Paddling the Trail

In this section of the Bayou Macon, the landscape subtly changes as the Macon Ridge becomes less prominent and the forest becomes drier and thicker with locusts, sycamores, cottonwoods and willows. Some of the land is used for grazing cattle. Some tallow trees are found along the banks, and more and more swamp-like vegetation can be seen from the canoe.

Continuing down the bayou past the boat ramp, the river opens up noticeably, and the current lessens, partly due to some dredging and channelization done in the 1960s. You will start seeing more and more waders – the water-loving class of birds that includes white pelicans, herons, egrets, storks, roseate spoonbills and anhinga. Bald eagles have been sighted here, as well as osprey and harriers. As you paddle along, watch carefully for old oxbows of the Bayou Macon that were isolated during channelization.

At most water levels you can paddle into one of these lakes for a view of classic Deep South scenery – Spanish moss draped cypress trees full of egrets and waters thick with turtles, snakes and that most famous of all southern amphibians, the American alligator. Big gators have been seen in these oxbows. Caution: Children especially should stay in their vessels. Watch your pets, if you are carrying any. You will pass four oxbows, one at mile 13.5, one at 14.1, one at 14.7 and the largest at 15.5. The first and last are accessible in the water at medium to high water levels, but the middle two have been incorporated into Poverty Point Lake and cut off by the levee.

Along a wooded bend of the river at mile 15.5 you will paddle past the four cabins of Poverty Point Reservoir State Park that overlook the Bayou Macon. These cabins can be rented but they are popular sites, so make your reservations well in advance.

Other constructed landmarks in this section of the bayou include a high-voltage transmission line (mile 15.5), an oil pipeline, a natural gas pipeline and several openings through the woods on the west bank where you could clamber up the levee and get a view across the reservoir.

Paddling around the last bend in this section at mile 18 you will see the Highway 80 bridge downstream and should start making plans for your final approach. Beware: There is a dangerous weir not far below this take-out. The boat ramp is under the bridge to your right (north bank). You will see a stout pier sticking out into the channel that you can tie your vessel to if you don’t want to run it up the ramp.

Acknowledgements:
Northwest Louisiana: Outdoor Series is a project of the LSU AgCenter’s agritourism program. www.lsuagcenter.com/agritourism
Trail Curator is John Rayley, Opelousas Canoe Co. Photos by John Rayley and Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

Lodging Along the Trail
Poverty Point Reservoir State Park has cabins overlooking Bayou Macon with a giant lake on the other side. Rent a cabin and make several day trips from these beautiful cabins with large screened porches. There is great birding on the lake and on this lower section of Bayou Macon.

Poverty Point State Park
1500 Poverty Point Parkway, Delhi, La. 71232
318-877-7530 or 800-444-0030 (toll free)
For reservations, call 877-CAMP-N-LA or 877-226-7652 (toll free)
Email: povertypointres@crt.la.gov

www.louisianadeltaadventures.com
www.louisianapaddle.com

www.tourism.northeastla.com
www.tourism.northeastla.org

Northeast Louisiana: Outdoor Series
Bayou Macon Paddling Trail

Getting There:
Poverty Point Reservoir State Park
1300 Poverty Point Parkway, Delhi, La. 71232
318-878-7536 or 800-474-0392 (toll free)
Email: povertypointres@crt.la.gov

From Interstate 20, take the Delhi exit and go north approximately 9 miles to the park entrance.
GPS Coordinates: N 32.28456, W 91.47583
Nearest Towns:
Delhi, La.
Epis, La.
Lake Providence, La.
Old Greaves, La.
Batiste, La.
Monroe, La.
Vidalia, La.

Skill Level
If you are a beginning paddler, you could go straight to the Poverty Point Reservoir State Park ramp and make a round-trip paddle of any distance. Park your vehicle at the ramp and paddle upstream as far as you want, then turn around and paddle back with the river's flow helping you return.

This flat water paddle has no topography changes. The 6.5 miles has no stairs or blocks of any sort. It can be run at any water level, but check with park officials about any possible local changes.

As with all southern rivers, water levels can vary on Bayou Macon and will have significant effects on water speed, safety and usability.

Note: There is a dangerous unmarked low-head dam (or weir) not far downstream of the U.S. Highway 80 bridge. There is no concern during low water, but it could be catastrophic in fast water.

Trail Length
This 6.5 mile paddle is perfect for beginners.

Beginners can count on making 1-2 miles per hour. Advanced paddlers can go 2-3 miles per hour. Of course, the strongest paddlers can go even faster. Regardless, check the mileage of your route and make sure you have enough time for your ability.

River Levels

To see www.Flowsage.com and view the river gauge for Como, La., for the best indications of river conditions in this section of river. Como is south of this section, so what you see on the charts will already have happened on the river in this area. Low water (too shallow) is below 16 on the Como Gauge (which means dropping through shallows) and mud flats might be necessary!

Ideal level: 40-50 on the Como gauge. Above 55 on the Como gauge, the current will be swift, and caution is advised. Flood stage is 62 on the Como gauge. During the hot, dry months of the summer and fall, regional farmers depend on Bayou Macon for irrigation, which sometimes affects local water levels.

Historical Water Levels:
Looking at data for the Bayou Macon from the past 10 years, the river typically runs around 16 feet on the Como gauge – with spikes due to rainfall and runoff, sometimes spiking up to 60 feet or higher. Bank full is at 62 feet, a level that has reached only twice in the past 10 years. During the Mississippi River flood of 2011, Bayou Macon stayed high for several months because of the amount of water seeping under the levee and emerging in all of the oxbow lakes, bayous and drainages, such as Chiost Lake, Ark., where Bayou Macon is born.

What You Will See on Trail
Possible wildlife sightings include wild turkey, white-tailed deer and lots of birds, especially egrets, pelicans, woodpeckers, blue jays and kingfishers. Be on the lookout for waders such as pelicans, herons, egrets, storks, mute swans and anhinga.

The best time to view animals is either early in the morning or late in the day. The best times for feeding really include all times of the day but are especially good around dawn and dusk.

Paddling Tips
Carry plenty of drinking water during the summer and fall months to prevent dehydration. During the winter months, carry extra warm clothing as well as an emergency kit including fire-starting materials. Hypothermia is a risk during the winter.

Always pack your overnight gear just in case you have an unexpected delay (such as severe thunderstorm or medical emergency). This paddle is through a remote, rural area with few services.

Watch for poisonous plants and venomous snakes.

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