

## 5 Chattooga River

This float traverses the most doable section of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River, which forms the boundary between Georgia and South Carolina.

**County:** Rabun

**Start:** South Carolina Highway 28 River Access

N34° 54' 11.9", W83° 10' 54.0"

**End:** Earls Ford N34° 52' 32.9", W83° 13' 43.7"

**Length:** 7.0 miles

**Float time:** 4 hours

**Difficulty rating:** Moderate to difficult

**Rapids:** Class I-II, III (Big Shoals)

**River type:** Mountain whitewater river worthy of its Wild and Scenic designation

**Current:** Moderate to swift

**Gradient:** 11.2 feet per mile

**River gauge:** Chattooga River near Clayton; minimum runnable level 1.2 feet; maximum runnable level 3.0 feet

**Season:** April to November

**Land status:** Public—Chattahoochee National Forest; Sumter National Forest

**Fees or permits:** A free river float plan must be filed.

**Nearest city/town:** Clayton, Georgia

**Maps:** USGS: Satolah; DeLorme: *Georgia Atlas and Gazetteer*, page 16; USDA Forest Service: Chattooga Wild and Scenic River

**Boats used:** Decked kayaks, canoes, rafts

**Organizations:** Chattooga Conservancy, 2368 Pinnacle Drive, Clayton, GA 30525; (706) 782-6097; [www.chattoogariver.org](http://www.chattoogariver.org)

**Contacts/outfitters:** Wildwater Rafting, Ltd., P.O. Box 309, Long Creek, SC 29658; (800) 451-9972; [www.wildwaterrafting.net](http://www.wildwaterrafting.net)

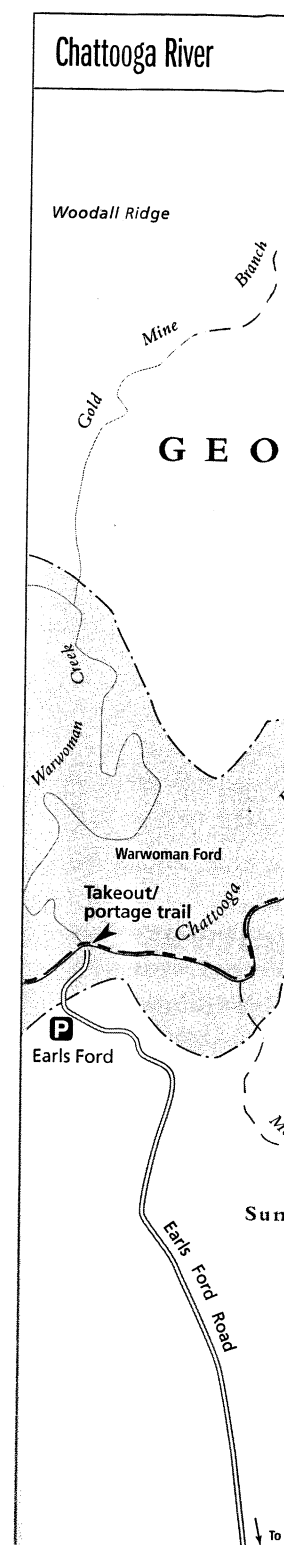
### Put-in/takeout information:

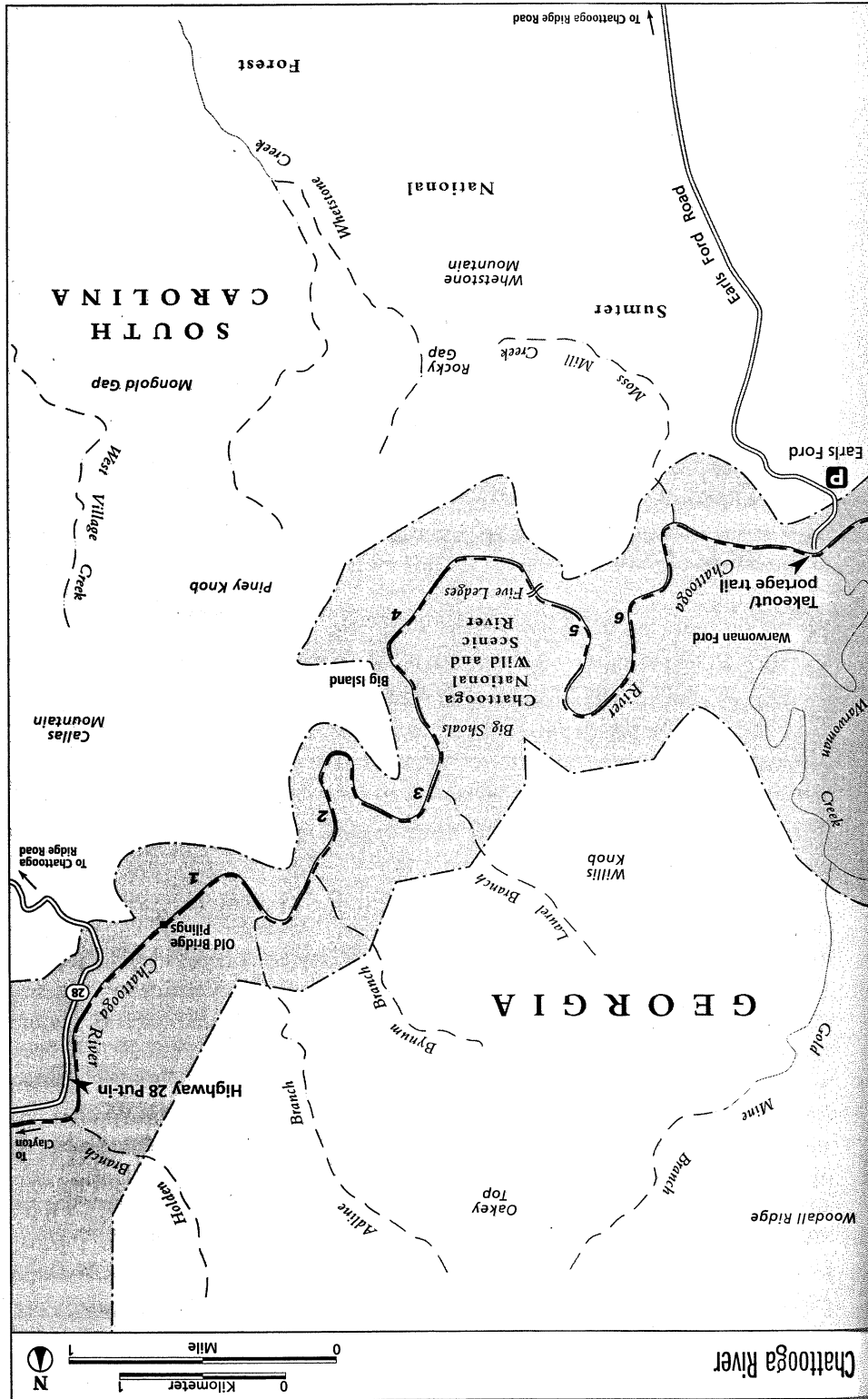
**To takeout:** From Clayton, just north of the intersection between U.S. Highways 76 and 441, take Warwoman Road for 14 miles east to Georgia Highway 28. Turn right onto GA 28 south. Cross the bridge over the Chattooga River at 2.1 miles. Continue on into South Carolina, now on SC 28, 1.5 miles further to the SC 28 river access. This is the put-in, so continue for 4.4 miles and turn right onto Chattooga Ridge Road. Follow Chattooga Ridge Road for 3.5 miles and turn right onto Earls Ford Road (South Carolina County Road 493). Follow Earls Ford Road for 3.9 miles to dead-end at the parking area.

**To put-in from takeout:** Backtrack on Earls Ford Road, then take a left onto Chattooga Ridge Road. Turn left onto SC 28 west and follow it to the SC 28 river access.

### Paddle Summary

The protected corridor of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River offers unspoiled mountain scenery at its finest. The trip is challenging for the novice paddler, although it is much tamer than sections of river downstream. That being said, this section does have several solid Class II rapids and one Class III rapid, Big Shoals. Be apprised that the takeout from the river at Earls Ford requires a 0.25-mile uphill carry up to the parking area.





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## River Overview

The Chattooga River deserves its Wild and Scenic designation, and then some. Culled from Georgia's Chattahoochee National Forest, the Nantahala National Forest of North Carolina, and the Sumter National Forest of South Carolina, this river corridor protects one of the most significant free-flowing streams in the Southeast. The river itself is 50 miles long. It starts in North Carolina then heads southwest for 40 miles, forming the Georgia-South Carolina border before meeting the Tallulah River and forming the Tugaloo River. The Chattooga is perhaps best known for being the backdrop of the Burt Reynolds's movie *Deliverance*. It was around this time, in 1974, that the Chattooga was designated a Wild and Scenic River—a place where rafters, canoers, kayakers, and anglers enjoy this valley of massive boulders, clear trout- and bass-filled waters, and deep forests.

The following section of river is the mildest in terms of rapids. Downstream, the following 20 miles of waterway—known as Sections 3 and 4—have rapids up to Class V and are known for both their challenging nature and extraordinary scenery. Additionally, the Wild and Scenic River corridor offers 36 miles of river hiking and more in adjacent national forestlands, which include the Ellicott Rock Wilderness.

## The Paddling

You can lengthen your trip by putting in at the SC 28 bridge, which crosses the Chattooga at the South Carolina-Georgia state line. This adds a little less than 2.0 miles to your paddle. The put-in is on the southwest side of the bridge. A trail leads down to the river. Be apprised that many anglers will be in the river around the bridge on nice days.

Make sure to file a float plan before you get on the river. You can file your float plan at either the put-in or the takeout. The SC 28 put-in has a steep concrete ramp that leads down to the rocky river. Here the Chattooga is about 50 to 60 feet wide, completely wooded with species such as mountain laurel, maple, and hemlock, the last unfortunately dying from hemlock woolly adelgid infestation.

A few houses line the South Carolina side for a bit. The clear water has a brownish tint, and in the shallows, pyrite—fool's gold—shimmers in the sandy shallows. The Bartram Trail, a footpath, runs along the Georgia bank, which is to your right as you travel downstream. The paddling is easy at first, with just a few minor shoals. At 0.8 mile pass the remnants of an old wooden bridge in a long, slack pool. As you make a curve to the right, you can look downstream directly at Oakey Top Mountain.

Islands border the river, which widens to more than 100 feet in places. Occasional logjams and sandbars accumulate on the river's edge. White and shortleaf pines tower high on the forested hills. The rapids remain Class I as you cruise downriver amid large boulders, especially at low water. At 2.4 miles the Chattooga goes over a small shoal then makes a nearly 180-degree turn to the right before reaching the first named shoal—Turn Hole Rapid. A nice high beach, suitable for camping, collects at

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the base of the rapid on river-right. It will also collect unwary paddlers. This rapid has several routes that change as the waters rise and fall, so stop and scout it before continuing downriver.

The river narrows, and several small smaller rapids lie between Turn Hole Rapid and Big Shoals, which you reach at 3.3 miles. Look for a pine island in the middle of the river, combined with a roar suitable for a Class III rapid. Large boulders line the river. You can paddle up to the boulders then scout your route over the fairly short rapid. Most paddlers go far right or far left and, at higher water, down the middle. Novices shouldn't be afraid to portage.

Once beyond Big Shoals, don't forget to look upstream for another view of Oakey Top. Below Big Shoals the river continues to divide into islands and the scenery remains magnificent. The longest island is appropriately called Big Island. Just below Big Island, look for the old Big Island ford that crosses the shallows here with roadbeds extending away from the Chattooga. A long pool ensues. Doghobble and mountain laurel grow in thickets along the river; white pines tower above the rest of the forest.

At 4.5 miles reach the Five Ledges Rapid. This Class II rapid has multiple ledges—and multiple routes. Two islands split the river amid the Five Ledges. Most paddlers stay to the right of the islands. Moderate shoals and superlative scenery continue. The Chattooga makes a hard curve to the right (west) at 6.4 miles, as Moss Mill Creek flows in from your left. Pass a few more islands downstream. You will recognize Earls Ford, as Warwoman Creek comes in on the right, just downstream of a large gravel bar on river-left. Now the real fun begins; a portage trail leads 0.25 mile to the takeout.

**THE RUSSELL FARMSTEAD** Near the site of the GA Highway 28 bridge was once the Cherokee village of Chatuga Old Town. This settlement took advantage of the flats among the steep mountains that rise from the Chattooga. This small Cherokee village consisted of no more than ten to fifteen homes with fewer than one hundred people living here. By the 1750s this Cherokee town had been abandoned, likely due to smallpox. The same flats beside the Chattooga proved alluring to the European settlers that came behind them. Today you can visit the Russell farmstead, located on the South Carolina side of the Chattooga between the GA 28 bridge and the put-in for this paddle. The farmstead is signed.

The Russell farmstead was a hub of activity—farm, stagecoach stop, and inn—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The historic site contains the foundations and remains of the Russell house and nine outbuildings, including barns, corncrib, springhouse, and pig farrow. The Russell farmsite was first settled in the 1820s by Ira Nicholson, but Union troops destroyed his house in 1864.