

## ***Chattooga River Trail (Lower Section) – Overview***

### **Chattooga River Trail – Lower Section**

**Distance:** 20.5 miles

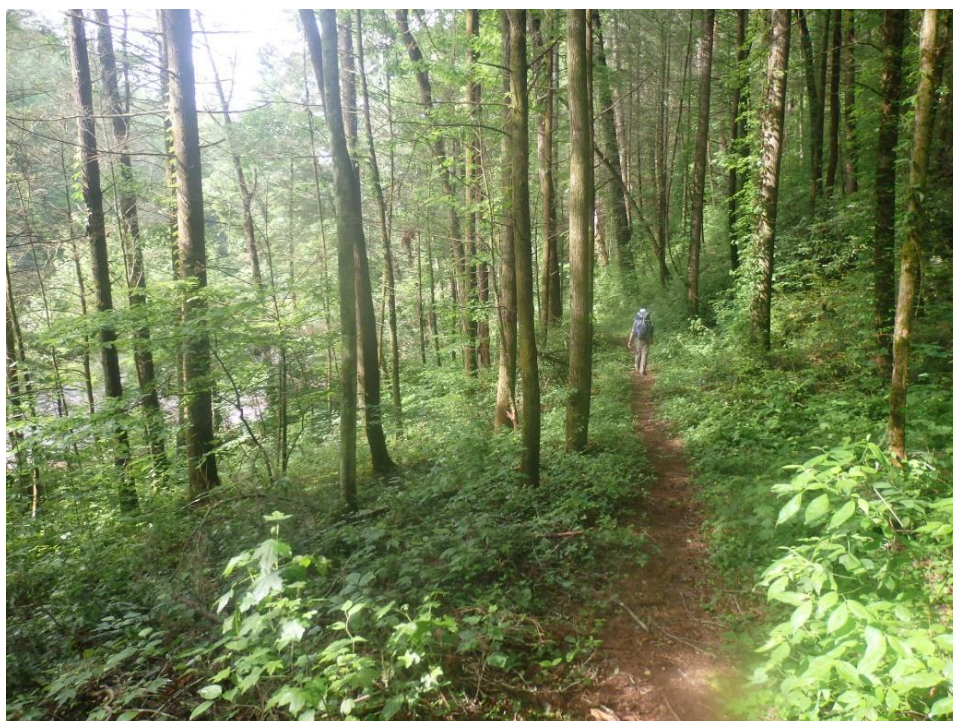
**Degree of Difficulty:** Easy to Moderate

**Directions to Trail Head:** From Highlands N.C., take Hwy 28 south for 14.2 miles to the parking area located just prior to crossing the bridge over the Chattooga River.

**Directions to Trail End:** From Clayton Georgia, take Highway 76 east out of Clayton and continue for 8.7 miles till you cross the Chattooga River, then turn left into the large parking lot.

The lower section of the Chattooga River Trail (CRT) is decidedly more tame and maybe a bit less interesting and scenic than the upper section, but it's the perfect trail for breaking in beginning backpackers or anyone that desires a great wilderness experience but doesn't want to work all that hard to get it. The trail is wide, not particularly rugged, and is very well maintained. Bridges span most of the creeks larger than what you can hop across and there are signs at most trail intersections with mileage and distance information. The trail alternates between hugging the river and paralleling it at higher elevations but elevation gains are relatively gentle and the trail is never more than a few hundred feet above the river.

You may see riders on horseback for the first 6 miles or so because this part of the CRT is included in a large network of equestrian trails on both sides of the river. The horses have caused some erosion on steeper trail sections but nothing that's all that bad. As easy and pleasant as this trail is it's surprising how few people use it. We hiked it over a Memorial Day Weekend and other than a couple small groups of backpackers, we only saw two parties of horseback riders and a few parties of day hikers on the section of trail between Dick's Creek Falls and the parking area for the falls.



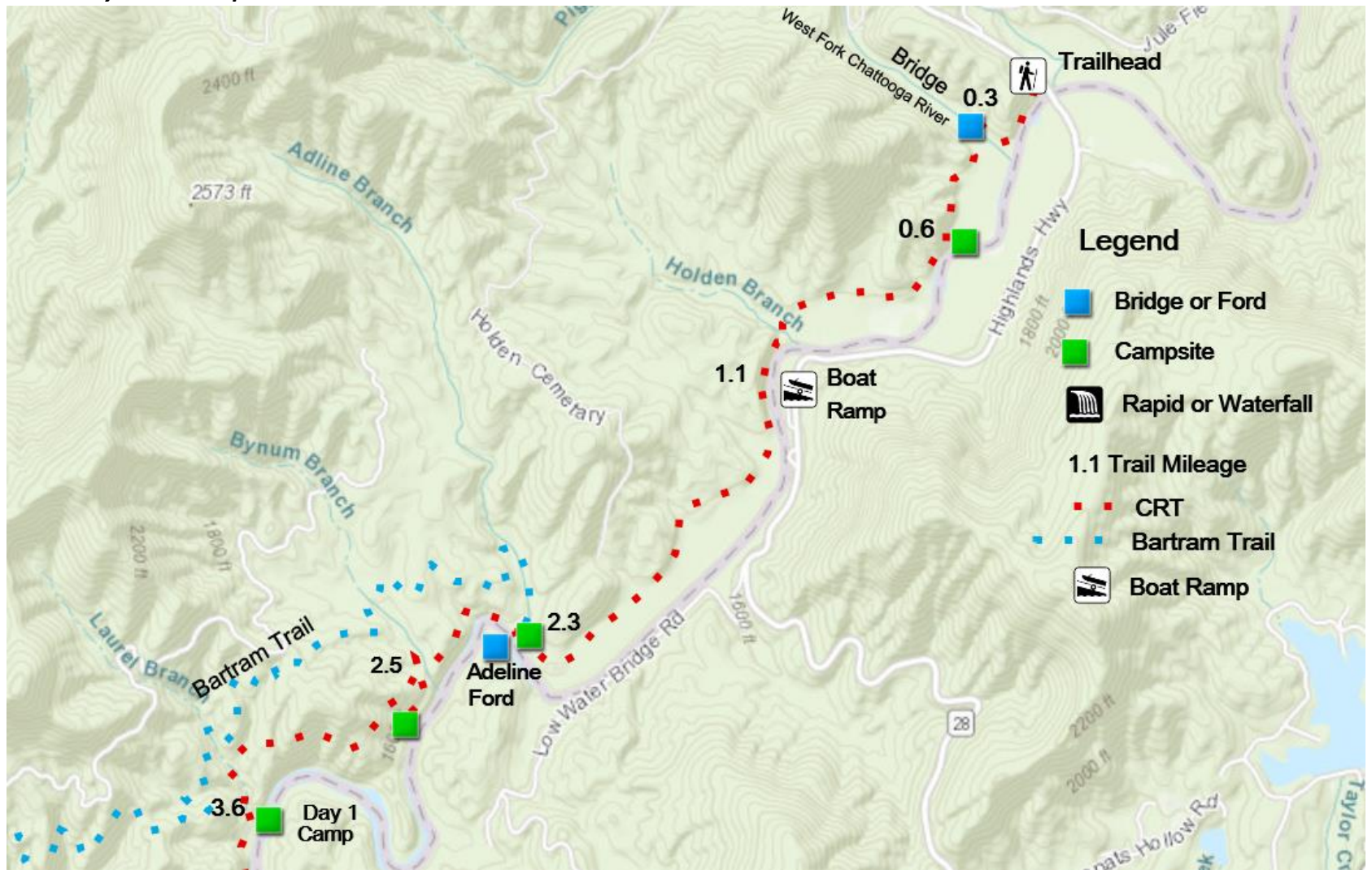
**Chattooga River Trail (Lower Section) – Trip Log**

**Day 1 - Friday, May 25, 2018**

**U.S. Highway 28 Trailhead to Campsite near Big Shoals Rapid**

**3.6 Miles**

**Day 1 Trail Map**





After the usual ten-hour drive from Florida, the WCBI contingent, consisting of Doc Livingston, the Madhatter and his son Coy, and Caver Joe and his son Cole, crossed the highway 76 bridge over the Chattooga River, and pulled in to the parking area at about 2:30 am Friday. The parking area is used by hikers starting and ending trips on the Chattooga River Trail (CRT), but its main purpose is parking for rafters, kayakers, and canoeists to end their trip on river section 3 or begin their trip on river section 4.



*Crashing in the Interpretive Center at the Chattooga River Parking Area*

There's a great trail that leads from the parking area about a half mile down to Bull Sluice, a very scenic class IV rapid, where people gather in large numbers to swim and watch boaters navigate the rapid, hoping with all their hearts that they will flip and dump their unhappy occupants into the cold, raging whitewater. Watching the panicked paddlers flail around as they try to get back to their crafts is highly entertaining and a great way to spend a summer afternoon.

Sleeping pads and bags were unpacked and the five hikers bedded down for what remained of the night in the three-sided interpretive center. They woke about 7:30 am, packed up, and were



*Group Photo at the Trailhead*

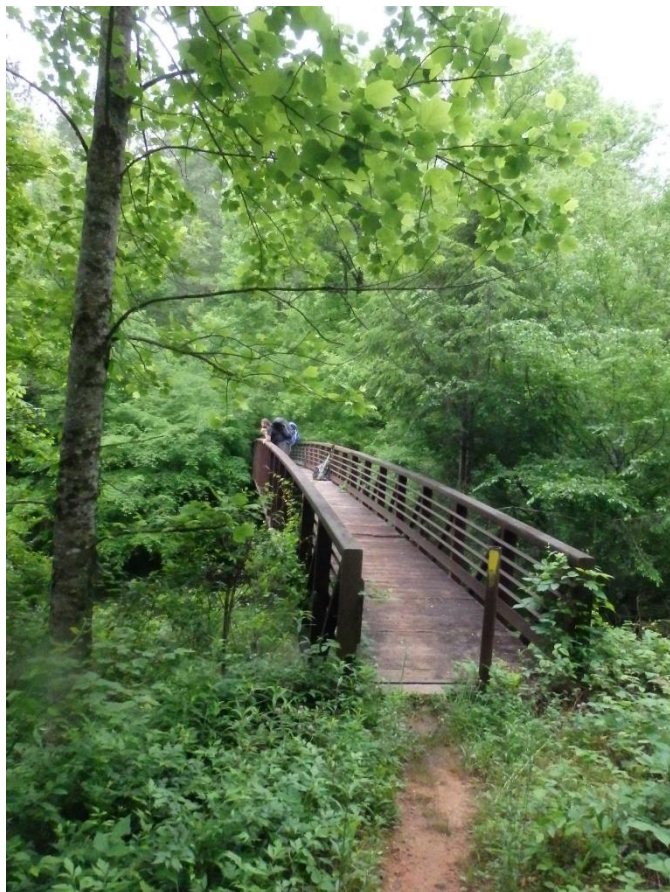
ready at 8:00 am, when "Taz" arrived to shuttle them to the trailhead. Doc first met Taz the previous year when he provided Doc's shuttle to the start of the Foothills Trail. He was something of a character with his fish tie over an old tee shirt and his signature gift of a hand-crafted alcohol stove made from a beer can.

The shuttle required only about 40 minutes, during which time Doc's interrogation of Taz revealed that it had been raining hard

for days and the Chattooga River was rising fast and nearing flood stage. They reached the trailhead on the Georgia side of the river and after Taz snapped a group photo, they were on their way.

The route of the CRT south of Highway 28 is shared for several miles with the Bartram Trail, which begins at Highway 28. The wide, relatively level floodplain they enjoyed for the first mile or so of their hike had a long history of settlement by both the Cherokees and white settlers. This was the site of Chattooga Town (see the Chattooga River Trail Overview).

The trail continued to follow the river within its broad, nearly-level floodplain and near mile 0.3, it swung west then crossed the West Fork of the Chattooga River on an elaborate steel bridge. The West Fork of the river flowed another tenth of a mile or so below the bridge before it merged with the Chattooga River. As they continued



*Crossing the West Fork of the Chattooga River*

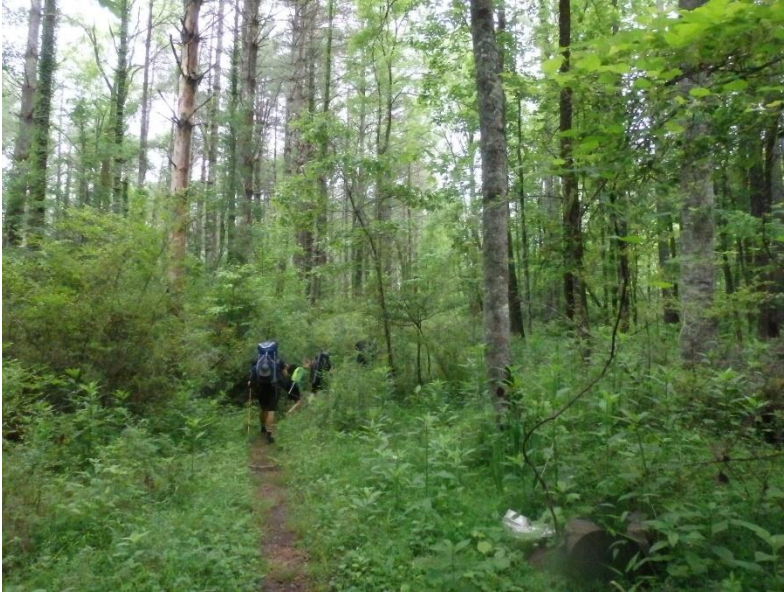
## The Bartram Trail

*The Bartram Trail runs for 116 miles through the mountains of Georgia and North Carolina. It roughly follows the route of William Bartram, a naturalist who explored the area in 1775-1776. Highlights of the trail include passage along several miles of the Chattooga River at roughly 1,500 feet, crossing Wayah Bald in North Carolina at 5,385 feet, and passage through the small town of Franklin, North Carolina.*

through the floodplain that was rapidly transitioning from farmed fields to forest, Doc thought about all the generations of Cherokees and white farmers who had lived and worked in the area for possibly thousands of years, and now there was very little trace that they had ever existed.

At mile 0.6 they crossed a small stream, then passed a campsite on a bluff overlooking the river. At mile 1.1 they passed the steep ramp for the canoe, kayak, and raft launch on the opposite side of the river adjacent to Highway 28. Soon they passed a couple of large pieces of abandoned farm equipment, possibly from the 1930s or 40s, that appeared to be for cutting and bailing hay.





### **Farmland Transitioning to Forest**

At mile 2.3 they reached a trail intersection near Adaline Ford. The trail to the right was the Bartram Trail, which ascends a few hundred feet to a ridgeline. It parallels the CRT, which stays relatively close to the river for the next several miles. From Adaline Ford to Earl's Ford, the CRT is part of a network of trails that are used by horseback riders. They took the trail to the left to stay on the CRT and after a few hundred feet, reached another intersection. Continuing straight ahead led to the ford of the Chattooga River that riders take to access trails



**Not to Worry – Cell Service is only 4.3 Miles away!**

## William Bartram

William Bartram was one of the first naturalists of early America. His *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida* (1773 – 1777), provided unparalleled descriptions of the plants, animals, and native American inhabitants of the region.

In 1775, Bartram crossed what he called the “delightful Chattooga River” near War Woman Creek. In 1776, he traveled through the present-day Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina, where he often encountered the Cherokee. He described his meeting with Chief Atakullakulla and visits to many Cherokee villages.

on the South Carolina side. Doc walked to the ford where he chatted with a family fishing in the river. They had a very small boy who explained that he had



given his puppies a bath and proudly directed Docs attention to where his stuffed canines were drying in the sun.

They took a right turn to stay on the CRT and passed a large campsite where the family was camping. The site was obviously designed for horseback riders due to the metal hitching rail and the unusual trail sign promising cell phone service a few miles further up the trail. They assumed this was an essential piece of

knowledge for trail riders since they had never come across such a sign on any trail they could remember.



*Climbing Up from a Tributary Crossing*

At mile 2.5, they reached an intersection where the left fork of the trail led several hundred yards to a large riverside campsite. They took a break at the campsite, then trekked back to the intersection and took the right fork to continue on the CRT. The trail left the river at this point and



*View from Day 1 Campsite*

followed the side of a ridge a few hundred feet above the river for about a mile. The trail began descending and at mile 3.6 they were again hiking along the river and soon reached a good riverside campsite. Even though it was only a bit after noon, they decided to set up camp because they wanted the first day for the boys to be easy and everyone was tired from the lack of sleep from the trip up the night before. Doc jumped in the river to get cleaned up, Coy broke out his fly fishing rod, and



everyone else set up camp. After a quick lunch, they were forced into their tents when a gentle rain began and continued for the next few hours.

The rain ended around 5:00 pm and they exited their tents and began preparing dinner and collecting firewood. After a leisurely meal and cleanup, Doc began to think about starting a campfire. Starting a fire with wood that is thoroughly soaked is a real challenge and Doc had to call up his vast store of fire starting



*Setting Up Camp*

skills to coax the wood to burn. To make it even more difficult, he was hampered by the boys who were attracted to anything to do with fire like Homer Simpson is attracted to doughnuts. They piled log-size wood on Doc's carefully constructed twig and kindling pile, which he politely removed, then revealed to them his most effective fire-starting secrets, which he always referred to as "old indian tricks." After several failed attempts to get the fire going, the exasperated Doc resorted to his box of fire-starting chemicals, sheepishly telling the boys that cheating was their only option.



*Venturing out after the Storm*

The boys explained to Doc that Indians could start a fire with wet wood in the rain without relying on chemical fire starters. Doc replied that the Indian's ability to produce a fire by rubbing two sticks together or sparking tinder from flint and a steel tomahawk was most certainly over rated, and he would have to see a demonstration to believe it was possible.

Although it took a while, the wood pile caught and soon



the group was sitting around a big fire drying their wet clothes and enjoying the cheer the fire brought to the soggy campsite.

Perhaps Doc's disparaging comment about the Indians displeased the Great Spirit because about 15 minutes later the skies opened up without the usual prelude of sprinkling or distant thunder. This caused them to bolt like a flock of disturbed turkeys to cover gear and dash to their tents for the night. Needless to say, the fire was soon quenched and all the effort put in to wood collecting and fire starting had been in vain. The rain continued on and off for most of the night but they all managed to stay dry and comfortable.



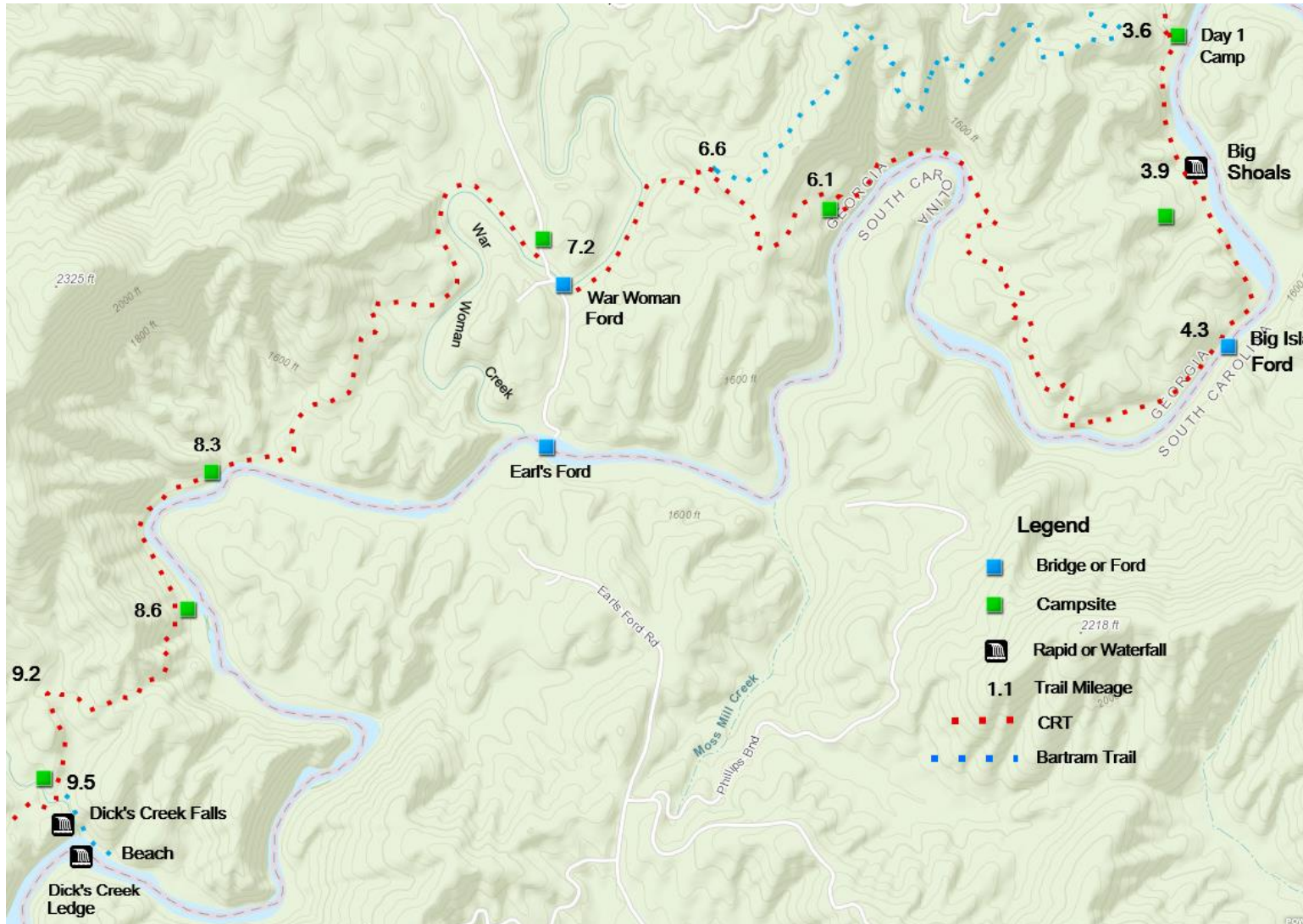


# Chattooga River Trail (Lower Section) – Trip Log

Day 2 - Saturday, May 26, 2018

Campsite near Big Shoals Rapid to Riverside Campsite at Buckeye Creek - 9.2 Miles

## Day 2 Trail Map, Part 1





They awoke the next morning to overcast skies with only occasional light sprinkles of rain, so they were able to stay relatively dry while eating breakfast and packing up. Camp was broken around 10:00 am and they soon reached Big Shoals Rapid and its riverside campsite. This is a Class II/ III rapid depending on the water level and is the first rapid of significant size encountered on the river.



***Big Shoals Rapid***

The trail continued to hug the river and at mile 4.3

they reached Big Island Ford. Years before, Doc and the Hatter had camped near here for a couple of days and did day hikes all through the area, crossing the Chattooga River at the fords and puzzling out the complex and lengthy network of horse and hiking trails.

They continued hiking along the River, leaving it briefly for a foray along a ridge, then returned to it before reaching a trail intersection at mile 6.1. The left fork continued along the river and reached Earl's Ford in 2.8 miles. They took the right fork to stay on the CRT, which took them



***Trail Junction at Big Island Ford***

away from the river and up an eroded trail, three tenths of a mile to a ridge crest in the War Woman Creek watershed. At the crest there was a sign where the Bartram Trail rejoined the CRT after leaving it at Adaline Ford the day before. There was yet another sign indicating that here one could access the cell phone service promised since the start of the hike. They almost felt



obligated to make a call because the sign makers had made such an effort to inform them of their ability to do so.

The group turned left, descended an eroded trail, and after 0.5 miles, reached Earl's Ford Road. Once on the road, Doc realized they had somehow taken a wrong turn and were no longer on the CRT. He remembered that the last time he and the Hatter had taken this trail, they had crossed



War Woman Creek on an ***Heading to the Ridge Crest on an Eroded Horse Trail*** elaborate steel bridge before reaching Earl's Ford Road. Doc speculated that maybe they'd needed to take the right fork at the sign on the ridge crest a half mile back to stay on the CRT. Fortunately, the wrong turn had not taken them far from the CRT. They simply had to turn right

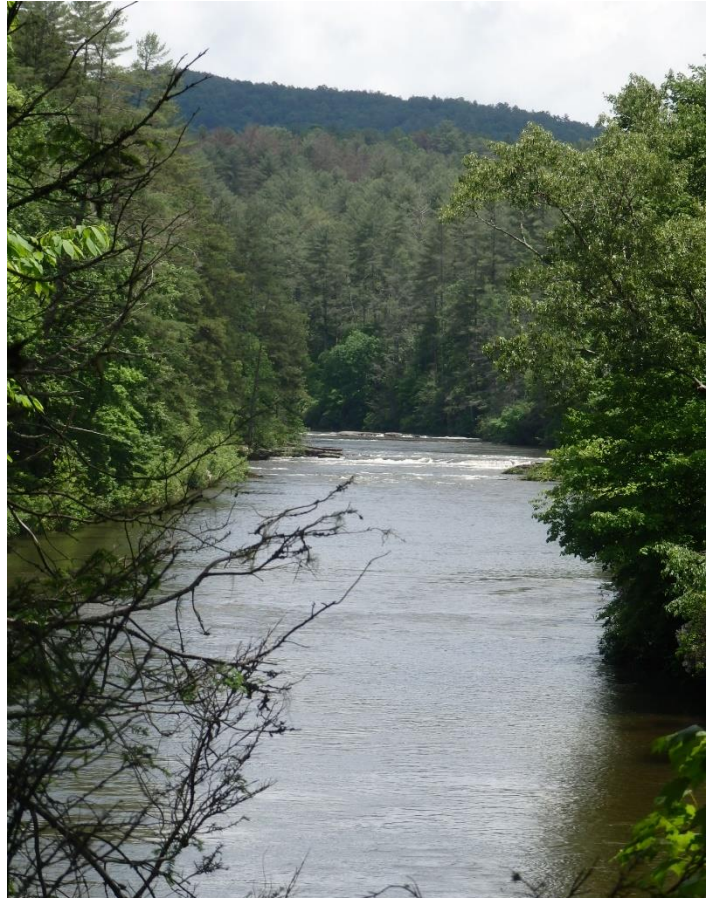


***Fording War Woman Creek***

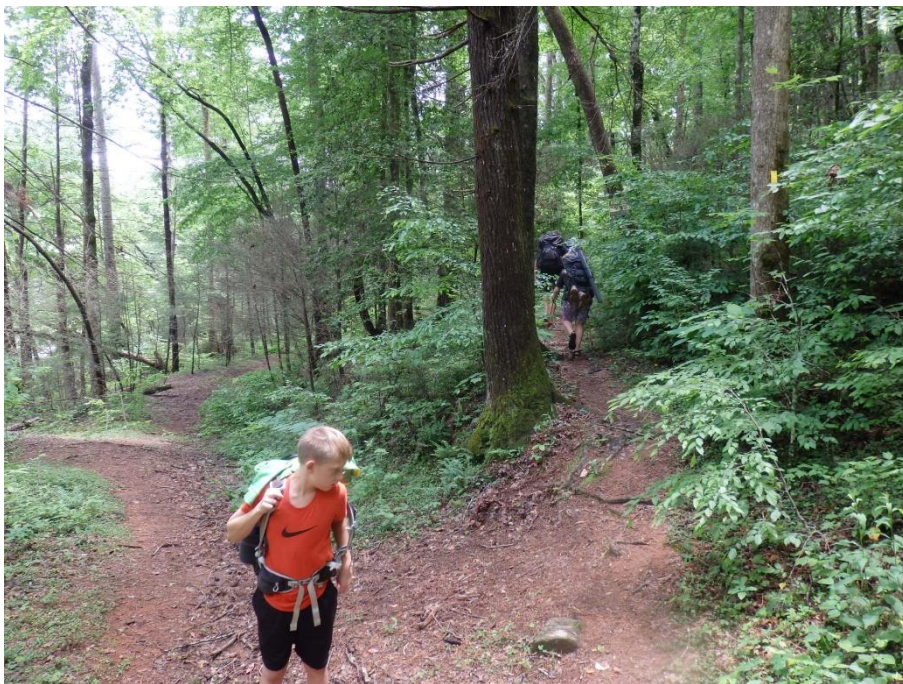


on Earl's Ford Road and hike a few hundred feet to a ford across War Woman Creek (a left turn here led about a quarter mile down to Earl's Ford on the Chattooga River). Under normal circumstances this was a beautiful little ford with crystal clear water that was ankle deep and only about 30 feet across. But the abundant rainfall had caused the creek to swell to several times its normal depth and width and turn the color of coffee so that the bottom was obscured. Because the creek was now hip deep for the boys, the adults carried their packs so they could cross unhindered by the extra weight.

Once across, they put their boots back on and walked up the creek bank, encountering the CRT within a few tens of feet. They entered a large campsite above the river where several horseback riders were dismounted, studying a map. After chatting with the riders for a few minutes, the group continued on the CRT as it progressively ascended above War



*Back to the Chattooga River*



*Leaving the River at the Big Campsite*

Woman Creek then turned away and continued to ascend for a short distance before descending to the Chattooga River. They reached the river at mile 8.3 and paralleled it, passing a couple of good riverside campsites. At mile 8.6, they passed an especially large campsite and just beyond it, the CRT turned away from the river and began ascending moderately. The trail soon leveled out and at mile 9.2



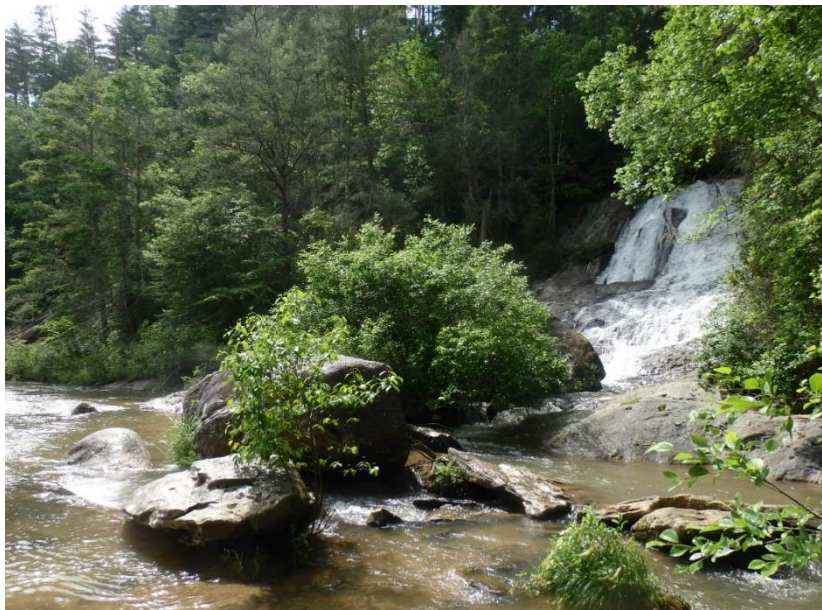
they reached an intersection with a forest road and turned left to stay on the CRT. After a couple hundred feet they came to a side trail that crossed Dick's Creek over a small bridge. They took the side trail and descended about a quarter mile along Dick's Creek, which picked up speed and was soon lost from view as it plunged over the lip of a steep drop where it became Dick's Creek Falls. They carefully picked their way over the bare, wet rock and upon reaching the edge of the falls, they were treated to a



*At the Lip of Dick's Creek Falls overlooking Dick's Creek Ledge on the Chattooga River*

spectacular panorama. Below, the falls splashed 50 feet over a series of ledges into the Chattooga River. In the distance the river appeared from around a bend and flowed toward them, cascading with a roar over Dick's Creek Ledge, a low wall of river-spanning rocks about 150 feet wide. At the base of the ledge, the river took a 90-degree turn and headed off to the southwest.

Beyond the falls, the trail descended a short distance then headed upstream along the Chattooga



*Dick's Creek Falls Dropping into the Chattooga River*

River, past Dick's Creek ledge, to a wide sandy beach a few hundred feet further on. Here they watched as two kayakers passed and disappeared over the horizon line that marked where the river dropped over the ledge. They ate lunch and swam and were soon joined by a couple groups of day hikers.

After an hour they packed up and returned the way they had come, uphill past the falls and back to the CRT. A number of good campsites were located





*Dick's Creek Ledge on the Chattooga River*



*Kayakers Heading Down River below Dick's Creek Ledge*



in the area that would be ideal for backpackers wanting to spend more time at the falls. They crossed Dick's Creek on a sturdy new bridge, where years earlier Doc recalled seeing an earlier version of the bridge lying mangled in the creek; a testament to the power that even small creeks can attain when fueled by hundred-year storms.

At mile 9.8, they reached a fork in the trail where the CRT and Bartram Trails parted company for good.

Here the Bartram Trail makes its way to the Georgia/North Carolina line, then to its end at Cheoah Bald on the Appalachian Trail in North Carolina, for a total length of 115 miles.

On just about every trip the WCBI seems to come across a person or group of people that are sort of outlying souls on the bell-curve of humanity. On this trip the encounter occurred shortly beyond the CRT/Bartram Trail intersection. They first passed a barefoot and shirtless young boy who was soon followed by a woman who looked like a flower child just returning from Woodstock

in 1969. She had straight waist-length hair and was wearing a long wispy dress that reached her ankles and her feet were clad in some type of flimsy, woven footwear. Close behind her came a barefoot man wearing a bathing suit who looked like he had just climbed out of his backyard pool. They were exceedingly friendly and grateful for our directions to the falls but as we passed, they looked expectantly down the trail the way they had come as if waiting for



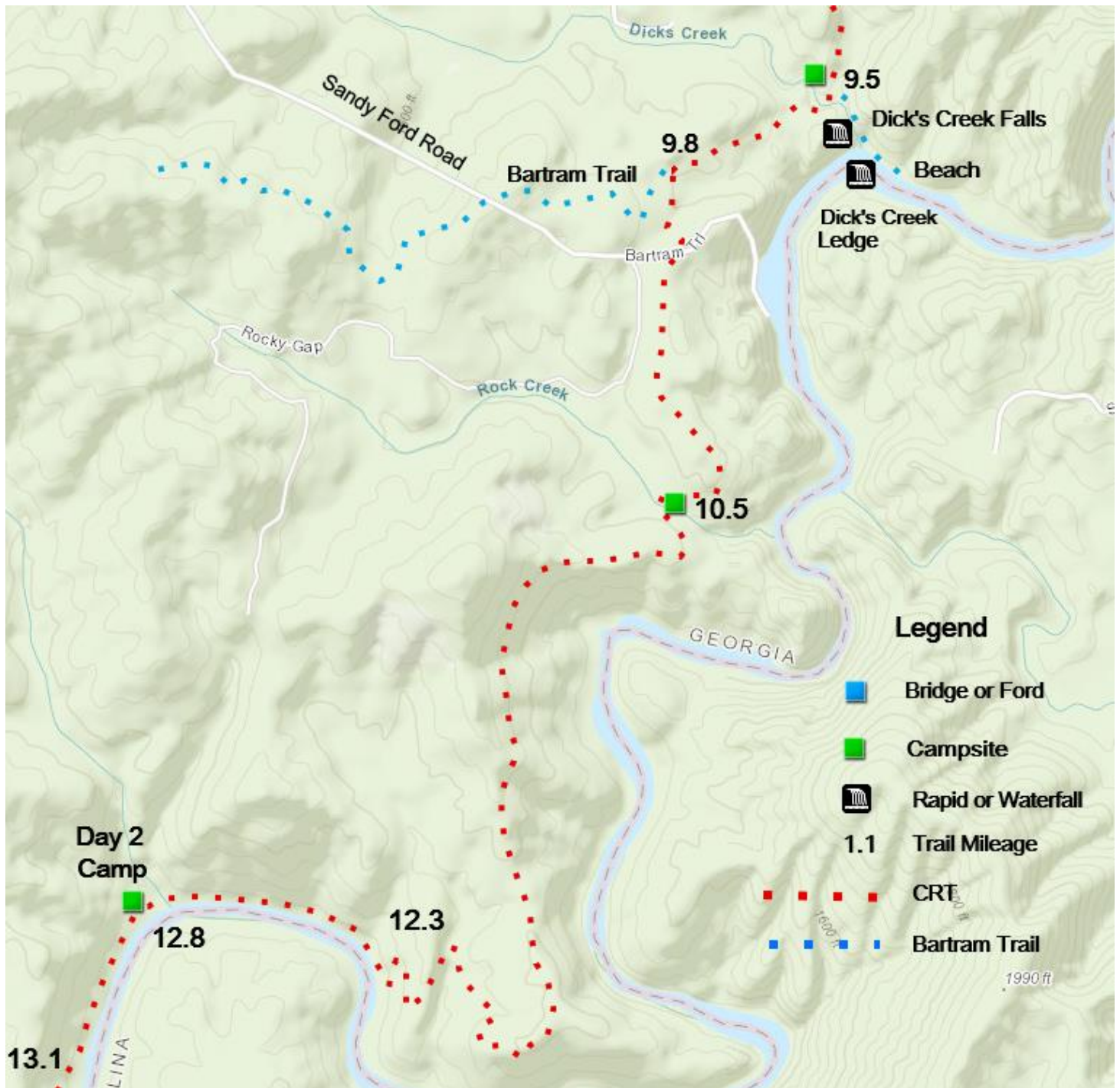
*The Beach above Dick's Creek Ledge*



*New Bridge over Dick's Creek; a Replacement for One Carried off in a Flood*

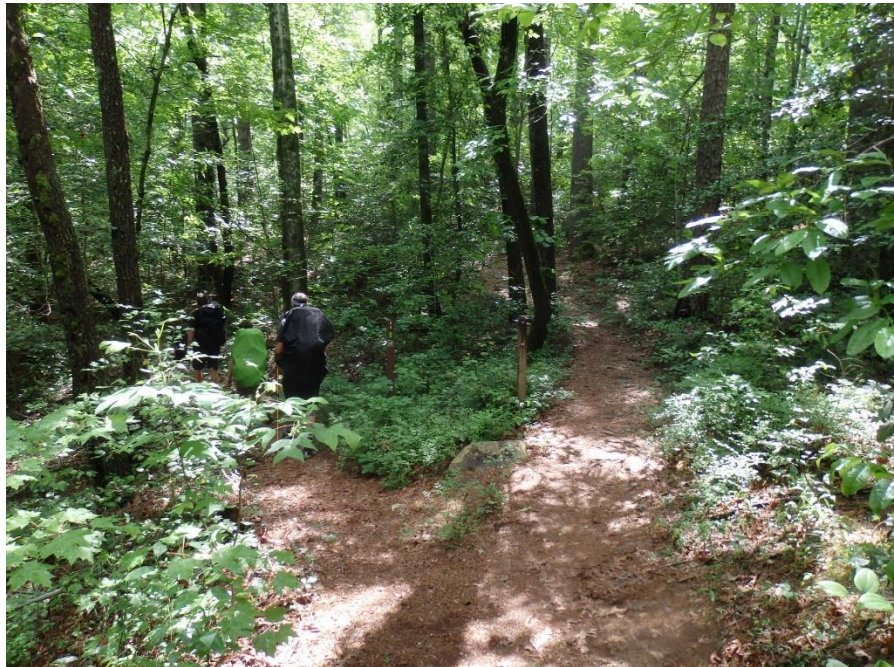


## Day 2 Trail Map, Part 2





another child. What appeared instead was a snow-white cat creeping cautiously after them. What was most interesting about this group was that they had come a few tenths of a mile from Sandy Ford Road where they said their car was parked. So by the time they completed their journey out and back to the falls, both human and feline hikers would have traversed a couple miles of rugged, rocky terrain, virtually unencumbered by protective footwear.



*The Bartram Trail Heading off to the Right for North Carolina*

At mile 10.0 they Crossed Sandy Ford Road and rested in the Dick's Creek Falls parking lot. From the parking lot it was about 0.3 miles to the Chattooga River down Sandy Ford Road. They began a moderate ascent out of the parking lot and climbed for a half mile before leveling off a few hundred feet above the river. They started a long gradual descent through an impressive open forest where the trail cut back on itself as it wrapped around deep ravines. The trail descended around a couple of switchbacks and at mile 12.3 they reached the river, which they paralleled for



*The Hatter and Coy Navigating the Winding Trail through Steep Ravines*

about a half mile before crossing roaring Buckeye Creek on a sturdy bridge. Just past the bridge was a good riverside campsite at mile 12.8. While the others set up camp, Doc found a path down the steep bank to the river to clean up. He took off his sweat-soaked clothes and plunged into the icy water. Just as he was climbing out he heard voices and looked up in time to see two kayaks floating rapidly toward him. The paddlers were both women so Doc submerged back into the water to avoid causing them



any undue fright from an unintentional flashing of his body. He waved and wondered what they were doing on the river so late and so far from any access points where they could take out. They must have wondered too about a lone naked man in the water with no sign of companions or campsite.



*Caver Joe and Cole Crossing Buckeye Creek*



*Day 2 Riverside Campsite*



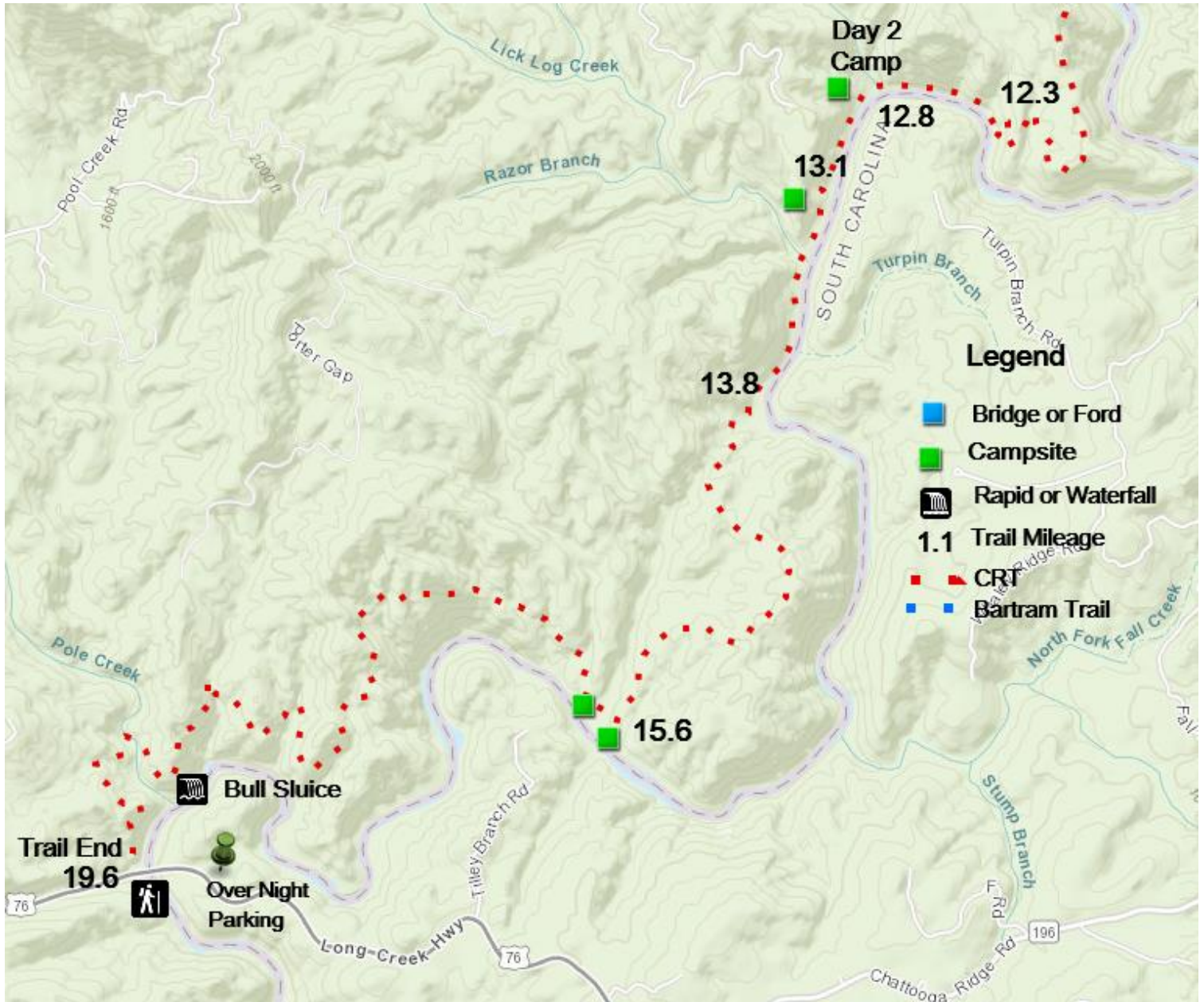
**Lower Chattooga River – Trip Log**

**Day 3 - Sunday, May 27, 2018**

**Campsite near Buckeye Creek to U.S. Highway 76 Parking Area**

**6.8 Miles**

**Day 3 Trail Map**



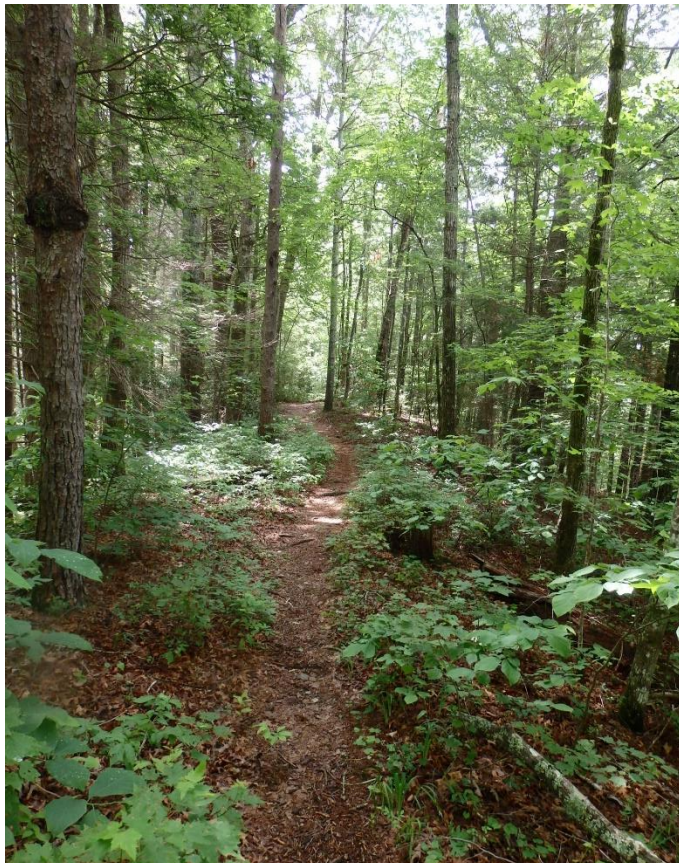


The group woke to a misty morning with the rain-swollen river rushing noisily along at a rapid pace. It had risen at least 6 inches overnight and once again Doc found himself flooded (pardon the pun) with relief that the only crossing of the river on the menu for the day was via the U.S. Highway 76 Bridge at the end of the hike.



*Morning Hike Along the River*

The sun broke through the clouds just as they broke camp and they walked along the river through patches of sunshine, watching it rush past a dozen feet below. At mile 13.1 they crossed a trail that led a short distance to the Lick Log



*Following the Crest of a Ridge High above the Chattooga River*

Creek Forest Service Road. This road winds tortuously for many miles to Sandy Ford Road and it could provide access to this portion of the CRT assuming no locked gates or other obstructions bar the way. Soon after they crossed Lick Log Creek and passed another good riverside campsite.

At approximately mile 13.8 the trail left the river and began climbing moderately until it crossed near the summit of an unnamed peak. It then descended back to the river at mile 15.6. The trail followed the river for less than a half mile, passing two nice riverside campsites before again leaving it, not to return till the highway bridge crossing at the end of the hike.

For the next few miles, they experienced the usual moderate ascents and descents as the trail followed ridge lines several hundred feet above the river, occasionally enjoying slivers of vistas of the Chattooga River Valley below. For the last couple of miles, they hiked along the sides of very



steep drainages, crossing tumbling streams on well-maintained bridges. There were numerous campsites in this section, many of which were located at the creek crossings.

They began hearing traffic noises as they neared the highway and passed a couple of unmarked trails that probably led down to the river. At mile 19.6 they broke out of the forest and turned east along U.S. Highway 76, leaving Georgia and crossing into South Carolina on the bridge over



*The Highway 76 Bridge*

the Chattooga River. The bridge has a walkway isolated from the busy traffic lanes that people use to walk down from the parking area to view the river.

As Doc stood on the bridge he thought back to the first time he'd experienced the Chattooga River when he started a rafting trip here. He could still remember the excitement and apprehension he felt as he was about to experience this unknown and mysterious river that had been made famous by the movie "Deliverance" just a few years before. Since then, dozens of kayak and backpacking

trips had turned the Chattooga into an old and familiar friend, but he smiled when he realized that he still experienced some of the excitement that 20-year old kid felt when he first saw the river over 40-years before.



*Last View of the River*

He turned and followed his companions over the bridge and as he climbed the long staircase that led to the parking area, he wondered how long it would be till his next journey on the magical Chattooga River.





*Bull Sluice Rapid*