Choctawhatchee Challenge
March 10-16, 2018

Start: Robert Fowler Memorial Park, Geneva, AL
End: Cowford Landing at Hwy 20 near Ebro, FL
Total Distance: 73 miles

Trip Fee: Includes camping, meals, and shuttle.
- $575/adults
- $550/seniors (65+) and college students
- $525/youth 8-17
- free/children under 8

Registration Deadline: February 24, 2018 or when trip capacity of 60 paddlers is reached

Shuttle Details: Paddlers will leave their vehicles at the launch point in Geneva, AL for the duration of the trip. At the trip’s conclusion, paddlers and their boats and gear will be shuttled back to Geneva. There is no parking option at the trip’s end point.

Trip Itinerary:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Lunch Stop</th>
<th>Miles to Lunch</th>
<th>Camp Site</th>
<th>Miles for Day</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Robert Fowler Memorial Park</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>At campsite</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>East Pittman Creek Landing</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Baker Landing Ramp</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>US 90/Carrville Landing</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cedar Log Landing (new)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Morrison Springs Park</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Morrison Springs Park</td>
<td>0-3.5</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Jenkins Landing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>River Run Resort</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>END: Cowford Landing</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Total Paddling Miles:</td>
<td>73-76.5</td>
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The Choctawhatchee River is Florida’s fourth longest river, traveling approximately 170 miles from its headwaters in Alabama through Florida (for 96 miles) into Choctawhatchee Bay in the Gulf of Mexico. This alluvial river encompasses a broad flood plain that nourishes farmland and old growth hardwood forests. Among its secrets are at least 13 springs, a history of pirates, and rumors of the elusive Ivory-billed Woodpecker hidden among the wetlands. The river, the bay, and their adjacent watersheds collectively drain 5,350 square miles.

The Choctawhatchee Challenge is a journey into the heart of Wild Florida where wildlife far outnumber humans. We will be extending our adventure about five miles north of the Florida border to launch in Geneva, Alabama and paddle a 73-mile stretch to Cowford Landing near Ebro, Florida. The Choctawhatchee provides habitat for an array of native wildlife, with several endangered plant and animal species, including the federally threatened Gulf Sturgeon. We will paddle beside a broad floodplain dotted with old growth hardwood forests and a few sparkling springs whose clear waters mingle with the tea-colored flow of this majestic river.
Day 1/Saturday, March 10: Robert Fowler Memorial Park in Geneva, AL

Paddling Miles: 0

We’ll be kicking off our week “north of the border” at Robert Fowler Memorial Park in Geneva, Alabama. Paddlers will check in between 1-5PM and set up tents prior to the kick-off dinner and orientation for the paddling adventure to come. Throughout the week, dinner will be served at 6PM each night, followed by an evening program at 7PM. Nightly entertainment ranges from musicians to educational speakers who will provide insights regarding the flora, fauna, history, and ecology of the region we’re paddling through. Be sure to bring a camera to capture and preserve some great moments.

Located at the junction of the Choctawahatchee and Pea Rivers, Robert Fowler Memorial Park is home of one of the largest and oldest live oaks in Alabama and the location for the annual Geneva Festival on the Rivers. Park amenities include a public boat landing, canoe ramp, pier, pond, RV sites, playground, bathroom and showers, food pavilion, cook house, and picnic tables.

Geneva has a rich history as a river town. It was founded by Henry A. Yonge in the early 1820s as an Indian trading post at the junction of these the Choctawhatchee and Talakahatchee (Pea) Rivers. Early navigation of the river was by log barges. Before long steamboats built in Geneva were regularly plying the rivers. The Lincoln Flood of 1861 all but destroyed the early settlement. As a result, the decision was made to move the settlement to higher ground. A new town was built at the north end of what is today Commerce Street, and Geneva was incorporated as a city in 1875. River trade flourished through the 1890’s. Geneva once again flooded in 1929, leading to the construction of a 2.9 mile earth-filled levee by WPA laborers in the 1930’s. Renovated in 2007, this structure still protects the city today. Cotton mills and clothing factories have come and gone, and these days companies such as Sysco Foods of the Gulf Coast, Reliable Products, Lincoln Fabrics, and Outdoor Aluminum provide jobs to areas residents.

Day 2/Sunday, March 11: Robert Fowler Memorial Park to East Pittman Creek Landing

Paddling Miles: 9

After breakfast at 7:30 and breaking down camp, paddlers will launch their boats onto the Choctawhatchee River from 8:30-9:00AM. We’ll follow that schedule each morning.

We’ll launch our river journey with a short 9-mile paddle today, going with the flow. Downstream currents often give paddlers a nice push along this river. We can expect to be on the water for 2-3 hours today, with lunch awaiting paddlers at their East Pittman Creek Landing campsite.

East Pittman Creek Landing is managed by the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NWFWMD). It is located on the east side of the river and the boat ramp is located in a park on a small bluff overlooking the Choctawhatchee River. The Landing offers excellent riverfront views, a pavilion, two picnic tables, grills, and bathroom facilities. The river features great fishing for four species of bass, shellcracker, bluegill, crappie, bream, and catfish.
Day 3/Monday, March 12: East Pittman Creek Landing to US 90/Carryville Landing  
**Paddling Miles: 21**

Eat a hearty breakfast as today is a high-miler. After launching at 8:30-9:00, our lunch stop will come early at Baker Landing, 6.7 miles downstream from East Pittman Creek Landing. Baker Landing is another NWFWMD facility located on the west side of the river.

Our destination for the day is Carryville Landing and US Highway 90. Carryville Landing is a Washington County park and boat ramp. Look for the single-lane concrete boat ramp next to Highway 90 where railroad and road bridges stand together—it’s easily recognized from the water. There is a small picnic area a hundred yards east of the ramp with a pavilion and picnic tables.

Photo Credit: Lori Ceier, Walton Outdoors

Day 4/Tuesday, March 13: US 90/Carryville Landing to Morrison Springs Park  
**Paddling Miles: 18**

Continuing our journey downstream, today’s lunch stop will be at Cedar Log Landing NEW—13 miles from Carryville Landing on river right.

Today’s destination is sure to be one of the highlights of the week. The 161-acre Morrison Springs Park is well known in the area and popular with divers, swimmers, and nature enthusiasts across the south. Cypress trees line the banks with their crisp, bright green needles defining the landscape. The park’s centerpiece is a 250-foot diameter spring pool with a sandy floor that slopes from the beach to the spring’s center where three vents, the deepest at about 300 feet, release the water flow. Morrison releases 48 million gallons of water each day, making it a second magnitude spring. The water is light blue and crystal clear with a prominent “boil” on the pool surface above the vents. Cave divers report that the water remains clear in the cavern and cave system. A permanently mounted divers’ flag floats on the surface to mark the diving area. Underwater wildlife is abundant and the spring is known for the many eels that inhabit its caves along with varieties of fish and other creatures.

Morrison Springs Park also features 575 linear feet of boardwalks that meander through ancient cypress trees, and span into the springs to a diver’s launching area. Restroom facilities, a pavilion with picnic area, wash stations, and showers are available.

The park was acquired by the state in 2004 and its management is now entrusted to Walton County for 99 years. The project is also part of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Springs Initiative, a comprehensive protection effort which provides funding for springs restoration throughout the state of Florida.
Day 5/Wednesday, March 14: Layover at Morrison Springs Park – ENJOY THE SPRINGS!

Paddling Miles: 0-3.5

Paddlers can use our layover day to relax and enjoy Morrison Spring or take our shuttle to explore other beautiful springs and creeks for which this region of the Panhandle is known. This day is the reason you should pack a mask and snorkel—you’ll want to explore these liquid gems above and below the water’s surface!

Holmes Creek & Cypress Springs — Paddlers will be shuttled to Cotton Landing and paddle downstream about 3.5 miles to Holmes Creek Canoe and Livery, which will be the take-out for the shuttle ride back to Morrison. It’s a short mileage day on purpose. Everyone will have lots of time to swim, snorkel, and explore the crystal clear waters of Cypress Spring.

Holmes Creek flows through a variety of diverse habitats. The upper and lower portions pass high sandy banks while the majority of the trail is through low-lying swamplands. Rich with flora and fauna, the creek is abundant with turtles and birds, including blue, green and white heron, ibis, warblers, and woodpeckers. Sections of the creek are shallow and clear. Underwater plants seem alive with movement as they ripple under the water’s surface and water lilies are in abundance.

Cypress Spring is one of the prettiest springs in all of Florida. Discovered by Spanish explorers, Cypress is a crystal clear spring and flows at 89 million gallon per day. You’ll want to bring your snorkeling gear for this leg of the journey, as a dive into Cypress Springs is sure to be a highlight of the trip.

Ponce de Leon State Park — Just outside the Walton County line (about 4 miles away from Morrison Springs) is one of the coolest places to take a dip, Ponce de Leon Springs State Park. With water at a constant 68 degrees year-round, both locals and visitors enjoy this nature-made swimming pool, which is a convergence of two underground water flows that produce 14 million gallons of water daily.

This beautiful spring is named for Juan Ponce de Leon, who led the first Spanish expedition to Florida in 1513 - as legend has it, in search of the fabled “fountain of youth.” The park was acquired by the State in 1970. The spring area boasts an open pool with easy access steps entering the water. The crystal clear water shows bream and bass swimming below.

Paddlers can take a leisurely walk along two self-guided nature trails through a lush, hardwood forest and learn about the local ecology and wildlife.
• Day 6/Thursday, March 15: Morrison Springs Park to River Run Resort  
_Paddling Miles: 15_  

River Run Resort is nestled on the banks of the Choctawhatchee River in Washington County and has a large camping area with a paved boat launch. It is located just downriver from Boynton Landing Recreational Area (Cutoff Landing) on the east side of the river.

Photo Credit: Lori Ceier, Walton Outdoors

• Day 7/Friday, March 16: River Run Resort to Cowford Landing  
_Paddling Miles: 10_  

We’ll end our week-long adventure with a nice low-mileage paddle of 10 miles to Cowford Landing. Cowford Landing is on the west side of the river and has a spacious sand and concrete ramp adjacent to the Highway 20 bridge. The river is wide and winding here with beautiful old growth cypress woods nearby. This is called Cowford Bridge by locals and is close to the small community of Ebro.

We'll load paddlers, boats, and gear for our shuttle ride back to our vehicles in Geneva. One there, we'll end our trip with a final barbeque lunch to celebrate the miles traveled and friendships and memories made.