education techniques, including the use of East End and other areas within the Alcovy River Greenway. Students were able to conduct biological surveys and participate in privet removal at East End. The institute is led by Director Dr. Steven Baker, Dr. Eloise Carter and Senior Lecturer Theodosia Wade.

The Georgia FFA-FCCLA was able to utilize the outdoor classroom facility at East End as a training exercise for counselors of their Advanced Wildlife Camp.

The Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division provided technical assistance and support, working in an advisory capacity to direct management techniques relevant to the removal of invasive species at East End and the protection of aquatic and wetland ecosystems.

The Georgia DNR Environmental Protection Division advised the East End project on wetlands regulations and sponsors the annual Rivers Alive event as part of their Adopt-A-Stream program. Both activities were held on the East End property as part of the restoration.

The Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council's work focuses on the removal of exotic invasive species. The GEPPC provided training and recommendations to staff on management of invasive species at East End.

Georgia River Fishing is dedicated to the pursuit of warmwater fish in Georgia's rivers and streams. Their members have been invited to make use of the put-in point at East End and will protect and maintain the access point as well as educate their members about fishing the Alcovy River.

Newton County Master Gardeners are a local, volunteer group of Master Gardeners active in projects all over the county. They will continue to provide assistance in the cultivation and planting of native species at East End.

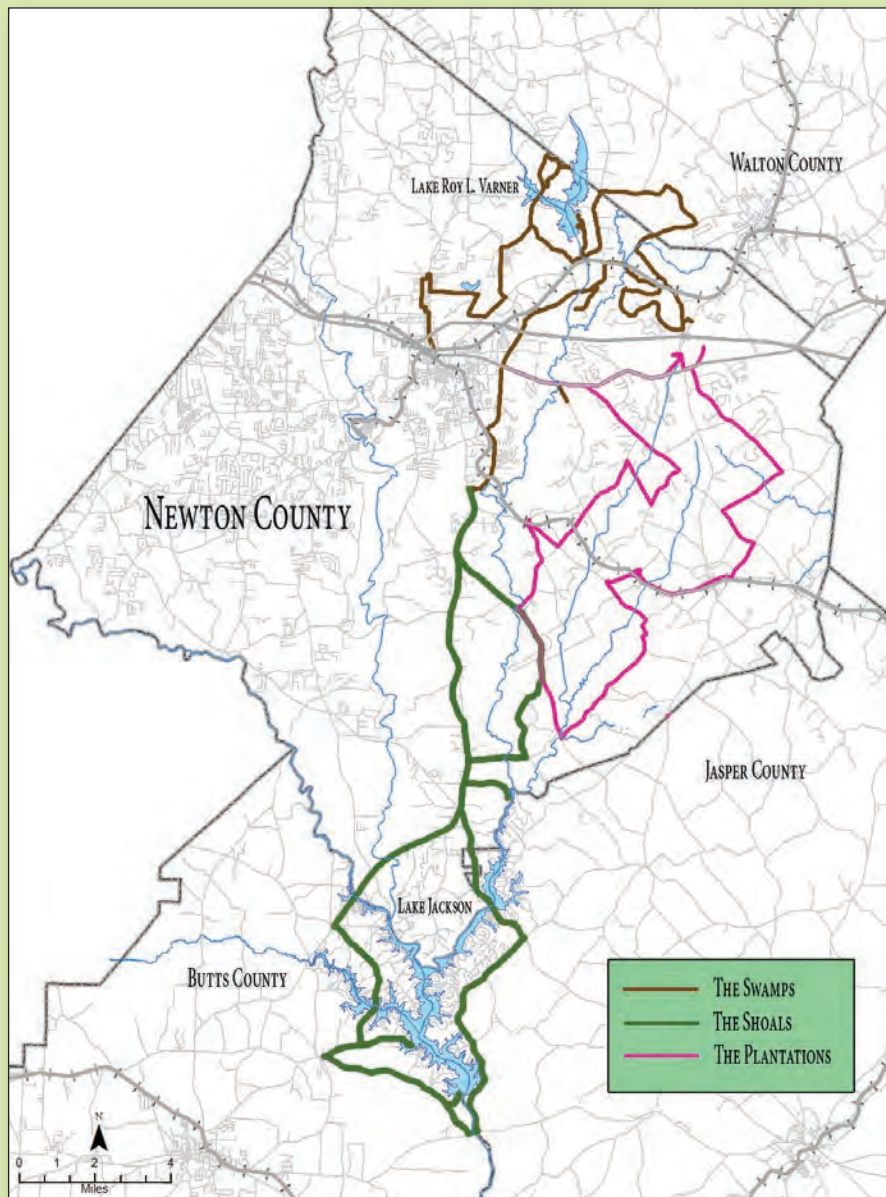
Air Conditioning Specialist, Inc. is a local, community-oriented business with a long history of support for the Georgia Wildlife Federation and projects benefitting the Alcovy River Greenway.

Boy Scout Troop 222 has taken an active role in the East End project. The troop has committed to ongoing service and maintenance at East End, having already completed work on the trails, parking lot, signs and kiosk.



Chapter 3

Alcovy River Ramble



Map: James Fitzgerald

The Alcovy River Ramble is an examination of the Alcovy River and its ecological and historical impact on Newton County. It is difficult to separate the two. Through most of human history, the ecological benefits rivers provide have been the very thing that drove commerce and community to their banks. The use of the river as a resource continues today as the Alcovy provides most of the drinking water in Newton County, though we no longer have to live on the river to depend upon its water.

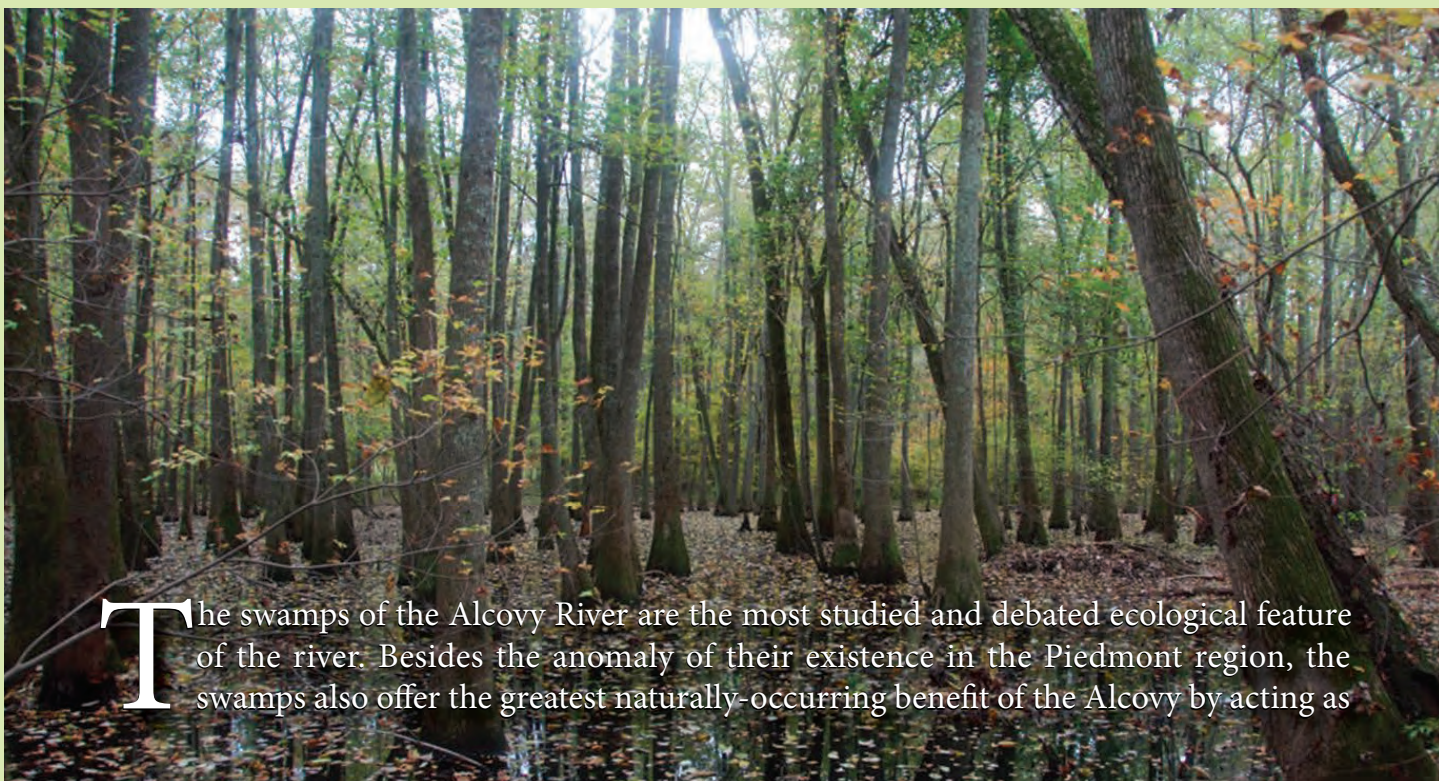
The Ramble is made up of three tours, The Swamps, The Shoals and The Plantations. Each tour is accompanied by a map of the route and directions are included in italics within the text.

We hope you enjoy the Alcovy River Ramble and take a moment to consider the vital impact the Alcovy and other rivers continue to have on your own life, as well as the role they played in the lives of those who shaped the world we inhabit today.

The Swamps

Saturdays belonged to me. They were all mine and I took full advantage of them. With my single-shot .22 rifle, a small vial of salt, two or three biscuits or slices of bread, I was out of the house and gone at daylight. Usually my destination was the Alcovy River swamp, three miles away, across hills, creeks and patches of cultivation. ... I had no qualms at all about drinking water from the Alcovy River that originated in swamps and meandered through the swamp forest, and was sweet to the taste. That was three-quarters of a century ago.

From An Outdoor Life, the Autobiography of Charlie Elliott, 1994



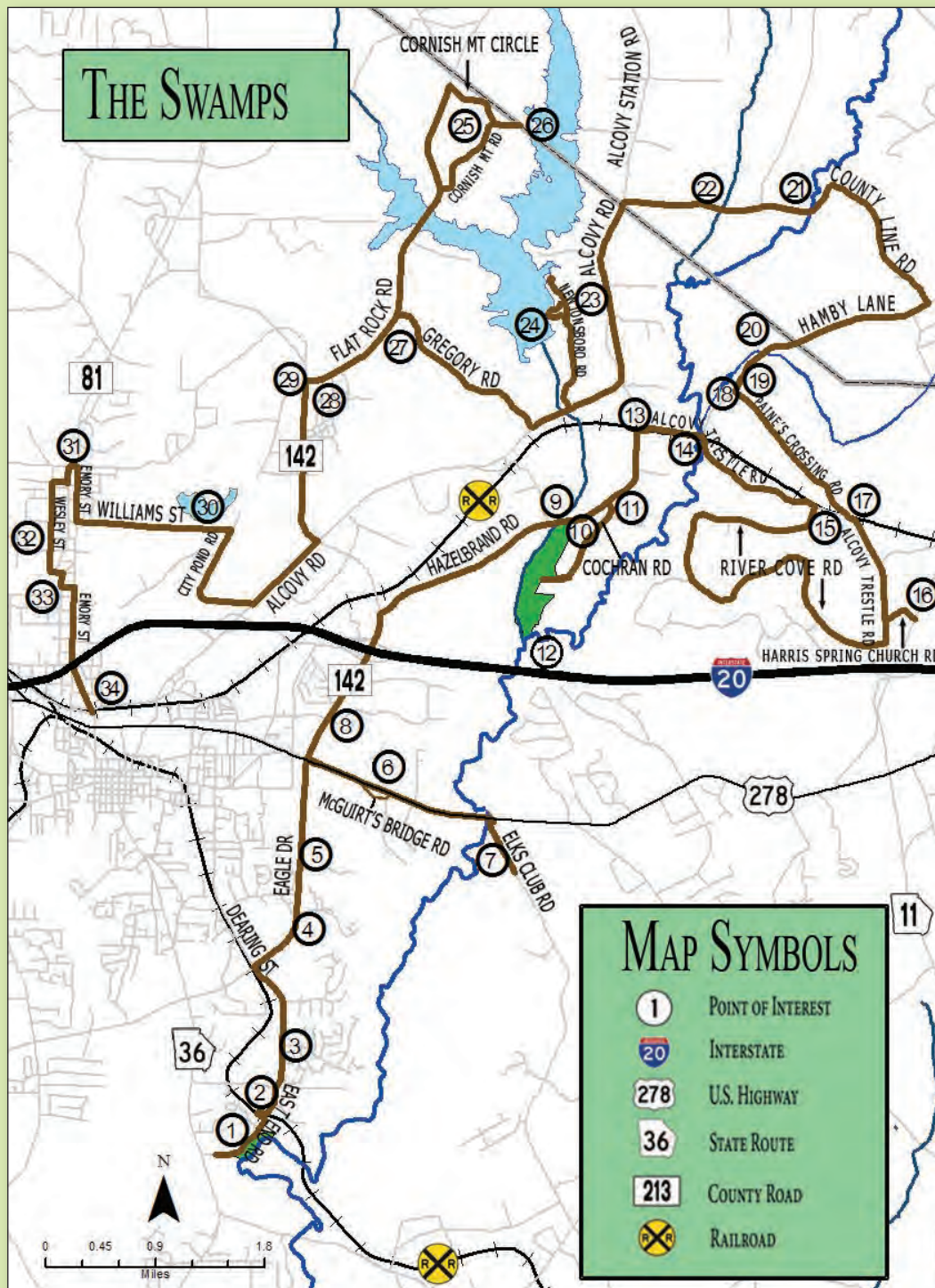
Tupelo Gum swamp. Photo: Hank Ohme

a water purification system for the river. The Alcovy River swamps perform what would be a vastly expensive and industrial task at no cost, simply by being allowed to exist in an unaltered state. This function maintains the river as one of the cleaner in the region, an important distinction because Newton County relies on the Alcovy River and its tributaries for nearly all of its drinking water. This is an economic benefit the river gives freely so long as we protect it. Certainly there are other benefits to be had from the river, but they must be extracted at an ever-increasing cost.

This northern section of the river in Newton County is a calm, slow-flowing river with little descent. To the northwest, Cornish Creek, a main tributary to the Alcovy, was dammed to create Lake Roy L. Varner in 1991. However, much of the water in the reservoir is actually pumped directly from the Alcovy River into Lake Varner.

The communities on the Swamps tour are some of the oldest in Newton County. The Alcovy River Station Community most likely began with settlers who moved to the area before the land was claimed by the United States in the 1818 Treaty of the Creek Agency. The history of Oxford and Emory University has filled its own books. That these were dominant communities in their time is evident in the paths of the first railroad. Alcovy River Station was the first in Newton County as the railroad moved west.

The wider influence of the Alcovy River is evident throughout this tour. In addition to Lake Varner in the north, before you get to Oxford you will pass City Pond Park. This is yet another location to which water is pumped from the Alcovy River for use as drinking water in the city of Covington. Though the Alcovy is largely hidden from view on the roads of Newton County, it is never far away from the county's growth and development.



Map: James Fitzgerald

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Alcovy River at East End | 12. McGarity Wetlands Preserve | 24. Lake Roy L. Varner |
| 2. Covington-Machen Railroad | 13. Alcovy River Station Community | 25. Cornish Mountain |
| 3. River Walk Farm | 14. Alcovy River Trestle | 26. Water's Edge |
| 4. Eastside High School | 15. River Cove | 27. Flat Rock Community |
| 5. Rock Quarry | 16. Harris Spring Primitive Baptist Church | 28. Land Lot 306 |
| 6. McGuirt's Crossing | 17. Graves Chapel AME | 29. Fretwell-Cook Cemetery |
| 7. Rainbow Lake Amusement Park | 18. Paine's Plantation | 30. City Pond Park |
| 8. Lochridge Industrial Park | 19. Stroud's Creek | 31. Oxford Town Cemetery |
| 9. Cornish Creek | 20. Arrowhatchee | 32. Old Church |
| 10. Alcovy Conservation Center | 21. T.C. Dally Memorial Bridge | 33. Oxford College of Emory University |
| 11. Colley-Hight Cemetery | 22. Big Flat Creek | 34. Covington Train Depot |
| | 23. Alcovy United Methodist Church | |

The total length of the Swamps Tour is 40 miles.

[1] This segment of the Alcovy River Ramble begins at the Georgia Wildlife Federation property on the **Alcovy River at East End Road**.

Leaving the East End parking lot, turn right onto East End Road.

[2] You will cross the **Covington-Machen Railroad**, a 28-mile track that ends just below Shady Dale. Operated by the Great Walton Railroad since 1989, the track was built by the Middle Georgia and Atlantic Railway in 1890-94 as part of a larger line between Covington and Milledgeville. The track crosses the Alcovy just south of here.

Continue on East End Road, which changes to Dearing Street.

[3] In about a half-mile, to your right, you will see the entrance to **River Walk Farm**. The Georgia Wildlife Federation holds a 217-acre conservation easement of riparian (streamside) property on the Alcovy.

Continue on Dearing. At the red light, turn right onto the bypass road (Eagle Drive).

[4] On the right, you will pass **Eastside High School**. Members of the school's Naturalists Club have been trained by Georgia Wildlife Federation to monitor Bear Creek, a primary tributary of the Alcovy River. By using the techniques learned through the Environmental Protection Division Adopt-a-Stream program, the data they collect will provide important water quality and quantity information prior to the construction of the planned Bear Creek Reservoir.

[5] Beyond the trees to your right you can just make out an early 20th century **rock quarry**. The quarry filled with water after many years of use, including as a source of rock in the construction of Interstate 20 in the 1960s and a location to restock wild turkeys to Georgia in the 1970s. It was originally considered as a possible site for a reservoir but was not deep enough. It is now

a primary water source for Indian Creek Golf Club.

At the red light, turn right onto Highway 278. Travel about 0.5 mile. Turn right onto McGuirt's Bridge Road (dirt).

[6] **McGuirt's Crossing** is the old path of the highway. If you look straight ahead, you can see an old roadbed, which once crossed the river just north of here.

"The public road, near McGuirts Bridge, on Alcovy River will soon be in fair order. Chairman Anderson, of the county commissioners, sent out ten new shovels to the road hands with positive orders that the road must be fixed and the shovels returned to the county."

The Georgia Enterprise, May 7, 1891

Reenter Highway 278, turning right. Turn right onto Elks Club Road. Travel approximately 0.7 mile and turn right into the entrance of the old Project Adventure complex.

[7] This is the site of **Rainbow Lake Amusement Park**. The park was a popular camping location for local Boy Scouts and featured community attractions such as an outdoor bowling alley and dance pavilion on the banks of the Alcovy River. In the early 20th century, east Newton County had

Alcovy River Natural Area

Two bridges cross the river and the wide floodplain on Highway 278 after McGuirt's Crossing. The Newton County Board of Commissioners owns land on both sides of the road between these bridges, called the Alcovy River Natural Area. The area adds 301 acres to the County's greenspace.

This site was designated as the Ulcofauhatchee Natural Area as part of the Georgia Natural Areas Act of 1966. The Natural Areas Council, chaired by Dr. Charles Wharton, inventoried and recommended properties of ecological value around the state for protection. When the Heritage Trust Program was created under Governor Jimmy Carter, many of these Natural Areas were targeted for more direct protection by the state through regulation or purchase.

The Natural Areas Act protected many properties around the state by raising awareness but alone did not remove the threat of development. The timber on the Alcovy River Natural Area was harvested in the 1980s, prior to county ownership as mitigation for the Bear Creek Reservoir.



Children teach each other during an amphibians workshop at Project Adventure in 1992.
Photo: Jeremy Bunn; Courtesy Margie Cline

a bit of a reputation for rural gambling sites and stills. In this tradition, Rainbow Lake Amusement Park was also a facility where drink and slot machines were available even though illegal in the county. Eventually the park was shut down after receiving a bit more publicity than was helpful. Later, in the 1960s, the facility was converted into a Project Adventure location by Pierce and Margie Cline, an experiential educational center for troubled youth.

Return to Highway 278, and turn left. Travel a little more than a mile, and turn right onto Highway 142.

[8] To your right, before reaching Interstate 20, is **Lochridge Industrial Park**. Since 2000, the Georgia Wildlife Federation has held a 115-acre conservation easement with $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile of frontage along the Alcovy River. This agreement between Gwinnett Industries and the Georgia Wildlife Federation protects this important riparian buffer in perpetuity from the impact of commercial and manufacturing development.

Continue on Highway 142, and turn right on Hazelbrand Road. Travel about 1 mile.

[9] Slow down as you cross the bridge, noted on a 1923 plat of the lands of O. N. Stanton, as Height (Hight) Bridge. You are crossing **Cornish Creek**, a primary tributary of the Alcovy River. The headwaters of Cornish Creek originate in Walton County, flowing through Lake Roy L. Varner and connect with the Alcovy River at the Georgia Wildlife Federation's Alcovy Conservation Center. The United States Geological Survey maintains a station at the bridge to monitor the flow of the creek. To



Civilian George Daniel was shot in 1864 by General Sherman's troops. He is buried in Colley-Hight Cemetery. Photo: GWF

your left is a recycling center managed by Keep Covington/Newton Beautiful (KCNB), a partner in the Alcovy River at East End Wetlands Restoration Project and an annual sponsor of Rivers Alive, a volunteer waterway cleanup event. In 2010 Newton County Board of Commissioners purchased 32 acres financed in part through a Section 319(h) grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to protect the riparian buffer of the Alcovy River. The Georgia Wildlife Federation holds a conservation easement on this land, ensuring its permanent protection.

[10] Turn right into the entrance of the **Alcovy Conservation Center**, headquarters of the Georgia Wildlife Federation and a **Regionally Important Conservation Resource**. Thanks to the very generous support of the Arnold Fund, Air Conditioning Specialist and James P. Hayes of Newton County, as well as many other foundations, businesses, and individuals, the Georgia Wildlife Federation opened the Alcovy Conservation Center in 2000. The facilities are used to advance the mission of conservation education and habitat protection. The 115-acre site includes forests, wetland and meadow habitats, woodland trails and wildlife habitat gardens. Please visit the website, www.gwf.org, to learn ways you can support the mission of the Georgia Wildlife Federation.

The Alcovy Conservation Center is the site of a 60-acre contiguous stand of Tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*). The swamp runs along the confluence of the Alcovy River and Cornish Creek and is one of the most enduring ecological mysteries of Newton County. The habitat is typically associated with the coastal plains of Georgia, not the Piedmont, and is isolated from similar habitats by 60 miles or more. The swamps have been theorized by noted ecologist Dr. Charles Wharton to be a remnant of ancient habitats which would have existed when the coast of Georgia was at the fall line. This unique habitat has been the focal point of conservation efforts for many years, including the anti-channelization fight headed by Dr. Wharton in the 1960s.

"The swamp pools swarm with invertebrate life even in winter. The Alcovy itself is clean and unpolluted compared to other Piedmont streams. It is perhaps unique among other Piedmont rivers in the vastness of its swamps, the nature of the swamps, and in having an accessible and central location....Between Monroe and Jackson Lake the Alcovy provides unexcelled wilderness experience in hiking, boating, hunting, fishing and general natural history....Natural areas, such as the Alcovy bottomlands, are important to education in Georgia. Undirected education, such as the boy - swimming hole - cane pole - dog association, can be a very important educational experience. The river swamps have all the attributes of natural outdoor laboratories-all our cities and towns desperately need these areas with an afternoon's bus ride."

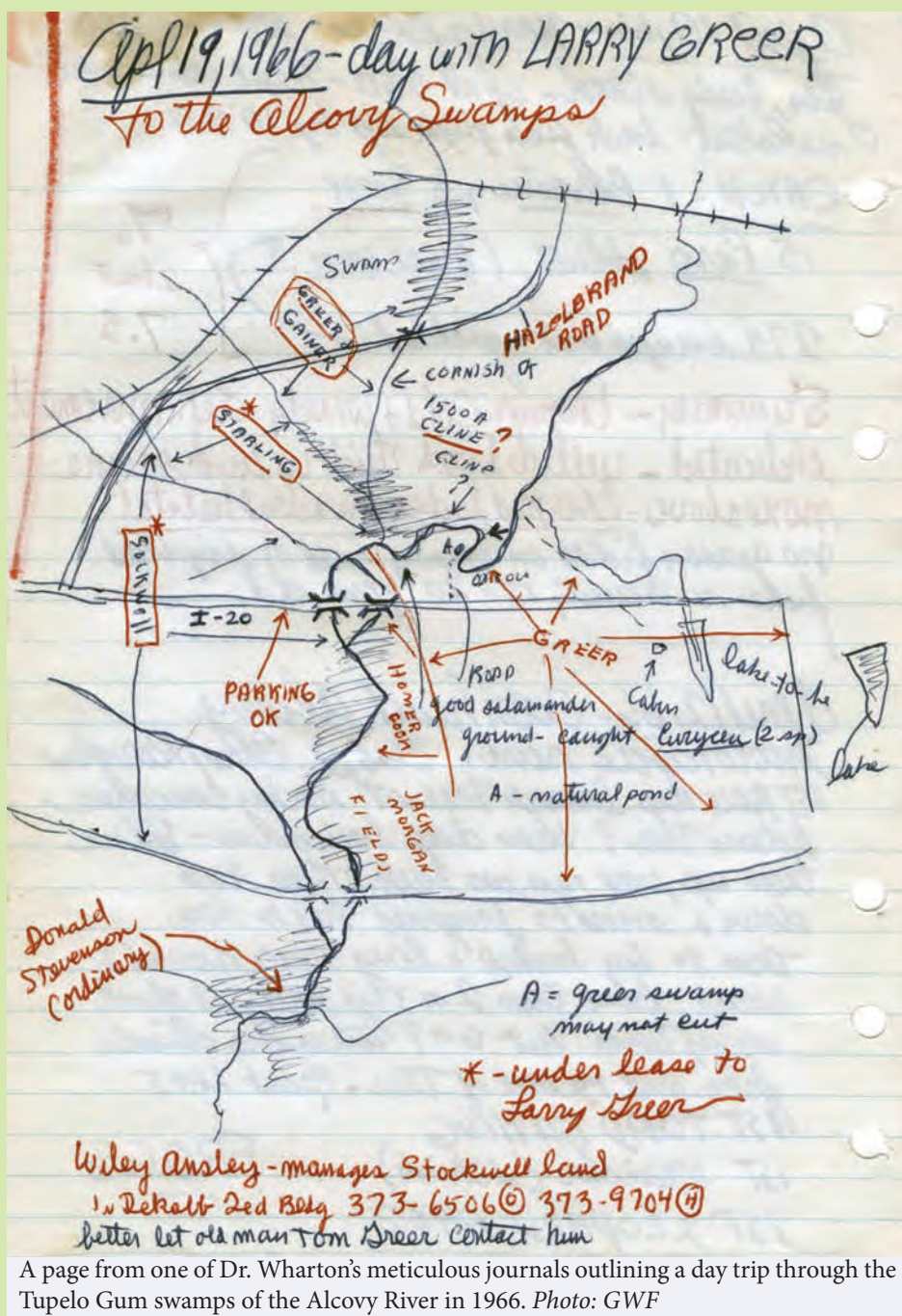
Dr. Charles Wharton, History of Newton County Georgia, 1988, p. 71

Turn right out of the Alcovy Conservation Center, go to the stop sign, and then turn right onto Cochran Road.

[11] At the curve, to your right, you will see the **Colley-Hight Cemetery**, where members of two prominent 19th century Newton County families are interred. Reverend Joel Colley founded the Harris Spring Primitive Baptist Church in 1822. He was the preacher there when the railroad was built nearby. Of Colley, G.C. Adams wrote in the Covington Enterprise:

"It is said that he prayed to God to derail the train on Alcovy trestle and kill all the people who were fools enough to ride on this newfangled invention."

S.D. Hight donated the land for the Alcovy Protestant Methodist Church in 1888. Interestingly, Hight was involved in bridging the gap between the newfangled and the nostalgic by trying to develop the Covington & Oxford Street Railroad in 1873 to connect the two communities. Street railroad cars were similar to trolley cars,



main line of the Georgia Railroad Company. This is the original track that ran from Charleston to Augusta, and then to Madison. The Madison to Atlanta branch was completed in 1845. After much wrangling over whether the economic boon of the railroad would pass through Oxford or Covington on its way to Atlanta, a compromise was made, positioning the track between the two. This decision would have historical implications in the next quarter-century. The **Alcovy River Station Community** grew up around the crossing of the railroad and the river and was one of the earliest thriving communities in Newton County. It was not until 1886 that the first church was organized at Alcovy Station. Reverends Joseph Abner McGarity and Tom Greer built the Rock Cut Protestant Methodist Church, a brush arbor they situated in the solid rock bank, cut to pave the way for railroad almost 41 years prior. In 1890, Reverend McGarity was one the incorporators of the Alcovy & Northern, a proposed railway from Alcovy Station to Jersey in Walton County. This line was never built. As the country entered the 20th century, railroads became less vital to the economy, and communities such as Alcovy River Station disappeared.

Crossing the railroad, turn right onto Alcovy Trestle Road.

From the Newton County Pumping Station on Alcovy Trestle Road, water is pumped out of the Alcovy River and into Lake Roy L. Varner and City Pond. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division sets a maximum withdrawal amount and a minimum river flow level for pumping to ensure the integrity of the river's water quantity and quality.

[14] To your right, you see the **Alcovy River Trestle**. On July 20, 1864, General W. T. Sherman sent these orders to Brigadier General Kenner Garrard:

"From Covington send detachments to destroy the railroad bridge east of Covington over the Ulcofauhatchee... Be prepared with axes, hatchets and bars to tear up sections of track and

riding on tracks, but pulled by a pair of mules. Continue to the end of Cochran Road.

[12] Straight ahead, you'll see the back gate of the Georgia Wildlife Federation's property and an information kiosk. Further south on the eastern bank of the river is the **McGarity Wetlands Preserve**. The 136-acre site is owned by the University of Georgia and is used by the Odum School of Ecology as a wetland research and outdoor

laboratory. The Odum School is named for Dr. Eugene Pleasant Odum, an early 20th century Covington resident, often referred to as the "father of modern ecology." Odum's grandfather, William Pleasant Odum, moved to Newton County in 1897 to enroll his sons at Emory College at Oxford.

Return to Hazelbrand Road and turn right.

[13] As the road curves, you will cross the

make bonfires. When the rails are red hot they must be twisted. Burning will do for the bridges and culverts but not for ordinary track. Let the work be well done.”

History of Newton County Georgia, 1988, p. 245

You can see the original stone abutments still standing under the current trestle. The bridge beside the trestle is also known as Boss Hogg Meet Bridge, a marker of a shooting location when the wildly popular 1980s TV show *The Dukes of Hazzard* was filmed in Covington. Colley’s Bridge (named for Reverend Joel Colley) was a covered bridge that crossed the river here.

Turn right at the stop sign, continuing on Alcovy Trestle Road. Travel about one mile. Turn right on River Cove Road.

[15] In the 1970s, Pierce Cline developed **River Cove**, one of the earlier conservation-minded neighborhoods in Newton County. Mr. Cline, appreciating the gently rolling topography, the open fields and woodlands, and the water resources of the Alcovy River, considered the properties suitable for single-family “mini-farms.” The minimum lot size in River Cove is two acres, with five to ten acres being more typical. Throughout the years, homeowners have enjoyed a peaceful, agrarian lifestyle, amidst an ever-growing part of Georgia.



This stone abutment is still visible from the original bridge which was burned by General Sherman in 1864 on his March to the Sea. *Photo: GWF*

Turn left back onto Alcovy Trestle Road and take an immediate right on Harris Spring Church Road (dirt).

[16] Turn left into the Newton County Harris Spring Fire Station. A commemorative marker indicates this as the location of the original site of **Harris Spring Primitive Baptist Church**, which has since been moved south to Gaither Plantation. On the right side of the station, there is a trail open to the public leading to the original baptismal pool. The church has

a long history in Newton County and is most likely the first Baptist church in the county. Reverend Joel Colley founded the Harris Spring Primitive Baptist Church in 1822, naming it for the nearby spring. An early document on the discipline of the church states:

“All improper conduct such as adultery, lies, or refusing to attend conference meeting, theft, Drunkenness, fighting, fishing on Sunday is frowned upon.”

History of Newton County Georgia, 1988, p. 454

Turn right out of the fire station and then turn right again onto Alcovy Trestle Road.



Photo: GWF

[17] To your right is **Graves Chapel AME**. Built on land owned by Solomon Graves, the original church was built for the slaves of Mt. Pleasant Plantation. Solomon Graves was one of the earliest and more influential early citizens of Newton County. Descended of Captain Thomas Graves who came to Virginia in 1608, the Graves family prospered in the cotton trade during the antebellum years, having interests in flour and saw mills, a general store, and a blacksmith shop.



The River Cove subdivision was originally a 1,235-acre cattle farm owned by Pierce Cline who dealt mainly in Hereford cows. There are still several large cattle farms found in Newton County today. *Photo: GWF*

Turn right onto Paine's Crossing Road.

[18] Possibly settling here before the 1818 Treaty of the Creek Agency, a pioneer family in the Alcovy River Station Community was Paine, descendants of Bishop Robert Lea Paine of Aberdeen, Mississippi. Paine's Crossing was over the railroad near the trestle, and the **Paine Plantation** was along the Alcovy River. James Gardener Paine married Frances Graves of nearby Mt. Pleasant Plantation, and both plantations prospered because of the proximity to both

the river and the railroad. You will also pass the cemetery of another pioneer family, Chapman, on Paine's Crossing Road.

Continue on Paine's Crossing for about 1.4 miles, and turn right onto Hamby Lane.

[19] You will cross **Stroud's Creek**, another Alcovy tributary, in about a half mile. Stroud's Creek originates about a mile north in Walton County. Most likely named for James Stroud, who was also a founding member of Harris Springs Baptist Church,

it is believed that Stroud operated a grist mill somewhere near where Stroud's Creek enters the Alcovy just north of Alcovy Trestle.

[20] To your left is **Arrowhatchee**, a more than 1,200-acre private hunting preserve. This tract of land is one of many examples in Newton County of private landownership that have afforded some degree of protection along the Alcovy River Greenway.

After crossing into Walton County, turn left onto County Line Road.

[21] and [22] Driving west on County Line Road, you will first cross the Alcovy River on **T.C. Dally Memorial Bridge** and then cross **Big Flat Creek** on Rice B. Green Memorial Bridge. Big Flat Creek is another tributary of the Alcovy River, which originates in Walton County and then converges with the Alcovy just south of the Newton County line. The Georgia Wildlife Federation owns 42 acres of bottomland forests here, which were donated in 2006 by descendants of the Hamby family, pioneers of the Alcovy River Station Community and early members of Harris Spring Primitive Baptist Church. The land was donated to protect the floodplain and wetlands of Big Flat Creek.

Continue on County Line Road until it dead-ends, and take a left on Alcovy Station Road, which will turn into Alcovy Road.

[23] To your right is the **Alcovy United**



Charlie Wharton's father examines a large water oak in the Alcovy Swamp. *Photo: Wharton*

Methodist Church. This church was originally called the Rock Cut Protestant Methodist Church and was located in the Alcovy River Station Community. Begun in 1886, services were held outside in the summer and in the community schoolhouse in the winter. The original church, renamed Alcovy Protestant Methodist was built in 1888 on land donated by S. D. Hight. It was moved to its current site in 1915. In addition to church members and family, the cemetery of the church is believed to be the burying place of a large number of Chinese railroad workers who helped to rebuild the railroad to Atlanta in the 1800s. This has not been verified, but the number of unmarked graves in the cemetery compared to the size of the church appears to bear out this bit of local legend.

Travel approximately 1 mile and turn right onto Newtonsboro Road.

[24] You are entering **Lake Roy L. Varner**, a **Regionally Important Water Resource**, and the Cornish Creek Water Treatment Facility. To your right, you will see an example of the large granite outcroppings in the area, giving this part of the Piedmont region a distinctly mountain-like appearance. To your left you pass the

Invasives

Invasive exotic species may sound like pet pythons released and breeding in South Florida, but most invasive species can be much more subtle and have disastrous effects closer to home. In the past 5 years, Lake Varner has become a breeding ground for Hydrilla, an invasive aquatic plant that resembles moss. In 2010 it was reported that up to 70 percent of the lake was covered in Hydrilla. Currently, how the plant got into the lake is unclear, though it could have been as innocuous as a chunk of the plant hitchhiking to the lake on a boat trailer put in for a weekend of fishing.

The effects on the ecosystem and the drinking water the lake provides have the potential to be destructive and expensive. Already hydrilla clogs the intake valves at the water treatment facility, causing treatment costs to increase. Hydrilla is also thought to carry Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy, a deadly disease that has killed hundreds of American coots at the lake. Predatory birds such as the bald eagle then prey on the diseased coots, themselves contracting the disease as a result. At least 5 dead bald eagles have been found in recent years at the lake. A plan is currently underway to stock the lake with grass carp, which has proven to be effective in other locations in eradicating the Hydrilla.



Cornish Creek Water Treatment Facility. This facility draws water from Lake Varner and at maximum capacity will produce up to 35 million gallons of water per day to Newton and Walton County citizens.

Veering to your left, there is a parking lot, which provides a wonderful view of Lake Roy L. Varner. Lake Varner is named for the lake's chief proponent and longtime Newton County Commissioner. With an excellent



Lake Roy L. Varner is widely enjoyed as a recreational area and quality fishing spot. The property surrounding the lake has remained largely undeveloped, offering many beautiful panoramic views of the water. *Photo: GWF*

fishing reputation for largemouth bass, crappie and bluegill, this 820-acre drinking water reservoir was built in 1990-91 and opened to the public in 1992. Several ponds were flooded in the creation of the lake, providing for a large fish population. In addition to fishing, there are nature trails and picnic areas to be enjoyed as well.

Return to Alcovy Road and turn right. You will cross Cornish Creek and then turn right onto Gregory Road (dirt). Travel to the end of Gregory Road and turn right on Flat Rock Road.

Slow down as you cross one of only two bridges to traverse Lake Varner, and enjoy the view.

After you cross the lake, turn right onto Cornish Mountain Road.

[25] **Cornish Mountain** is the highest geographic point in Newton County, climbing to 935 feet above sea level. Newton County Board of Commissioners has a water tower on 55 acres atop Cornish Mountain.

Throughout the 1970s, biologists with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources embarked on a statewide program to restore Georgia's wild turkey population. The first restocking in Newton County occurred when captured turkeys were released on top of Cornish Mountain in the late '70s.

[26] Follow Cornish Mountain Road around until you reach the roundabout at **Water's Edge**. Before the lake was built, this road once crossed Cornish Creek. Looking straight ahead through the row of trees, you can see the original path the road took and how it currently sinks into the lake.

Circle the roundabout, and turn right on Cornish Mountain Circle. At the end of Cornish Mountain Circle, turn left on Flat Rock Road.

[27] Travel about two miles and you will see to the left a vast expanse of exposed flat rock and granite outcroppings. These geological outcroppings are where the **Flat Rock Community** got its name. The Flat Rock School was located near a large solid rock

formation.

Continue on until Flat Rock Road ends at Highway 142.

[28] To your left is **Land Lot 306**, originally bought by early resident Joseph Lawrence in 1824 for \$2.47 per acre. In a letter to his brother-in-law, Lawrence described his new land:

"The growth is oak, pine, poplar, hickory, dogwood, lin, buckeye white and shumake white and prickly ash, grapevine and rich land weeds, the grass range good on the upland, cane in the bottom land, on the ridges chestnut timber and chinkapin, the swamps have beach

and sweetgum and other groths similar to the swamps in North Carolina. In summing up the whole I consider it a very desirable country."

History of Newton County Georgia, 1988, p. 39

Cross Highway 142, and immediately turn left into the dirt drive on the corner.

[29] The small cemetery at this corner is the **Fretwell-Cook Cemetery**. Richard Fretwell, who died in 1842, served during the Revolutionary War in the 4th Virginia Regiment. His daughter Nancy married Wiley Burge, the patriarch of the Burge Plantation family.

Granite Outcrops



Of the entire Piedmont Region, from Alabama to Maryland, more than 90 percent of the granite outcroppings are located in Georgia. The outcroppings at Lake Roy L. Varner are part of a very small number of protected flat rock exposures in the state. Most outcroppings are protected through the conservation efforts of private landowners. Photo: Lisa Kruse, Georgia DNR

Turn right back onto Highway 142. Travel 1.4 miles and turn right onto Alcovy Road. At the next red light, turn right onto City Pond Road. Follow the road around the curve until you see the large City Pond Park sign and turn left onto Williams Street.

[30] To your right is the 80-acre **City Pond Park**, owned by the City of Covington. The complex features several youth recreation facilities and has a 2-mile trail that circles the pond. You may turn in to view the pond just beyond the tennis courts. This is another location to which water is pumped from the Alcovy River for use as drinking water. City Pond Park is an excellent example of urban greenspace.

Follow Williams Street until it reaches Highway 81 (Emory Street.) Turn right on Emory Street and travel about 0.5 mile. Turn left on Richardson Street and then immediately left on Asbury Street.

[31] Many prominent citizens of Newton County are buried in **Oxford Town Cemetery**, established in 1837. Dolly Sumner Lunt Burge Parks, author of *The Diaries of Dolly Lunt Burge*, a frequently-cited work describing plantation conditions before, during and after the Civil War, is buried in the historic southeast section. Dolly married into the Burge family (of Burge Plantation in east Newton County) and managed the affairs of the plantation for many years after her husband's death. Warren Candler is also buried in the cemetery. Candler was a Bishop with the Methodist Episcopal Church and served as President of Emory College in the 1890s and was the first Chancellor of Emory University after the college moved to Atlanta. Warren's brother Asa was the financier of Coca Cola who enabled the college to move and expand. Also in the Oxford Town Cemetery is Bonnell Harold Stone, sometimes referred to as the "Father of Forestry in Georgia." As a student, conservationist Charlie Elliott worked under Stone who was the president of the Georgia Forestry Association. Stone played a key role in developing state fire protection legislation and the creation of the Georgia Forestry Commission.

At the edge of the cemetery, turn right onto Collingsworth Street and then take your next left onto Wesley Street.

[32] About a half mile ahead on your right is **Old Church**, built in 1841. You may park on the side of the road and visit the Oxford Multi-Use Trail, which begins to the right of the church. The trail winds through shaded woodland beside Turkey Creek and behind Oxford College. The Georgia Wildlife Federation worked with Oxford College to remove invasive species along the trail and to mark and identify many native plants along the way.

Continue down Wesley, and then turn left on W. Pierce Street. Then turn right onto Haygood Avenue.

[33] To your right is **Oxford College of Emory University**, a **Regionally Important Heritage Resource**, a beautiful and historic campus worth exploring as well.

In the 1830s the Fellenberg movement, an educational philosophy from Switzerland extolling the virtues of combining manual labor and academic work became popular throughout the eastern United States. In Newton County, the Georgia Methodist

Conference created the Georgia Conference Manual Labor School in 1834, two years before the founding of Emory College. Many of the board of trustees were also founding members of Emory College, including Ignatius Few who headed the committee to select a location. The Manual Labor School was enlarged and its operations were included as part of Emory College in Oxford.

Turn right on either Hamill or Moore Street to get back to Emory Street. Turn right on Emory Street.

[34] Traveling just over a mile on Emory Street, you will cross the Georgia Railroad, the same line that further east crosses the Alcovy River at Alcovy Trestle. The **Covington Train Depot** is situated on the north side of the tracks. The current structure was built in 1885 to replace the original depot, which burned in 1884. A hub of commerce and industry in town, the line also offered an Atlanta passenger run each day, allowing residents a full day in the city. It is also where the mule trolleys of the Covington & Oxford Street Railroad met so that passengers could continue their journey between towns. Today the depot houses a bar and restaurant.



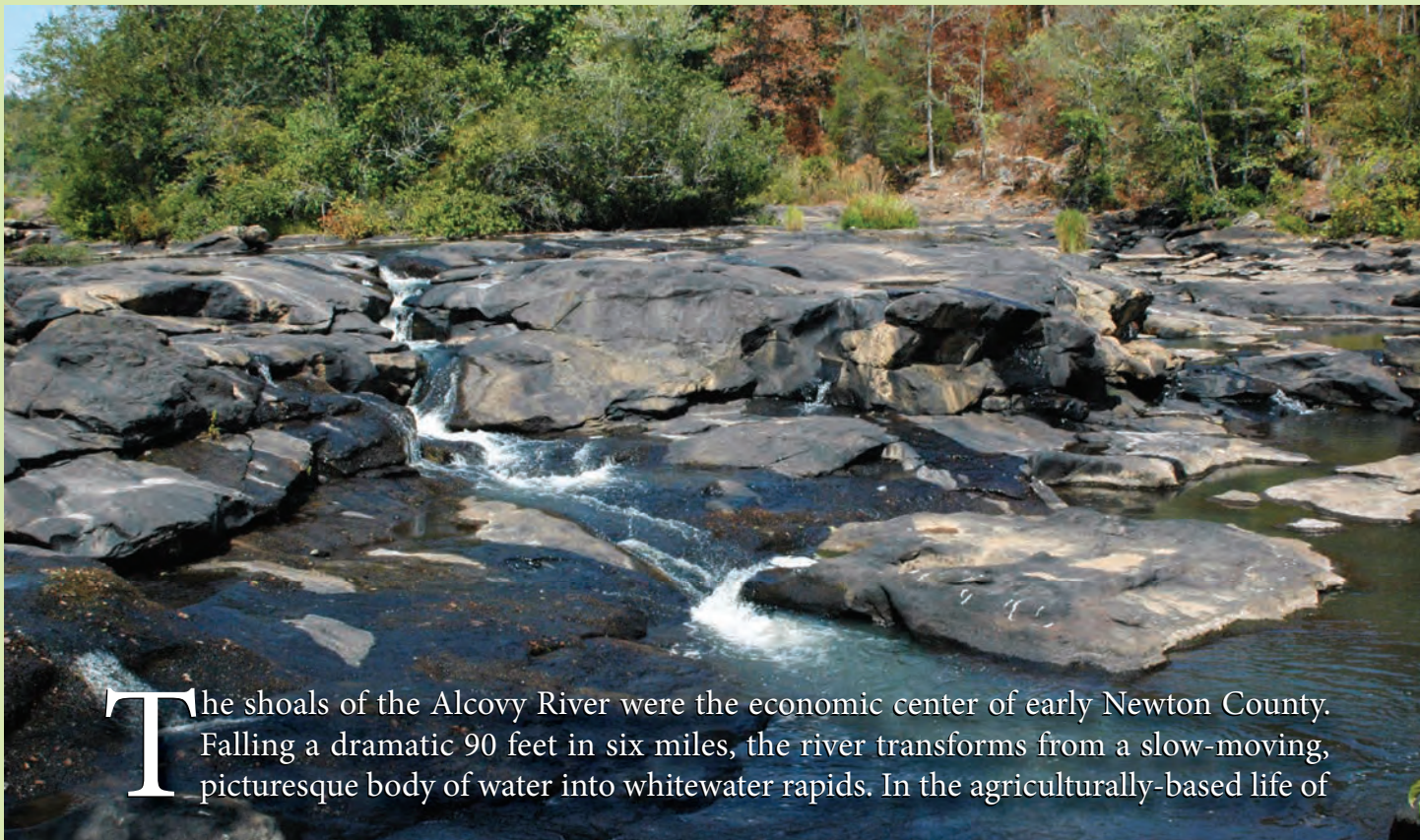
Old Church, built in 1841 and restored in 1999, was the epicenter of the Methodist community in Oxford and the founding of Emory University. Photo: GWF

The Shoals

June 17th, 1862

Lou who has been at the Factory for a week or more has returned she looks feeble & is no better than when she left home I think. I sold 12 bags of cotton to F. Davis & Co. for which I got 1½ cts. per pound.

From The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge 1848-1879



The shoals of the Alcovy River were the economic center of early Newton County. Falling a dramatic 90 feet in six miles, the river transforms from a slow-moving, picturesque body of water into whitewater rapids. In the agriculturally-based life of

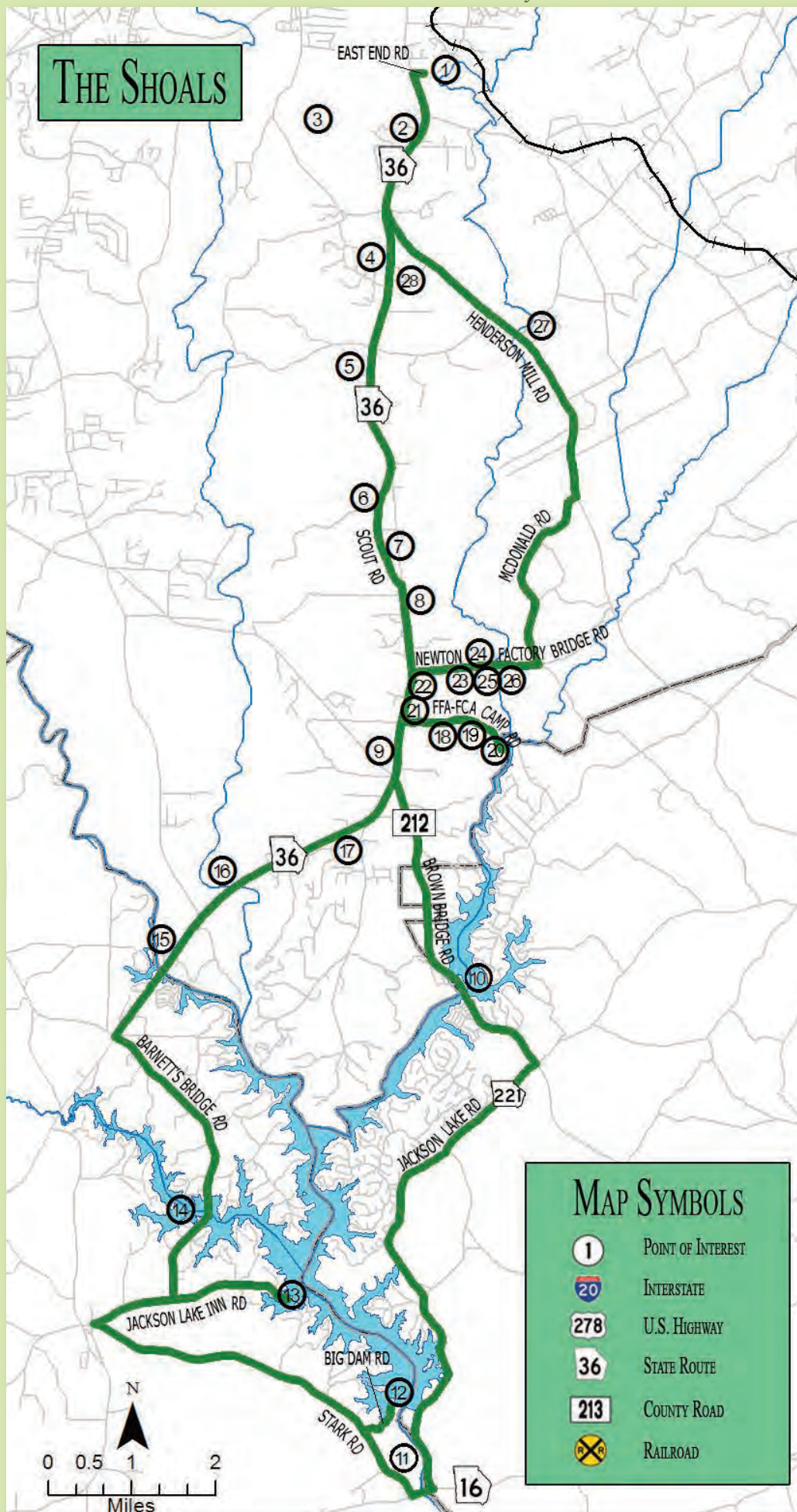
Alcovy River shoals. Photo: GWF

the 19th century South, rapids - sections of descending river with powerful, fast-flowing water - were sought after for the power they produced. Cotton, corn, lumber, and other products were brought from all over the area to be ground, spun, and sawed for domestic use. Industrial gristmills, saw and cotton mills were in operation on both sides of the Alcovy River in the Newton Factory Community where the Factory Shoals Recreation Park is now located. Today, the shoals are primarily used for recreation, kayaking in particular. In early Newton County, they were the industrial life-blood that transformed the agriculture of the region into products to be sold in a global marketplace.

Prior to the industrial revolution, which coincided with the discovery of the energy-rich properties of coal and oil, water was the great energy producer and a renewable one at that, having been used to turn wheels which ground wheat for 2,000 years. This practice was still the technological basis for factory production in the first half of the 19th century. The reliance on the natural flow of water for power meant that, by necessity, industrial factories were always located on the water.

Ruins of three of the old mills are still visible to visitors of Factory Shoals Recreation Park. Stacked stone walls remain in place, just feet from the banks of the Alcovy River. The flumes cut into the bedrock are also still visible. These deep trenches were dug to reroute the water from the river up the bank and into the factory.

The South had modern industrialization forcefully thrust upon them in the dramatic aftermath of the Civil War. Mills at Factory Shoals were burned by Sherman's men and with new technology following close behind, the entire area was soon depopulated and largely abandoned. The modern factory and mill had little need of the river for power and moved inland, following as shipping and transportation also moved off the river and onto rails and roads.



Map: James Fitzgerald



A baptism in the spring-fed pool of High Point Baptist Church in 1915. Photo: Georgia Archives

The total length of the Shoals Tour is 55 miles.

[1] This segment of the Alcovy River Ramble begins at the Georgia Wildlife Federation property on the **Alcovy River at East End Road**.



Emmitt Benton, buried at Bethabara cemetery, was the son of Coleman Benton, a prosperous farmer born into slavery. Photo: GWF

Leaving the East End parking lot, turn left on East End Road, and then left on Highway 36. Go about 1 mile.

[2] To your right, you will see **Bethabara Missionary Baptist Church**, an African-American church formed in the late 1880s by Deacon Jerry Snow from Social Circle. Originally known as Bethelberry, this is the fourth church building on the site. In its past, baptisms took place in the Alcovy River, just south of the Highway 213 bridge.

[3] South of Covington, between the Yellow River in Porterdale and the Alcovy River at East End, was known as the **Leguinn District**. Economically, the Leguinn District was notable for some of its mills, most importantly, the Henderson Mill facility. Today, the area is recognized as the High Point community.

[4] Continuing down Highway 36, the cemetery and location of the original **High Point Baptist Church** are on the right. Founded in 1893, the church was originally referred to as Brush Arbor, under which they met. The church was located beside the cemetery. A spring-fed pool was built for baptisms, though the first were held at Henderson Mill on the Alcovy.

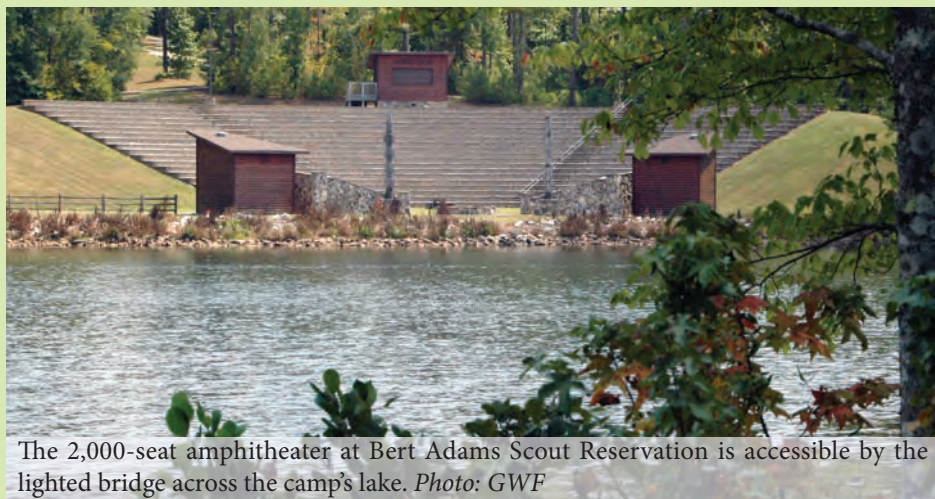
[5] Further down Highway 36 on the right is the **Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery**. Though the cemetery is the only remaining sign that a church was located here, Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church was once a thriving place of worship, founded in 1824. Parking seeming to be a church problem since time immemorial, members of the church agreed in 1829 "to try to buy more land for the tying up of horses." Originally named Bethesda Church, records end around the turn of the 19th Century and the building has been gone for some time. Baptisms were held at Purrington Shoals.



River baptism of High Point Baptist Church. Rev. H. King on right. Photo: Georgia Archives

Travel about 1 mile and turn right on Scout Road.

[6] About half a mile to the right you will see the entrance to **Bert Adams Scout Reservation**, a **Regionally Important Conservation Resource**. The camp was moved to its current location in Covington in 1960 from Vining. Thousands of scouts from around the state visit each year and enjoy the 1,250-acre camp featuring a 2,000-person capacity amphitheater, climbing and aquatic center as well as archery and rifle ranges, foot bridges and other outdoor training facilities.



The 2,000-seat amphitheater at Bert Adams Scout Reservation is accessible by the lighted bridge across the camp's lake. Photo: GWF

[7] To the left, you can see the back of **Heard-Mixon Elementary School**. The school takes part in the Georgia Schoolyard Wildlife Habitat program initiated by the Georgia Wildlife Federation. The program encourages the use of outdoor classrooms and laboratories to teach environmental education. The school was named for the Heard family who donated the land and for Reverend Asbury Mixon, who organized and founded the Lovejoy Methodist Church in 1899 off of Lackey Road.

At the end of Scout Road, turn right on Highway 36.

[8] To the left you will pass **Alcovy High School**. The school's campus backs up to the Alcovy River, allowing students the

opportunity to conduct outdoor classes and monitor the river.

[9] Though it certainly does not look it, the Chevron Station at the junction of Highway 36 and Highway 212 is quite an old landmark. Still bearing the name of **Potts Store**, it was originally owned by the Potts family in the early 1900s. The J.M. Potts were founding members of the Stewart Baptist Church and the Stewart Community. Stewart Baptist Church was formed in 1907 after many members of the Pleasant Grove Community fled their homes due to a recent malaria outbreak in that community. Potts Store was located on a high ridge at the time and said to be relatively free of mosquitoes. This is the third store building on the site. The store is

still in the family, owned by John Potts, grandson of J.M. Potts.

Turn left onto Highway 212, which will become Brown Bridge Road.

[10] Head south for about 3 miles to reach **Watters' Bridge**, which crosses Jackson Lake and the Alcovy River. Downstream is the confluence of the Alcovy and Ocmulgee rivers. You are also leaving Newton and entering Jasper County.

Go to the stop sign, and turn right on Jackson Lake Road, State Route 221.

In about 5 miles you will pass Riverside Park and then the Ocmulgee River Public Ramp. Both of these are day-use-only areas, managed by Georgia Power.

Continue on Jackson Lake Road, and turn right on State Route 16.

[11] You will immediately cross the **Ocmulgee River**, which is the Jasper-Butts County Line. A few miles south on the Ocmulgee is the site of Seven Islands, once a thriving commercial center with cotton gins and textile mills. The Seven Islands of the Ocmulgee were a landmark on the Seven Islands Trail from Augusta to Mobile, AL.

Travel about 0.2 mile and turn right on Stark Road. In 1.0 mile turn right on Big Dam Road.



Longtime Georgia Wildlife Federation partners, Junior Bass Busters create fish habitats in Jackson Lake by tying blocks to Christmas trees and sinking them in the lake. Photo: GWF

[12] Follow Big Dam Road to **Lloyd Shoals Dam** at Jackson Lake. One of the oldest reservoirs in Georgia, construction on the Lloyd Shoals Dam began on April 29, 1908 with parts of the dam completed and operational by 1911. Constructed by the Central Georgia Power Company (now Georgia Power) to provide electricity for the city of Macon, the dam was a massive project, creating a 4,750 acre lake with 135 miles of shoreline.

Return to Stark Road, and turn right. Travel about 3.5 miles and turn right on Jackson Lake Inn Road. Travel 2.5 miles to the turnaround at the lake.

[13] In its infancy, Jackson Lake was a fairly

exclusive site and hosted many well-to-do visitors. At the end of this road is the site of the **Jackson Lake Inn**, a rather high-end lodging from the 1930s which hosted bandleader Guy Lombardo, an early motor boating enthusiast who won many championships and set several records in the fledgling sport of speedboat racing.

Continue around Jackson Lake Inn Road the way you entered for 1.5 miles and turn right on Barnett's Bridge Road.

[14] In a little over a mile, you will cross the Van Kersey Bridge over **Tussahaw Creek**, a tributary of the Ocmulgee. According to Ken Krakow's book *Georgia Place-Names*, Tussahaw means either "stream of life," or

"warrior shooting at you."

Travel about 2.7 miles and turn right on Highway 36.

[15] One mile ahead, you will cross the **South River** as you re-enter Newton County. Prior to 1850, the South River was considered to be the Ocmulgee. Today, the Ocmulgee begins after the South and Yellow Rivers converge just south of here.

[16] In about 1.3 miles, you will cross the **Yellow River**. The Creek Indian name of the river was the Welauneehatchee.

[17] After you cross the Yellow River, in about 1.4 miles, you will pass through the

Hydroelectricity

Georgia began as river country. There are no large, natural lakes in the state. In the early 20th Century, the rising demand for power and our increasingly sophisticated technology allowed for the creation of a series of large lakes for the generation of hydroelectric power.

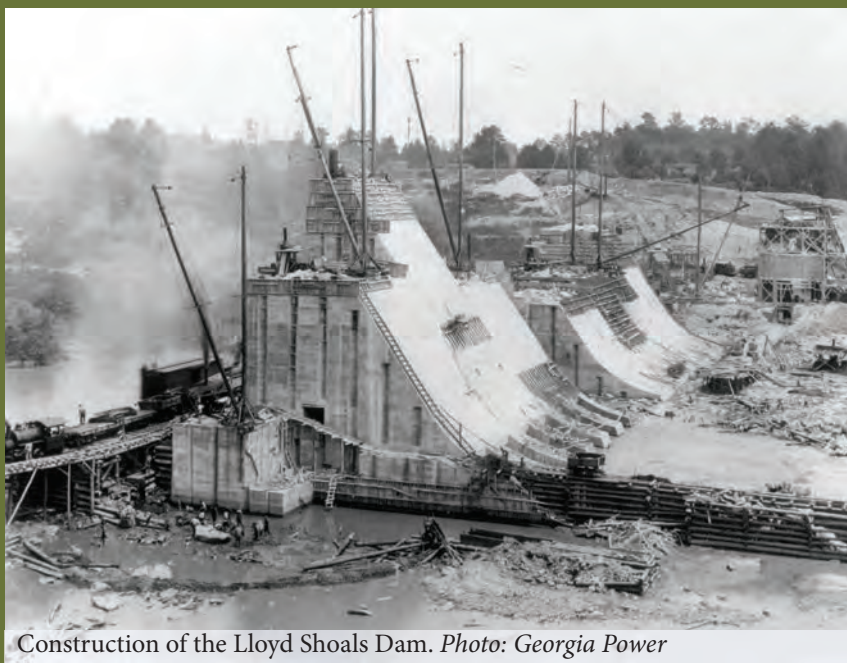
Jackson Lake was constructed

by the Central Georgia Power Company (later Georgia Power Company) in 1908 and was the highest dam planned at that time and first to raise water 100 feet above its original surface. From the heightened elevation, water flows downhill through turbines in the dam, producing electricity.

Hydroelectricity was, for many years, a primary source of power in the United States. It was not until 1961 that coal became the major fuel used by utility companies to generate electricity. Today, only 2% of Georgia's energy is supplied by its 20 hydroelectric dams. There are 14 fossil fuel plants in the state and 67% of Georgia's power is now supplied by burning coal.

Hydroelectricity is a cleaner energy source than fossil fuels, able to reuse its primary power source of water. It does not come without an ecological price, however, as the damming of rivers drastically alters the natural habitat and landscape. The creation of lakes around Georgia has provided many opportunities for sportsmen to enjoy the water for fishing or boating and there has been an obvious upward economic impact on lakefront real estate.

Today, there are few rivers in Georgia whose flow has not been affected by the construction of a dam either up or downstream, though most are now proposed to supply drinking water.



Construction of the Lloyd Shoals Dam. Photo: Georgia Power

Stewart Community, settled by the Potts family during the 1907 malaria epidemic.

Continue north on Highway 36 for 1.7 miles, and turn right on FFA-FHA Camp Road.

[18] On the right, you will pass the **Harold L. Smith Arboretum**. The arboretum is used during the FFA's Wildlife Camp for teaching outdoor survival skills, deer stand safety, primitive camping and outdoor cooking.

[19] After the arboretum, you will pass the **Hayes-Outz Wildlife Education Center** on your right. Named for James P. Hayes, a prominent Newton County businessman and tireless supporter of the FFA and GWF, and Clyde Outz, a celebrated agriculture education professional, the fishing pond has a covered pavilion and classroom facilities. The catch-and-release pond provides young people with the opportunity to enjoy a rewarding fishing experience.

Continue on FFA-FHA Camp Road until you enter the FFA camp.

[20] A **Regionally Important Conservation Resource**, the **Georgia FFA-FCCLA Center** is located on land once



A Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*) tree showing fall colors. Photo: Terry Tatum

owned by Peter Walton Godfrey, a large land owner who owned two farms in Newton County, one across from James Paschal Baptist Church on Highway 142. His son-in-law, Samuel Charles Candler, sold 150 acres to the state's nascent FFA program to establish the camp. Work began that year with granite found on site quarried for construction. Students were asked to find rocks around Jackson Lake which were later used to build the dining hall fireplace. The National Youth Administration provided many youth volunteers to work, though money for materials was scarce. The state became involved and governors Eugene Talmadge and Ellis Arnall both provided roadwork, grading and convict labor to assist in the construction. The center was completed in 1943 and currently hosts 20,000 campers annually with expansion plans in the works. Take note of the many facilities available for use to organizations with an educational purpose. Behind and beyond the Pulliam Cottage, the Alcovy River serves as a backdrop to the camp's amphitheater.

Travel through the camp and you will eventually loop around to exit the way you came. Travel back to Highway 36, and turn right.

[21] Just ahead, turn right into the parking lot of **Red Oak Methodist Church**. This is one of the oldest churches in Newton County. It is assumed that the church was formed before 1822 as there are no Newton County deed records for the property. Prior to 1822, the site would have been part of both Henry and Baldwin Counties. Oral history within the church cites the founding in 1803 and the land purchased directly from the Indians. The church was named for the red oak logs used to construct the original building. Amazingly, making up the foundation of the main church building are the sawed off stumps of the original oak trees used in the church's construction. The current building is thought to be more than 200 years old.

[22] Continue on Highway 36 for 0.3 mile, and notice the old store on the right. The **L.L. Dick Store**, operated by the Pulliam



The L.L. Dick store on Hwy. 36. Photo: GWF

family, was once situated on the East side of the Alcovy River. According to Pulliam family history, it was moved in 1930 to its present location and remained in business for many years.

Continue north on Highway 36, and turn right onto Newton Factory Bridge Road.

[23] The **Newton Factory Community** was centered around the many mills in operation on the southern shoals section of the Alcovy River. A primary business center for the largely agricultural county, Newton Factory Park also served as a meeting place for churches and the community as well as the site of many recreational activities from dancing to camping. Newton Factory contained a cotton, saw and gristmill and for a time was a true mill community. In the 1860 census, there were reported more than 600 citizens being served by the Newton Factory Post Office. That number dwindled to just 160 in the 1870 census following the human and economic devastation of the Civil War. Jones' Grist Mill, owned by Harrison Jones, was the earliest mill in the area. A land deed from 1833 refers to it as Jones' Mill Dam. With no other mills nearby, Jones' mill was instrumental in serving the many needs of a growing agricultural economy. The mill was located on a steep slope on the west side of the Alcovy River south of Newton Factory Bridge Road. White's Factory was a cotton mill owned by the Irish immigrant brothers Robert and Hugh White, who purchased the land for the mill in 1847. Another brother in Clarke County also ran a cotton factory that would found the Whitehall mill community on the southeast side of Athens. Records concerning White's Factory prior to the Civil War are spotty at best and it is unknown in what year the factory was built or for how long it operated, though it is



Remnants of White's Factory, a cotton mill on the shoals of the Alcovy River. Ruins still stand in the Factory Shoals area of Jones' Mill and Newton Factory. Photo: GWF

assumed to have run into the early 1880s. The factory was located about half a mile below Newton Factory Bridge Road.

Watch on the left for the sign indicating the entrance to the Newton Factory Cemetery and the campgrounds. Turn left and the cemetery is on your right.

[24] The church for the **Newton Factory Cemetery** is no longer standing, though it was located to the right of the park entrance.

The cemetery was established in 1854 and was used as recently as the 1940s. Follow the road and travel past the cemetery and notice the riverside campsites.

Return to Newton Factory Bridge Road and turn left. Take an immediate right into Factory Shoals Recreation Park.

[25] **Factory Shoals Recreation Park**, a **Regionally Important Conservation Resource**, has been called one of Newton



Newton Factory Cemetery is a shaded and secluded spot within the Factory Shoals Recreation Park. Photo: GWF

County's best kept secrets. The park offers RV and tent camping with hot showers and bathrooms and nearby recreational fields. As the elevation descends rapidly on the southern part of the Alcovy, the shoals feature Level III rapids for two miles as the river flows toward Jackson Lake. Driving through the park you can catch a view of the Alcovy River through the trees.

Return to Newton Factory Bridge Road, and take a right.

[26] Immediately after turning right, you will cross the **Alcovy River**. From the bridge, you can see the beautiful shoals that give this area its name. Just beyond the bridge on the left is a parking area which many use to access the river for swimming or kayaking.

Half a mile past the river, turn left onto McDonald Road. Follow McDonald Road for 2.3 miles, and turn left on Henderson Mill Road.

[27] Approximately 2 miles ahead on your right, **Henderson Mill** still stands, just before the Henderson Mill Bridge crosses the Alcovy River. Henderson Mill was founded by Isaac P. Henderson, one of the earliest and most successful Newton Countians. He was 61 in 1850 and farmed 2100 acres, owned 47 slaves and averaged 65 bales of cotton a year, making him one of the wealthier men in the county. Henderson Mill was one of several owned by Henderson along the southern portion of the Alcovy River. The mills were a community gathering place for more reasons than simply commerce. The mill is now a private residence.

[28] Travel 2 miles ahead on Henderson Mill Road and turn left into the parking lot of **High Point Baptist Church**, the newer church building across the road from the 1893 High Point Baptist Church Cemetery.

Turn right on Highway 36, and travel about 2 miles to East End Road. Turn right and go 0.5 mile to return to the Alcovy River at East End where the tour began.

The Old Professor & The Ecologist

Charles Newton Elliott & Charles Heizer Wharton

The legacies of two of Georgia's most enduring conservationists are intertwined with the winding path of the Alcovy River and its bottomland forests and swamps. The unifying theme in the works of both men was an unwavering commitment to the importance and value of an ecological education. An outdoors education. A natural education.

Covington native Charles Newton Elliott was a prominent conservationist and author as well as the first director of Georgia's Game and Fish Commission. Elliott grew up spending as much time as possible in the wild areas around the Alcovy River, particularly the swamps, depending upon the outdoors for his shelter, food and water. It was here that he taught himself the craft of the outdoor writer. He said, "When I was in the woods I carried a small notebook and stub of pencil in my pocket and often I'd sit and fill several pages of the notepad with some sight or occurrence that was new to me. I can't remember the time when I did not feel the urge to write about my experiences."

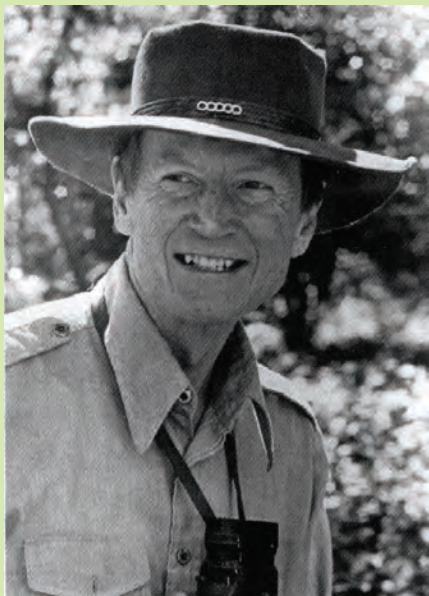
In 1940, Elliott wrote his seminal work, *Conservation of American Resources*, one of the earliest textbooks to focus on the conservation of our natural resources. Elliott believed all children possessed an innate curiosity for the natural world and wrote, "It is our duty...to encourage this natural interest and make clear the relationships of land, trees, water, and all plant and animal life, and the importance of these renewable resources to the social and economic life of our country and its people."

Charles Heizer Wharton grew up in the Decatur area but spent many years tracking raccoons through the Alcovy Swamps on hunting trips with his father. The experience had a profound and lasting effect on Wharton, who would return to the Alcovy River time and time again over the course of his long career as an ecologist, professor and activist. He said the hunting trips felt as though he and his father "were playing out an ancient ritual in an ancient place."

Wharton believed strongly in the educational value of natural areas. He was adamant that environmental education should stand equal to the traditional "three R's." As a professor at Georgia State University and the University of Georgia, Wharton brought students to study the ecosystems of the Alcovy River swamps.

As a member of many educational initiatives in Georgia, Wharton advocated for a state-wide system of educational natural areas for use as outdoor classrooms. He said, "These environments will expose students to sensory awareness and engender "feelings" for natural places which traditional classrooms cannot inspire. Students can acquire both emotional and spiritual components from the diversity of natural environments which make up the mosaic of life-support systems."

Wharton was a leader of the successful anti-channelization movement to save the Alcovy River in the 1960s. The fight eventually toppled the federal government's outdated and scientifically unsound practice of manipulating streams and rivers. Wharton later wrote, "I suggest that we reaffirm our partnership with nature, and that we especially acknowledge our bond with the river swamps. This environment not only cradles our most precious resource, water, but offers us perhaps the last place where we can feel a part of nature – isolated, wild, and free."



The Plantations

"Water is life. We cannot live without it."

Charlie Elliott, from Conservation of American Resources, 1940



East Newton County is a pastoral, rural area; a stark contrast to the higher-density western side of the county. This has a lot to do with the natural proximity to Atlanta's urban sprawl, but it also has to do with the history of the county and the way it was initially settled and developed.

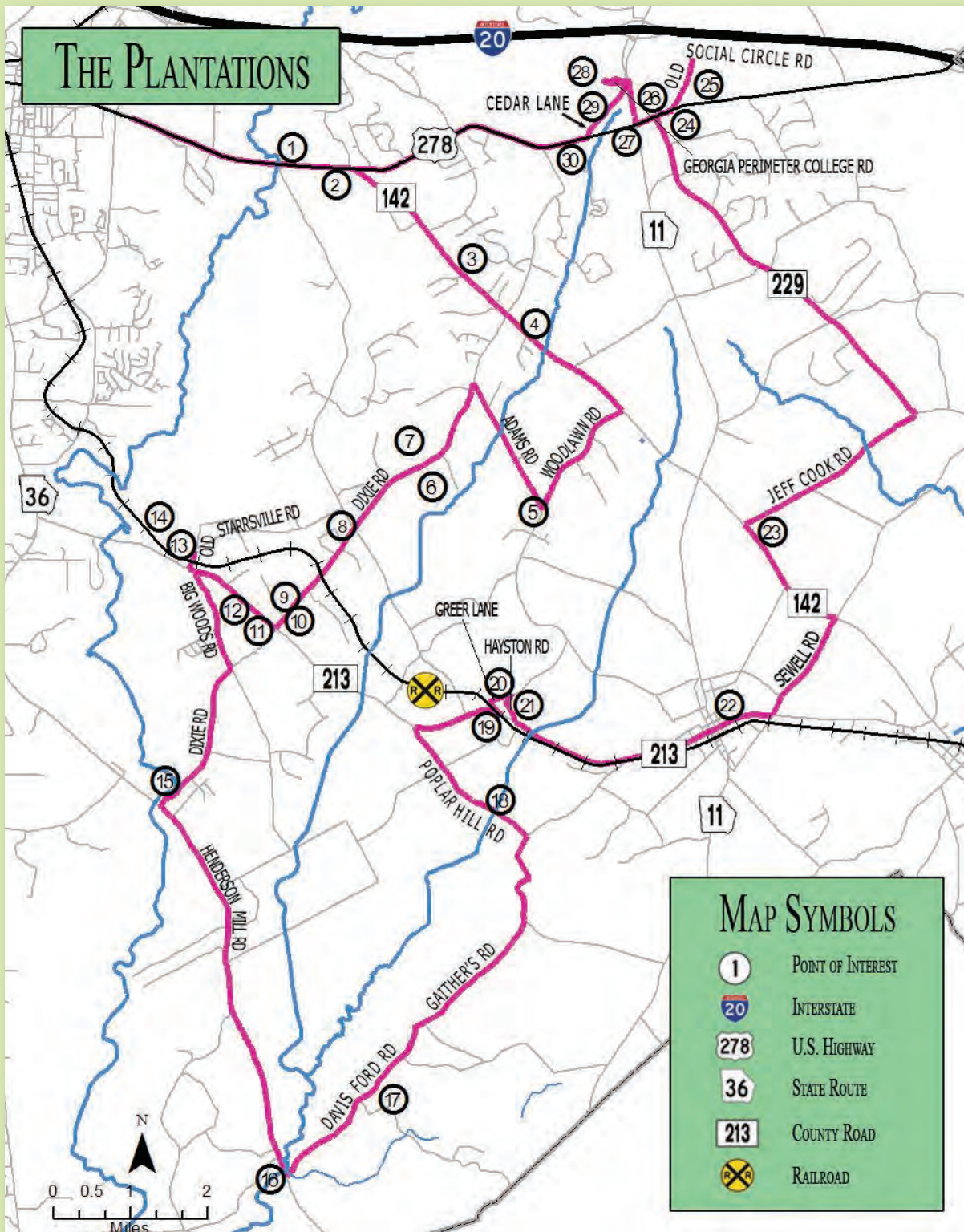
Mt. Pleasant. Photo: GWF

In a treaty with the native Indians in 1805, the western border of the country in this area was the Ocmulgee and Alcovy (Ulcofauhatchee) Rivers. Of course this border was altered many times over in many successive treaties, but it was an important border at an important time in Newton County's development. The majority of the old plantation families established themselves in Newton County in the early part of the 19th century between 1805 and 1822, the year of Newton County's formation. They settled in the land that was available, to the east of the Alcovy River, which also happened to be rich and fertile farmland.

These were huge operations, and land tracts of hundreds and hundreds of acres were owned by a few families. Water resources were a vital part of the success of these plantations. East Newton County is split north to south in three almost equal parts by the Alcovy River, East Bear Creek, and West Bear Creek. From these creeks flow numerous smaller tributaries east to west. Above-ground water is plentiful all across the area. Many of the older plantations and farm sites have their own farm ponds, typically built using water from one of the nearby creeks or springs.

Although water was plentiful for these estates, all of the plantations were also tied to the larger shoals areas of the Alcovy River and Bear Creek for the use of the many grist mills in grinding their wheat and corn and the gins for their cotton. Plantation life in Newton County was never far removed from the river or its tributaries.

A surprising number of these early plantation holdings in Newton County have remained in family hands. Many large tracts of land have been passed down through generations and have to this day resisted large-scale development. Several holdings that were sold have remained as large lots, allowing the entire area to retain a distinctly agricultural identity, though today cattle and cotton have largely been replaced with smaller farms offering a more diverse mix of crops.



Map: James Fitzgerald

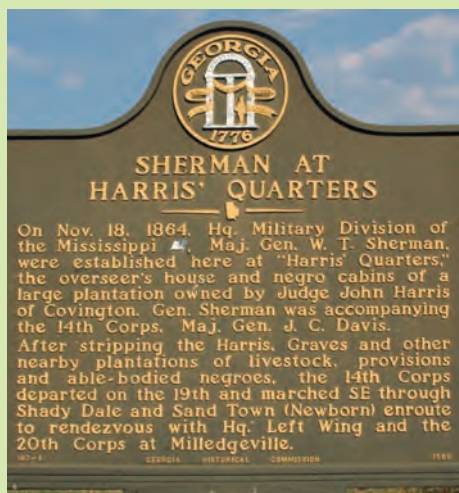
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|--|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Alcovy River | 11. Old Starrsville Store | 21. Luther Hays Presbyterian Church |
| 2. Harris Plantation | 12. Belcher Plantation | 22. Mansfield |
| 3. James Paschal Baptist Church | 13. Covington-Machen Railroad | 23. Burge Plantation |
| 4. West Bear Creek | 14. Anderson Plantation | 24. Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church |
| 5. Wm. Adams Homestead | 15. Henderson Mill | 25. Brick Store |
| 6. Rakestraw Cemetery | 16. Bear Creek | 26. Stanton Plantation |
| 7. Dobbs-Lane Cemetery | 17. Gaither Plantation | 27. Hub Junction |
| 8. East Newton Elementary School | 18. USGS Monitoring Station | 28. Georgia Perimeter College |
| 9. Starrsville United Methodist Church | 19. Hayston Community | 29. Mt. Pleasant |
| 10. Starrsville Community | 20. Tanyard Place | 30. Coffee Cemetery |

The total length of the Plantation Tour is 40 miles.

[1] The Plantation Tour begins where the **Alcovy River** crosses Highway 278, east of Covington.

Travel east on Highway 278 for about 1 mile after crossing the Alcovy River bridge.

[2] To your right is a state historical marker for Harris' Quarters. Harris' Quarters refers to the overseer's house on the **Harris Plantation** near the current intersection of Highways 278 and 142. In November of 1864, General William T. Sherman spent the night at Harris' Quarters, later writing about speaking to the slaves there in his memoirs.



Turn right on Highway 142.

[3] Just over a mile down 142, on your left, is the **James Paschal Baptist Church**. An early African-American congregation, this church began in 1864 under a brush arbor. Originally called Cross Road Baptist Church, it was also said to be known as James' Pasture Baptist Church because it was located in the pasture of a man named James. This was one of two farms owned by Peter Walton Godfrey, whose other property became the Georgia FFA-FCCLA Center.

Continue down Highway 142 for another mile.

[4] You will cross **West Bear Creek**. Bear Creek is a main tributary of the Alcovy River and splits into an East and West branch. In turn, these two branches have many smaller tributaries that spread out east and west, providing much of the early East Newton County farms with relatively easy access to water.

Continue on Highway 142 for another mile, and turn right on Woodlawn Road. In 1.3 miles, turn right on Adams Road.

[5] Look just to the left as you turn on Adams Road and you will see a marker for the **Wm. Adams Homestead**. William Adams, a Confederate veteran and pastor at Harris Spring Primitive Baptist, had 16 children including 10 sons who worked the family's successful farming operation, using the fertile bottomlands of West Bear Creek. The large family used the homestead – which boasted a 34-seat dining table and 10-hole privy – as a summer retreat for many years until it was destroyed by fire in 1956.

In about ¾ mile, you will again cross West Bear Creek, though the sign on the bridge says Bear Creek. At the stop sign, turn left on Dixie Road.



This model bog garden at the Alcovy Conservation Center was created by the Conservation Program of the Atlanta Botanical Garden. Photo: GWF

[6] and [7] Notice the large Adams Family Cemetery on the left. A mile further, on the left, is the **Rakestraw Cemetery**, established before 1822, the year of the formation of Newton County. Across the road, a few hundred feet west and tucked into the woods, is the **Dobbs-Lane Cemetery**, established in 1841. This cemetery sits on land deeded by Henry Lane in 1825 upon the establishment of Lane's Meeting House, an early church. By the middle of the 19th century, the church moved to Starrsville and became the Starrsville United Methodist Church.

[8] Continuing down Dixie Road, you will pass **East Newton Elementary School** on the right. The school is an active participant in the Schoolyard Wildlife Habitat program and maintains a demonstration bog garden among others.

You will soon cross the Covington-Machen Railroad.

[9] Just ahead on the right is **Starrsville United Methodist Church**, established at least as early as 1825. Church members originally met at Lane's Meeting House near the Dobbs-Lane Cemetery. It is unknown when the church was moved to its current location, though the earliest records are

from 1866. Several members of the Starr family were leaders of the church.

[10] Across the street is the parsonage, which was once the site of a gin house and later a clubhouse for the Hays District Women's Club. The area around the church and intersection of County Road 213 and Dixie Road is the **Starrsville Community**. Several members of the Starrsville Community drew their land in the 1820 and 1821 land lotteries, when the area was part of Walton County. The area was considered an educational center in the county and boasted two competing schools in the late 1800s, one run by county Ordinary James Belcher.

[11] At the intersection of County Road 213, you may pull over onto the shoulder to view a small historical marker on a large stone describing the **Old Starrsville Store**. This two-story wooden building was one of the oldest in the county before its demolition in 1992. The upstairs was used as a meeting hall for a Masonic Lodge, Temperance Union and other social and political meetings as well as for entertainment. The store was opened in the early 1830s.

Turn right onto County Road 213.

[12] Just on your left is the ca. 1870 **Belcher-Costley house**. This plantation style home was built by James Belcher, the first son of

Archibald Seals Belcher. Archibald came to Newton County in 1840 and acquired Land Lot 283 on the Alcovy River. He grew the Belcher Plantation along the banks of the Alcovy and at his death in 1870 his plantation contained more than 1,100 acres.

In about one mile, turn right on Old Starrsville Road.

[13] Just ahead, you will cross the railroad tracks. In 1893, the Central of Georgia railroad company built a railroad through Starrsville as part of the **Covington-Machen Railroad**, a 28-mile track that ends just below Shady Dale. Operated by the Great Walton Railroad since 1989, the track was built by the Middle Georgia and Atlantic Railway in 1890-94 as part of a larger line between Milledgeville and Covington. It was originally planned to pass close to the Old Starrsville store, but in the end was relocated a mile north. At the time, this area was known as New Starrsville.



The Belcher-Costley Home. Photo: GWF



The Starrsville Railroad Station was the center of Starrsville and actually shifted the community north in accomodation to the railroad. Photo: GWF



Starrsville United Methodist Church.
Photo: GWF

[14] Nearby is the **Anderson Plantation**. The Anderson's played a major role in some of the early construction in Newton County, operating the Anderson Brickyard. Their bricks were used in the construction of the Starrsville railroad station, a mercantile store and homes across the street. They are believed to have been used in the construction of the Brick Store building, though there is some debate on that point. The Andersons also eventually purchased the mercantile store in Starrsville as well and operated the local post office out of the Anderson Store. The store stayed in business by the family until it was closed in 1976.

Turn around at the railroad station, and turn left on County Road 213. Almost immediately, turn right on Big Woods Road. Travel about 1 mile to the stop sign, and turn right on Dixie Road.

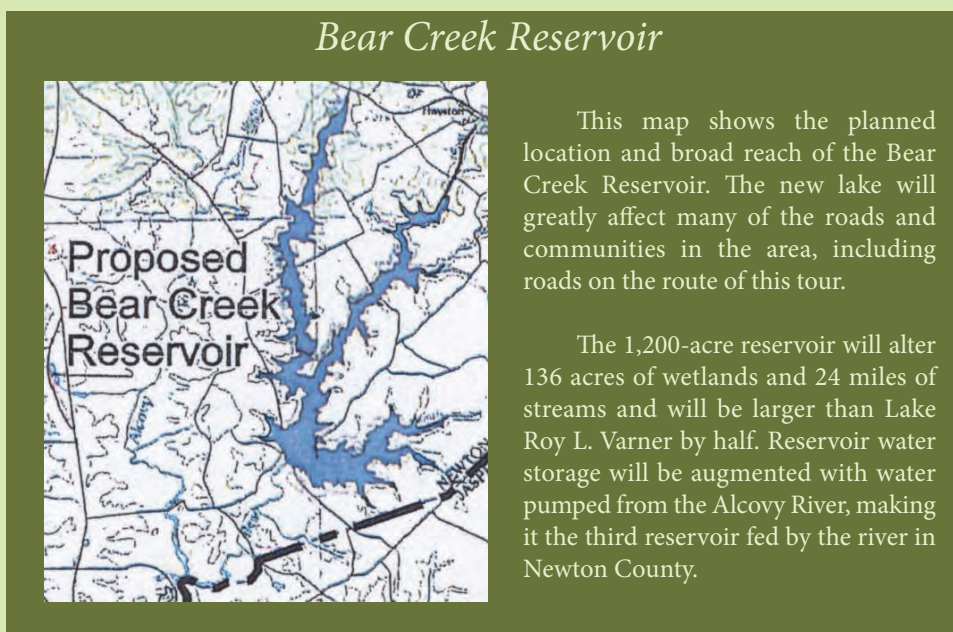
[15] A mile-and-a-half ahead on your right is **Henderson Mill**, on the banks of the Alcovy River. Henderson Mill was founded by Isaac P. Henderson, one of the earliest and most successful Newton Countians. He was 61 in 1850 and farmed 2100 acres,

owned 47 slaves and averaged 65 bales of cotton a year. Henderson Mill was one of several owned by Henderson along the southern portion of the Alcovy River. The mills were a community gathering place for more reasons than simply commerce. The mill is now a private residence.

Turn left on Henderson Mill Road.

[16] Travel about 3.5 miles, and slow down as you approach a large bridge crossing **Bear Creek**. To the Southeast, Bear Creek feeds into Jackson Lake. To the Northeast, the tributary splits into East and West Bear Creek. This area is the planned site of the Bear Creek Reservoir, a **Regionally Important Water Resource**.

The Lake Varner reservoir on Cornish Creek was opened in 1991, when the population of Newton County was just over 40,000. The 2000 U.S. Census reported the population had grown to 62,000 and the county soon began planning for another public water supply. Newton County grew even faster in the next decade and the population reached 100,000 in the 2010 Census. The Bear Creek Reservoir is planned to provide more water than the Lake Varner Reservoir and meet the 50-year water demands of the county, based on ambitious growth rate projections. Bear



Creek, a main tributary of the Alcovy River, was already designated as a water supply watershed and has been protected as such through state and local regulations. The dam will be located near this bridge on Henderson Mill Road and the reservoir is estimated to be more than 1,200 acres in size.

Just past the bridge, turn left on Davis Ford Road.

[17] To your right is **Gaither Plantation** a

This map shows the planned location and broad reach of the Bear Creek Reservoir. The new lake will greatly affect many of the roads and communities in the area, including roads on the route of this tour.

The 1,200-acre reservoir will alter 136 acres of wetlands and 24 miles of streams and will be larger than Lake Roy L. Varner by half. Reservoir water storage will be augmented with water pumped from the Alcovy River, making it the third reservoir fed by the river in Newton County.

Regionally Important Conservation Resource. The Plantation is closed except by appointment only. There is a phone number on the sign and a tour may be scheduled ahead of time. The plantation is owned by Newton County and is used as an event facility as well as an educational field trip destination, with a blacksmith shop and other period structures as well. When Newton County built the Newton County Harris Spring Fire Station, the building of Harris Spring Primitive Baptist Church was relocated to Gaither Plantation. For more on the Harris Spring Church, see p. 18 of the Swamp Tour. The Gaither family is descended from Dr. Henry Gaither, who moved from Hancock County to Oxford around 1827 to practice medicine and work at Emory College. So much of southern Newton County was owned by Gaither's eight children that for a time it was known as Gaithers District. The family was instrumental in the founding of Gaithers United Methodist Church on Newton Factory Shoals Road. W.H. Gaither owned 875 acres in Newton County. In 1900 the boll weevil destroyed the cotton crop and led to a series of hard times for the family.

Davis Ford Road will turn into a dirt road. Continue on and the road will make a 90-degree turn onto Gaither's Road, also dirt. Travel about 2 miles on Gaither's Road, and turn left on Poplar Hill Road.



Gaither Plantation is replete with old farm implements and buildings. The plantation is used for educational field trips as well as events. Photo: GWF



USGS monitoring station on East Bear Creek. Photo: GWF

[18] Shortly you will cross East Bear Creek, with a **United States Geological Survey monitoring station**. In cooperation with Newton County, the station monitors gage height, discharge and precipitation at East Bear Creek. You can view current water data for any station in Georgia at: <http://ga.water.usgs.gov/>.

Poplar Hill Road will dead-end into County Road 213. Turn right. You will cross the Covington-Machen Railroad again, and immediately turn to the left on Greer Lane. Greer Lane will make a 90-degree turn.



A basket full of native Pawpaws, the namesake fruit of the Alcovy River. One of the initiatives of the Burge Plantation's organic farm is the sale of foraged native fruits and vegetables such as poke salad, choke cherries, black walnuts, elderberries and muscadines. Such foods have seen a resurgence of interest in the local food movement.

Photo: T. Tatum

[19] Two mercantile stores were operated by different members of the Hays family as well as **Tanyard Place**. Tanyard Place was a leatherworking and tannery facility whose goods mainly supplied the communities nearby. Shoes were also made here for soldiers during the Civil War. Remnants of the original structures are still visible on the upper side of Greer's Lake. A gin and sawmill were located nearby.

[20] This is the **Hayston Community**, situated between East and West Bear Creeks, named for the Hayes family, early settlers in the area. (The "e" was later dropped.) George Newton Hayes was the earliest of the family, migrating to Newton County shortly after 1805. George was a veteran of the American Revolution and married three times and had 15 children.

Turn right on Hayston Road.

[21] To your left, you will see **Luther Hays Presbyterian Church**, established in 1883.

The Hays family cemetery is beyond the church but is private and restricted to family members only. Hayston and Luther Hays Presbyterian Church were actually named for George Hayes' son, Robert Luther, who was born in 1802 and had 18 children himself. Members of the populous Hays family have stayed in the area ever since.

At the end of Hayston Road, turn left on County Road 213. Continue on County Road 213 for about 1 mile.

[22] You are now passing through the town of **Mansfield**. Compared to many of the local communities, Mansfield is a much younger settlement. The area was plantation farmland before the Civil War and remained much the same after, though economic times were more difficult. With the construction of the Covington-Machen line in the 1890s, a group of businessmen bought land for a township and laid out the town, complete with street names and numbered lots.

According to local legend, the town's name has an interesting history. On the night before the land lots were sold, the members of the company stayed in Social Circle. On the buggy ride into town the next morning, town names were discussed and it was agreed that the town would be named for anyone of the group who could stay sober at the celebratory barbecue following the sale. Afterwards, the new town was named Mansfield, after the sole member of the company who abstained from drink. The town charter also forbade the sale of alcohol within the corporate limits, which has led to speculation that the founding day celebration was excessive indeed.

Mansfield boomed into existence and by 1909, the town boasted 5 supply stores, 2 restaurants, a hotel, nine grocery stores, two banks and a newspaper. In 1906, aided by the railroad, the town was one of the largest cotton markets in the state. Following World War I, cotton prices fell and growth in the town slowed as the agricultural way of life gave over to the increasing urbanization of Georgia's farmers throughout the 1930s and 40s.

Cross over Highway 229 at the stop sign, travel about 0.5 mile and turn left on Sewell Road. In 1 mile, turn left on Highway 142. Travel about 1 mile.

[23] To your left and right is **Burge Plantation**, a **Regionally Important Conservation Resource**. The old farmhouse to your left is the original building and was moved to its present location. The newer construction is to your right. Perhaps the most famous of the Newton County plantations, the home site has remarkably stayed in family hands since its inception in 1809. The home is best known from the extensive diaries kept by Dolly Lunt Burge, who lived at the plantation from 1850 until 1891, assuming sole control over the plantation and its management after her husband's death in 1858. *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge* (UGA Press) provides a first-hand account of life on the plantation before, during and after the Civil War, including eloquent descriptions of Sherman's March to the Sea as he passed through Newton County. For a time the plantation was owned by five orphaned children (cared for by the Graves family) and managed by a devoted black couple, "Uncle" George and "Aunt" Sidney Gunn. Today, the home has been restored as a private hunting, shooting and family club,

hosting weddings and special events as well as operating an organic farm.

Turn right on Jeff Cook Road, which will soon turn into a dirt road. Go to the stop sign and turn left on Highway 229. Travel about 3.7 miles.

[24] Turn right into the parking lot of **Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church**. (This is a good place to park and walk around.) Located at the corner of Highways 278 and 229, Mt. Pleasant was for a brief time used as a community name, though the more colloquial Brick Store stuck. Originally built in 1819, the church was burned by a slave in 1862 and due to the hardship of the Civil War and reconstruction, the current building could not be begun until 1878.

Exiting the church, turn right onto Highway 229 and then right onto Highway 278. Almost immediately, look for Old Social Circle Road, and turn left. You may pull over into the dirt drive immediately on your left, or you may turn into the church parking lot on the right, and park your car.

[25] Ahead, you may walk over to view **Brick Store**, the oldest building in Newton County. The construction of the Brick Store building is a source of some debate. Long assumed to have been built by Solomon Graves, land lottery information shows the original lot being sold to Martin Kolb with documents referencing his house as a meeting place for a temporary court house in 1821. Indeed, the county's first Superior Court was held in the Brick Store on April 15, 1822, when it was decided that the court (and county seat) would be moved to Newtonborough (Covington).

Turn right back onto Highway 278.

[26] Just past the intersection of Highways



Brick Store. The oldest building in Newton County.
Photo: GWF

Watersheds & Private Conservation Incentives

The Burge Plantation is uniquely situated between the tributaries of two different watersheds, the Ocmulgee and the Oconee. Jeff Cook Road crosses over Shoal Creek, which originates nearby in Newton County. Shoal Creek flows into the Little River which in turn flows into the Oconee River. Likewise, East Bear Creek is a tributary to the Alcovy River which flows into the Ocmulgee.

Because of the cumulative effect of water pollution to communities downstream, agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provide technical assistance and funding to private landowners who implement environmental stewardship programs that fit into the State Wildlife Action Plan. For more information, visit: www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov



The Brick Store Community Center at Mt. Pleasant Methodist Church. Photo: GWF

278 and 229 is the **Stanton Plantation**. The current house was built in the 1870s, originally as a one-story home. The Stanton family's patriarch, Bartholomew "Batte" Stanton, fought in the War of 1812 under Andrew Jackson and settled in Newton County in the 1820s to stake claim to land newly available as the Indians were moved west.

[27] The intersection of Highway 278 and Highway 11 is known as **Hub Junction**. This area was the crossroads of the old Stage Coach lines from Charleston to New Orleans and Ruckersville, VA to Milledgeville, then the state capital. Both stages stopped here regularly with passengers staying at the old inn behind Brick Store. The road remained a busy thoroughfare and in 1935 Robert Stanton Sr. built "The Hub", a small general store that sold gasoline, oil and sandwiches. The Hub became a bus station that grew in importance as a transfer station for the many bus lines of the time. During World War II, as many as 40 buses stopped each day at Hub Junction. The station was even featured in Robert Ripley's Believe it or Not column as "the world's largest rural bus station."

Turn right on Highway 11. Travel about 0.4 mile. Turn left into the parkway of Georgia Perimeter College.



The Stanton Plantation sits in the center of the Brick Store Community. Photo: GWF

[28] **Georgia Perimeter College** was established in 2007. The Arnold Fund donated 100 acres for the college in 2005. A master plan was developed for a proposed mixed-use community centered around the campus. A Development of Regional Impact study was submitted to the Northeast Georgia Regional Center and deemed to be in the best interest of the region and state. Rezoning for the development was completed and 95 acres were set aside as permanently protected greenspace.

Exiting Georgia Perimeter College, turn right

on Cedar Lane, which is an unmarked dirt road, before you reach Highway 11, just where the two lanes of GPC's drive meet before the median.

[29] Ahead on your right is **Mt. Pleasant**, the homeplace of Solomon Graves, one of the earliest and more influential citizens of Newton County. Descended of Captain Thomas Graves who came to Virginia in 1608, the Graves family prospered in the cotton trade during the antebellum years, acquiring over 7,500 acres. The earliest reference to the house lists 1835 as its construction date. The home stayed in the family for well over 150 years. The home has since been restored by several owners and the five original slave cabins were sold to the Stone Mountain Park Authority to be displayed at the plantation area of the park.

Continue to the end of Cedar Lane at the intersection of Highway 278.

[30] The **Coffee Cemetery** sits along Highway 278 with most graves circa mid-to-late 19th century. The cemetery's origins are unknown and no headstones exist bearing the name Coffee.

At the stop sign, turn right on Highway 278. Travel 3.0 miles and you will return to the Alcovy River where the tour began.



Coffee Cemetery. Photo: GWF

Regionally Important Resources

Regionally Important Resources (RIR) are determined by the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission as valuable to the region and state but vulnerable to uncontrolled or incompatible development. Developers are asked to include protection of these areas in any development plans but are not required by law to do so.

Heritage Resources include historic structures, farms, campgrounds and rail lines that have made a significant contribution to the history of the state and region. They must be the only such resource in the region and have an impact on a shared history as well as an economic impact through tourism. The Heritage Resource in the *Alcovy River Ramble* is:

- Oxford College of Emory University

Water Resources provide drinking water, sewage treatment, power generation, and recreation. Water Resources in Newton County are:

- Alcovy River Greenway
- Bear Creek Reservoir
- Lake Roy L. Varner

Conservation Resources are existing parks, farms, open spaces and forestry resources that perform essential environmental functions and improve the quality of life. Trees and vegetation provide habitat for wildlife, mitigate the effects of the sun and wind, help to sequester carbon, thus reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide, reduce stormwater runoff and soil erosion and filter pollutants. These areas provide greenspace and corridors as well as improve air and water quality. Conservation Resources in Newton County are:

- Bert Adams Boy Scout Reservation
- Burge Plantation
- Factory Shoals Recreation Park
- Georgia Wildlife Federation/Alcovy Conservation Center
- Gaither Plantation
- Georgia FFA-FCCLA Center



The Alcovy Conservation Center, headquarters of the Georgia Wildlife Federation. *Photo: GWF*

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National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

www.nfwf.org

National Association of Counties

www.naco.org

Wildlife Habitat Council

www.wildlifehc.org

Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.gov

Southern Company

www.southerncompany.com

Newton County

www.co.newton.ga.us

The Conservation Fund

www.conservationfund.org

GA DNR Wildlife Resources Division

www.georgiawildlife.org

GA DNR Environmental Protection Division

www.gaepd.org

Oxford Institute For Environmental Education

www.emory.edu/OXFORD/OIEE/

Keep Covington/Newton Beautiful

www.kcnb.biz

Georgia FFA-FCCLA

www.georgiaffacamp.org

Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council

www.gaepc.org

The Georgia River Fishing

www.georgiariverfishing.com

Newton County Master Gardeners

www.hort.uga.edu/extension/mastergardener/

Air Conditioning Specialist, Inc.

www.theairconditioningspecialist.com

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