



Pirate News

The 13th day of August in the year Two Thousand and Twenty Two, Mill Town, Florida

Finally, we are in The Hall of Fame!!

After years of hard work and dedicated effort, the Blackwater Pyrates have finally made it to The Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

I want to thank everyone who have supported us through the years, and a special thank you to the previous Captains who have led the charge.

Finally we are achieving the recognition we deserve. The pinnacle of our profession. No other Pirate organization can make the same claim to fame as the Blackwater Pyrates.

Okay, okay! So maybe we only made it to the steps of the Hall of Fame. It still feels good.

Thank you to Captain Fins Up and his family and friends for taking the time to bring our "travelling flag" with them as they visited the Hall of Fame.



A Quiet start to August

July started off with a bang as we successfully completed another Great Mill Town Duck Race on the fourth and then followed it up with another wonderful day on the water watching the Blue Angels perform their Pensacola Beach airshow. Unfortunately, August has been a little more difficult to gather with our friends.

The August Lighted Boat Parade was forced to be cancelled due to lackluster participation. Then our scheduled Boater Safety Training was postponed due to the unavailability of training materials and the reduced number of Pyrates signing up to participate.

Both of these events are the backbone of our organization and it is unfortunate that we were forced to postpone and/or cancel both of them. We will do a better job from the leadership perspective in the future. We will ensure that more time and energy is added for verifying that resources are available as well as strive to gain additional crew support and participation through focused advertising and marketing concepts (and maybe some arm twisting and plank walking). To quote a famous Blackwater Pyrate, “there may be some fireworks involved.”

Moving forward, August is also when we have our annual Crab Island Crawl. Historically, this event has been one of our more fun events with strong participation. I hope we can continue with that same tradition as we explore the waterways from Navarre to Destin.

This year’s event is currently scheduled for August 20th. We will be discussing our plans at the General Membership meeting Wednesday, August 17th. I hope we have a large gathering at both the General Membership meeting and the Crab Island Crawl.



2021 Crab Island Crawl— Pyrate ships aligned in attack formation!

Crab Island Crawl

In case you have never attended our annual Crab Island Crawl event, we start with breakfast at Juana's in Navarre. After a brief gathering with family and friends, we start our



A couple of Pyrate ships beached at Stewey's Dad's Resort

voyage as an armada of Pyrate ships in search of booty. Frequently, we make stops at various locations along the way, including a favorite of the winches, Stewey's Dad's Resort.



Pyrates "festivating" at the annual Crab Island Crawl

As the trip continues, various unplanned adventures are added. Including some "watering hole and provisioning" stops (we wouldn't wish to get dehydrated). Safety first!

Alas, as the day progresses the celebrating and socializing continues until it is time to return to our home port. In 2021 we even enjoyed a celebration under the pontoon (pictured right).



And the party continues under the pontoon

Crab Island Crawl



Does anyone else see the resemblance with Capt Lucky and the Pyrate shown above?

Ode to the Blackwater Rivers

The next few pages are from a story written by Taylor Brown, with photos by Benjamin Galland. The entire piece was sent to me by Suffolk Scalawag. I hope everyone enjoys it.



Ode To **BLACKWATER RIVERS**

Blackwater rivers are the haven of innumerable species, the keepers of our earliest recorded history, and the key to the health of our marshes, islands, and coastlines, but they're under threat from mining, residential development, and pollution. Georgia author Taylor Brown pens a love letter to the rivers he grew up on, a call to keep them thriving for generations to come.

Story by Taylor Brown | Photos by Benjamin Galland June 28, 2022

I grew up on the Georgia coast, a 100-mile-long stretch of salt marsh, sea islands, and maritime forest that extends from the historic ports and riverfront of Savannah to the wild horses and eroded mansions of Cumberland Island. As with most coasts, the outermost edge seems to garner the most attention, strung with storied islands such as Sapelo and Blackbeard, St. Simons, and Jekyll — a coastal armada known for quartz-sand beaches, gothic oaks, historic lighthouses, and dolphin-favored waterways. But today I want to take you deeper; I want to take you upriver, inland, *into the blackwater.*

Ode to the Blackwater Rivers

The world's major blackwater rivers are found in two distinct parts of the world: the vast Amazon basin of South America; and the American South, where they coil through low-lying swamps and wetlands, their slow-moving waters stained tea-dark with the tannins of decaying vegetation. In contrast to their clearwater and whitewater counterparts, they are not only darker, but softer and more acidic. These are cryptic rivers, where your hand may disappear just inches beneath the surface, and it's easy to imagine all manner of mysteries and monsters roaming the darkness underneath.

My childhood friends and I grew up boating, paddling, and fishing in such dark waters. Foremost for us was the mighty Altamaha, also known as the "Georgia's Little Amazon" or the "Amazon of the South," and we spent time on Georgia's Satilla, Ogeechee, and St. Marys rivers, as well. I always thought these blackwater rivers were beautiful with their Coca-Cola waters and pale sandbars, the gnarled roots of cypress trees standing along the shorelines, and everything slashed darkly with tide lines. Even the alligators that cruised their waters had a prehistoric beauty, telling us we were in a world older and deeper than we were accustomed to — and that, yes, there were still things in the world that would love to have us for supper.

But when I began to dig a little beneath the surface for my novel [*The River of Kings*](#), I realized these blackwater rivers have a majesty and significance greater than I'd ever imagined, so much deeper than we were ever taught in school or even outside of it. For instance, I didn't realize that Georgia's Golden Isles were largely built by these rivers, their sediments deposited over eons to help create the line of barrier islands that buffer the mainland and marshes — the cradle of so much sea life — from the ravages of hurricanes. In large part, we can thank our blackwater rivers for the flotilla of islands we love so much because their geological histories are so tightly interwoven.

What's more, I came to learn that during the Pleistocene Epoch, the sea level was up to 100 feet higher than it is today, so our shoreline lay 80 miles farther inland. At one time, much of the Georgia coast was underwater, which is why you can still find the giant teeth of megalodon — sharks the size of school buses, weighing as much as 65 tons — along Georgia's Lowcountry rivers. In fact, the shark's tooth is the state fossil of Georgia, and teeth the size of your entire hand are regularly found by blackwater scuba divers in the bed of the St. Marys River, just steps away from where I'm writing this at White Oak Conservation in Yulee, Florida.

As I uncovered story after story during my research, I was like a boy walking along the muddy banks of the river, looking for those sharks' teeth, and what I found was truly awe-inspiring. I felt that I'd stumbled upon buried treasure.

I learned that the first fortified European settlement in what would become the United States wasn't founded by the Spanish in St. Augustine, as many believe. The first fortified European settlement in the New World was France's Fort Caroline, founded in 1564 — a year before St. Augustine and more than four decades before Jamestown. For years, it was thought to have existed on the banks of the St. Johns River outside present-day Jacksonville, Florida, but many scholars, archaeologists, and historians now believe that Fort Caroline was located on either the Altamaha River or on the St. Marys.

There, an artist named Jacques Le Moyne created the first drawings we have of the flora, fauna, and native peoples of the New World. Here, along this river, may have been the location of that lost fort of *Le Caroline*, where peoples of the Old and New Worlds lived in close proximity, learning the strange and thrilling differences, and parallels, between each other's cultures. It was a fraught and complex history, in which they traded, feasted, parlayed, and battled until a Spanish attack decimated the fort. One of the most important meetings of worlds in all human history was perhaps within paddling distance of the nearest river access.



Rain at sunrise on the Altamaha River.

Ode to the Blackwater Rivers



An alligator and cypress knees in the Okefenokee Swamp.

I learned that these blackwater rivers had been home to the Timucua and Guale at the time of European arrival — Native American peoples whose populations would be rapidly diminished by disease, war, assimilation, and enslavement. Single-masted sloops and double-masted schooners plied the blackwater in the age before steam, transporting cargo upstream and down. In fact, in 1805, a British warship sailed 12 miles up the St. Marys, where it found a Spanish pirate ship and two of its British prizes lashed broadside across the river. After an extended duel, the British succeeded in capturing all three vessels. That was just five miles downriver from where I now sit, near the Florida ghost town of Crandall.

In the other direction lies the Okefenokee Swamp — often translated as the “Land of the Trembling Earth” and home to the headwaters of the St. Marys River. In the late 1800s, a group of former Confederate officers formed the Suwannee Canal Company with the intent to drain the swamp for cypress logging, turpentine, and, with the trees all felled, a vast array of croplands. They brought in steam shovels, gangs of convict labor, and veteran gold miners from the north Georgia hills, dredging a canal 12 miles through the halls of cypress, through malaria and snake-bite, and whole navies of alligators. But their shovels tore open dormant deep springs, and the water flowed the wrong way, into the swamp instead of out. People called it “Jackson’s Folly,” after the man behind the project, Captain Harry Jackson. Today, the Suwannee Canal remains a liquid inroad to the interior of the Okefenokee, but thankfully, the rest of the swamp still stands.

I learned how the longleaf pines of Georgia were assembled into giant timber rafts the size of basketball courts and floated down to sawmills on the coast, where they were made into the masts of great sailing ships, naval stores, and timber used in the building of bridges, railroads, and sailing vessels. The raftsmen were known to sing chanteys and ballads as they worked their great 50-foot oars, swinging their rafts around dangerous bights and whirls and shoals with names like “Devil’s Elbow” and “Old Hell Bight.” It’s said that their songs could be heard echoing up and down the river — at least until a century ago, when most of the state’s virgin timber had been cut down, and their voices were heard no more.

Ode to the Blackwater Rivers



The Little Satilla River.

During World War II, it was feared that German U-boats could navigate upstream on our rivers, sabotaging bridges or discharging commandos deep inside the heart of Georgia. Soldiers from the state defense forces were posted on the river bluffs. The German submarines cruised the coastal waters instead, once sinking the oil tankers *SS Oklahoma* and the *Esso Baton Rouge* off the coast of St. Simons in the early hours of April 8, 1942. Locals feared a German invasion of the Georgia coast. Rumors abounded of Nazi submariners coming ashore to buy bread and cigarettes, to meet spies, to watch the picture shows. Submarine-hunting blimps and the Civil Air Patrol were sent up to patrol our rivers and coastlines for the rest of the war.

I learned of the legendary cryptids of these Lowcountry rivers, most notably the Altamaha-ha (aka “Altie”) — a two-finned version of the Loch Ness Monster that’s reportedly been sighted for more than 200 years. In fact, some of Jacques Le Moyne’s illustrations bear a strange resemblance to the creature. I thought I’d seen the fabled Altamaha-ha one afternoon on Stud Horse Creek when something large and unidentified crossed before the bow of my boat. My friends and I stared slack-jawed at the creature, only to realize it was a giant feral hog as it climbed out of the water on the far shore. A creature nearly as astounding, it seemed — especially after our boat grounded on a hidden shoal and we spent the night huddled around a meager campfire, surrounded by muddy hogzilla hoof prints, waiting for the tide to rise.

And I learned of a river creature nearly as mythic in scale as the Altamaha-ha, yet real: the sturgeon that have used these rivers as their breeding grounds for millennia. These “living fossils,” as they’re often called, can grow up to 14 feet long, weigh 800 pounds, and live to 80 to 90 years old. They come upriver to spawn in the spring, rest in watery caverns protected from the river’s pull in the summer, and return to the sea in the fall. In the deep holes of our rivers, these real giants are still rumored to gather, armored and silent, like a fleet of submarines. They also produced some of the world’s greatest caviar until they were listed as endangered, and a moratorium was placed on the sturgeon fisheries. A University of Georgia biologist told me that these prehistoric fish, some the size of torpedoes, would stack themselves like cordwood down in deep holes in the river. They were so big that when fishermen tied them up along the Darien waterfront, still alive, the entire floating dock would sway back and forth in the river. Howell Boone, a fisherman based out of McIntosh County who used to harvest sturgeon from the Altamaha River, told me tales of shipping caviar overnight to Ted Turner and Jane Fonda in Atlanta.

Today, only about 1% remains of the Atlantic sturgeon’s historic numbers, which at one time were in the hundreds of thousands.

Ode to the Blackwater Rivers



A train passes over the Altamaha River.

Our blackwater rivers remain a refuge for the osprey, bald eagle, whitetail deer, black bear, bobcat, raccoon, manatee, otter, beaver, gopher tortoise, alligator, indigo snake, and so many others. They remain a stopping ground for my favorite raptor, the swallow-tailed kite — one of nature’s supreme aerialists, known to spin and wheel and dance over the dark water as if putting on an airshow, catching insects on the wing — and a stopover site for a vast menagerie of other avian migrants.

Though they don’t receive the attention of the sea islands and port cities, our blackwater rivers are the true lifeblood of the region. They remain the haven of innumerable species, the keepers of our earliest recorded history, and the key to the health of our marshes, islands, and coastlines. There is such history here, human, and natural, waiting along the banks, resting in the riverbeds.

Today, these rivers are under threat. In recent years, the St. Marys River alone has faced the threat of titanium mining near its headwaters in the Okefenokee Swamp, residential development along its banks, and even the establishment of a nearby spaceport. The Altamaha and Ogeechee rivers have been victims of repeated pulp and textile plant pollution violations, and Satilla advocates have been fighting a proposed landfill near its banks. All three rivers have made the Georgia Water Coalition’s “Dirty Dozen” list in recent years — an annual report of the state’s waterway health.

If you are reading this, you can help safeguard and preserve our blackwater rivers not only for yourselves, your children and grandchildren, and *their* children and grandchildren but for the vast generations of flora and fauna to flourish beside them. In my opinion, it’s a sacred responsibility.

More and more, scientists are learning how interconnected we all are, all the living creatures of our planet. More and more, their findings show the staggering intricacy of the web of life to which we’re joined. They’ve found that trees, even trees of different species, communicate with one another through their roots, sending nutrients to aid the sick and dying of their kind through the aid of mycelium, a network of tiny threads of fungi that run through the soil.

Perhaps it’s no wonder that even a single 15-minute session of “forest bathing” — a phrase translated from the Japanese word *shinrin-yoku* and a fancy term for immersion in nature — has been found to have positive clinical effects, including blood pressure reduction, improvements in immune system function, and alleviation of depression, stress, and anxiety. Of course, I don’t need a study to prove the healing effects of drifting on a blackwater river with the sun shining down and the wide wings of a great blue heron unfolding as it takes flight before me, and I hear the rush of air beneath his wings. I can think of little else better for body and soul than that.

Ode to the Blackwater Rivers



Ode to the Blackwater Rivers



The South Georgia Waterfall on the Little Satilla River.

We have a long history of thinking of ourselves as superior to the rest of the animal kingdom, as above and apart from the rest of the inhabitants of our planet. We think we are the cleverest of creatures, having climbed to the top of the feeding order. We are the dominant species on this planet, and with that comes a great deal of responsibility — one that we have not always taken seriously. In many cases, we have been monstrously negligent.

More and more, we are realizing that what is good for the rest of the planet is good for us. That the health of our own species is tied inextricably to the health of our natural world. And that we remove ourselves from the natural dynamics of this majestic planet at our peril. Peril to ourselves, to our fellow living creatures, and to the incredible gift of this world, with all its majesty, its beauty, and its mysteries still to be unfolded.

If there's a last thought I want to leave you with, it's this: What is good for our blackwater rivers and the many residents who depend on them to survive — avian and mammalian, aquatic, and reptilian — is good for all of us.

What is good for our rivers, my friends, is good for us all.

Ode to the Blackwater Rivers



Blackwater Pyrates 2022

January	February	March	April
12 Booty Council 19 General Mtg	9 Booty Council 12 Milton Mardis Gras Parade 16 General Mtg 19 Mardis Gras Flotilla - POLT	5-6 Renaissance Fair – Duck Adoptions 9 Booty Council 16 General Mtg – Crew Duck Adoptions Begin	9 Poker Run 13 Booty Council 20 General Mtg 23 River Clean Up/Earth Day * 30 New Member Party
May	June	July	August
7 Skull Island Retreat *to be rescheduled 11 Booty Council 18 General Mtg 21 Boater Safety Week* Blessing of the Fleet USCG Boat Inspection	4 Lighted Boat Parade in Ward Basin 8 Booty Council 15 General Meeting/Duck adoption paperwork and \$\$\$ due 18 WWSRE	4 Great Mill Town Duck Race*** 9 Blues Cruise 13 Booty Council 20 General Mtg- Membership Dues	6 Lighted Boat Parade 10 Booty Council 17 General Mtg 20 Destin Crawl ? Boater Safety Class
September	October	November	December
14 Booty Council 17 Upper River Clean Up * 21 General Mtg 24 History Lecture* (date change)	1 Skull Island Retreat (date chg) 12 Booty Council 15 Oktoberfest 19 General Mtg- New Captain Nominations 21/22 Ghost Walk	9 Booty Council 12 Blues Cruise 16 General Mtg – Vote for new Capt	2 Christmas Lighted Boat Parade 7 Budget Meeting 14 Caroling with the Pyrates 31 Red Solo Cup

*Core Mission Revised May 17, 2022 ***All Crew Participation





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*The
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Duck Race*



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A photograph of a large number of yellow rubber ducks floating in a body of water. The ducks are scattered across the frame, some in the foreground and some in the background. The water is a light blue-grey color. Overlaid on the image is the text 'The Great Mill Town Duck Race' in a large, stylized, red font with a white outline. The text is positioned in the lower half of the image, with 'The' on the first line, 'Great Mill Town' on the second line, and 'Duck Race' on the third line.

*The
Great Mill Town
Duck Race*



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*The
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Duck Race*



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Paradise Screen Printing
Pawpaw's Small Engine
Pensacola Bay Brewery
Primerica Financial Services
RM Integrations
Return to Health - Milton
Ritchey's Service Center
Riverwalk Hair Exhibit

The image shows a large number of yellow rubber ducks floating in a body of water. Overlaid on the image is the text 'The Great Mill Town Duck Race' in a large, stylized, red font with a white outline.

*The
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Duck Race*



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