

“Combahee River Reverie”
By Bob Newbert
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The Combahee River.

It's a Bucket List cruise -- My favorite in the Lowcountry. Start with the fact that the 184-mile journey probes 41-miles up into the ACE Basin, a 360,000-acre natural wonder the Nature Conservancy calls “One of the Last Great Places.” It is a pristine, unspoiled landscape that moves your soul.

The ACE takes you from vast expanses of salt water marsh to a narrow, black water trail twisting & turning deep in dense woodlands. Other than a few kayakers and two guys fishing in a John boat, we had the entire river to ourselves. Pristine. Unspoiled. Soul moving.

Then there's history. Yes, the history that comes to life along its shores for the Combahee abounds with fascinating people and events that make this enchanting place a treasure trove of captivating character.

Where to begin?

In no particular order, we shared (among other stories):

- The final resting place of a Chinese warship.
- The birthplace of the Jeep Cherokee.
- The death of Alexander Hamilton's best friend – a tragedy highlighted in the hit Broadway musical “Hamilton.”
- The site where a woman led armed men into battle for the 1st time in US history.
- A 10,000-acre plantation dedicated to “research enhancing our understanding of wildlife and their habitats.”
- A magnificent estate whose owner, a history enthusiast, uses 1-watt light bulbs to simulate candlelight for “authenticity” in his 19th Century showplace.
- The place where young Forrest Gump learned to run –run fast– when chased by a carload of bullies.

- A plantation with grounds designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, America's premier landscape architect.
- A dock created by Frank Lloyd Wright for his largest and still unfinished project. There are no right angles or perpendicular surfaces here. All buildings, walls and fences are canted 80°. (Ask a Combahee cruiser and they'll tell you why).
- A beautiful, White-Cliffs-of-Dover bluff.
- A private club once owned by a British billionaire with 7-miles of riverfront, 600 acres of stocked fishing ponds, 29 miles of carriage roads.
- A 2,500-acre duck hunting plantation with a 3,300-foot air strip and 300 acres of duck impoundments.
- An over-the-water "tea house" with a Hinckley yacht moored underneath.
- The point in our exploration of the Combahee River where Garmin stops showing water – A testament to the courage of ABCHH mariners who nonetheless continued "overland."

Yes, the Combahee is my favorite cruise but it is challenged closely by the Ashepoo River, another 10-hour journey into the heart of the ACE Basin with beautiful plantations like Airy Hall and Paco Sabo plus a remote fishing village at the end of the "road to nowhere" that's a 75-mile drive to the nearest store.

Then there's the Edisto River, third name in the ACE Basin (**A**shepoo – **C**ombahee – **E**disto) not to mention Wimbee Creek, Chehaw River, Keans Neck, Wiggins and other wonders of this magical place known as the ACE. Exciting adventures all, but adventures for another day.

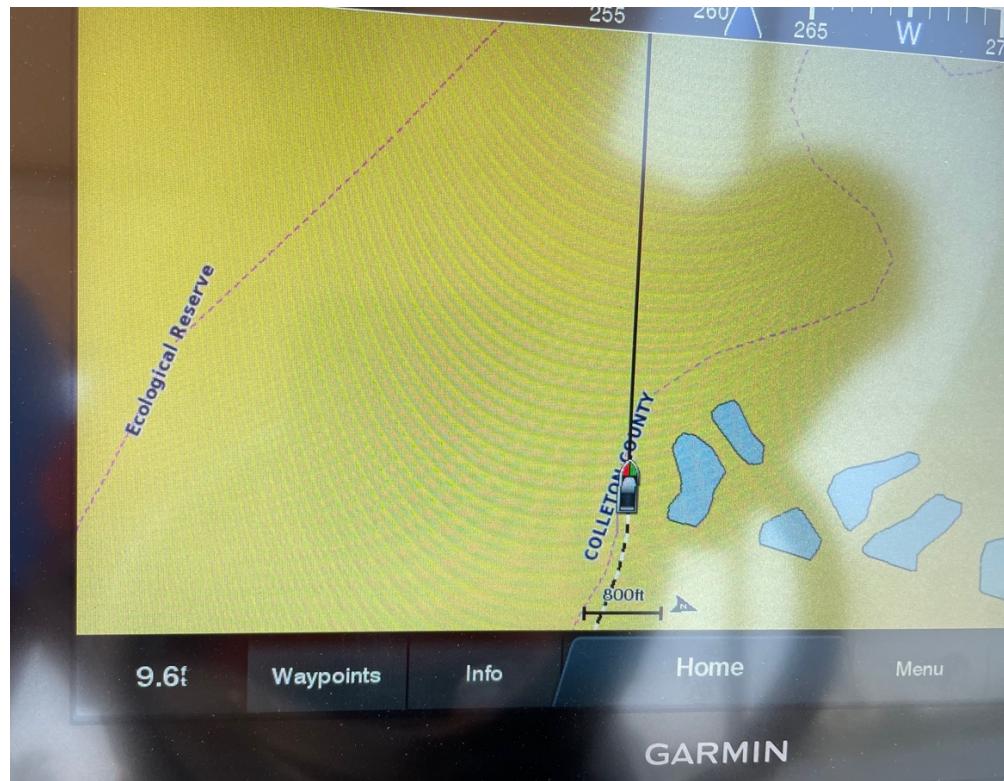
Yet for those who joined us this day, it's a wonder they will never forget.



SQUEEZING UNDER THE TUBMAN BRIDGE on US17 are Bob Green (front) and Brad Loescher (rear). Phew! They made it!



"DID WE MISS A TURN? Is this Dover, England?"



TAKING THE "OVERLAND" ROUTE when Garmin stops showing water on the "uncharted" leg of our journey.



OVER-THE-WATER TEA HOUSE



COOLING OFF AFTER A SPOT OF TEA are (L to R in the water): John Fitzgerald, Pat Nesmith and Mary Richardson.



BLACK WATER WILDERNESS.



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT designed dock house with walls and railings canted at 80°



ARCHITECTURE BUFFS Carole & Bob Greene admire Frank Lloyd Wright's handiwork.



10-HOUR CRUISE WITH NO RESTROOMS. Are we stopping for a refreshing dip or a Bio Break? You'll never know.



JOHN FITZGERALD offers a toast at Luther's in Beaufort where we gathered to celebrate our Bucket List cruise into the heart of The ACE Basin.