

The Call of the Cahaba

By Lilly Roehrig



We set forth from the sandy banks of the Cahaba, swaying unsteadily in our seats and grasping our paddles with uncertainty. The shallow water's stillness was quickly replaced by a swiftly moving current, which sent our boat into a dizzying rotation that my partner and I frantically attempted to stabilize.

As the river began to carry us away, I could hear the calls of our friends from the shore, reminding us to keep paddling. Eying the glassy stream below, I met my reflection with a determined gaze, tightening my hand on the t-grip and plunging the fin into the water below.

Within minutes we had reached the opposite shore, and with a sigh of relief, I grasped a tree branch overhead. This would be the first of many new experiences I would have on the Cahaba that day.

The canoeing trip, led by Wil Rainer and La'Tanya Scott of the Cahaba River Society, had been organized by Southeast Forest Stewards Guild program director Dakota Wagner for the University of Alabama chapter. As a newer member, this was the first field activity I had done with the group. Though I only knew a handful of people attending beforehand, it was easy to feel accepted in the outgoing and welcoming group that is UA's Forest Stewards Guild. Equipped with a partner, canoe, and one paddle each, we traveled over 8 miles downstream. Throughout the trip, we crossed over rocky shoals that tested our balance and endurance, along with peaceful stretches of sand where we stopped to catch native fish. Wil and La'Tanya were excellent guides, giving our group a vast education on the river in the short period that we were with them, ranging from the correct way to paddle to the complex biology of the freshwater fish. I was particularly fascinated by the Cahaba River Lilies, which I was told would bloom for miles down the river in the coming weeks of Spring.

By the time we reached our docking spot, I found myself gloriously sunburned and limp-armed from all of the paddling, but overjoyed with the beautiful day I had experienced. Without a doubt, I will be returning to the Cahaba River of my own volition in the near future (with sunscreen, of course).

