

CHATTOOGA RIVER FATALITIES AND NEAR FATALITIES SINCE 1970

Compiled by U.S Forest Service

CUMULATIVE FATALITIES	DATE	DESCRIPTION/DETAILS/LOCATION *denotes swimming (as opposed to boating) fatality
1	1970	1 death at Woodall Shoals
2-3	1971	2 deaths at Bull Sluice
4	1972	1 death at Woodall Shoals; canoe overturned, victim not wearing PFD.
5	1972	1 death at Narrows; Alfred Hochlan, 25. Indianapolis, In.
6	1972	1 death at Bull Sluice; Raft overturned, victim not wearing PFD.
7	1972	1 death at Bull Sluice; canoe overturned, victim not wearing PFD.
8	1973	1 death at Woodall Shoals; Thomas Reeves, 24, Chamblee, GA. Canoe overturned, victim wearing PFD. Probable cause of death from exposure and injuries on rocks.
9	1973	1 death at Bull Sluice; raft caught in hydraulic, victim not wearing PFD.
10	1973	1 death at Narrows; Charles Ritchie, 21, Columbus, GA. Raft overturned, victim not wearing PFD
11	1973	1 death at Woodall Shoals; Joe H. Fox, 45, Decatur, GA. Thrown from raft, victim not wearing PFD.
12	1973	1 death at Bull Sluice; running rapid in innertube, victim not wearing PFD.
13	1974	1 death at Woodall Shoals; Gilbert R. Shenks, 23, Marietta, GA. Thrown from raft, victim not wearing PFD.
14	1974	1 death at Crack-in-the-rock;; Bob Goeke, 38, Athens, GA. President of the Georgia Canoeing Ass'n. Fell out of kayak in left crack, swam back into rapid to retrieve boat, PFD ripped off. Foot became entrapped, companions were unable to free him.
15	1974	*1 death at Earls Ford; James Doyle, 15, Long Creek, S.C. Swimming fatality. Caught in undertow at mouth of Warwoman Creek.
16	1975	1 death in Fall Creek area; Robert Frazier, 19, Travelers Rest, SC. Hypothermia. Floating in inflatable boat with 1 friend. Victim's boat punctured and deflated, friend went for help; Mr. Frazier spent the night beside the river, he died before assistance arrived. Low air temperature that night was 16 degrees F.

17	1975	*1 death, intoxicated man drowned while swimming in still water at Thrifts Ferry.
18	1975	1 death at Sock-em Dog; Monroe Sanders, 23, New Bern, NC. High water. Fell out of raft and caught in log; PFD ripped off. PFD floated to surface 10 minutes after victim disappeared. Body recovered 12 days later.
19	1979	* 1 death, Marvin Cooper, 31, Rabun Gap, GA. Mr. Cooper could not swim. He slipped off a rock at the bottom of the Woodall Shoals rapid and was carried downstream and drowned.
20	1979	1 death at Jawbone; Charles R. Bernard, 28. NOC guide. Slipped out of eddy, kayak pinned under undercut rock. Kayak broke in half. Body recovered after 5 hours. PFD and helmet ripped off. Detailed description of incident in River Rescue by Bechdel and Ray.
21	1980	1 death at Crack-in-the-rock; Lisa Jean Seabacher, 24, Atlanta, GA. Kayak capsized above rapid; boat, then victim, washed through left crack. Victim pinned for 20 minutes.
22	1981	1 death at Bull Sluice; Edward Holmes, 30, Atlanta, GA; Reported to be a guide for High Country of Atlanta on a guide training trip. Stepped out of canoe at top of main ledge to free canoe from rocks and leg was caught in pothole while force of water bent him over.
23	1981	*1 death at Bull Sluice; Melanie Murphy, 25, Port Hammock, FL; Victim body surfing through rapid at 6 P.M. on 8/15 with her husband and friends. Leg caught in rocks between hydraulic and decapitation rock. Companions were unable to pull her downstream. Freed from rocks within 3-7 minutes by two Southeastern Expeditions guides who administered CPR. They pulled her upstream with a rope. Alive when transported to hospital. Died at 0700 on 8/16. Water level was very low, about 0.6 feet.
24	1984	1 death at Woodall Shoals; Mark Hinz, 25, from Navidad Texas. He was a paddler who was apparently scouting the rapid by himself for a planned trip. He was not floating at the time. A freak wind and rain storm snapped the top out of a large pine and pinned him in waist deep water where he died of exposure. He was found the following day.

25	1989	<p>1 death at Crack-in-the-rock; Kevin Bright, 21, Augusta, GA. Victim was one of five persons in a raft which overturned in Corkscrew Rapid. There was another raft preceding it with four members of the party of nine. It was a private trip. Three of the swimmers made it to shore immediately and Mr. Bright and a companion hit the large rock which separates Middle and Left Crack. Mr. Bright went to the left and was pinned under water in Left Crack. Approximately 25 people, consisting of volunteers, FS personnel, Commercial Raft Guides and Mountain Rest Rescue Squad personnel spent about 1 1/2 hours recovering the victim's body. The drowning occurred at about 3PM, FS was notified by Oconee Sheriff at 4:15 PM. Personnel arrived at scene at 5:15 PM. Body was recovered at 6:30 PM. Water level was 1.65 feet at the Highway 76 gage.</p>
26	1990	<p>1 death at the Narrows; Daniel Berryman, 11, Powder Springs, GA; kayak flipped and victim drowned as a result of foot entrapment.</p>
27	1991	<p>1 death at right Crack-in-the-rock and below; Christopher Booker, 24, Richmond, VA. Mr. Booker and his two partners were all fairly experienced paddlers. This was their first Section IV Chattooga trip. The water level was 2.2 feet. Mr. Booker's partners had left their boats to scout Crack-in-the-rock. One of the other boaters lost his paddle and Mr. Booker, in an attempt to retrieve it, went through right Crack in his kayak before scouting. No throw ropes were set. Chris became stuck in the hole beneath right Crack, side surfed for a short time, and wet exited. He made several attempts to pull his kayak from the hole and he was recirculated through the hole. After he abandoned his attempt to pull out the boat, he flushed out of the hole alive, but exhausted. He was last seen alive floating into Jawbone in the feet up self rescue position. His partners went to get their boats and follow him. The next time they saw him he was dead; his body floating approximately 1.5 miles downstream from the confluence of the river and Lake Tugaloo. He had a large hematoma above his eye.</p>

28	1992	<p>1 death in the Five Falls Area, either in Jawbone or Sock-em Dog. A 17 year old boy from Clayton, and three friends put-in at the Camp Creek trail (end of Water Gauge road). They were on innertubes, and were not wearing PFD's or helmets. They were not familiar with the river. The water level was about 2.3 feet. The victim and two of his friends ran and/or swam Entrance, Corkscrew, and Right Crack. Two of the youths managed to swim to the Georgia bank below Right Crack. When the two got to the bank, they urged the fourth boy to not come down. They then looked downstream to see the victim, still conscious, entering Jawbone. That was the last time they saw him. The body was found June 17 by a Wildwater trip. It was floating near the edge of the large deep pool by Possum Creek. A large number of family and friends of the victim were at the scene until the body was recovered. Several grappling hooks used in attempting to recover the body were lost.</p>
29	1993	<p>1 death in the Five Falls area. Water level 2.0 feet at the Highway 76 gauge. A 42 year old man from Woodstock, GA was paddling with three other people. He had flipped and swam 2 or 3 times before they reached Five Falls. He ran the beginning of Entrance Rapid upright, but hit a small hole or wave at the bottom and flipped. One of the other paddlers said it appeared that he tried to roll a couple of times, then it looked like he was trying to get out of his kayak. Shortly thereafter he quit struggling. He was upside down, in his boat, and not moving when he washed through Corkscrew. One of the group paddled up beside him below Corkscrew. He was still in his boat, upside down, and not moving. The other paddler managed to roll his boat upright. The victim was unconscious. The other paddler lost his grip, and the victim washed through Crack-in-the-Rock. The other paddler ran Crack-in-the-Rock and saw the victim wash through Jawbone. His body was found about thirty minutes later in an eddy on river right just below Shoulder Bone rapid.</p>
30	1994	<p>One drowning, probably in the hydraulic at Dick's Creek Ledge Rapid. A 20 year old man from Piedmont, SC and three other young men launched in one raft at the Highway 28 put-in. The river was well above flood stage, and crested at around 10 feet that day due to a tropical storm. The flood was estimated to be between the ten and twenty-five year storm event. The four men had little to no whitewater experience. Their raft flipped at Dick's Creek, which is the last time that the victim was seen alive. His body was found two days later (by helicopter) in a log jam on the upstream side of the island by Sandy Run Rapid. The victim was wearing a PFD, but it was found off of his body.</p>

31	1995	<p>One death just above Sock-em Dog. The river level was 1.6 on the Highway 76 gage. A 30 year old woman from the Atlanta area was rafting with a group of 20 individuals. The victim had been rafting a few times before; some of her friends were experienced boaters. The victim was in a raft with four other people. They successfully ran Jawbone, but the raft then lodged against the upstream side of Hydroelectric Rock. The raft began to take on water and then flipped vertically throwing all five paddlers into the river. The group had two ropes set at this rapid. The victim caught one of the ropes and began to pendulum towards the South Carolina shore. Then she lost her grip on the rope. The second rope was thrown, but landed short of her. The victim was last seen on the right upstream side of a large flat rock, known as Anvil Rock or Allison's Rock, approximately 20 yards downstream of the pool below Jawbone. Her helmet and one of her shoes were found below Sock-em Dog shortly after she disappeared. On May 19, a group of five local river guides recovered her body from under the large flat rock using a 20 foot long pole with a gaff hook and a rope haul system. Her body was six feet under water and six to eight feet back under Anvil Rock. The water flows under Anvil Rock and emerges on the downstream side through several smaller rocks, which form a sieve. The river level was 1.4 feet at the time of the recovery. The group who performed the recovery felt that it could not have been completed safely at a higher water level. Her PFD was still on her body. (Diagrams of the accident scene and recovery procedure are in the Forest Service 6730 file).</p>
32	1996	<p>A 24 year old man from Georgia was kayaking with three other men. The water level was 1.9 feet. They put-in at Highway 76. The victim was an experienced boater. No one in the party had paddled this section before. At Crack-in-the-Rock, everyone got out of their boats to scout. In an attempt to get a closer look at the rapid, the victim swam from the bank on river left to the middle rock of Crack-in-the-Rock. He made it to the middle rock, but was unable to hold on to it. He then assumed a rescue swim position, with his feet downstream, and was swept into the rapid. He disappeared under water and did not resurface. The other members of the party attempted unsuccessfully to dislodge his body for two hours before they proceeded to the take out. His body was apparently lodged in the body entrapment wedge where several other boaters have died. His body was not recovered until June 24.</p>

33	1997	<p>* A 21 year-old seasonal agricultural worker who had been residing in Clayton, GA, drowned below Bull Sluice. He was last seen alive sitting on the pyramid-shaped rock in the large eddy on river left. He could not swim. His body was found the next day in seven feet of water on the bottom between the pyramid-shaped rock and Mermaid Rock (a few feet upstream). The mild current in this location held his body against a rock, but he was not entrapped. Neither he nor his companions could speak English, which may have been a contributing factor.</p>
34	1998	<p>A 24 year-old, experienced paddler from Athens, GA, drowned above Sock-em Dog. He was familiar with this section of the Chattooga. He swam out of his kayak after several attempts to roll when he flipped at the end of Jawbone. He swam into Sock-em Dog near the Puppy Chute. The current held his body against a large undercut rock and against a tree lodged at the top of the rapid. Another paddler was able to get on the rock and tried to help the victim out. Ropes were placed on his wrist. His head was above water, and he stayed conscious for several minutes, until he couldn't hold on any longer. The water level was 2.6 feet at the Highway 76 Bridge. The body was removed a few days later when the water level dropped. The body moved easily away from the rock at the lower water level.</p>

35	1999	<p>* Rachel M. Trois, 15, from Pennsylvania, Charles D. Yoder, his family, and a friend hiked to the Chattooga near Raven Rock Rapid at 3,00 PM. Around 7:00 PM, Rachel and Charles decided to wade across the Chattooga from the SC shore to the Georgia side. As they attempted to cross the river above Raven Rock Rapid, they lost their footing and were washed downstream toward the rapid. According to a witness, Charles grabbed a rock in the river with one hand and had Rachel in the other. Shortly thereafter they were swept into center slot of Raven Rock Rapid. Charles surfaced below the rapid. Rachel never surfaced. Neither was wearing PFD's. Members of her group swam through the rapid numerous times attempting to rescue Rachel. The water level on the 76 gage was 1.25 feet. Rescue personnel attempted unsuccessfully to locate the victim's body on 5/30 by probing the rapid. On 5/31, an unsuccessful attempt was made to locate the body by diverting the water out of the center slot with a sheet of plywood suspended by ropes above the river. On 6/5, search and rescue dogs made a positive hit in Raven Rock Rapid. Film recorded with an underwater video camera showed what some believe was the victim's head in the center slot near the bottom of the rapid. On June 24, a dam supplied by Portadam, was erected above the rapid, in an attempt to divert enough water from the center slot to allow divers into this location. The attempt was unsuccessful. On July 28, a higher dam was erected. Before the dam was completed, divers located the victim's remains about 30 feet downstream of the rapid, against the large rock on river left. After the dam was completed, divers were able to swim into the center slot. Part of the victims clothing was found entangled with a log in the center slot.</p>
36	2000	<p>* At about 2,30 PM, Manuel Gaspar Munoz, 28, of Clayton, came to the Highway 76 Chattooga River access with five friends. Manuel was swimming near a rock commonly known as "mermaid", which is about 30 feet downstream of Bull Sluice, in a pool near the middle of the river. His friends saw him swim to mermaid, and start swimming back. Shortly afterwards, they could not find him. They told some private boaters and swimmers, who began looking for the victim. From discussion with the private boaters, I estimate that the victim drowned at 1500. He was not wearing a PFD.</p> <p>Oconee County Deputies and Rescue Squad personnel arrived at about 1600. They began questioning the victim's friends and began an organized search with a diver. The diver located the body near mermaid about 1700. The body was circulating in an eddy on the bottom of the river.</p>

37	2000	<p>* Brittani M. Briones, 10, from Monroe, GA, was wading upstream of Bull Sluice Rapid with her mother. They both lost their footing and washed into Bull Sluice. The water level was 0.94 at the 76 gage. Neither wore PFD's. Mrs. Briones surfaced below the rapid. Brittani never resurfaced. Volunteers were able to reach her body by attaching a rope to a swimmer. A volunteer swam upstream under decap rock and found her body. Her legs were lodged between a log and rocks directly under decap rock. She apparently swam into the rapid feet first. The volunteer was able to extract her body and she was brought to shore about 30 minutes after she became entrapped. Rescue personnel applied CPR until she reached Oconee Memorial Hospital, where she was pronounced dead.</p>
38	2003	<p>Tony Eric Cobb, 42, from Long Creek, was rafting on a private trip on Section IV. The water level was 2.0 on the 76 gage. The group of five people in one raft were all wearing PFD's. They did not intend to run Sock-em Dog, and all but one person got out of the raft above this rapid. But the raft started floating down stream with one other person in it, and Tony swam out and got back into it. Tony and the other person were in the raft when it overturned in the Sock-em Dog hydraulic. The other person floated out, but the raft and Tony stayed in the hydraulic for about 15 minutes. His body had become entangled in one of the raft's lines. A crew from one of the rafting companies brought his body to shore and performed CPR, but he never recovered.</p>

39	2003	<p>Keith R. Green, 40, Greenville, SC, an experienced paddler on the Chattooga, met a group of five boaters from North Carolina. They did not know each other, but agreed to let him join the group after learning of his whitewater experience. They put in at Highway 76.</p> <p>Upon reaching Five Falls area (approx 3:30 pm), the group ran Entrance rapid. Green went on ahead and ran Corkscrew alone. The group saw him flip and make several attempts to upright. Unsuccessful, he exited the kayak and swam. Green was last seen being washed into right Crack-in- the-Rock just ahead of his kayak. The group paddled down and began searching. Another group of 15-20 paddlers (Atlanta Whitewater Club) was also paddling through Five Falls at this time. Members of this group found Green's paddle in dead man's pool below Sock-em Dog rapid. The five NC boaters searched for about an hour along the river and banks and did not see any sign of Green or his kayak.</p> <p>The Chattooga River Swiftwater Task Force (Task Force) met that evening at the Long Creek Fire Dept at approximately 6,00 pm. Two members of the NC party and several AWC members came to that meeting for a short time. Since the incident area was thoroughly searched immediately following the last sighting, no additional searches were scheduled that evening. It was decided that an aerial search would be requested first thing the next morning followed by river and ground-based searches. Green's recovered PFD was brought to the fire station. The body was located with an underwater camera on November 11 but the diver was unable to reach the body. The river was monitored until November 15 when another unsuccessful recovery effort was made. On November 16, the water level had dropped sufficiently for the Rescue Team to remove the kayak, which released the body.</p> <p><u>River Facts at time of Drowning –</u>  Water Level - 1.5 feet  Water Temperature - about 54 degrees  Air Temperature - about 53 degrees.</p>
NEAR FATALITIES		
	DATE	DESCRIPTION/DETAILS/LOCATION
	1978	Kayaker turned over in Narrows, he turned blue but was revived by a physician who happened along 5 minutes later in another group.

	1992	<p>One near death on the left side of the big island about 1/4 mile below Big Shoals on Section II. A 22 year old woman was canoeing with a group of seven. The water level was high (3.5 feet on the Highway 76 gage). The victim was in the center of a canoe with two other people in it. They went on the river left side of the island and turned sideways against a log jam which had formed completely across the channel near the downstream end of the island. The canoe rolled and the victim's head was pinned underwater between a thwart and a log. She held her breath and passed out. Her friends were able to move the canoe after 5 to 10 minutes. By this time, she was not breathing, her eyes were gray, her pupils were dilated, and her lips were blue. Her body was completely limp. One of the individuals in the group had extensive water rescue and survival training. He gave her about four breaths and she started breathing, shallowly at first, on her own. The group built a fire, elevated her feet, and wrapped her in extra clothing to treat her for shock. She seemed coherent in about 30 minutes. The incident occurred at 5,30 PM. The local rescue squad carried her out on a backboard, and she reached the hospital about 11,00 PM. She had aspirated very little water. She made a complete recovery in a few days.</p>
	1994	<p>Two near drownings in the hydraulic at Woodall Shoals. Water level 1.6 on the Highway 76 gage. Six young men in two rafts put-in at 76. Some of them had floated Section IV several times before. This was the first Chattooga trip for the two who nearly drowned. The first raft ran the hydraulic with no problems, and proceeded down stream. The second raft, with three people in it, flipped in the center of the hydraulic. One person pushed off the raft and flushed out immediately. The other two were in the hydraulic until they lost consciousness and then flushed out. The other people in the party and bystanders gave CPR to both men and revived them. One was reported to have no pulse and to have glazed eyes. Both were transported by EMS to Oconee Memorial Hospital. They spent a couple of days in the hospital and were released with no lasting effects.</p>

	1994	<p>One near death at Right Crack-in-the-Rock. The river level was about 1.8 feet on the Highway 76 gage. A woman was pinned in her kayak between a rock and the log which has been at the top of Right Crack for several years. She was pinned upright, with the water up to her chest. The boat was crushed around her left leg. The two other people in her party were unable to free her. Eight professional guides worked with the two people in the victim's party when their commercial raft trips arrived on the scene (Nantahala Outdoor Center, Wildwater, and Southeastern Expeditions). Two guides paddled out and notified EMS. The victim was entrapped for about 2 1/2 hours before they were finally able to free her. By that time, she was suffering from hypothermia as well as circulation loss in her legs, numbness, and bruises. She was transported by raft and motor boat to the Tugaloo Lake road, where an ambulance was waiting for her. She was treated and released from the hospital the same night.</p>
	1995	<p>One near death in the pool below Bull Sluice. A 36 year old man was swimming in the pool below Bull Sluice, without a PFD. A few minutes after he entered the water he started bobbing up and down, gasping for air. Another swimmer noticed he was having trouble and swam towards the victim. By the time the other swimmer reached the victim, his face was underwater. The other swimmer pulled the victim to shore and called EMS. The victim was stabilized and transported to the Rabun County Hospital. He was treated and released the same day.</p>

	<p>1995</p>	<p>One near death in Woodall Shoals. A 29 year old man and a friend of his were paddling inflatable kayaks. The river level was 1.6 feet at the Highway 76 gage. They were not experienced boaters. They stopped above the Woodall Shoals hydraulic. They were advised by NOC guides on a commercial raft trip to portage because it is difficult to avoid the hydraulic at that water level in an inflatable kayak. The victim and his friend stayed above the hydraulic while the raft trip went downstream on the far right. A group of three kayakers then paddled in above the hydraulic. The kayakers advised the victim and his friend to portage or to run through the narrow passage on the immediate right side of the hydraulic. The three kayakers successfully ran this passage and proceeded downstream. Apparently the victim decided to run the same route. His inflatable kayak was pulled into the hydraulic, flipped, and he was pulled under water. He recirculated in the hydraulic for a short time, and popped out floating downstream, face down. The kayakers and guides managed to swim him to shore. His face and lips were blue. They gave him a few rescue breaths. He had a pulse. After a few rescue breaths, he started to breathe on his own. They carried him to the parking lot. Oconee Memorial Hospital paramedics arrived and transported him. He was semi-conscious when the paramedics arrived. He was released from the hospital on June 12.</p>
	<p>2003</p>	<p>One near death occurred in the Five Falls of Section IV. The incident was recorded on a video recorder run by a person filming a group of boaters. The water level was 1.85 at the Highway 76 gage. Rod Baird was kayaking on a private trip. He ran Jawbone from the Parking Lot eddy, swung wide, flipped at decap, rolled up, hit Hydro, flipped, and got pinned in Hydro. The boat with Rod in it plugged the hole in Hydro. A person from another group paddled out to Hydro and climbed on it. Another rescuer, with the assistance of a rope, swam to Hydro. They pushed on the boat and it and Rod flushed through the hole. Rod then came out of the boat and floated over Sock-em Dog. He was brought to shore and had no pulse, was not breathing, and was cold and blue. He had been underwater for six minutes (determined from the clock on the video recorder). After about five minutes of compressions, a strong pulse was detected. In ten minutes, he began breathing, but assisted breathing continued. Some of the rescue party paddled to the lake and called 911. When they got back Rod was breathing on his own. They made a catamaran by bridging the backboard across two kayaks and floated Rod down river. In several places they had to carry the backboard downstream. In two hours, they had him to a motorboat and then into the ambulance at the ramp. In few weeks Rod made a complete recovery.</p>

