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2013

2013 - 05

Starting to build the board - 2013-05-20 04:52

Less than two weeks until this crazy adventure begins. I've been dreaming up a several-month-long journey for years. This summer I am finally doing it. I have decided to stand-up paddleboard the length of the Missouri River (no, I don't mean the Mississippi). I will be starting at the headwaters in Southwest Montana and following the Missouri for 2400 miles until I reach the St. Louis Arch. My goal is complete the trip somewhere around the 100th day on the water. I will be camping along the way and my gear will travel in excellent, Aquapac dry bags on the deck of my board. I will charge my phone, GPS and camera batteries with a solar panel kit from GoalZero. I plan on updating my progress on this blog.

I am building my paddleboard out of wood. Chesapeake Light Craft has partnered with me as my board sponsor. The kit I received is top notch and includes everything I need to build a solid craft. I am going with a Kaholo 14 which should be strong and fast. They also sell plans to build all sorts of water craft from scratch as well as other gear. Check them out at CLCboats.com

I want to thank my friend Mike for setting me up with some space in his family's airplane hanger. The space and ample tool supply has been a real asset. I started the board just about a week ago but progress has been fairly swift with just a few minor set backs. After driving an hour to the hanger to start my first build day I realized I left the epoxy in my apartment. Not the best start. Two hours of driving later I was finally able to don latex gloves and mix some glue.

The type of kit I am building is known as "stitch and Glue." This means that you stitch the CNC cut panels together with copper wire, then glue the joints to secure the shape. After the whole board is glued together it gets wrapped in a layer of fiberglass. Lastly, several coats of varnish will bring out the woods full potential.

It is going to be a crazy next couple weeks to get everything situated in Chicago. I need to finish up a big work project, move all my stuff into storage, and finish the board. There are still a lot of logistics to figure out but one way or another, it'll all get done. I'll be hitting the water on June 7th. Sometime between now and then I need to figure out a name for my newly created water craft. There will be loads of pictures and video to come.



borrowing space in a friend's hanger; assembling the side panels



assembling the side panels; the hull in the background



copper stitch



stitching side panels to bulkheads



first big step done



side panels stitched to the bulkheads



stitching the centerline



lots of stitching to do



planing the tailblock



checking the alignment before glueing begins; top deck in the background



tightening a side panel stitch



sealed hull interior



sealed hull interior

2013 - 06

[The Reinforcement - 2013-06-03 07:35](#)

The board has taken shape. A pile of plywood has been stitched together with copper wire and reinforced with epoxy and fiberglass. I couldn't be more pleased with how it is looking. Sure, there is an occasional rough spot but this board has been built to be used and not put on display.

I installed a fin box in the board so I could have interchangeable fins and not have to rely on fixed fins. This required cutting into the board which brought some apprehension. I measured multiple times and plunged the drill through the thin wood. Right now I have a flexible plastic fin which will be great for the unexpected shallow spots. Ideally, I will get a wood fin to match and just hang onto the plastic one as a spare.



marking out the fin box hole



fin box hole



trimming the deck after the epoxy dried



ready to glass the hull

The few days that it took to install the deck and glass the whole board were some of the most enjoyable in this process. I used a block plane to level the bulkheads, stringers, and side rails so the deck would sit flat. Before the fiberglass fabric was laid out I spent a few hours with a power sander to round the edges. This is when I really started to see the potential of the board in its final form.



using a plastic spreader to apply epoxy to the glass

Glassing is a Surprisingly long process. After mixing the epoxy you pour small amounts on the board and apply it with a plastic spreader. The fabric slowly absorbs it and turns from white to clear. After a few coats of epoxy the fiberglass weave disappears and you are left with a beautiful wood grain finish.



glassed hull; excess fiberglass is trimmed after it cures



bow



installed fin box and glassed hull



sanding the deck before glassing



ribbit



mixing epoxy



applying epoxy



trimming excess fiberglass fabric



glassed deck with some lamps for a little heat

It seemed appropriate to add an American flag to the tail since I'll be traversing so much of the country. I bought a small flag which fit perfectly on the back. Before the glass went on I saturated the fabric in epoxy and centered it on the stern. Afterwards I applied the glass.



American flag laminated under the fiberglass



After two more coats of epoxy you can no longer see the fiberglass weave

I happened to find some fabric that had a patriotic moose. I cut it out and glued it about an inch above the footpad position. This leads me to the name of the boat. I have been bouncing between The

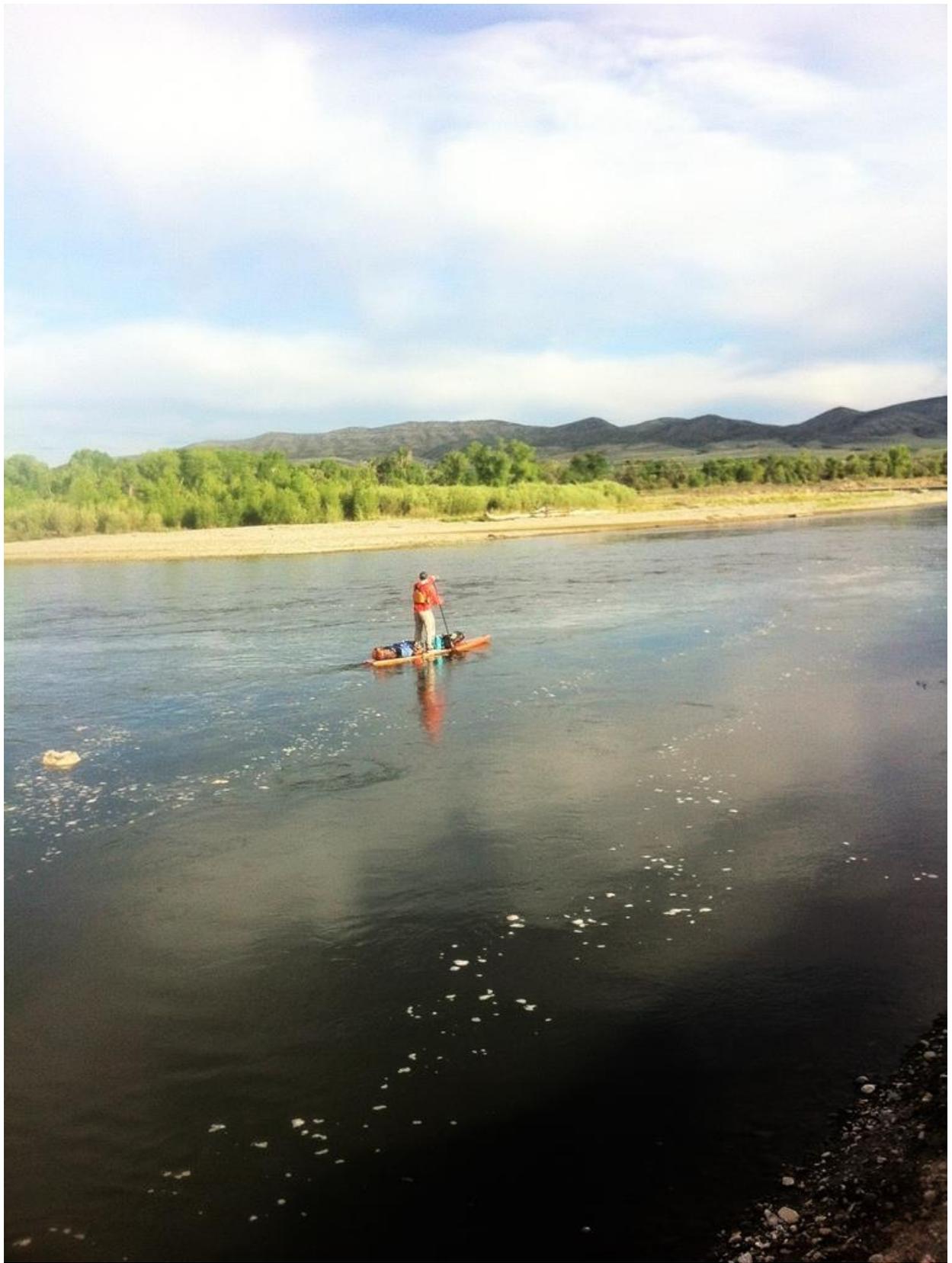
Bulkhead Bull or The Muddy Moose since I'll be traveling down the Muddy Missouri. Anyone have thoughts on this?



I got a little behind with posting as I focused on finishing everything to head west on schedule. The boat has been varnished and is looking shiny. I crossed into Wyoming last night and will be heading to the Grand Tetons for a couple of days before making my way to the headwaters. Details of the finished board and my departure coming soon.

[It's Happening! - 2013-06-09 03:28](#)







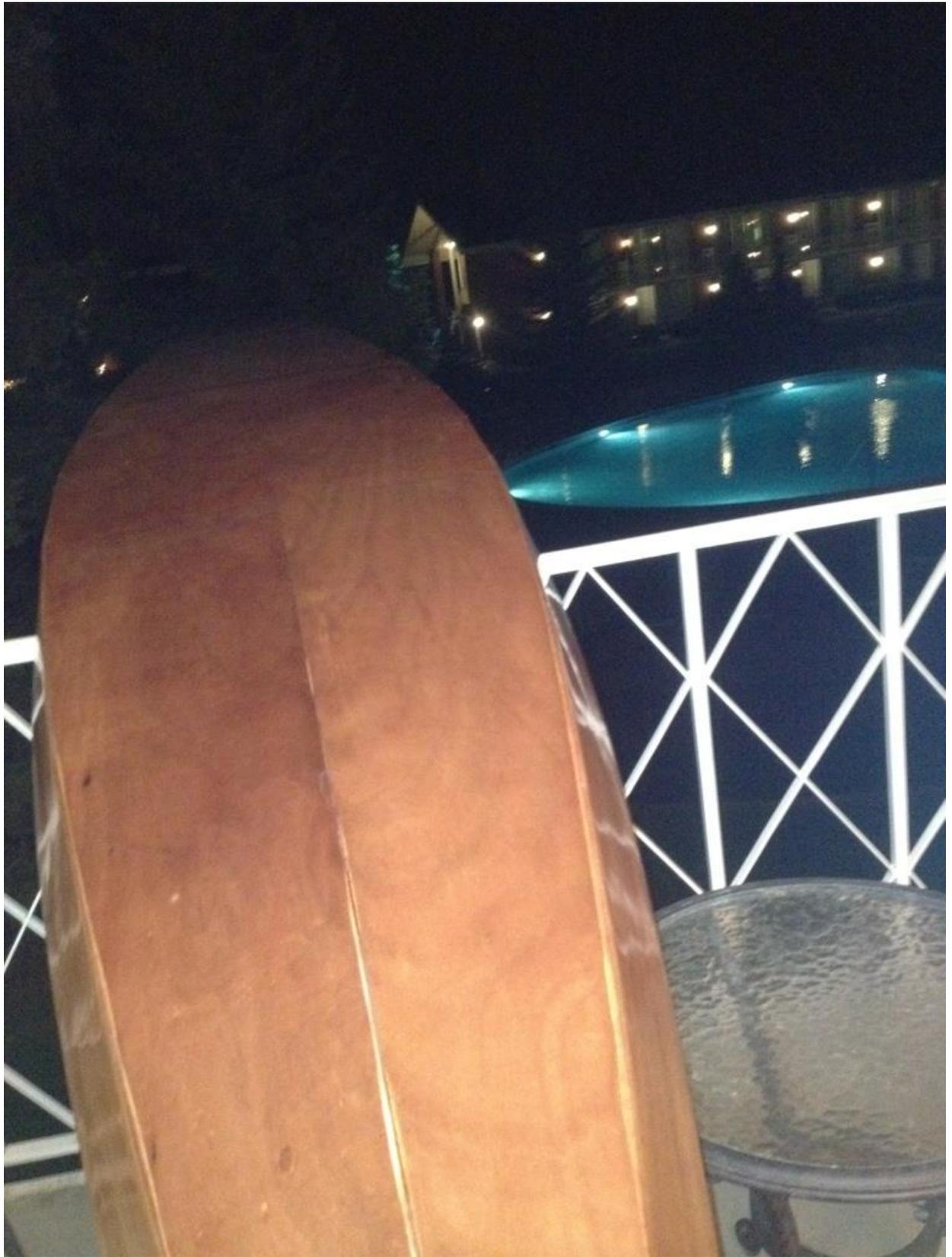
My friend Josh drove out to Montana with me to see me off and drive my car back to the Midwest. We spent a few days in the Grand Tetons which were amazing. My departure and trip west is a whole other post. I have tons of shots that need editing and stories to write.

I just wanted to give a quick update for now. Yeaterday morning I launched on the Madison River just above the Missouri. A few miles went by before I got comfortable with a loaded down board and transitioned into my new way of life for the next few months. The current was swift with a few small rapids and after 22 miles I stopped just up river from Toston Dam. I had a long evening of going through all my bags and getting better organized.

There was a short but strenuous portage around the dam where I found out the dolly I built in the hotel room can't hold much more weight than the board. I carried all my gear then turned around for the board. At one point today I hit 8.7 mph and it was a fairly easy 21 miles to the town of Townsend Montana.

Tomorrow I hit my first lake. The 25 mile Canyon Ferry Lake will be my first true test. I'll be missing that current.

Here is a preview of my "Heading West" post to come





[The Trip West - 2013-06-17 02:56](#)

I was in hyper-manic-prioritize-productive mode. My self-imposed deadline to leave town was looming and the to-do list only seemed to grow longer. Each day I did what I could from sun up to sun down and eventually the list got smaller. I left early on Sunday June, 2nd but my friends organized a farewell party on Friday. After scrambling all day I arrived at the Fountainhead Bar in Chicago to an amazing group of people. I scanned the whiskey menu and ordered a Buffalo Trace and let some stress turn to excitement. Plans were discussed and I answered questions from friends who couldn't quite wrap their head around how or why I wanted to do this. It was a night I'll remember and I want to thank each and every person who came out to wish me luck and for the unexpected gifts.



lots and lots of sanding

I went through no less than 100 sanding disks to get the board ready for varnish. Despite my best efforts to control runs and drips in the epoxy there were many spots that needed to be squashed into toxic dust with the whirl of 80 grit on a random orbital sander.



first coat of varnish

I had never used varnish before and I grossly underestimated the time it takes to apply a coat. None-the-less I enjoy the process. Probably because the board now gave off a brilliant sheen but it could just be that I no longer had a sander in my hands. With only time for two coats before I hit the road I planned to add a third coat to the sides and deck sometime along the way to Three Forks, Montana.



tied down tightly

The rain poured down on my last trip to the hanger. As I tried to secure the board to the top of my vehicle I found out how slippery a wooden boat can be when wet. I made a mental note to never try to stand on the board where there wasn't a foot pad.

Sunday June 2nd, the day was here all too soon. I didn't feel ready and the to-do list still had a lot to be checked off. This was also the day I had to say good bye to my girlfriend Rachel for a few months. That was no fun task. She has been incredibly supportive of this whole crazy notion. I am very thankful for that and know I owe her big time for the support and understanding.

My friend Josh took the bus in from Michigan the day before and the two of us hit the road west out of Chicago. The plan was to spend a few days in the Grand Tetons before heading to the headwaters. Josh would then drive my car home for me. There was finality in the fact that he was taking the car back east and it wasn't being stored in Montana. It would make it much harder to quit in the early get-go. I liked that idea.

Just after crossing the Missouri River in Omaha the GPS indicated our next turn was in about 700 miles. It was gonna be a long way to get back to this point on the river. When stopping for gas I checked the oil to find it was very low. Apparently the added drag from the board made my car burn oil at a much quicker rate than the 172,000 mile SUV already did. I bought two five-quart containers of it and we

added a little every stop.

Conversation carried us to Cheyenne the first night. I was weary of leaving the board on the roof with no way to lock it up. The first hotel we tried didn't have any first floor rooms available but they did have balconies so we lifted the board up to the second story and tucked it in for the night. We got some interesting looks in the morning as we lowered the 14 foot board out the sliding glass door.



lifting the board into the room over the balcony



sleep well Muddy Moose

We got all loaded up in the morning and headed for Jackson, Wyoming. Right away we could tell something didn't quite smell right. Turns out that I hadn't screwed the cap to the varnish thinner on tight enough. It had tipped over when we unloaded the car. There are few things less pleasant on a road trip than the overwhelming stench of neurotoxic varnish thinner. We loaded the offending container into multiple trash bags and continued on with the windows down on a not quite warm enough June afternoon. Half way to Jackson we pulled up the trunk mat and wedged it between the board and the roof.

After hundreds of miles of flat landscape and farms we started to feel the terrain change and see the mountains rise in the west. When the mountains first come into view there is always a moment where your mind becomes transfixed on all that's ahead. The adventurous spirit began to buzz.



I was last in Jackson about fifteen years ago and have been dreaming of coming back since. This Missouri River trip was the perfect excuse to come back. I've seen mountains all over the United States but there is nothing like the Grand Tetons. We drove the long road in, admiring the Snake River as it slithered its way in front of the peaks. We had no set plans for our trip but on the drive in I discovered we could camp in "tent cabins." These were structures with two log walls, two canvas walls, a canvas roof and a potbelly stove. I figured I could store the board in there and it would be safe enough. Also, it would provide a place to apply my last coat of varnish.



The Grand Tetons



the "tent cabin" we stayed (and varnished) in

We would go to sleep each night warm as the fire burned in the stove and wake up cold long after the wood had turned to ash. I did some light sanding on the picnic table and then balanced the board on the bunks to varnish. I did this in the morning so the smell would dissipate by the time we needed to go to sleep. There was a satisfaction with finishing the boat in such a serene setting. Sure you are supposed to have a totally dust free environment when varnishing but the boat ended up looking excellent. Having built the board I wouldn't want it any other way. It wouldn't be the same experience going down river on a pre-made board. Although it was shipped to me as a kit it has become a creation that feels uniquely mine.



sanding before my last coat of varnish



varnishing



Hidden Falls by Jenny Lake in Teton National Park

I love new experiences but I knew I had to repeat a hike I did fifteen years earlier. We took the ferry across Jenny Lake and hiked up to a waterfall and an overlook above the lake before heading into the mountains for several miles. We skipped the ferry and walked along the lake on the way back to the parking lot. It felt good to be in the mountains again.



Josh above Jenny Lake



Despite my better judgement Josh talked me into going horse back riding. I'm usually up for anything but I'm just not comfortable on a horse. Still, there is no better place to go horse back riding than Wyoming. I sucked up my nervousness and settled into the saddle of Dixie Cup as Josh got paired with Sally. It was easy going as we crossed a river that came up to mid horse and I was having a good time. That was until good ol' Dixie cup took off and started bucking. I did my best to gain control again and all-in-all it was pretty exciting. Our cowboy guide thought the horse might have gotten stung by a bee. The river crossing on the way back was probably the worst part. The current was strong and the horse decided to freak out a bit and turn downriver and thrash about. Turns out this horse got spooked by lightning when it was crossing this river in the past and sometimes acts up... great. After two hours we could barely stand up and our knees were aching. That's enough horseback riding for about a decade.



a couple city slickers on horses



I much prefer to cross a river on a paddleboard than a horse

There was a road on the map marked "four-wheel drive required." My car isn't exactly made for off-roading but it has good clearance so we figured we'd check it out. The two hour, 20 mile drive was one of the best parts of the trip. We got many good views of the Snake River on our right and the Tetons on our left. As we followed the river upstream I began to get really excited to see the Missouri. There were some fairly rutted parts of the road but the car handled the terrain fine. You don't know if you don't try.



172,000 miles strong

After years of looking at this board online and weeks of building, it was finally time for its first test run. I had no doubt it would float but how would it feel. I installed the deck pads and the bungee cords that would eventually secure all my gear. We drove it a short distance to Colter Bay on Jackson Lake and I shoved off. The board looked great in the setting sunlight and felt strong and fast. There could not have been a better setting for its first float.



the boards first float!

We drove back into Jackson for dinner and were treated with one of the best sunsets I've ever seen. The sky lit up in color that went from orange to purple. On our way back the night was moonless and the

stars were brilliant. We pulled over at the Snake River Overlook and I aimed my camera away from the mountains and towards the Milky Way. It had been years since I'd seen it last.



most majestic mountains in the USA



fire in the sky



The Grand Tetons in all their glory



cars passing as we gawk at the Milky Way



The Milky Way on the way back from a late dinner in Jackson

The next morning we headed for Yellowstone. It is directly on the way to Three Forks. A few miles down the road we saw a moose and then right at the Yellowstone entrance we got to see a grizzly. I have been waiting years to see a bear and was absolutely thrilled to see one and was also happy it wasn't too close.



My first ever bear sighting!

We did the typical Yellowstone geyser walk and hit the road again.



Riverside Geyser in Yellowstone



Old Faithful

We had been seeing a lot of bison but at the north end of the park they were just feet from the road. The car in front of us stopped to let one cross. We got pinned in when the car behind us didn't give us any room to back up. The buffalo crossing the road decided to turn right and walk down the other lane towards us. Maybe it was the smell of oil burning in my engine or the goofy thing on my roof but it took great interest in us. This car-sized animal squared off a few feet from my car and looked right through the windshield for what felt like several minutes. I whispered to josh, "no sudden movements." Eventually it walked right next to the driver's side and carried on up the line of stopped cars.



a bison RIGHT next to the road





we got pinned in by cars and this guy decided to check us out for a couple minutes

I raided the REI in Bozeman for last minute items and had the most fortunate of chance encounters. The lady helping me find quick-dry pants, Kris, asked what I was gearing up for. When I told her, she informed me that her boyfriend, Norm Miller, had paddled UP the river and she would give me his number. I gave him a call and he couldn't have been more helpful with insights into the first few days of the trip and I think he was more excited about my trip than I even was. He has been a great help in relaying information to me and putting me in touch with other paddlers through Facebook.

After REI Josh bought me my last meal before hitting the water early the next day. We then drove over to the put-in site to scope it out. The current looked fast and the water was cold. A feeling of exciting trepidation filled me as we headed for the motel.



The headwaters the evening before launch

For hours I organized and packed. Ideally you don't wait until about 8 hours before setting off to see if you can fit everything in your bags but that's where I was. Josh was a giant help in all this. We made a huge mess as we cut PVC pipe and thread rod and formed it into a makeshift board dolly. I found out two days later that sometimes it doesn't really pay to make what you can buy. It does work pretty well on pavement but most of the portages are gravel. Either way it is small and light weight and the board is pretty easy to carry.



the board cart we threw together the night before the launch. It works fine on pavement but its pretty poor in the gravel. Small and lightweight.

The final touch to the board was adding the decals from CLCboats. I think the blue color looks great and adds some dimension to the board. They even gave me some missouririversup.com decals.



finished the board at 1am the night before launch

We got to the Missouri Headwaters State Park about 7:30am the next morning after going to bed at two. There was one can of Moose Drool Brown Ale left from our time in the Tetons so after moving all the gear down by the water I said a few words and poured it over the bow to christen the board, "The Muddy Moose of the Missouri." I said good bye to Josh and thanked him for his immense help during the last few days. I think he had a rather good time though.

I took a breathe and looked around to take in the soft morning light and crisp mountain air and stepped onto the board. I rocked it back and forth to feel the load of my gear for the first time and let the current of the Madison carry me about 200 yards into the beginning of the Missouri.





[Building an Expedition - 2013-06-18 23:26](#)

The visual story of building the board and setting off for the Missouri.

<https://vimeo.com/68634149>

[Some press on the trip from Great Falls - 2013-06-22 04:18](#)

<http://www.krtv.com/mobile/videos/man-paddleboarding-from-mt-to-mo/>

<http://www.greatfallstribune.com/article/20130617/NEWS01/306170016/A-one-man-expedition-Water-walker-plans-journey-Missouri>

[Three Forks to Great Falls - 2013-06-22 04:19](#)

I was off. I called for Josh to toss me the GoPro camera that he was filming me with from up on the river bank. Plunk. It bounced off my hand and into the water. Luckily it's waterproof and floats. I bent down to grab it as I eyed the cross current from the Missouri coming closer. Just a minute after launching on the Madison I let the current of the Missouri spin me to the right and carry me north. Most people don't realize that the beginning of the Missouri flows due north and doesn't bend decidedly east for a couple hundred miles.

I sped toward my first set of rapids at about 7mph. I don't know how many times I'd heard a slightly misinformed Montana native warn, "but there are lots of rapids on the Missouri." The rapids are about as big as the wake from a jetski. Really nothing to worry about but I admit I was nervous going through the first set.

After a few hours I found a gravel bar to make lunch on. I pulled my new tiny little camp stove out of its plastic case for the first time and fired it up. The thing sounds like a small rocket and boils water in just a few minutes. I opened my first packet of freeze dried food and poured boiling water in to "cook" it. Just as my feet dried out I walked back into the water and set off again.

The scenery began to intensify and wouldn't stop getting grander for several days. I took a ninety degree left turn and headed into a section with towering cave-pocked cliffs. I was getting the hang of the board and the current was helping my confidence in the journey.



I arrived at my first camp site at 3pm and after setting up my tent I dumped everything out of every bag and totally repacked because I didn't know where anything was. It was a lonely first night. I had been very busy leading up to the trip and I didn't know what to do with myself now that all I could do was sit around at the head of a dam with no cell service.

I had expected to get on the river and immediately start reflecting on how it all came to be and the meaning behind the trip. The truth is, there just wasn't time. There were maps to go over and rocks to watch out for. It wasn't until a couple miles down the river that first day that I paused and realized I was actually going after it. Feelings of fortune that I got myself to this point came as I passed a cement plant on my right. Perhaps not the best setting for wilderness reflection. I carried on.

In the morning I began my first portage. Josh and I threw together a small cart out of lawn mower wheels and PVC the night before I launched. I planned to load all my bags on the board and pull it down the road. This was not to be. The cart couldn't handle the weight so I would walk with all my bags draped on my shoulders for about 100 yards and turn around and wheel the board along. I'd repeat this until I got to an area where I could put in.



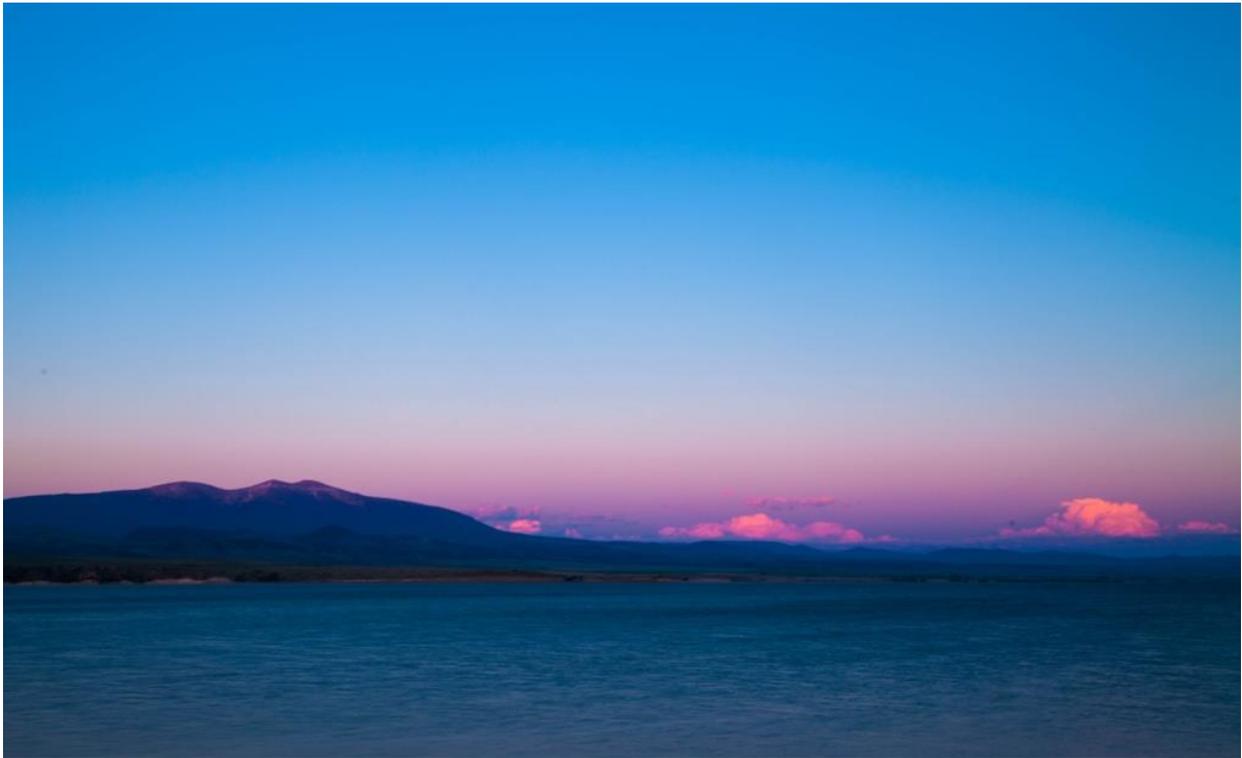
I spent my second night in the tiny town of Townsend Montana. The towns slogan of "Valley of Adventure" spoke to me. The walk into town provided the opportunity to grab some supplies I decided I had needed and some fresh fruit. From there I headed into my first lake. Canyon Ferry lake is only 25 miles long and I was feeling confident heading in.

Just a couple hours into the lake I got my first test of the trip. The headwinds slowed my paddling speed to about 1 mph. My back and arms screamed in defiance so I resorted to walking along shore for about 6 miles as I pushed my board forward with my paddle.











I hit the water at 6am the next morning to beat the wind and was greeted with a whole day of sunshine and calm conditions. The north end of the lake was full of coves that looked like great places to anchor a boat. After exploring a small cave I pressed on and made it to the marina by the dam by noon. I hurried up a hill to the bar to get some food. I ordered a frozen pizza from the small menu and a dark local beer. After I ate I fell asleep at my table for a couple hours and no one bothered me. I started chatting with the bar owner and his wife and he drove me around the dam and I carried on for a few more hours.

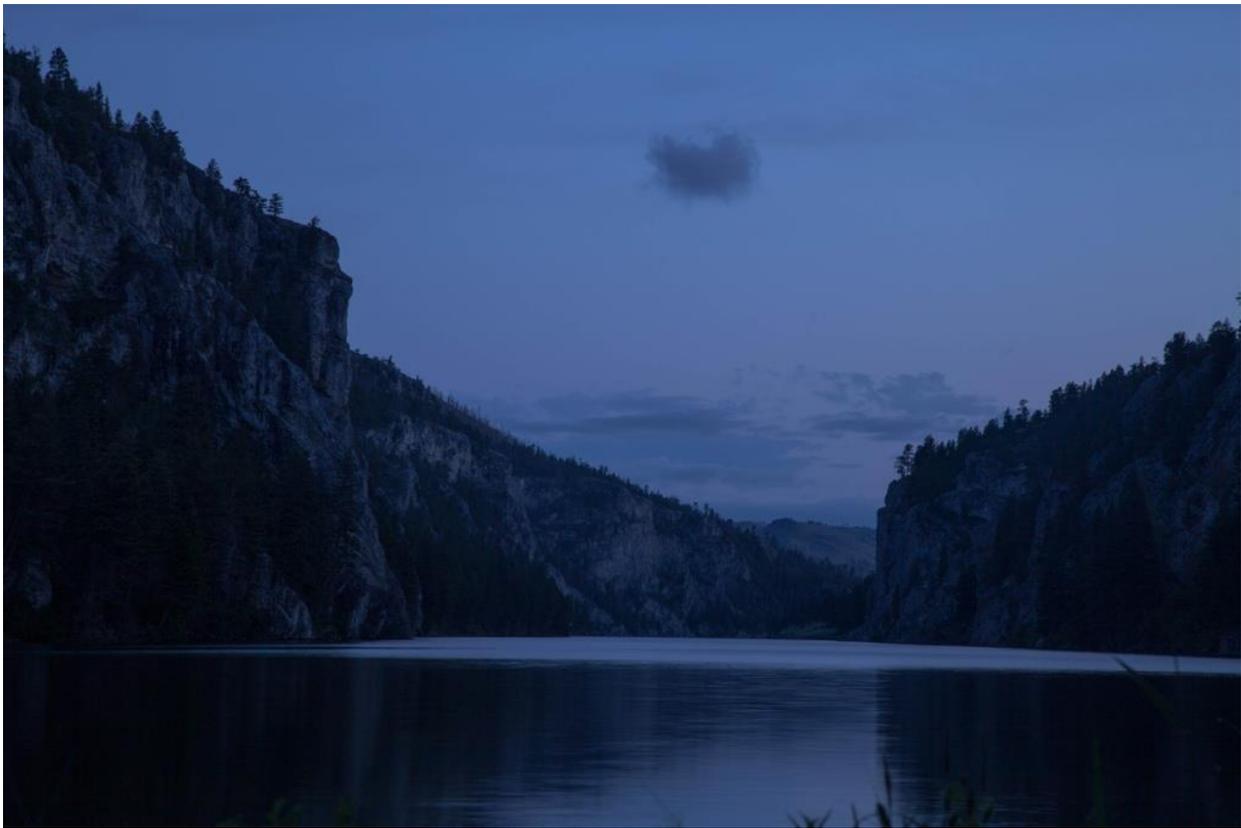






Another lake, another morning of headwinds. I fought for 4 hours to make it only 8 miles. Totally worn out and with storm clouds rolling in I pulled off into the most picturesque forest I'd even been in. The scene must have been what Henry David Thoreau was after. As the rain began I set up my tent and ate and slept for 3 hrs before the skies cleared. It was now 5pm and I had a shot of making it to the Gates of the Mountains by sundown if I hurried.

I paddled a half mile across the lake only to realize the portage ramp was on the side I just came from. Not willing to go back I hauled all my gear up an impossibly steep and slippery slope and was on my way again shortly after. I paddled until just before sunset and set up my camera to grab images of the passing magenta clouds over the entrance to the Gates.







I awoke at 5am to watch the first sun rays of the day come over the cliff walls and pushed off deeper into the canyon. I took my time through this section. I didn't see another person for hours as I took in the same sights that Lewis and Clark saw 200 years earlier.







Another lake, more headwinds. Just before I entered Holter Lake another nasty storm system rolled in. The weather radio was indicating that the whole state was getting slammed. The shore was lined with cottages so I picked a house that looked empty and sat under their second story deck for a few hours. Once there was a break in weather, I headed onto the main body of the lake and was across after a few tough hours.

That night I thought I might wash away in the rain. When the hail started I pulled my biggest Aquapac dry bag over my head and hoped the tent held together.



In the morning I took some time to dry things out from the past couple days of rain. The campground host, Dan Fry, drove me around the dam and I launched into a rejuvenating current.

This day was probably my favorite. It started pouring as soon as I got on the water but I didn't care. I was cruising again at 7mph and the scenery once again surprised me with its beauty. I must have passed 100 trout fisherman, most of whom couldn't quite figure out what I was doing standing on this board as I floated by.

I pulled into Craig to get some food. There are two restaurants by the river in Craig. One closes at 3:00 and the other opens at 4:00. I got there at 3:10. I went to the bar to kill time and get out of the rain. There I ended up talking to a guy named John Rittel. I've heard you meet the most interesting people on trips like these and this guy was one of them. I listened to his stories of world travel and Montana discoveries. He is also the author of the book, *Cooking Backyard to Backcountry*. Check it out on amazon.

After a very late lunch I wandered into a fishing lodge a few miles downstream. They allowed me to use their outdoor shower which was enclosed from the neck down and had a wonderful cedar scent. Easily

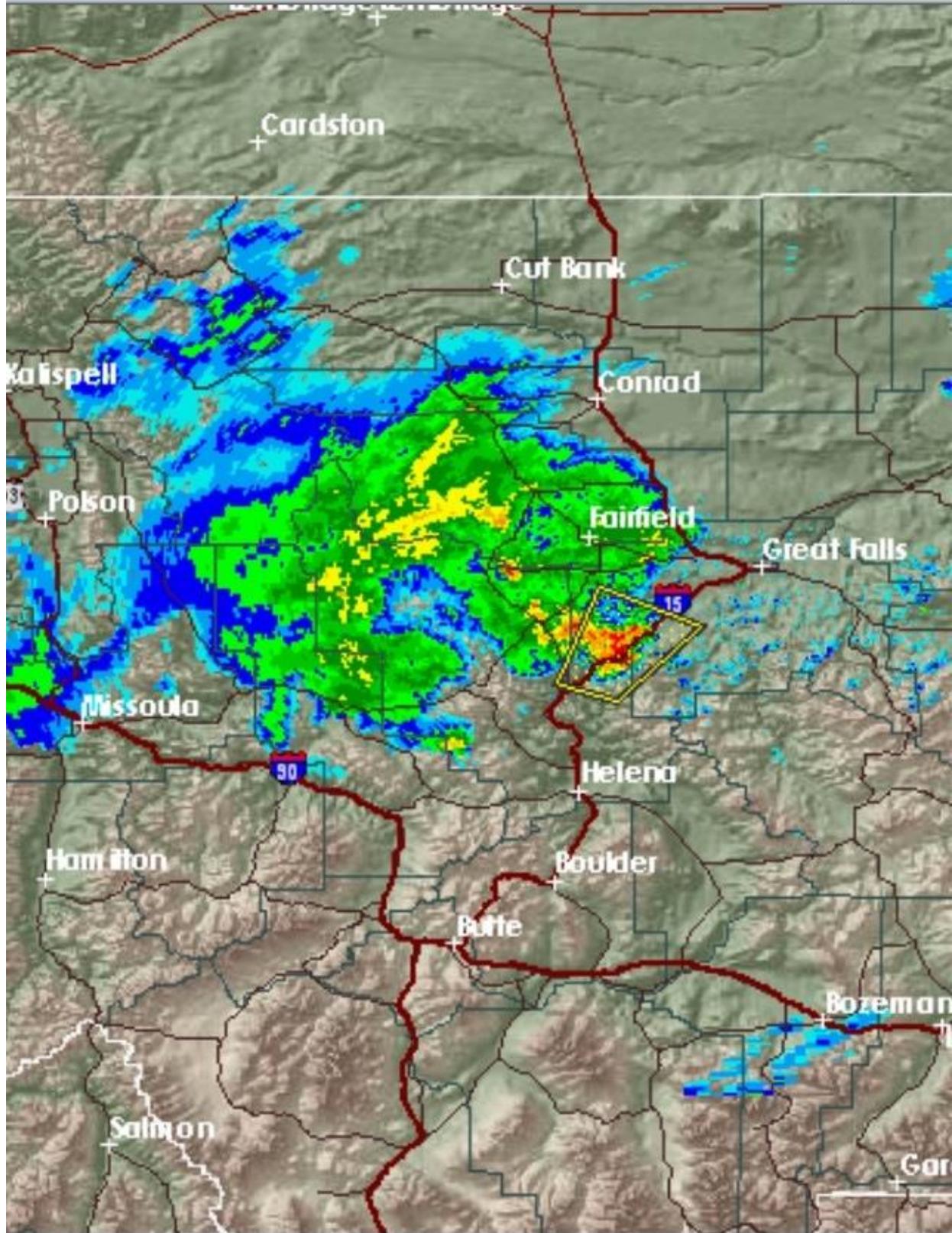
the most refreshing shower I'd ever had. The water was hot and there was a great view of the river.











Even though I knew I'd have to wait for my dad to arrive I was anxious to get to Great Falls. I made the next day a long day and got 44 miles in. I was helped along by the current and a nice tail wind for a change. There were eagles and osprey soaring through the sky all day. The even was filled with beaver sightings.

I camped on the river bank and watched the setting sun softly light up a herd of cattle on the grassy hill across the river. The wind woke me up at 2am. When I realized I forgot to tie the board down I begrudgingly got out of the tent and tied my line around a bush. I turned around and over the cow pasture was a sight of a very bright milky way.







Five hours of paddling into the next day I arrived in Great Falls. I loaded my gear onto my board and walked 200 yards down a nicely paved bike path to a hotel and an awaiting shower and laundry room.











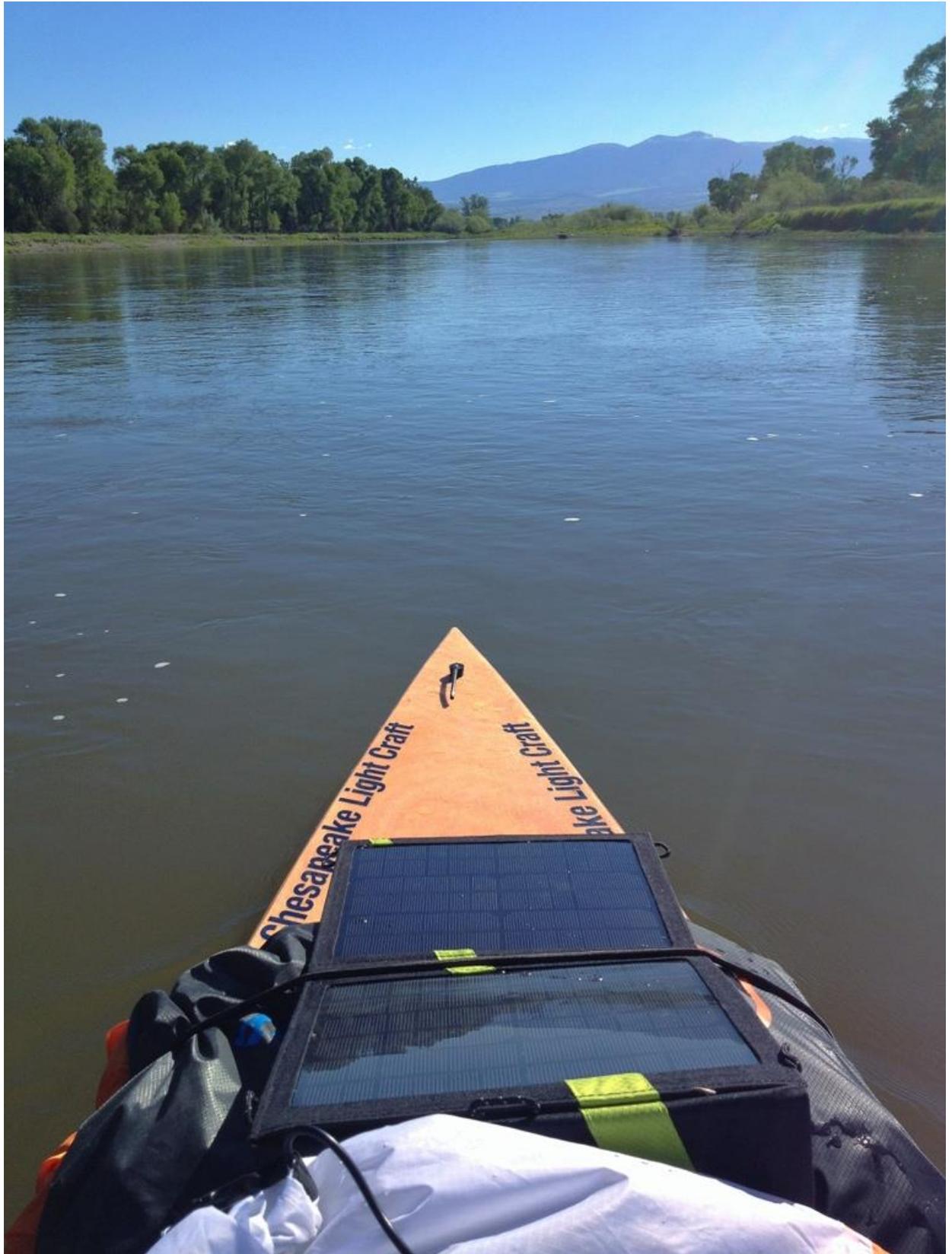
















2013 - 07

[The Wait - 2013-07-03 05:15](#)

It was a Saturday and I wasn't scheduled to hit the water again until Friday when my dad would arrive to join me for a week. I had really been looking forward to some time off in Great Falls but I wasn't expecting so much time. I did the first 200 miles quicker than I anticipated.

The community of people traveling the river is small but well connected. There were two people I wanted to meet and they would only be there Saturday night. This, as well as laundry, a shower, and restaurant food, were the reasons for pushing myself to arrive on Saturday.

I called up Dave Miller, author of *The Complete Paddler*, and he just happened to have enough time to grab a beer. I discovered his guidebook about a year ago. It details all the important things for a paddler to know while traveling the Missouri River. From where to camp and typical water conditions to where to grab a beer.

We sat down at MacKenzie River Pizza and each had a Moose Drool. He greeted me with the same greeting I get from anyone who has heard about this trip. They size me up and ask, "so you're the guy who's paddleboarding the Missouri." They then wait for my response which will give them an idea if I'm crazy or just ambitious.



After the beer Dave drove me over to where a guy by the name of David Forbes was staying. David is 62 and currently resides in Texas. He is kayaking the entire Missouri and he had been relaying some information back to me as he travelled a couple days ahead. We all chatted and compared river notes. David and I asked Dave questions about the sections to come and he did his best to answer in the same straightforward way the book is written. It was a real pleasure talking to the two Daves.

I set to work organizing the 100 gigs of video and pictures I already amassed. I originally had planned to

post video updates along the way but it took three very long nights to create the first segment.

<http://www.missouririversup.com/243/>

I might just have to post only quick edits of raw footage until I get a constant internet connection and power source.

On Sunday morning I went out in search of pancakes. I found a little diner that hadn't been updated in 40 years and settled right in. For \$8 I got two huge strawberry covered pancakes, two eggs and hash browns. Exactly the kind of meal I was looking for.

On Monday morning a reporter from KRTV Great Falls called and asked if I could come into the station in an hour. I jumped in a cab and met with Matt. He is the weather guy but also covers local news. The camera was set up and we did a quick interview. Matt used to work for a storm chase tourist company and showed me some great shots of tornados. Hopefully I don't run into any. The story aired the next day and captured the spirit of the trip well.

<http://www.krtv.com/mobile/videos/man-paddleboarding-from-mt-to-mo/>

The Great Falls Tribune had called when I was at KRTV so I met with them in the afternoon. The newspaper still appears strong in Great Falls and everyone seems to read it. Practically everyone I met thereafter had seen the article and recognized me. People passing in boats a couple hundred miles away would ask if I was that guy from the paper.

<http://www.krtv.com/mobile/videos/man-paddleboarding-from-mt-to-mo/>

I got a message from a guy who saw the article in the paper and invited me over for dinner. His name was Nolan and he had run 450 miles across South Dakota in 2008 in just 14 days. Along the way he was touched by the kindness of strangers and he wanted to pay it forward. It was my last night in Great Falls and I still had half a large pizza to eat so we settled on ice cream. Over huge bowls of peanut butter cup we talked all things endurance travel. It was nice to meet another person who could understand the reasons for a trip like this after completing one himself.

As we sat on his back porch I watched pigeons fly in and out of a large shed-sized birdhouse. Nolan and his wife train homing pigeons. These aren't like the awful pigeons of Chicago but pretty and white. I mentioned that I had never seen a baby pigeon. You just don't see them in the city. They got out a couple baby birds for me to check out. The real small ones kind of look like a skinned chicken. I then got to take a fully developed bird and toss it in the air and watch it fly back to its house.

On the way out they gave me a steel water bottle with Montana's new slogan "Get Lost (in Montana)" and some Gu packets. A totally unique few hours that I'll remember.





I arranged a shuttle around the series of dams that were downstream of Great Falls for the morning. Jim from the Medicine River Canoe Club picked me up and drove me the 30 or so miles down to the first place to put back in the water. There isn't much choice but to skip the section around the dams. Lewis and Clark had to portage around Great Falls too because of the waterfalls. Though, I had it a little easier in the passenger seat of a pickup truck.



I paddled the easy 16 miles to the Fort Benton Canoe Camp where I ran into David Forbes. He was also waiting a few days for someone to arrive. We walked over to an adjacent campground to meet a gal named Sandy that Dave Miller had told us about. We watched her horses graze as we waited for her to get home. Lovely little lady Sandy is. She was very happy to have us as guests but as the sky darkened we headed back to camp. Another wicked thunderstorm blew through the area for a few hours so there wasn't much to do but wait it out and hope to not be blown away or hit by lightning.

There were a lot of sights I wanted to see in the historic town of Fort Benton. This town of 1500 is known as "The Birthplace of Montana" and was established in 1846 as a fur trading post.

After meeting with Bethany, a reporter from the River Press, I headed down to the actual Fort Benton. Along the way I admired an old steel railroad bridge that now serves as a pedestrian walkway and then walked past a replica keelboat. It must have been the most brutal work imaginable to bring one of those upstream.

http://www.riverpressnews.com/More_Articles/Entries/2013/6/26_Paddleboarder_embarks_on_100-day_Missouri_River_adventure.html



Once inside Fort Benton I got talking to a man in deerskin pants. He was working there as a reenactor in the roll of an interpreter. The interpreters roll was to facilitate trade between the fur trappers and Indians. He told lively stories of what it was like for those pioneers of the west for nearly an hour before another visitor wandered in.

My next stop was the Palace bar. I was ordered by a certain guidebook author to do two things. Meet Sandy and check out this bar. The Palace Bar is the kind of place where all the heads turn toward the door when it swings open. Unlike in western movies it isn't in an intimidating way. After sitting down and noticing the giant steer head mounted above the entrance I immediately got talking with two couples and a guy by the name of Mike bought me a beer. Word travels fast and they had heard I was coming through town. Mike, Judy, Al and Gale were all added to the ever growing list of people who warned me about the weather on Fort Peck Lake.

Fort Peck had been a growing legend in my mind since before this trip started. Everyone in Montana kind of gasps when they begin talking of it. "Ohh Fort Peck, the wind can blow there. White caps on that lake." I reassure all the concerned acquaintances that I plan on listening to what the weather has to say and only being on the water when conditions are safe. If I have I sit on shore for a few days then so be it.

After waiting for the rain to stop on Friday morning I paddled the mile to the boat ramp where my dad was waiting. There was a whole crowd of people getting ready to launch and a few of them recognized me from the paper. You wouldn't want to end up in the paper for a bad reason in a place like Great Falls because absolutely everyone would recognize you.

In our unplanned, matching orange rain jackets and orange PFDs we set out for the next 7 days and 150 miles together.



My current location is 15 miles from the dam on Fort Peck. If you'd like daily updates please check out the Facebook page: Missouri River SUP Adventure. This blog will run a week or two behind.

Floating with Dad - 2013-07-10 04:09

My dad and I pushed off into the brisk current and set out for 150 miles together. I watched as he settled into the rental canoe. Twelve gallons of water rode in the bow as a counter weight and to provide us our only source of water for the next week. I was happy when I saw that he would have no problem with the load of gear.

This was the only time I had planned on anyone paddling with me for more than a day. It is logistically difficult for someone to meet me at a set time and then travel away from their car for a few days. What would they paddle and how would they get back? The section between Fort Benton and Kipp's Landing is a heavily floated section with a few options for outfitters so it works well.

If I wanted anyone to join me for some time on the water it would be my dad. He was the one who introduced me to a vast variety of outdoor sports growing up. He loves Montana and I knew this would be a great trip and one that was a little challenging.



We did a very easy 20.3 miles that first day and made camp close to two huge cotton wood trees. The wind was blowing so I strapped my board to one of them for safe keeping.



With hours of daylight left we climbed some rocks and then walked a couple miles to an overlook over Decision Point. Here Lewis and Clark had to decide which of the two merging rivers was the Missouri before they could carry on.



Back at camp the local Sheriff stopped by to chat. He drove up in a sand colored suburban that looked to be from about 1985. After talking for a while we settled down for the night.



Around 11pm a truck pulled into our camp and shined its lights right through my tent. They must not have been expecting anyone to be there because they quickly backed out and continued down the road. Turns out they were out for a Friday night of shooting a gun into the river. At least they knew we were there and would hopefully aim away. I stacked a couple bags between the direction of the gun shots and myself and went to sleep.

We decided to do 36 miles the next day so we could camp at the Eagle Creek Campground which has a great view of some white cliffs and a slot canyon to explore. David happened to be paddling by as we launched so we paddled with him until we stopped for an early lunch. My dad got more acquainted with life on the river and enjoyed mooing back at the cows.

The riverside is lined with soft sandstone cliffs and sagebrush filled hills. There is an extra satisfaction in knowing that most of this area can only be accessed by water.

It was a long day but with a good current we reached Eagle Creek at dinner time. As we pulled into shore one of the group of nine people who launched at the same time as us called out, "Hey Scott, you want a cold beer?" We made landing in ankle deep, shoe-sucking mud and unloaded. After a pouch of freeze dried food we meandered over to say hello again and take them up on that beer.

These people know how to camp. They had a collapsible two burner propane stove and all the cookware needed to make a gourmet meal. They insisted we eat the leftover desert and made some amazing egg muffin sandwiches in the morning.

We planned on a low mileage day so we could do some hiking. After fighting through a swarm of mosquitos across a field, we reached the slot canyon. There we enjoyed scrambling through the ever tightening canyon and under a giant boulder that was wedged a few feet off the ground. You can't help but think of the possibility of getting squished and pinned down by a falling rock. Images flashed in my head of Aaron Ralston, the guy who cut his arm off with a pocket knife after getting it smashed against a canyon wall by a boulder in Utah.



We floated a few more miles and stopped to hike up to the "Hole in the Wall." Once again we battled Mosquitos in the valley before climbing up to the barren rocks. From our high vantage point we had great views of the river and incredible rock formations. The soft stone had been carved over time by the wind into flowing spires.









That night we camped at a great site shaded by huge cottonwood trees. As an added bonus, our fire ring was already piled high with wood. It's the little things.

The next day saw 15-20 mph headwinds but we were still able to cruise over 3mph with the current. There were a few John boats tied together floating down river. As we paddled past they waved us over and supplied us with a beer for me and a cokes for my dad. They were out mending fences to control their cattle and seemed to be having a great day of work. We talked as their dogs inspected us and then a bag of delicious chocolate chip cookies was passed around.

People see me standing and seem to take pity on me and want to give me food. Others are just curious. There aren't a lot of paddleboards out here.



That night at Judith Landing a big thunderstorm passed though the area but we got lucky as the clouds split us and we just saw light rain.

The river had now turned its signature muddy hue. It was as dark as chocolate milk the morning after the storm. Everything would soon be coated in a grimy wetness that would turn a chalky light brown when it dried.



We floated into a campsite at 4 or 5pm after 33.5 miles and the group of nine happened to be there. Mary Ann, Gary, Dave, May, Chinook, Becca, Ross, Cynthia and Jessi welcomed us in and even invited us under the shade of their cotton wood tree for dinner. This could not have been a better group of people to run into. The food was great and we really enjoyed talking with them. Most were on ski patrol at a hill just outside of Missoula so I got to talk about my favorite subject, skiing.

The people I've met in Montana have been the most genuinely nice people I've ever encountered. Everyone wants to help each other out and the whole state feels like one big community. Not only that but this group also had blueberry pie! A real homemade-set-on-the-window-sill-to-cool pie. Like I said, they know how to camp.



It was a perfect Montana morning. As everyone was loading their boats Chinook stopped for moment to take in the scenery and turned to me and said, "Everyday I'm happy to be alive." I'm was very happy I took the chance and was where I was.

The tailwinds were strong so we decided to arrive at our destination a day early. I was hoping the winds would stay at my back as I set out on the 130 mile Fort Peck Lake.

We were greeted by a swarm of mosquitos thicker than I'd ever seen when we reached James Kipp Recreation Area. The fire rings were submerged in a few inches of water but I managed to start a fire on the flip-down food grate to smoke out the bugs.

There was no cell reception but there was a pay phone you could make collect calls from. I needed more food before heading out into Fort Peck. It could be anywhere from 6-12 days depending on weather before I'd reach any sort of civilization. This was poor planning on my part. I should have left a box of food with the shuttle that was picking my dad up. We tried to use the phone to contact the shuttle service but we couldn't get a hold of anyone.

I went to talk to Illa, the campground host, to ask how far the nearest town was. Twenty eight miles in either direction. She graciously offered to drive us into the town of Roy. This saved us from waiting and hoping the shuttle had time to take me.

It's always interesting to get a bit away from the river and see how different things look. We were now in a land of long rolling hills with the closest mountains 40 miles off.

We passed Illa's house just down the road from the camp ground and she pointed out her ranch that ran for hundreds of acres on either side of the road. You could easily not know the Missouri flowed through if you were just passing by.

The grocery store in Roy is an oasis for a hungry traveler. We ordered deli sandwiches and I gathered groceries as we waited. The sandwich was excellent and was followed by a big waffle cone of ice cream for each of us. Thank you Illa!

My dad bid me good luck with the lake and I set out to make some miles before dark. I was happy everything worked out for him to join me and I look forward to our next adventure together.



























For daily updates please check out the Facebook page "Missouri River SUP Adventure" and please check out the "Donate to Big City Mountaineers" page on this site.

The Plague - 2013-07-12 03:39

If there is one over riding theme on the Missouri it's that everything is earned. My pictures may give the impression that things are just beautiful and grand. Well they kinda are, but not all times are fun. For every sighting of a bald eagle soaring through the air with a mountain backdrop, there are a few hours of neck aching headwinds. For every sunset over the water, there is knee deep mud to trudge through. As a whole, that's what makes trips like this special. You have to be out there for it all. Nothing is manicured or cookie cutter. Now let me tell you about a particularly frustrating couple hours.

It was 2:30 in the afternoon and I set out to do some miles before sunset. My dad had just gotten picked up and I was headed toward my first of three giant lakes, Fort Peck. I was feeling rested and well so at 6:30 I was thinking I'd push on until around 8:00.

My plans quickly changed. I had donned my rain jacket in an attempt to shield myself from the ever increasing mosquitos. There had been a lot of flooding in the area recently which allowed for prime mosquito breeding conditions. The river banks were high and cut at a steep angle which kept me on the water.

Luckily I had some bug spray that was easily accessible. I blasted away the fresh Montana air in favor of the salvation of deet. I must have used half a can. These super flies didn't care. It did nothing. I began spraying at the mosquitos so at least they would hate themselves.

By the time I finally found a spot I could take out I was engulfed in the pests. I tossed the bags up a four foot bank and tried to maintain my footing as I hauled the board out of the water.

I quickly grabbed a pile of wood and started a fire to smoke the mozzies out. I was standing directly in the smoke and still getting attacked. I rushed over to my bags and grabbed my tent. I threaded the poles in and tossed it onto the grass without bothering to stake it down.

I was now not just in a swarm but a cloud of mosquitos. I'd never seen anything like it. This was ten times more annoying than a screaming baby on an airplane. I was clothed head to toe but they were doing their best to go after my hands and face and through my pants. They wanted blood!

I unzipped the tent just enough to dive in and quickly closed it behind me. I could finally breathe. I chuckled to myself at the intensity of the bugs.

I cooked dinner in my tent and didn't plan to leave until morning. One mosquito's buzz isn't very loud but hundreds of them provides a reverberating reminder that you are trapped.

I started to pack away my camp stove and get ready to read a bit before bed. My elbow knocked an entire Nalgene full of instant lemonade all over my tent floor. I was in a wilderness preserve and I just scented a body sized patch of tent floor with the sweet smell of processed raspberry lemonade.

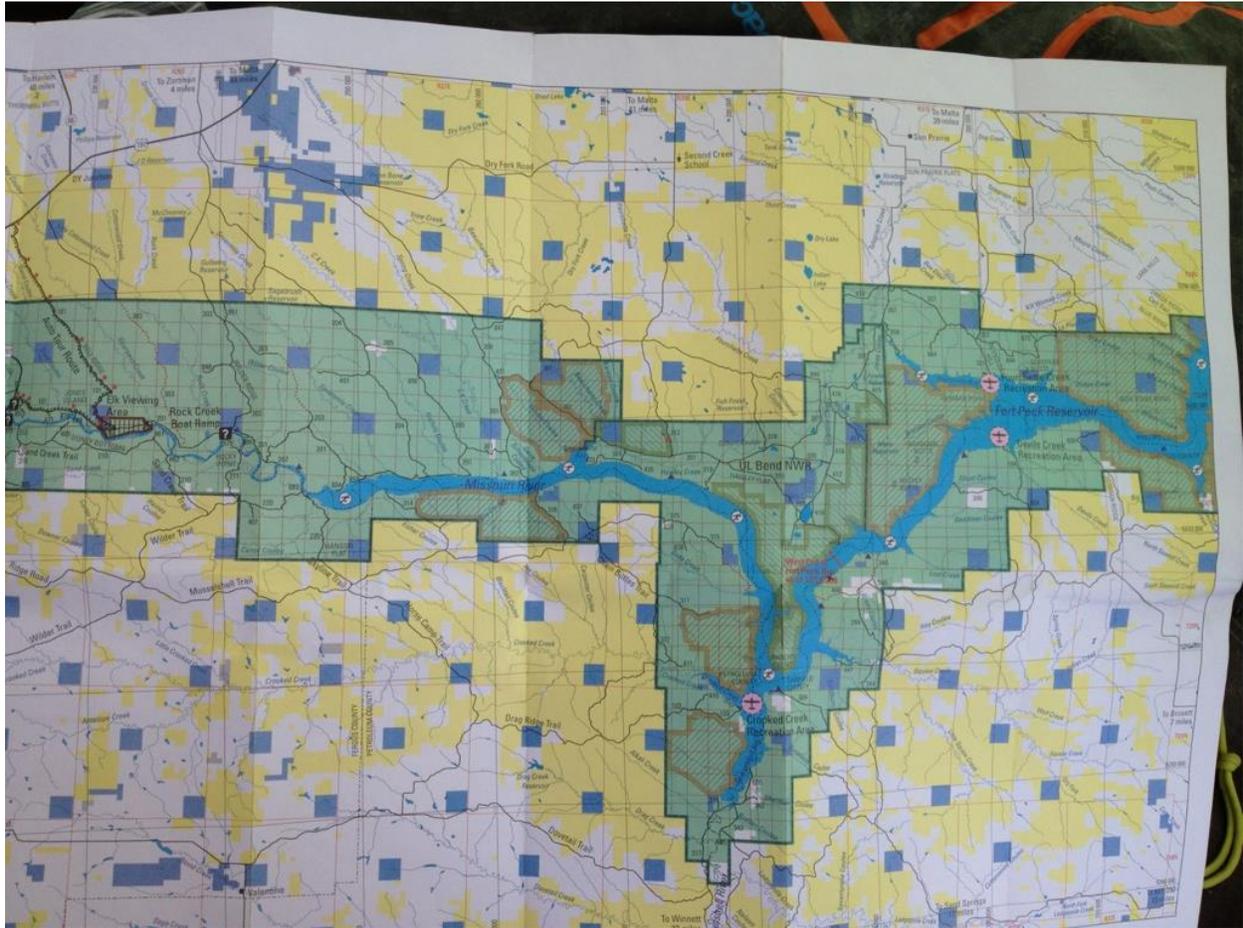
I repeatedly soaked up the liquid with my towel and unzipped my tent just enough for my hands to fit out so I could wring it out. Half a liter of water was spent cleaning up the mess. This was one of those, if you don't laugh you'll cry moments. At least the mosquitos couldn't be as bad in the morning.

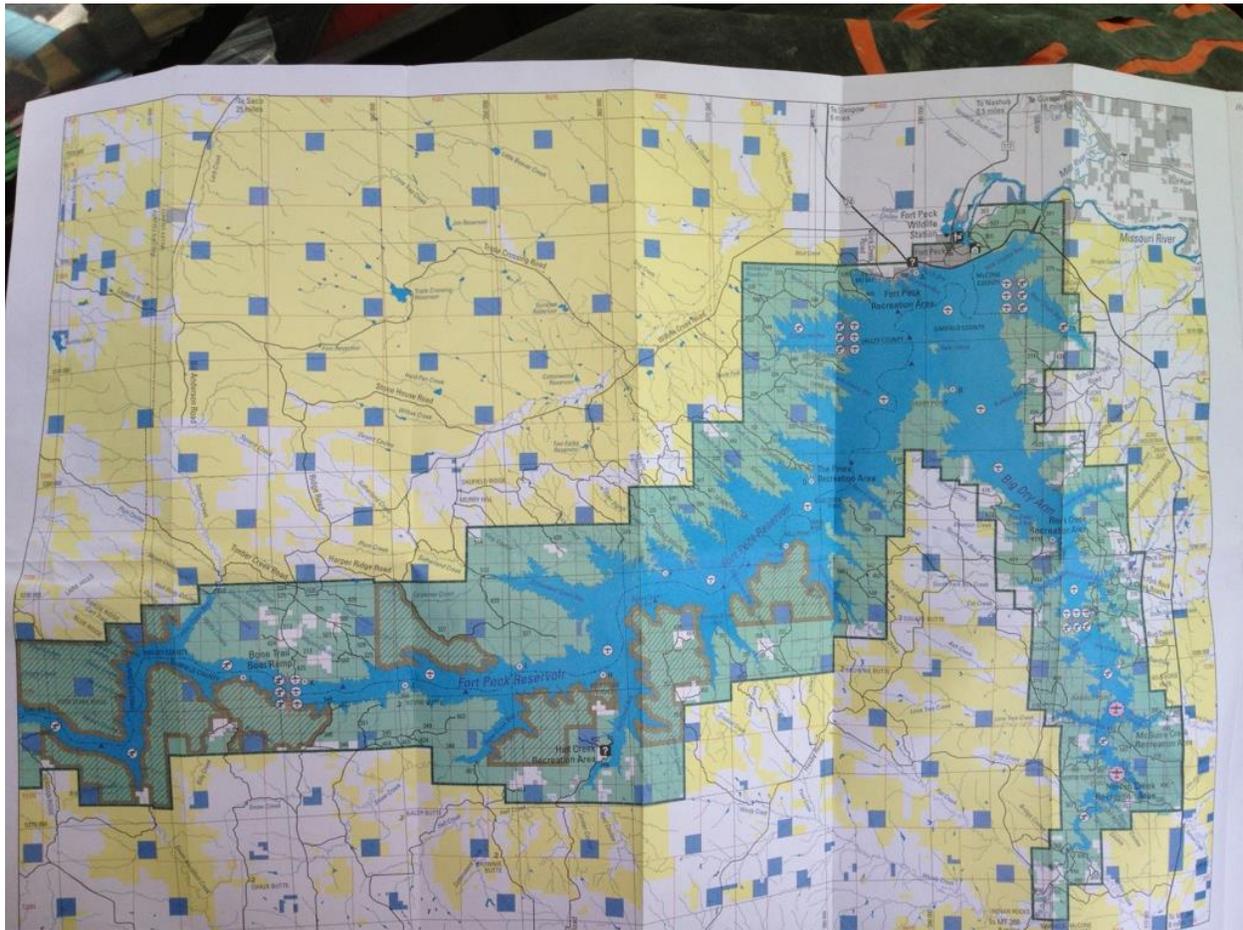
When I awoke there were a couple hundred motionless mosquitos on the other side of the netting. Assassins who patiently waited out the night to get blood. I had never loaded my board as fast as that morning.

The bugs took the wide open space of Montana and made me feel claustrophobic. After ten minutes on the water they let up. I was rewarded for my struggles with a calm and windless day in which I would make great progress onto Fort Peck.

[Fort Peck Lake - 2013-07-14 00:15](#)

[Fort Peck Lake - 2013-07-14 00:24](#)





Fort Peck is rather legendary. That's the impression you get when talking to anyone from Montana. I've met less people who didn't warn me about Fort Peck than who did. A few have said, "You know there are some big lakes ahead." Yes... Thanks.

Fort Peck Lake is 130 or so currentless miles with a reputation for wind and big waves. All down the river people ask, "Well, what's your plan for Fort Peck." I tell them I'll stay along shore as much as I can and if I have to I'll sit out and wait until conditions improve.

By the time I finally reached the beginning of the lake on paddling day 18 I was actually a bit excited to see what it was all about. It was easy to be excited when I had a windless day and could make 37 miles.

The Lake starts with a large bend from south to north and widens from there. Just after the bend I stopped to make dinner. On the menu tonight was mac and cheese (prepared without butter or milk as usual) and a whole avocado I picked up in Roy.



A couple miles down the lake I knew I made a costly mistake. I'd lost a pretty important piece of equipment. When I stopped for dinner I took my shoes off and placed them on my board. I made a mental note to strap them in if I didn't put them back on. Looking down at the board I realized one was gone. There is no way I'd find it, with the evening breeze likely pushing it out into open water.

I left my brown flip flops on a river bank a few days before as they blended in with the mud. Now I was down to a very flimsy pair of flip flops my dad left me and some neoprene booties. At least I could walk along shore in the booties if I had to.

I tried not to be too upset since at least I was making great distance that day but I was already feeling the loss of my sturdy water shoes with great drainage holes in the sole. Especially after I was pressing a tent stake into the ground and it went through the flip flop and cut my foot.

Every night on the lake held one of the best campsites of the trip. A rocky shoreline meant no wading through mud and the views were incredible. A deer walked just behind my tent on the second morning. This area had a great remote feeling and the camping felt cozy and secure despite the openness of the water. I slept great every night on the lake.





I'd heard all the stories of the wind and how it could leave you sitting on the shore for days. That kind of wind didn't transpire but what I did have for four days was a constant headwind of 5-15 mph. For the most part it was still possible to paddle into but it was absolutely draining. There was a sore and painful burning where my shoulders meet my neck for much of the time. I moved gingerly and slowly on land at the end of the day.

The one thing no one warned me about were the biting flies. There were black ones and blue-gray ones and they drove me absolutely mad.

They loved to take shelter from the headwind on the backs of my legs and bite through my pants. When they'd get to be too much I'd turn around on the board and smash the little jerks. I must have killed a couple hundred. There was great satisfaction whenever I'd get three in as many slaps. I hit myself more times than I can count on this lake crossing. I asked a fisherman what he did about them. His response, "swear at them."

After great progress on day one I made 17 hard earned miles on day two. Toward the end of the day a foot long fish jumped out of the water and landed on my foot and thrashed about before plopping back

in. The surprised yelp I gave would have been embarrassing had there been anyone within a couple miles.

After setting up camp I heard voices on the water. I looked out to see two kayakers. Realizing it was late in the day and there wasn't a whole lot around, I figured they had to be on a similar trip to mine. I got out of the tent and a guy in a white kayak shouted, "Hey Scott, you want some company?"

They had heard about me from the guy who gave me a ride around a dam a few weeks earlier. Josh and Reed came ashore and set up their tents. They were two guys from central Minnesota who set out to paddle from the headwaters all the way to the Gulf. They had made it to this point in just 11 days.

It was nice to sit and get to know each other in such an uninhabited place. Some would argue they are doing the trip right. Neither had a watch and they just had one cell phone between them with no data plan.



I planned on hitting the water early to beat the wind on day 3 but when I awoke at 5:00 it was already blowing pretty hard so I went back to sleep. I got on the water at about 9:00 and fought for over eight hours to make it only 15 miles. Much of the time I was pushing the board in front of me as I walked along shore. Although there was no lake here then, Lewis and Clark apparently had an awful time in this area, so it was fitting. I was rewarded with a great camping spot and an excellent sunset.







Day 4, the wind stayed down to around 5-10 mph so I was able to make it 23 miles and to where the lake spreads into a series of branching coves. The tips of coves could be miles apart and progress would only be made under favorable conditions.

I got lucky. The next two days were relatively calm and I was able to do many open water crossings to save distance.



On day 5, folks by the name of Tim and Nancy pulled alongside to talk and offered a beer. It was an absolutely ice cold Fat Tire. A peanut butter and jelly followed right behind and they left me with an apple and the most refreshing Gatorade I'd ever had. The exchange and the calories reenergized me for the rest of the day.

July 3rd, I had just 14 miles to the marina next to the dam. Lunch was calling my name from the marina's restaurant. There was even a slight tailwind!

I never knew something such as a dam could look so good. The problem was, I could see it from miles away. Not only are you moving much slower on a lake but it feels much slower too. Your waypoints are typically several miles away and just don't seem to get any closer.



In a headwind you at least have waves coming at you which can trick you into a sensation of speed. I had a tail wind that last day which was great for actual distance gain but the waves rolling past me made me feel like I was standing still.

I knew I was close and was going to make it around 1:00. It was noon and I started feeling queasy. The thought of seasickness hadn't crossed my mind before this trip. I had paddled in waves enough on Lake Michigan without incident that I didn't think I had to worry. It could have been the lack of calories that day or the state of exhaustion I was in but those small rolling waves really got to me.

I could see boats zipping in and out of the marina entrance and was doing everything I could not to vomit. Looking off at the shoreline didn't seem to be any better than looking straight down. I tried to just stare blankly ahead and paddle.

A pontoon boat with about 10 people on it pulled up to me to say hi. Great, I was gonna throw up in front of an audience. After holding it together for a brief exchange I made it into the sheltered waters of the marina.

When I hit shore, Josh, Reed and David were all there. After a Congratulatory handshake, David helped me carry my gear up the ramp. Once my stomach settled I ate enough to upset it again.













[What I Eat - 2013-07-17 23:17](#)

A lot of people have asked me about what I eat. This video answers those questions.

<https://vimeo.com/70509279>

Online Media - 2013-07-18 01:09

I somehow missed this article where Chesapeake Light Craft comes clean with their initial doubts about my trip.

[CLCboats - Scott Mestrezat's Missouri River Adventure!](#)

Also, I spoke with Will from SUP Magazine while I was in Fort Benton. I then went into an area of no cell service for 10 days. I got a little behind but this article is great! Thanks SUP Magazine!

[supthemag - Field Notes: A Journey Down the Missouri](#)

America's Birthday - 2013-07-24 01:29

I had just crossed Fort Peck Lake and it had been about 13 days without a proper shower. Bathing in the lake only does so much. Michele, the owner of the marina and bar at the end of the lake, graciously offered to let me use her shower. I'm sure she didn't want me driving customers away with my stench. David was camped behind the little convenience store, so after I set up my tent by his I washed the grime off.

I needed to replace my lost shoes and the next day was July 4th so I had to get to town that day before the stores closed. After arranging transportation for the 18 mile trip to town, I came across a small outdoor store. Besides the largest selection of cowboy hats I'd ever seen, they had a decent selection of shoes. I got a pair that looked like they drained water well and were comfortable without socks.

Michele even offered to let me do some much needed laundry. What a paddler friendly business owner! My bags were full of provisions for the next leg and my clothes were clean. A rejuvenating feeling.

The marina saw a constant stream of people launching their boats for a 4th of July of fun on the water. I offered to help out in exchange for all that Michele had helped me with. The place was well managed so they didn't need much but I helped gas up a few boats.

David and I didn't want to stay the night there since there would likely be a lot of noise from the bar. John, one of the marina employees, gave us a ride around the dam. We set up at the waters edge, ready

for the last few days of paddling in Montana before we hit North Dakota.





Video montage of my 700 miles through Montana - 2013-07-24 18:59

<https://vimeo.com/70955432>

A Month in, a State Down - 2013-07-26 16:51

On July 5th, I launched onto the longest section of free flowing water on the Missouri. It was 224 miles until the beginning of the next lake. I was just a few days away from North Dakota and I hoped to reach the lake in 6 days.

I hit the water a little before David but as we paddled into a 16mph headwind he surged ahead. He messaged me that he would set up camp after 40 miles. We planned on paddling together the next day since there had been some paddler related incidents along this stretch.



Several years ago a paddler got beat rather badly and another was shot at. We were informed to only camp on the south shore since the north shore was an indian reservation, that we had no business being on. I did, however, have a welcoming encounter with a few people from the reservation who were out fishing for walleye. They insisted I grab ahold of their boat as they floated downstream and join them for a beer.

The headwinds switched to tailwinds and I found David on a nice stretch of sandy beach. He already had his tent set up and a fire going. We toasted to our 40.7 miles over a bit of scotch that he carried in a Nalgene. As dinner cooked on the fire we speculated how far we would go if the forecasted tailwinds came the next day. The howl of coyotes and rumble of trains filled the air as I drifted off to sleep.

With a head start I was able to make it 15 miles before David caught me just before the trouble area. As he came into view I was reminded of the machete he has had strapped to the side of his boat for the last 600 miles. We passed without incident but it was here I got to see the side-by-side performance of a kayak to a paddleboard.



I knew I had more difficulty in head winds but what I didn't realize was how much current I was missing out on. A paddleboard sits on top of the water and a kayak sits deeper in the water and is therefore better pulled along by the current. Ignorance was bliss. Now I find myself missing that extra mph on those long days where the only goal is making miles.

At noon I had made 26 miles. A good full day on many days, but the tailwind was just picking up. Soon, 30mph gusts were pushing me along. I was doing 6mph without paddling at times. It was the conditions I dreamt about. After nearly 13 hrs on the board and 58 miles, I ran into David. Once again he had

selected a great sandy campsite among the steep and muddy shore we had travelled through.



I was so exhausted I could barely eat. I made noodles with a packet of salmon but could hardly put it down. A month on the Missouri was taking its toll. By the time I woke up David was gone. Likely already on the water for an hour.

You never know who you might meet on the Missouri. To want to paddle the whole thing you have to be a bit eclectic (crazy?). It was a great fortune to meet and paddle with David. He is aiming to hit St. Louis about three weeks before me and I have no doubts he'll hit that goal.

After 30.5 miles I set up camp on an island, hopping with small sand-colored frogs. The cows across the river were particularly loud but I had a good site.

As I was about to put my book down and go to sleep I heard a loud huffing and grunting noise right outside my tent. I froze motionless and slowly reached for my can of bear spray as I imagined what beast was on the other side my tent wall. Clomping hooves indicated that whatever it was had torn off into the trees. I suppose it was a deer that was upset that its path to the water was blocked by a weird green dome.

A few minutes later the animal was back and as annoyed as before. I took the safety off the bear spray and quickly exited the tent on the water side. I figured I could launch myself off the river bank into the water if the thing attacked. My rustling must have scared it off. I tossed several large sticks into the trees to try to further spook it away. The island beast never came back but more thunderstorms did roll through that night.

The weather radio predicted a sure chance of thunderstorms in the afternoon but I set off under sunny skies. I made sure to pack my rain jacket in an easily accessible place.

Around 2pm the skies darkened and I found a good site to pitch my tent soon after. I watched as the storm past just to the north and figured the coast was clear.





I packed back up and made it a few more miles before a fresh system rolled in. The banks were high and I eventually had to settle for wading several yards through knee deep mud to get to a site somewhat sheltered under an eroding berm.

I opened the bag with my rain jacket to find that it wasn't there. Surely I couldn't have misplaced a bright orange rain jacket. I search frantically through all my bags as the rain started.

At lunch time I had stopped just long enough to pull my stove and food out of my bag and pushed off down the river. I have done this often to let the current carry me as I boiled water on my board. I must have set the jacket aside and was too preoccupied with not dropping the stove in the water that I failed to glance back at the shore.



The rain was really coming down. I decided to wait it out before setting up my tent so I wouldn't get the thing soaked before I could get the rain fly on. I sat in the mud against the dirt wall and cursed myself for losing another piece of rather important gear. First the shoes and now this! By the time the rain let up I was soaked and getting cold. I pitched the tent on the firm mud and got into some dry clothes. I was just 14 miles from North Dakota but was in no mood to celebrate.













[Stoke Radio - 2013-07-28 22:59](#)

[Stoke Radio - Going the Distance](#)

A radio show from a couple weeks back I did with Shane Perrin. He is currently on his own epic adventure. Check him out on Facebook.

SUPthemag Awards - 2013-07-28 23:17

[SUP Magazine Awards 2013 - Top Expedition](#)

I just found out I've been nominated for SUP Magazine's "Top Expedition 2013" Award. If you've enjoyed following the blog please click the link to vote. Much appreciated.

Scott

Bismarck Media - 2013-07-30 17:14

A reporter from both the Bismarck Tribune and local news station caught up with me in Bismarck

[Bismarck Tribune - Paddleboarder traveling length of Missouri](#)

[KXnet - stand up paddleboarder makes voyage down Missouri River](#)

2013 - 08

Williston - Oil Boom Town - 2013-08-01 16:54

It had obviously stormed all night. The inside of my tent was damp and the ground outside was saturated. My tent probably shook in the wind as thunder crashed but I didn't wake once.

I stuffed my soaking wet tent in its bag and loaded the board, as my shoes sank ever deeper in the mud. Missouri River mud has remarkable cohesive properties. Like many times before, my mud caked shoes slid all over the rubber foot pads. I had to balance on one foot as I scraped the mud off on the edge of the board. Preserving my carefully varnished finish was no longer a concern.

Fourteen miles later, after 28 days of paddling and 687 miles, I hit North Dakota under chilly, overcast skies. I wasn't as excited as I should have been. Supplies were needed and Lake Sakakawea loomed.

I realized I could make Williston that evening. My plan was to hide my board and gear in the bushes and

hitch hike to a grocery store. An island, two miles from the bridge into town, made for a good stopping point for the night.

Williston is an oil boom town. People talk of Williston as if it's a foregone conclusion that you don't want to be in Williston. However, there is plenty of lucrative work to be found there. The problem is, the people don't know what to do with their new found riches and problems arise.

Despite the warnings, I decided I wanted to see Williston for myself. Everyone has their own ideas about the places they see. On past trips, people in Chicago wouldn't understand why I'd vacation in the "nothingness" of Montana. Upon telling people I was from Chicago, Montanians are often quick to say that the city is no place they'd wanna live or even visit. To each their own.

By 9am I had my stuff well hidden and I walked up a dirt road to the bridge. After paddling under a couple bridges in North Dakota I already knew to expect no shortage of semis and pick-up trucks.

I had never hitch hiked before and I never considered it before this trip but necessity brings new experiences. At least I'd be heading into a town and not toward the boonies, and my cell phone had good reception.

Roughly two minutes after sticking my thumb out an old minivan slowed down and pulled over. Trent, a student from Michigan Tech, drove me into town and dropped me at a grocery store. Along the way he explained how he works on the rigs in the summer to make enough money to pay for school. He was seizing the opportunity and trading his summers for a student-debt free graduation.

Shiny new pick-ups raced around the small city at a big city pace. Practically everything I saw out the window of the passenger seat looked new. There were huge tool stores and dirt lots full of pipe, with man-camps scattered around. Trent explained that it cost him \$300 a month just to park his trailer and for electrical hookup. No water.

Walking into a well stocked grocery store has taken on a whole new meaning for me. I resisted the urge to just start dumping things in my cart, but on this trip I bought as much stuff as I thought could fit in my dry bags. After weaving through the many shelf stockers, who are trying to keep up with the consumption of Williston, I headed for Arbys.

After ordering from a less than friendly cashier, I enjoyed a great sandwich with a big milkshake. In desperate need of a couple days worth of water, I rinsed out my milkshake cup and filled a two gallon jug, one cup at a time, from the bathroom sink.

Getting a ride back to the bridge proved more difficult so I called a cab. It was on the way back that I noticed all the help wanted signs. If the boom ever dies Williston will be the most depressing city in America. It will be a city of abandoned, purpose-built structures, that couldn't be built fast enough during the boom. The driver was enthralled by my trip and refused to accept my tip at the end of the ride.

I found my gear safe and sound. The price for its safety was paid in mosquito bites as I pulled it out of the high grass that covered it.

With a heavy load of supplies I was looking forward to seeing what Lake Sakakawea had in store for me.







Location as of this writing: Bismarck

[Sakakawea - 2013-08-04 18:59](#)

Fluffy cottonwood seeds floated by, letting me know there was still a gentle current as I left Williston. My first day into the 200 mile long Lake Sakakawea started just like my first day into Fort Peck Lake, calm.

I navigated through a maze of channels and willow thickets to get to open water. Along the way I began to see evidence of the oil boom. Sand colored oil wells slowly pumped in a slow rhythm not unlike the

pace of the river. High on the hilltops overlooking the lake, fires burned off the natural gas byproduct from oil collection.

A continuous large black cloud of smoke was blown toward the shore I intended to camp on. Building headwinds gave me no choice but to camp in the smokes path. Luckily it had to travel a couple miles to get to me and was mostly dispersed high above.

I set up camp after making 28 miles since leaving Williston at noon. As if on cue, the smoke stopped as I crawled into my tent around 9pm. It was good to be camping on the quite, mud-free shores of a lake again.

Strong winds pushed menacing waves toward the shore. After 5 miles I decided my goal for the day would be a campground with showers and a restaurant just about 6 miles away. I had resorted to walking in knee deep water instead of paddling. I jumped on the board to paddle around some partially submerged trees and felt that something wasn't quite right.

The board listed to the side and I hopped off into waist deep water. When I tried to climb back on I realized the board was sitting quite low in the water. Right at the 750 mile mark of my journey, Muddy Moose was wounded.

My first thought was that I must have hit a rock when lining the board along shore. I later realized that, when I beached the board to check something out on land, a branch or knot from some logs I slid the board over was likely the culprit. I had rocked the board back and forth to get the weight of my gear over those logs and onto land. This wasn't a fault in the design but a result of my impatience getting to shore.

I threw my empty water jug and spare paddle 20 feet onto shore out of frustration and got the board unloaded. With it now holding several gallons of water, I could barely pick it up. I popped a drain plug and got the water out.

When I flipped my board onto its deck a 2-3 inch "L" shaped crack revealed itself. I cut a piece of fiberglass and mixed some epoxy with a stick.

I set up my tent to take shelter from the sun on the 90 degree, North Dakota afternoon and set about making minor repairs to other equipment. Rest was needed anyways and I didn't need to be in any hurry. My girlfriend, Rachel, was meeting me in Bismarck in 16 days and I figured I could easily make it there in under two weeks.

A short while later I noticed a group of people appear a few hundred yards down the beach. I wandered over to discover I was stranded just a half mile from a campground with showers that I thought I had passed already. A two mile walk took me to the parks convenience store where I enjoyed an ice cream cookie sandwich, lemonade, and a hot pocket while sitting in the A/C.

After a shower I figured I'd relax and read. Just a few pages in I looked out the tent to the west and saw

dark skies. I switched on the weather radio to find out 60 mph wind gusts and quarter sized hail were predicted. There was nothing to tie the board to so I loaded it down with rocks and loaded big rocks on all the tent stakes.

I sat just outside the bathroom as I watch the hail come in, followed by sideways rain. As I walked back to my tent I wondered what shape I'd find it in. It was partially folded over but popped right back to its original shape.

The tent needed one more storm line so I cut a length off my paracord. While melting the end to prevent fraying, a bit of the melting nylon dripped onto my finger and burned a pea sized blister onto the back of it. This was followed up by knocking my pot full of noodles off the stove and onto the ground.

Sakakawea greeting me with perfectly calm seas at 6:30 the next morning. After pulling off for half an hour for rain clouds to pass, I pressed on. In the late evening I paddled by cattle fields and shoreline filled with uninviting brush. I aimed for the shelter of bluffs off in the distance. Light from the oil rigs bounced off the clouds and lit the sky at night.





I can't forget to look back every once in a while. These wide lakes allow you gain an appreciation for distance. After several hours of paddling I sometimes can see nothing but water from where I came from. Of course, I am likely aiming towards a shoreline that seems an impossible distance away.

After a 33 mile day I took a forced day off. Twenty mph headwinds were an opponent I chose not to battle. The sky filled with storm clouds again that evening. Once those past, the wind switched direction and blew at 40 mph. My first real tailwind on a lake came the next day. Progress was accelerated by 15-20 mph winds which helped me to another 30 mile day.





The biggest arm of the lake loomed. I hit the water early to beat the winds and hoped to cross to the other shore. It was not to be. After continuing on for a couple miles longer than I'd like, due to the prevalence of cattle, I called it quits after 5 miles. I was surrounded by cattle fields but the cow patties around my campsite at least looked like they had been there for a few days. I was gonna be here for about 20 hours so I built a stone and stick fence as an attempt at a cattle barrier and rested up.

I fought to get away from shore in the morning and headed into four to five foot waves. The big rolling waves rhythmically lifted the board up and lowered it into the troughs between them. This was adventure! My balance was being put to the test.

Lake Sakakawea finally won. As I was cresting a wave, it broke and tipped me off the board for the first time. The board capsized in the process. I had wondered what would happen in this scenario. I carried a knife clipped in my pocket in case I'd have to cut my gear loose from the bungee cords and paracord that secured the bags to board. Luckily my full 3 gallon water jug floated off the board. That was 25 pounds less that I would have to flip. After two tries I was able to right the craft and climb back aboard. No gear was lost.

Tailwinds pushed me for twenty miles to my first North Dakota "resort." The RV campgrounds in the area are often called resorts. Compared to the primitive conditions I've been living in, this meant luxury. Indian Hills Resort had a convenience store with a selection of hand dipped ice cream, frozen pizza, and

wifi. The quarter fed showers were excellent, as were the hiking trails overlooking the lake.



After spending some time talking with Tyler and Alyse, the couple running the shop, I got set up with a great spot right on the water and went for a shower. Six quarters got me about eight minutes of glorious, steaming hot water. After exploring the lakeside trails I stopped at the campsite of a woman who had invited me for dinner when I met her at the boat dock earlier.

There was something sitting on my picnic table that wasn't there when I left. As I got closer, the mirage focused into reality. I was just thinking how good a beer would have been at that moment and was now staring at an ice cold six pack, glistening in the late evening sun. Earlier, I had asked Tyler if there was a place nearby to pick up some beer. He told me there wasn't much for 30 miles. They decided to welcome me with some of their own. Touched by this gesture, I stuck a couple in my pack and walked back up the trail to photograph the sunset. A storm, just passed, unveiled an amazingly colorful North

Dakota sunset.



Instead of fighting the 20 mph headwind the next morning, I walked over to the store with a bag full of batteries and their chargers. I sat there all day on an electricity binge and chatted with Tyler and Alyse as I worked on editing pictures and video. It was nice to be in no hurry.

Tyler and Alyse decided they were sick of fighting the rat race in California so they bought an RV to travel the country, stopping someplace new each summer to work. They were enjoying the freedom of a simpler lifestyle and the adventure of new places. Something I could now relate to.

My next stop was just 18 miles away on the other side of the lake. The wind was blowing the exact right direction so I cruised across and made it to Dakota Waters Resort for a late lunch of blueberry pancakes and a veggie omelet. This was a celebration meal. I turned 10,000 days old on this day! Over a year ago I wondered how many days old I was and realized I was nearing this nice round number. This helped fuel the fire to get out on this trip. You only get so many days. Where did I want to be on my 10,000th?

Another tailwind carried me toward the dam the next day. I angled against the wind for the last mile. Sakakawea wasn't gonna let me off easy. David had let me know that the state park rangers were happy to assist paddlers so I gave them a ring as I pulled up to a massive boat ramp. A ranger came down and loaded my gear onto a trailer and drove me to my campsite.



With a whole evening ahead of me I started to walk the two miles into the town of Pick City. I only made it halfway before a ranger saw me and drove me the rest of the way. Dinner was had at The Little Bar and Grill. Someone asked what I was in town for and soon questions flowed from all directions. A guy

down the bar bought me a beer and after an enjoyable meal I walked back.



The next day, with a large duffle bag of laundry I started walking to town. Once again a ranger picked me up before I made it halfway. I sat down at the laundromat to work on editing video as I waited for Little's to open. Those plans were almost foiled when I realized I left my hard drive cord in the tent. Luckily another man was doing laundry and offered to drive me back to grab it. I didn't write his name down until later but I believe it was Dennis. He was in the area for a family reunion and saved me quite the hassle.

I had Little's to myself for dinner and enjoyed talking to the owner, Noelle. She was more than friendly and gave me a Little's coozie and had her son drive me back to the campground. That night I joined my camping neighbors around their campfire.

Ranger Keith picked me up in the late morning to take me around the dam. The camping neighbors followed in their car to watch me take off and send well wishes.







To Bismarck - 2013-08-13 23:31

Seventy five miles to Bismarck, which I hoped to make in two days. The plan was to post up at a restaurant and catch up on things on my computer. Rachel, my girlfriend, would be driving out for a week off from work and arriving in a few days.

One of the strongest headwinds of the trip greeted me as I pushed away from the dam. I looked upstream and, to my disappointment, the dam gates were closed. This meant a weaker current than I hoped for.

Several hours later I ran into a group of five women out for a Sunday afternoon kayak. Like many before, they eyed up my gear laden board and inquired as to what I was doing. I paddled with them for a while and continued past a large power plant as they reached their take out point.



The sky was not reassuring of my plan to reach Bismarck in two days. I decided not to pass up a large sandy beach, sheltered by a bluff. My tent was up and board secured just in time for the rain to fall. Only

19 miles were paddled but at least I had a great view out my tent.





As often happens, a tough day was followed by great conditions. I had some tail breeze and finally realized that there was actually a pretty good current now that the wind wasn't holding me back.

At 6pm I was within 12 miles of the city. I planned on camping on a large island but found it less than desirable so I pressed on for Bismarck. Besides, there was a restaurant right on the water I couldn't resist.

Just around the bend I came across a large group who offered me a craft pale ale. Good thing I hadn't stopped. They explained that some of them were in town for their mother's funeral but it was a celebration of life and they were enjoying being together.





Boat traffic increased as I got close. With such long winters, I imagine that people make full use of the days when they are as perfect as they were that day. A large-engined speed boat turned 90 degrees to pull up to me. Upon hearing the answer to their question, "where ya headed," the driver passed over a Bud Light.

It was going to be dark by the time I ate and paddled to the campground just past town, but I could taste the food of Freddy's Bar and Grill already. I was surprisingly excited to pass under the I-94 bridge. When this road reaches Chicago it is just one of many blood-boiling, traffic congested city roads but it was a faint connection to life back "home."



As I reached the boat dock at the restaurant I wondered what the average Bismarck boater's blood alcohol level was. People were zooming all about.

Dinner was a two appetizer and an entrée affair. I set out under a rising full moon for a two mile paddled to Fort Lincoln State Park. Instead, I found a sandy island a mile downriver. The high banks kept me partially hidden and it would be less distance I'd have to paddle upstream to get back toward the restaurants.



I was meeting a reporter from the Bismarck Tribune later the next day at a bar and grill directly across from where I camped. A soapy swim before I paddled from shore was my attempt to freshen up. As I pulled up to The Pier Bar and Grill I found a canoer named Shawn there.

We had been hearing about each other and decided to meet. Shawn built a huge canoe with the intent of paddling the Missouri with two buddies. Well, one backed out right before the trip and the other abandoned him on day 16. He was left to manage a 19 foot, 160 pound canoe on his own.

Shawn's determination became apparent after talking with him for a while. However, I could not imagine someone as ill prepared when he started. He was blissfully unaware of the dams and vastness of the lakes and even how much water was needed aboard for some stretches but he has found a way and made it this far. I believe he will make his goal, the Gulf.



I worked most of the day on my computer as I munched down food before the interview. Right as I was thinking about packing up and heading for the campground, a guy who had taken interest in Shawn's trip offered to let us stay with him that night. Greg gave us directions on how to paddle to his waterside home and minutes later we were hanging out on his porch. It was quite nice to have a shower and a proper bed for a night and for that I thank him.

I paddled back to Freddy's for the day and finally made for the state park that evening. I paddled up to shore and was greeted by Rick and his future father-in-law. Rick had seen the Bismarck Tribune article which had just been posted online a couple hours before. They invited me to share their camping spot

and helped lug my gear over to where Rick's fiancé and some more of their family were sitting by a fire. I was provided beer and Rick cooked up a huge skillet of vegetables. It was a real pleasure camping with them.

Rachel wouldn't be arriving for another three days so I figured I could get some more miles in. I found a campground 60 miles away that agreed to store my board and arrived there two days later. After Tiffany, the Bayside Resort's owner, helped me get the board and some gear locked up I enjoyed a good meal at their restaurant.

The next day I needed to get back to Bismarck. Rachel would arrive around 8pm and if I didn't find my own way back to town, her 13 hour drive would turn into a 15 hour drive. I had breakfast at the restaurant and headed to the road with four bags. A car only passed about every ten minutes so catching a ride would be difficult but I had nothing else to do. I found it interesting that most cars waved as they wizzed by.



I found myself back in the restaurant for lunch after an unsuccessful couple of hours. Walking out, I hoped I wouldn't have to be back for dinner. Around hour five on the roadside, a pick-up pulled over. I

ran up to the window and was informed that the driver was heading where I wanted to go. I threw my stuff in the back and climbed in with Mark and his dog Willie for the hour trip.

The time flew by as Mark told me about his hunting property he was out working on and the things Rachel and I could do in Bismarck. It took Willie a while to warm up to me but soon enough he was sitting on my lap as we pulled into town.



[Rachel Visits - 2013-08-20 18:26](#)

At long last, two months since seeing each other, Rachel came bounding into the hotel after a 13 hour drive from Chicago and greeted me with a giant hug. I had been looking forward to seeing my lady. My location wasn't the most convenient but we found a way. Though, she was a bit taken aback by the full

beard. I asked her to bring the clippers. It was time for a fresh start. Besides, I had another six weeks to grow a new one.

What to do for a week in Bismarck. Perhaps not on the top of most people's list of vacation destinations. Even some locals almost cringe when I ask how to fill a week in Bismarck. We always have a good time together so I wasn't too worried. After a morning stop to the hotel's waffle maker we headed for the zoo.







We got invited to the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation's annual meeting which happened to be in town the same time. A guy by the name of Clay Smith had seen my article in the paper and decided I might be interested in what they had going on. The opening ceremony was that night so after killing some time at the mall we went to check it out.

The Lewis and Clark bumper stickers in the parking lot let us know we were in the right place. This place was like a star trek convention for Lewis and Clark fans and people come from all over. We found Clay and he introduced us to the president of the organization. He told me he would introduce me to the 200 attendees after dinner and asked if I could talk for about three minutes.

I got on stage, possibly the scariest moment of the trip, and explained what I was doing and tried to hit the bullet points of frequently asked questions. After the opening remarks commenced I received a stack of business cards from people located along the river. There were so many who wished to help in any way they could.

A young couple, Josh and Amanda, invited us out for food and drinks along with Dan and Lou. They filled us in a little more on what spurred their interest of Lewis and Clark as we sipped on beer flights. Turns out that Josh is a video game designer who is creating a game based on the Corp of Discovery Expedition where you play the part of Lewis.

[Meriweather](#)

I spent considerable time getting organized and packed on Monday morning. Rachel had brought me several items I'd been shipping to her as I discovered I'd needed it or broke something. She even stayed up late the night before making me some wax fire starters.

We headed back to the conference to listen to a couple of the presentations. I had no idea how many topics could be discussed from this one expedition. There were hundreds of books for sale and the Pierre chapter of the organization gave us some t-shirts. I found the presentations to be very interesting but after a couple hours Rachel hit her L&C quota.

I had gotten a Facebook message from a lady who saw the newspaper article and wished to show us some North Dakota hospitality. That night we went to Megan and Cody's house (and baby Ruby) for pad thai and River Ale. It was so kind of them to do this for a couple strangers and we really enjoyed the evening. Meeting friendly people was part of the reason for a trip like this.

We headed to camp at Fort Lincoln State Park, a place I camped a week prior. The tent was just big enough to hold a twin air mattress if you ignore the sides bulging out. With much reduced headroom we hoped it wouldn't rain all night.

Tuesday's forecast was full of rain so we headed for the movie theater. On the way back we decided to take advantage of an open air produce market. Fresh vegetables have been a bit rare in my diet the last couple months so we cooked a great meal over the open fire as we enjoyed some cold beverages and just relaxed.



Fort Lincoln has a few Historical recreations so we checked out the soldier's lookout posts high above the river. It's possible to climb to the top and see the soldier's viewpoint. We walked all around on the roof and took in the sights. We decided to come back later for the sunset.

The campground is right by where Indians used to live in earth lodges. These structures were created by making a wood skeleton and covering that with dirt. They were surprisingly big inside. It was tempting to climb on top of the structures but we managed to contain ourselves.









Mark, the guy who gave me a ride back into Bismarck, suggested we eat at Little Cottage. After seeing Custer's old house we sat down in the all American diner for some brunch on Wednesday. One of our favorite things to do is sleep in and go to brunch when we could and Bismarck was no different. I have a soft spot for pancakes.

An assisted care worker, Abby, had contacted me to tell me that my article in the Bismarck paper had sparked one of the resident's adventurous spirits and asked if I was available to stop by. After we ate we headed to the Missouri Slope Lutheran Care Center where I showed a couple videos and lots of pictures to an attentive audience of about 50 seniors. On the way out they surprised me with a box filled with cookies and other treats.

I had been craving sushi since the trip started (no I didn't want to just catch my own) so we had a great dinner at what appeared to be the only sushi place in town. Chicago has great sushi and I can't wait to take Rachel out for some when I get back.

On Thursday morning we headed for the site of the recreated Fort Mandan. This is where Lewis and Clark wintered on their journey west. I'd imagine it would have been a very long and cold winter in these small quarters.



There was a short hike with a great overlook over Lake Oahe. The view was vast and the ticks were many. Rachel somehow avoided them but I must have found ten on me.



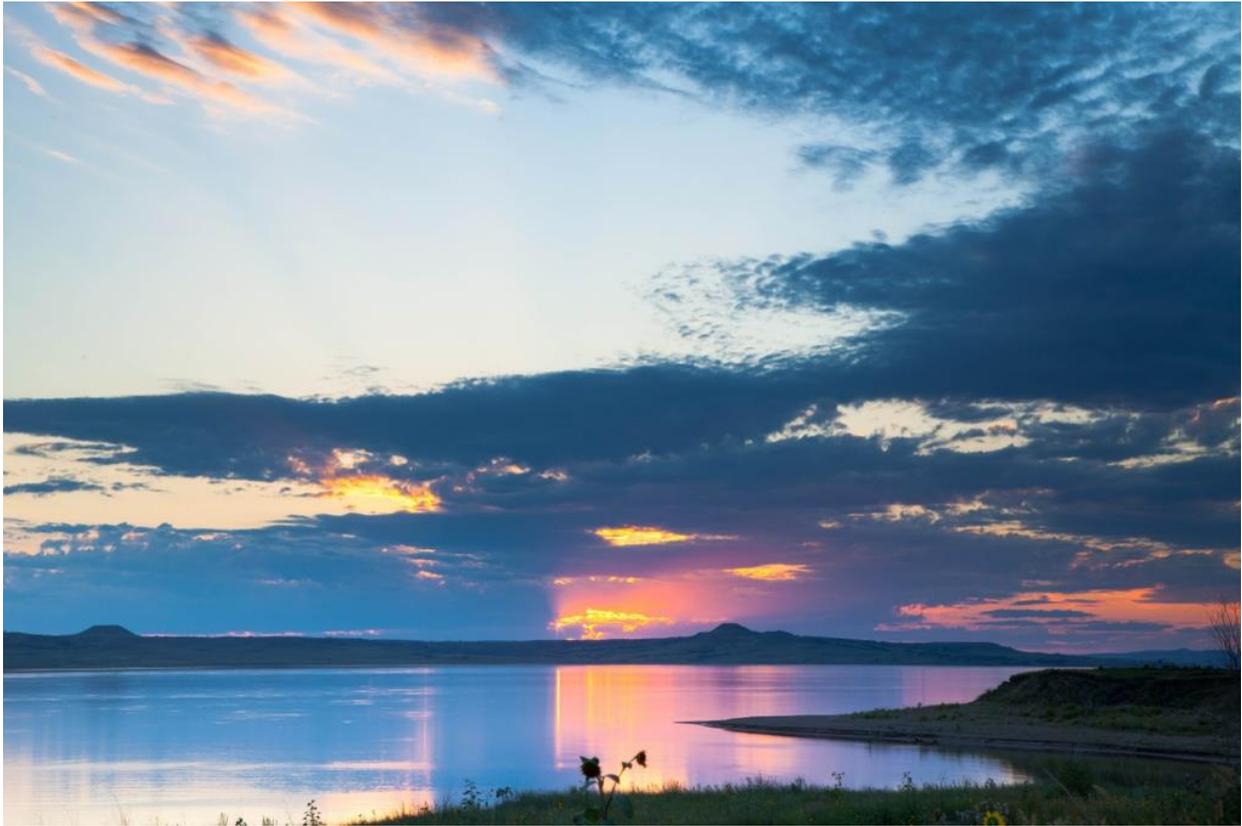


We figured I could make some miles on Friday while the forecast was good so Rachel took some of the gear I normally have to carry and I set out for our meeting point 25 miles down the lake.

Rachel spent the day exploring the area and ventured into Pollock, South Dakota. There she made friends with Vina, the lady who runs to Pollock interpretive center. Vina introduced Rachel as her surrogate grand daughter when they went to lunch together. She was in her 80s and had lived in Pollock her whole life. She explained how the town was once along the flowing river but once the dam came the whole town had to be moved. I paddled.

We got set up and headed back to Pollock for dinner. Along the way we passed a sunflower farm that seemed to be miles wide. On our way back to watch another great North Dakota sunset we talked about what brings people to live in certain places and the contrast you can find in America.





On Saturday we dropped the paddleboard in the water and Rachel, my Sacajawea, sat in front of me with my short backup paddle and I stood behind paddling. I was happy I wasn't trying to make progress that day because I would have faced a tough wind. Rachel then set out solo into the rough water for a bit. I somehow couldn't convince her to join me for the second half of my trip.

Back to Pollock we went, so I could meet Vina. She showed me around the interpretive center and took time to show us some scrapbooks that held the history of the little town.

We decided to head down the road further to Mobridge. I would have to paddle 37 miles to get here and the drive made me realize just how big and intimidating the lake was. I couldn't believe that what I saw was just a quarter of what lay before me on Oahe. Back at the campground, we strolled along shore to enjoy our last evening together before turning in.

That night the winds howled and rains came. The rain stopped just in time for Rachel to pack up and head for home but I knew I couldn't paddle in these kind of conditions. I headed for the campground's cafe as she drove back east.

I was very thankful we got a little time together this summer. She has been supportive of the trip since day one which is pretty amazing. I'm a lucky guy.





The Great Cow Hunt - 2013-08-24 21:28

Rachel set out on the long drive home but the wind was gusting over 30 mph, causing white caps on Lake Oahe. Shawn, the canoer I met in Bismarck, had arrived the day before. We knew there was no chance of making progress so we lounged around in the campground's cafe. The hours ticked by as we made use of the wifi and available food.

KJ, one of the people who run the resort, mentioned something about having to go shoot some medicine into cows with a dart gun. Shawn and I looked at each other with the same idea. He spoke up and asked if this would be something we could tag along for.

We headed up the road to KJ's buffalo farm to get the necessary equipment. After darts were filled with drugs and the air gun tested, KJ and his friend Lee loaded a three seat, four wheeler onto a trailer and we headed for the cattle pastures.

KJ explained that he would be treating for something called hoof rot. This is a bacterial infection that causes the skin between the animal's toes to rot. You can spot the infected cow by its limp.

Instead of explaining what happened next here is a video.

<https://vimeo.com/72897826>

The views were amazing and the pursuit was thrilling. I was pretty happy the wind had kept me on shore that day.

KJ gave us a couple packs of buffalo jerky and sent us back to the campground with one of his vehicles to get ready to go to town. His wife, Crissy, and several of their friends joined us for dinner at his brother's restaurant, the Fin and Feather. KJ picked up our tab and we went next door to the bar.

It was a Sunday night but the recent rains meant the farmers wouldn't be harvesting in the morning. This, combined with the Sturgis motorcycle rally kicking off the next day, meant that this Pollock, South Dakota bar was hopping. After the bar closed at midnight the patrons moved to the sidewalk where drinks were enjoyed with grain silos in the background.

My plan was to hit the water very early to take full advantage of the forecasted tailwinds but the late night didn't make it too easy. KJ let us stay in their camper that no one was using so that helped speed up the packing process in the morning. With not enough sleep I headed out for the South Dakota border and a big mileage day on Oahe. I paddled away thankful for everything that the day before had turned into. Who knew a little town like Pollock South Dakota could be so fun.

Oye, Oahe - 2013-08-31 02:49

I crossed into South Dakota as a tailwind strengthened. One hundred and sixty miles of Lake Oahe still lay before me. This lake has been in the back of my mind for much of the trip. It had potential to be the toughest opponent of the journey so I planned on taking full advantage of my tailwind and knocking off a big chunk.

I started listening to an audio book written by the first guy to sail solo around the world in the late 1890's. If he could survive repeated attacks from "savages" and navigating with a sextant, I could brave the waves and make due with a GPS and google maps on my iPhone.

The drive into Mobridge a few days earlier had scared me a bit. Thirty seven miles of lake viewed from hilltops looks daunting but about 10 hours of paddling later I could see the bridge in the distance and I knew I'd make it in one day, thanks in part to a gentle push from the wind.



I also knew there was a Burger King pretty close to the water. Ask anyone who knows me and they'll tell

you that I'm no burger fan but I was quite excited. The problem was that there was about 100 feet of tall muddy grass, followed by 100 feet of neck high brush to get through.

I tied my board to a partially submerged cotton wood and walked through the grass while holding my paddle out in front of me. Any snakes would hopefully meet my paddle before my legs. I stood facing the brush for a few moments, deciding if it was worth it. My stomach prevailed and I cleared a path through with my paddle.

I gobbled down a bunch of food and headed back to the board in hopes of finding a place to camp before dark. There was about half an hour of light left at the most. After nothing but mudflats I found a rocky beach and set up my tent with the aid of my headlamp, switching it off any time I saw a car pass on the adjacent road.

If only I'd realized how close I was to the Bridge City Marina I would have just kept paddling. I paddled the mile to get there the next morning and had a pizza for an early lunch at the paddler friendly stop. It would be a great place to stay had the timing worked out differently.

From there I had to cross the lake and run perpendicular to the wind. First it was Lake Sakakawea and now Oahe. I lost my balance and a wave flipped the board upside down. This time, gear scattered. My flip flops floated off my feet, a large dry bag floated away as my water jug bobbed about and my paddle drifted on the other side of the board. I grabbed my back up paddle and set about gathering my belonging. Nothing was lost. I made for the shelter of a cove and got everything dried out.

I flew down the lake from here. The wind was allowing me to keep up with the waves and I was surfing down some. My GPS indicated that I hit 7mph. Once the lake turned it was a different story however.

I tried to make progress far enough to the west to make the next southern straightaway but I was blown to the south shore much too soon. I figured I could walk the board to the bend but I ran into trouble.

The water was only about a foot deep for the first 50 feet from shore then it dropped off to waist deep. Once the waves hit this shelf they accelerated and curled over with force. When I tried to walk in the foot of water the waves tried repeatedly to rip the board from me. I got knocked down twice trying to keep it from washing to shore and possibly being damaged.

I was stuck. There was no way to get to shore without letting the board get rammed into the shallow water. I walked in the waist deep water for about a mile before the terrain changed and I could head for shore. After waiting for the wind to die I eventually decided to make camp with the toads in yet another cattle grazing area.





The next two days were a blur of shifting light winds and monotonous green hills. I could have sworn I was passing the same cattle herds over and over. Paddle to the water, I moved forward.



The river makes a sharp bend and I was presented with an option. I could paddle twelve miles around the bend or portage a half mile over a steep hill to get to the same point. Doing a manual portage is as thrilling a prospect as getting a tooth pulled but I knew I could do it faster than the four hours it would take to paddle the distance. If I portaged then I'd be left with about 32 miles instead of around 38 once the day was done. With high winds expected two days from then, I really wanted to get off the lake the next day. I figured that since it was a manual portage it wasn't cheating.

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Directions



I consolidated gear and walked a ways up the hill to figure out my route. Five heavy bags weighed me down as I trudged upward. I'd go until my shoulders had enough and then I'd turn around for the board, paddle, and water jug. The last section was the steepest so I made several trips. I took a moment to rest at the top and made my way down the other side. The last 100 yards to the water went through what seemed like impenetrable brush. I carried the board first and used it to ram a path toward the water. It was now eight and night and the mosquitos were well aware of my presence.





After an hour and a half I reached the water tired and sweaty. I stepped into the water to load my boat and sank up to my knees in mud which was soon all over the board. I used the last of the daylight to get a couple more miles in and rinsed off in the lake as night fell.

The Pike Haven Resort does a free breakfast for through paddlers so I set off into the wind for some food. The place was very welcoming and although I missed breakfast by an hour, they insisted I take my packaged muffin, danish and bottled lemonade on the house when I went to pay.

The headwind died as I pressed on throughout the day and once again I believed I could make the dam. Luckily the thing is lit up like a runway and it guided me in after dark. I set up my tent just out of view of the boat ramp and promptly fell asleep after five long days of paddling since the North Dakota border.















2013 - 09

Pierre, South Dakota - 2013-09-11 00:37

When I awoke, my phone had a few missed calls and text messages. I had been in contact with Bill Stevens from the Pierre Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, who I met at the conference in Bismarck. He offered to help portage me around the Oahe Dam and told me to just call him in the morning when I was ready. Well, he and Rich Avilla and Yvonne Haefner decided to have breakfast at the marina and were waiting for me.

They had been surprised they couldn't find me when they drove by the boat ramp earlier. I had

strategically camped where the tall grass hid me from the road. Oahe had left me exhausted and I wanted a night of uninterrupted sleep. I hadn't expected anyone to come looking for me though.

With the help of Rich and Yvonne we loaded my gear into Bill's large red van and headed for breakfast. It was a good day to be off the river. The wind was blowing the wrong direction and rain fell intermittently.



Yvonne had contacted the Pierre Days Inn about getting me a discounted rate but they decided to just comp me a night. I was incredibly grateful for the access to a shower, laundry, wifi, and a nice bed.

After getting settled, Bill and Yvonne gave me the grand tour of Pierre. As we drove along seeing the sights, Bill gave me more information about the historical significance of South Dakota's capital city than I could take in. Most interestingly, he took me up a hill to the Verendrye Site where French Explorer Pierre Gaultier De La Verendrye and his sons buried a lead plate, laying claim to the region for France. Afterwards, Yvonne gave me an "earth bracelet" which was a great unexpected gift. I planned to wear it the remainder of the trip.





Bill used his contacts and arranged interviews with several local media outlets. After talking with a local radio reporter, Tony Mangan, we were joined again by Rich and his wife and Bill's wife and headed for the Cattleman's Club.

The Cattleman's Club has something I'd never seen before in a restaurant, sawdust covering the floor. The story is that the original owner built the restaurant but didn't have enough money for flooring so he just put sawdust down. The tradition has stuck and they change it out every few days.

Following a great meal with engaging conversation some of us went for ice cream. On the way I got a tour of the outside of the capital building where Bill worked in government for many years. That night was spent getting caught up on editing pics.





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I packed up and got a late start to launch back on the Missouri. Lance Nixon from the Capital Journal interviewed me and snapped some pictures as I paddled out into the glorious current below the dam.

[article here](#)

A few miles downriver I went ashore to meet with Jeri Thomas, another radio news reporter.

[sound bites here](#)

As I paddled away from Pierre I reflected on my good fortune to have so many people looking out for me. These "Lewis and Clarkers" actively practice good trail stewardship and are positive influence on their communities. It wasn't long before the current died and I was on Lake Sharpe. At only about 75 miles long, it was only the fifth largest lake of the trip but I was in for a fight.

[Lake Sharpe, The Lake I Underestimated - 2013-09-11 17:11](#)

It was early evening when I left Pierre so, despite the current, I only made 20 miles. The sun was setting fast and the options for places to pitch my tent were lousy. I eventually had to settle for heaving my gear up a 3 ft bank onto equally tall grass. This was easily the worse campsite of the trip.

I knew I got a little spoiled by my calmer-than-usual conditions on Oahe so I couldn't complain too much about a bit of headwind as I set off the next day. When it came time for lunch I spotted two chairs around a fire pit on shore. It isn't often I have an actual chair to sit in when I eat so I decided to trespass and cook up some mac and cheese.

A short time later I heard a lawn mower coming my way. Would I encounter a hostile landowner when it came over the hill? A lady pulled up and turned off her machine as I quickly apologized for being on her property. She told me not to worry and informed me that she read about my trip in the Capital Journal that morning and came down to the water an hour before to look for me! Her name was Phyllis and we chatted for some time. She told me about her trip up the Missouri in a power boat with her husband 25 years earlier. They travelled from the Gulf to this very spot. She just loved my trip and I could tell her adventurous spirit still sparked. Chance encounters like this were adding a whole new dimension to the trip.

My energy level was low and the long days, just past, were catching up to me. This day was a mental battle. Again, suitable campsites were rare, with hours going by of nothing but eroded hills that ended as cliffs into the water, so I decided I would pull off at the first reasonable place after 6 o'clock.

Close to shore, I spotted something interesting sticking out of the water. It was a deer skull with an eight

point rack. I was really hoping to find some antlers on the trip and I can't tell you how many times white cottonwood branches caused me to do a double take.



It would have been cool to mount them on the bow but I need to store the board on its deck at night to protect the fin. I hooked the antlers through the aft most bungee cord and searched for a camp site.

There was supposed to be a meteor shower than night and I thought the clouds just might clear enough to capture it on camera. I set my alarm for a time of darkness a few short hours away and dozed off. When I was jolted awake by my phone's buzz I saw clear sky. I let my camera run for a while but it soon clouded over. No meteors. As I was going back to sleep I thought I heard something rustling outside my tent but figured it was just the wind.







Interrupted sleep left me groggy. I knew there would be headwinds for days to come so I wasn't exactly pumped to get moving. I looked over at my hat, which was right next to my head, and saw mouse poop in it... What? I sat up and saw a small hole chewed through the side of the tent. Next to it was another hole. At least he let himself out. At my feet were a couple zip lock bags that had been chewed to shreds. There had never been food in the bags so I'm not sure what the pest was after. I found droppings in a couple more places as I packed up. Lake Sharpe was going to be a very long lake.

Right away I knew I wouldn't make it too far. I was on a long straightaway with nothing to block the wind. In fact, I was in the only area that Lewis and Clark were able to travel upstream using nothing but their sails. The high bluffs funnel the wind right up the river. After just 5 miles I pulled my gear up a boat ramp and happily found a patch of mowed grass to camp on.

The only people I saw all day were in a boat that was taking out of the water the same time I was. They asked if I needed anything and thankfully gave me almost a gallon of water and gatorade combined. I was making much slower progress than I planned for and water would have been running low.

I had planned on being on the water early to beat the wind but it rained all night and morning until about 9:45 am. Realizing I would still need more water if the rain delayed me, I poured three of the bottles of water the fishermen gave into my jug and cut the bottles in half. With these I was able to

collect almost half a liter of rain water as it ran off my tent.

As I was making several trips down the boat ramp with all my gear I decided I didn't want the hassle of looking after the deer trophy for over a month. It was one more thing to load and unload in addition to five bags, two water jugs, shoes, a solar panel, and whatever else migrated out of a bag and to the deck of the board throughout the day. Besides, it was actually in pretty rough shape. It looked like it had been chewed on and sitting in the water for some time. Still, I was thankful to have found it. The same fishermen who gave me the water the day before had put their boat in again that day so I left it next to their trailer for them to take if they wanted it.

I fought into the wind for ten miles, mostly walking. The lake then made a 180 degree turn and I had a great last seven miles to a campground with a ripping tailwind. I had to pay for an RV sight but I was right on the water. After spreading everything out to dry from the previous night's rain I got invited around a campfire a few sites over. That night I talked with the large family group from close by in South Dakota.

From the campsite I'd have to go a couple miles across the lake so calm conditions were desired.

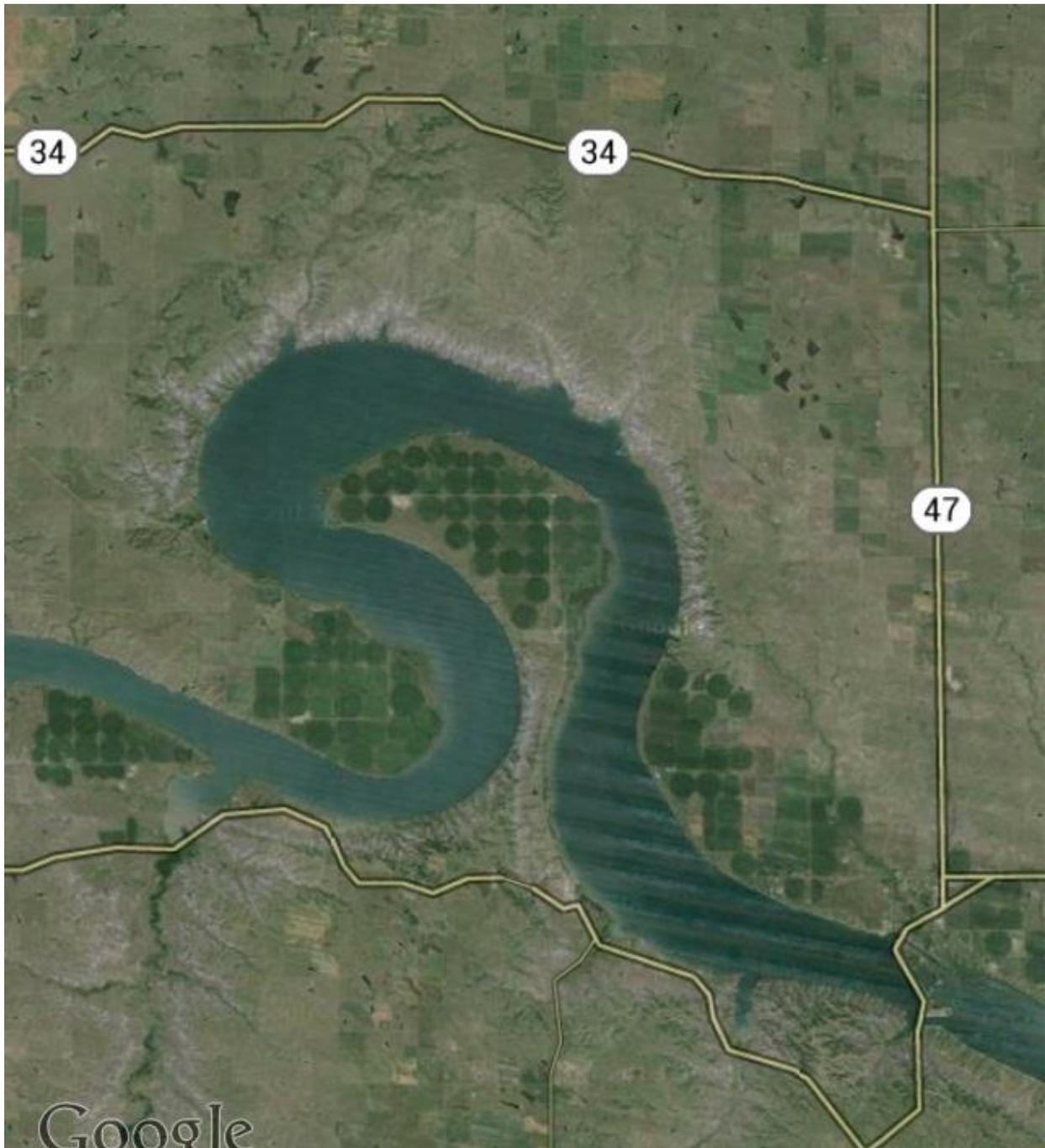


The wind was already blowing hard at 6am so I decided to take a day off and hope the next morning held calmer conditions. Rest was needed. I'd been waking up with head and body aches the last couple days. I spent much of the day hanging out and playing bags with my camping neighbors. They shared their dinner feast with me and the day ended with people sitting in a large circle around the fire.

It was the birthday of one of the guys, also named Scott, and he was more than happy to share his birthday meal with me. He also let me try some whiskey from the first legal distillery in South Dakota that his brother started. Coming from a family of about 9 brothers it was appropriately named, Bickering Brothers Whiskey. Pick up a bottle if you ever see it in stores.

The whole group was incredibly welcoming. South Dakota was quickly putting itself in the running for the most friendly state. They offered to drive me around the lake to the dam but of course I declined. One of the other guys, Duane, gave me a couple Gatorades to power me through the last day on Lake Sharpe. I was very thankful to have them throughout the last grueling day.

I set off in the morning to cross the lake and finish paddling around Big Bend. This was a 25 mile long bend in the river that comes back to within 1.5 miles of where it started. Essentially, paddling in a circle for ten hours.



Once I turned the last corner and had the dam in view about six miles away I was fully exposed to the wind. There was no way I was stopping but I also couldn't make much progress paddling. I walked the remainder of the lake and found a ride around the dam. I then paddled across the river to a campground and again had to take an RV site to avoid hauling my gear to the tent sites clear across the campground.



The wind blew hard for two days but I was sapped of energy so the forced rest was for the best. I popped ibuprofen to fend off the aches and spent a lot of time just laying in my tent. There was an indian Pow Wow in town a few miles away so I eventually wandered over.

I walked through a parking lot full of cars and people adorning themselves in colorful, feather-filled garments and head dress and reached a circular, covered grandstand. I bought a couple indian tacos, which are the usual taco ingredients piled on fry bread, and sat down to take in the Pow Wow. Different tribes took turns singing songs and playing drums and elaborately dressed performers danced ancient dances.







Had the wind not been so bad I wouldn't have seen this. It was truly unique and I was happy the tradition lives on. I was mesmerized by the event and tried to picture the scene set out on the plains a few hundred years ago. As I was walking back to camp a car stopped and asked if I needed a ride. Another kind South Dakota soul. This saved over two miles on my tired body. I tried to take it easy and get prepared for the 107 mile Lake Francis Case.













[Lake Francis Case - 2013-09-11 21:48](#)

It had been a mild summer up to this point. I couldn't have asked for better temperatures along the way. The first 1400 miles saw 70's during the day and 40 or 50's at night. Perfect when you are outside for days on end. I knew it would come to an end eventually.

It was already baking at 7 am as I headed into the water below Randall Dam. A siren was sounding to warn nearby boaters that they would be releasing water. I light current helped me the first five hours of the day into Chamberlain, South Dakota. With my board beached at a campground I headed into town for some lunch and groceries. This would have been a great stopping place for the day but the conditions were calm so I pressed on ten more miles before dark. I found a spot between the bluffs and

set up my tent on the gravel shore.

My condition deteriorated during the last hour. I had purchased a thermometer in Chamberlain since I had not been feeling well the last few days. Although I got a normal reading in town it now read over 100. Staying in Chamberlain for the night would have been a much better idea but I got distance hungry and antsy to get through the last of the big lakes. To make matters worse, my inflatable sleeping pad had gotten a hole in it.

The heat was scorching and the flies unrelenting as I took a rest day on shore. The hotter it got the more I wished I was in Chamberlain but at the same time I enjoyed relaxing undisturbed on the shore. This could be the last time I got to take a day to do nothing and just be. Once the sun moved far enough across the sky I was able to sit under a cliff in the shade and enjoy the quiet of the lake.





Morning came and I felt ten times better. After a few miles the White River joins the lake and with it comes heavy silt. There was now only about 6 inches of clear water on top of a sediment layer the color of heavily creamed coffee. My fin dragged through this layer for a few miles, each paddle stroke brought to the surface a plume of muck.

I had been excited that a 10 mph tailwind was in the forecast. That never seemed to generate but I did have dead calm and my energy back. I was aiming for the Highway 44 bridge and the restaurant next to it called Dock 44. Making it there for dinner wasn't likely but breakfast would start the next day off right. The lake was absolutely silent except for my paddle splashing in the water and the occasional cow moo.

Toward the end of the day a big storm system appeared to the south. I could see lightning way off in the distance but it seemed to be well enough where I was. It rained on and off but I decided to risk it and keep going. The dangers stayed south of me and the clouds from this storm painted the view a cool blue. It was both a bit eerie and calming.



I paddled up to the parking lot by Dock 44 and sure enough it was closed. This didn't take away from my happiness of making 36 miles after 12 hours of paddling. As I boarded my boat a car pulled up and an excited figure jumped out. Scott Abbas greeted me and asked if I was paddling the whole river. He

pointed across the harbor at a bright yellow sailboat and told me he spends most of his summer on the boat. Scott was a figure straight out of Key West but dropped in the middle of South Dakota.

I paddled a short ways and camped in the mowed grass next to the parking lot. When you have camped for three months, little things like level cut grass to pitch your tent on are luxuries you don't take for granted. Morning came and I headed for some eggs and pancakes. Scott had called the restaurant from his boat and offered to pay for my meal.

As I was packing I saw the little yellow boat catching the wind on its way out of the harbor. I quickly loaded up and paddled over to thank him. The lake gets progressively more scenic as you travel south from here. Memories of Montana flashed in my mind as pine trees once again lined the shore for the first time in hundreds of miles. This section of lake has to be the most beautiful in South Dakota.





That night I pulled up to a campground. There was a mist in the air and the place was completely void of people. It was rather creepy. I camped on shore a short ways away and threw down some peanut butter, too tired to make a proper meal.

I crossed the lake and did a combination of paddling and walking for several hours. I only had 17 miles to the dam and I wasn't willing to wait out the wind because the forecast called for similar conditions for days on end. At one point when I was walking a big wave came and dumped half my gear in the water. I unloaded to check the bags for water and debated ending the day right there. Once a herd of cows came around the corner about 100 yards away, looking like they wanted my patch of beach, I decided I'd press on. Eventually I travelled far enough to reach the south shore where the wind was partially blocked by the high bluffs so I was able to get within a couple miles of the dam before pulling off due to darkness.



I slept in and paddled the last 2.5 miles to the dam in the late morning. I had to kneel on the board to get across the last couple bays where the wind wasn't blocked at all. A public beach was my landing spot and I quickly moved all my gear into the shade and waited until I could find someone with a pick-up truck to see if I could get a ride to the campground on the other side of the dam. I was incredibly relieved and happy to have reached this point. Only one more 20 mile lake remained.

The town of Pickstown was a few miles away so I approached a man with his family on the beach to ask about restaurants in town. He asked how I get around the dams and next thing I knew we had my board loaded on his PWC trailer and gear in the back of his 70's Blazer. Seth and his wife Corri lived down river but come up to the lake to boat. Seth mentioned contacting me when I got closer to his hometown as they departed.



After I got camp set up I figured I'd paddle across the river to town instead of walking an extra two miles around and over the dam. That's when I realized I'd somehow left my paddle at the beach! I started half running back up the road. If it was gone I'd probably have to wait at the campground for a week for a new one to be shipped, not to mention the expense. A SUP paddle isn't exactly a common item.

I waved down a camp ranger to ask for a ride back there. To my considerable relief it was still there among the beach goers, it's black shaft blending in with the shadow of a tree. I'll blame that one exhaustion. Just one more damn dam lay ahead.











[Prints Available! - 2013-09-13 03:02](#)

Enjoy the pictures from my trip? Consider purchasing a print! Available on photo paper, canvas, or even metal.

[Prints Available Here](#)

The pictures posted to the blog and on Facebook are compressed but these are full resolution and can be enlarged with great quality. Feel free to shoot over any questions through the "Contact Me" page.

Thank you.

The Last Damn Dam - 2013-09-16 16:54

I scrambled down the rip-rap and tied my board to a rock so the current didn't take it away as I loaded up. There are about 45 miles of current before the last 20 mile lake and last dam. The first stretch was straight south and into a ripping wind.



The current zoomed by under the board as I strained to keep up with it as the wind tried to blow me backward. I remain unflustered because at least I had the current. There would have been no progress had I still been on a lake.

Shortly after leaving the campground below Randall Dam the right shore became Nebraska. State 4 of 7. About the time I reached the state my stomach clenched up. Maybe it was the walleye I ate in town the day before or lingering symptoms of whatever illness I had been battling. It's not like there was any place to stop had I wanted to so I kept paddling.

Around 4pm the tall cliffs provided shade if I paddled about three feet from shore. My fin eventually found a hidden rock. Normally when I hit something with the fin it bounced over or ground to a bumpy halt. This time the board stopped dead and I kept going. I rolled over the bags in front of me and right into the water. Fall number three of the trip.

I knew I had to of damaged the board. After unloading it I flipped it over to find that the force of the impact cracked the fin housing. A strip of fiberglass was laid down and I sat in the shade and watched the first waterskiers I'd seen all summer do laps up and down the river. I used the time to make dinner and headed back out once the epoxy had tacked up.

The next day I thought I would throw up for sure but I kept paddling. I just wanted to reach the last dam so I could rest up in civilization in the town of Yankton, South Dakota. The Niobrara River joined the Missouri which sped up the current. I even had a tail wind once I turned Northeast. It felt good to be moving at a pace I hadn't experienced since Bismarck.

The current dissipated as I entered Lewis and Clark Lake. I wanted to get about half way across it to leave myself a short last day on the final Missouri lake. Huge rocks line the shore, fallen from the steep cliffs above. There were few safe options for camping. I passed a perfectly flat car sized boulder which would have made for a suitable place to pitch a tent but there was a beaver den leaning up against one side of it. They probably wouldn't appreciate neighbors.

As I wearily dragged myself forward I heard a voice up ahead and then saw a golden retriever wade into the water to come check me out. A guy appeared on shore and waved me over. His name was Steve and turns out he was a kayak instructor from Omaha staying at his cabin up the hill. He handed me a cold beer which I held against my forehead before drinking it.

Steve called his wife Pia to come down to meet me. As I was just thinking about heading back out to find a campsite Steve asked where I planned to stay that night. When I told him I would try to find a spot just up ahead he offered a room in their cabin and refuge from the oppressive heat.

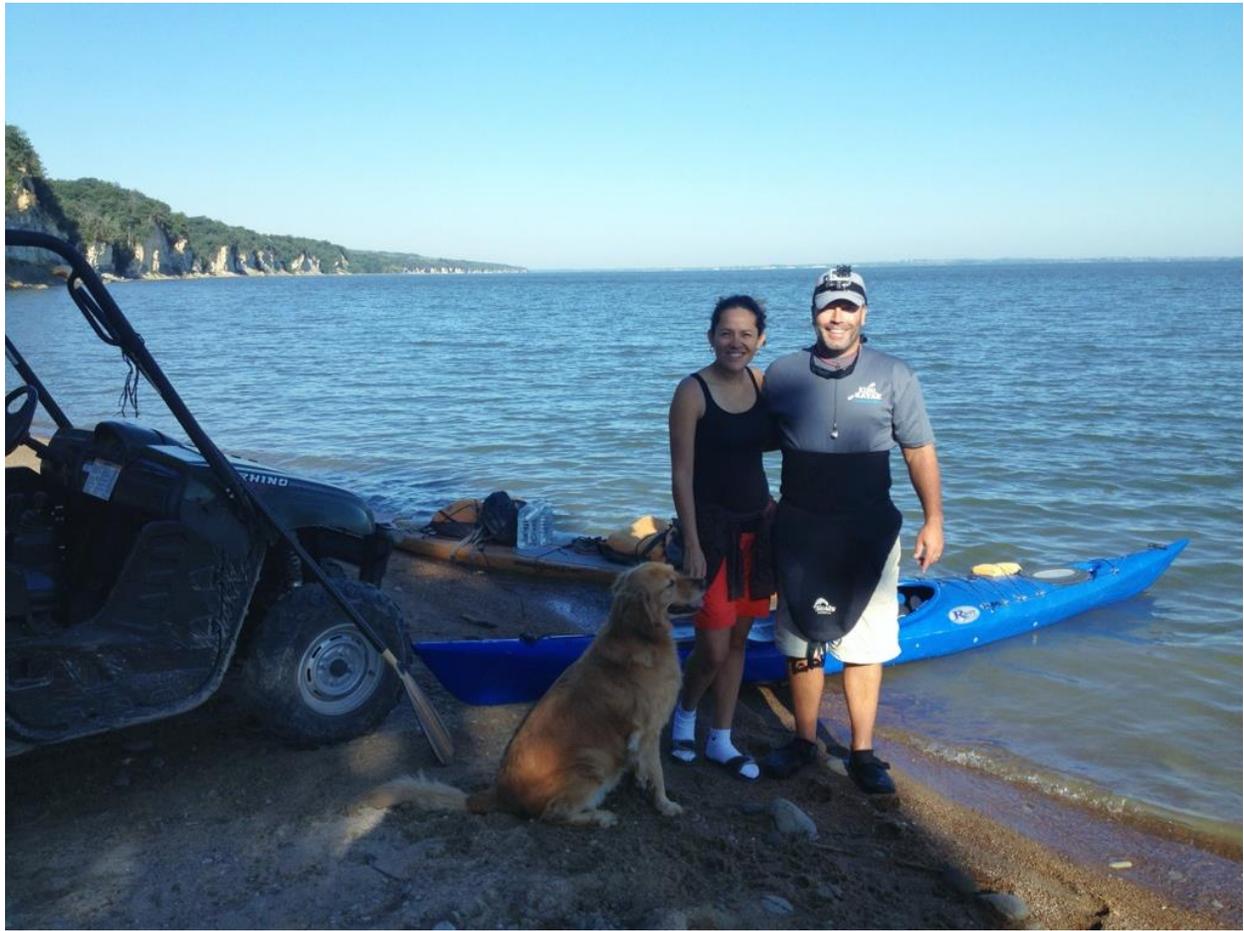
Next thing I knew we were charging up a rutted hill in their Ranger 4-wheeler with my gear in the back. We arrived at an oasis among the treetops in an area known as the Devil's Nest. I stepped into the cold AC and was handed an ice cold water. I instantly felt better. From the second story deck was a grand view of the lake a mile below and the cliffs on the opposite shore. The exposed trees bent in the wind.





Pia whipped up a tilapia dinner as I answered questions about the trip and played with Murphy the dog. Steve's desire to do the trip in a kayak built as the evening wore on. After much needed laundry and a shower I had a wonderful nights sleep in a comfy bed. The Devil's Nest was the unexpected recharge I needed. There couldn't have been a more welcome experience than running into Steve on the side of the lake and getting to know these river angels.

In the morning, Steve paddled with me for a bit as I set out to do the last 13 miles before the dam. There was the slightest of tailwinds to help me along on the last few miles of the 700 miles of the Missouri's lakes. Just like the rest of the trip, one paddle stroke at a time I moved forward.





Right by the dam lies the Marina Grill. I tied my board to a dock and walked in to get a celebratory meal. The AC hit my clothes, that were still wet from cooling off in the water, as I sat down with a large coke and ordered a big taco salad.

I had made it. The lakes were brutal but they will be some of the more memorable parts. They had the best camping and best sunsets for the most part. A paddleboard is not the ideal water craft for a wide open windy lake but it was doable. This was the biggest milestone of the trip besides actually finishing it. Nothing but 800 miles of current lay on the other side of the last damn dam. Relief.







[Current, sweet glorious current - 2013-09-16 19:32](#)

Jarett Bies, Yankton radio news manager and resident river angel, arrived with a kayak trailer and cooler full of IPAs to pick me up from the last dam. Most of the country was under a heat spell so he offered to put me up for the night at his place. He gave me the use of his car as he finished up things at work. I restocked my bags with groceries and we headed to his house tucked among farms near Vermillion, SD.

As we unloaded the car his curious chickens came to check out the new guest. Out of the heat, Jarett cooked up some dinner and I got to kick back and relax. He organizes a local paddling race called the South Dakota Kayak Challenge which I asked him about. The guy is a great ambassador for the river and he unselfishly enjoys helping out paddlers.



The stars were still out when we got on the road at 4:30am the next morning so he could drop me off and get to work on time. I had planned on taking the day off but figured I'd mind as well make the most of my early start. I took a nap next to the river as I waited for the sun to come up and pushed off into the glorious current.



The river is wild here. It picks its course among many islands and sandbars. I was overjoyed to be able to move downriver with the aid of the current. I kept thinking it was going to end at any moment and I'd be on yet another lake. In fact, I was just a couple days above the channelized section where it would only speed up. The current had a refreshing effect greater than the best of meals on an empty stomach.

My stopping point for the day was about eight hours downstream. Seth Rubida, the guy who portaged me around Randall Dam, put me in contact with his friend who has a river cabin on the South Dakota side by Vermillion. I tied to their dock and headed up to a log cabin that was everything you would want in a river cabin. Seth and Corri and their two kids were there along with some family members of the cabin owners.

It was a scorching hot day so Seth put his boat in the water and we motored across the river to a sandbar to go swimming. This was the first time I swam in the current on the whole trip. It was a struggle to stand your ground but it was fun to float a bit downstream and walk back along the sand. I then went kneeboarding behind the boat which is something I hadn't done in years. It was good to be with such fun-loving people.

Blaine, the cabin owner, showed up a couple hours later driving his new two-person pontoon boat. It was like the golf cart of boats and fun to take for a spin. Burgers were grilled and I was left with the cabin to myself for the night. Both families had been incredibly welcoming.



I slept about ten and half hours and didn't get on the water until noon. I was only going about 21 miles though. Seth had offered to pick me up from a boat ramp by his house in Elk Point. It was going to be another day close to 100 so I gladly accepted his offer. As I got close I saw Seth and Corri speeding toward me in their boat. Once on land we strapped my board into their boat and headed to their house.

They took me to dinner and for the fourth night in a row, I slept in the AC. Seth dropped me back at the ramp in the morning and we bid farewell. I would leave South Dakota for Iowa in a few short hours and take with me a lot of memories. South Dakota was by far the toughest state of the journey but it also had some of the best chance encounters with people and was the most welcoming state. I could only hope I'd have as warm a reception down river.





[Into Omaha - 2013-09-18 02:45](#)

About 750 miles from the confluence with the Mississippi the Missouri River becomes channelized. This means that the Army Corp of Engineers has contained the river so it can no longer wander and change its course. The riverbanks are lined with rocks called rip-rap and wing dams on the inside bends direct the flow of water to the outside bends. This makes it very easy to navigate for barges and paddlers alike. An added benefit is that the outside bends have some great current. I could now average 5.0-5.4mph throughout the day.

Twenty miles into the channelized section I paddled into a marina at the edge of Sioux City, Iowa and headed to Bev's on the River for lunch. I ordered a Coke as I waited for Beverly Hinds (no connection to the restaurant that I'm aware of) from the Sergeant Floyd Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation.

She had arranged for all three TV news stations to come out and interview me. After talking with them the Sergeant Floyd Chapter treated me to lunch. Beverly then took me to a couple museums which were very well run and put together. Right after, we went to see the 100 foot obelisk that serves as the monument to the only member of the Lewis and Clark expedition to die during the expedition.



Sergeant Floyd died of appendicitis which, at that time, would have killed him no matter where he was. It is pretty amazing all the other members of the Corp of Discovery survived their epic two year journey into the unknown. Beverly's late husband played a vital role in getting the monument built so there is a brass plaque on one side recognizing his contribution.

When I arrived, I had been anxious to make Sioux City as short a stop as possible since I had a rare north wind helping me out but I ended up spending several hours there. I was enjoying my time with Beverly and I was trying to absorb as much information as I could as I explored the museums. Beverly and others in the city are doing great work.



Back on the water, I paddled until just before dark to set myself up to make Omaha two days later. I set up camp in the sand tucked among the wild sunflowers that line the river as you enter Iowa. In the morning, I headed downriver under a waning rainbow as it drizzled for a short while.





Twenty miles later I reached my lunch destination as the sun started to bake the earth. I got a quick sandwich at a place called Pop-n-Docs and pressed on as boat traffic steadily increased on the Saturday of Labor day. All day long I answered the question, "Where ya comin' from?" It was a little more fun to answer that question now that I was 1600 miles into the trip and eating up the miles at a much faster rate.

For hundreds of miles I'd seen giant trees that had been washed up on shore. Sometimes they were a dozen vertical feet higher than the current water level, which tells you how much the water can fluctuate. However, I had not seen one of these massive trees floating in the water until after Sioux City.

I watched as two neighbors pried a 50 foot tree free from the upstream neighbor's dock and raced down to the other dock to successfully deflect it away. About 30 minutes later I caught up to another floating tree. The branchless beast meandered on a path free of obstruction. I pulled along side it and decided to see how sturdy it would be to stand on. The Muddy Moose heeled up along side its fallen ancestor as I stepped aboard the tree. It maintained its position as I took a few paddle strokes in vain.



I carried my gear and board up a steep sand bank to a flat spot close to the trees. It poured that night and as I was climbing out of my wet tent in the morning I heard some loud rustling in the bushes. Whatever it was had been moving fast. Startled, I looked up and was eye to eye with a doe. We were

both rather surprised to see each other. I waved my hands toward it and shouted, "Get out of here!" It spun a 180 and bolted back into the trees. I was now wide awake. No need to make coffee.

Boats flew by, mostly heading north to enjoy their holiday weekend and be on the water as summer neared an end. Friendly boaters waved all day as they past and sent their wakes my way.

The Omaha skyline came into view as I approached an old steel railroad bridge. As I turned south through town I passed under a crowded pedestrian bridge and stopped at a sandbar full of parked boats. Curious weekend warriors asked lots of questions and offered food from every direction.

I set out toward my destination about 20 miles south of the city. On the way I passed under the I-80 bridge which was the place I crossed over the Missouri on my way out west back on June 2nd. At the time I was fiddling with my handheld GPS for the first time in the passenger seat and almost missed the river crossing. I thought then that it would take a very long time to get back here. My course took me in a months long circle back to this point.



The last two hours of my 58 mile day really dragged. I knew there would be a good meal that night so I was anxious to arrive. This was also the first time my feet had really started to cramp up. Maybe it was the added challenge of balancing through the constant boat wakes.

Several members of the Mouth of the Platte Chapter of the LCTH Foundation greeted me as I arrived, some holding signs. Mary Langhorst had been keeping tabs on me since we met in Bismarck and arranged the warm welcome and reserved a spot for me at the campground.

Also there was Janet Sullens Moreland. I found out about her trip the day before I started mine and had been slowly catching up to her all summer long. She was well on her way to becoming the first American and first woman to travel the Missouri river system from source to sea. 3700 miles in a kayak named Blue Moon. It was an honor to finally meet her after following her trip on Facebook. Check out her page: [LoveYourBigMuddy](#)



I got my tent set up and showered for the benefit of everyone around me and we all headed for dinner across the river in Iowa. At dinner they made me and Janet honorary members of the chapter and even made a contribution toward the trip on behalf of the members. One of those members, Della, picked up our tab.

I went to bed that night tired but full and happy I was taking the next two days off.





2013 - 10

Q&A for Vertical Oar - 2013-10-01 14:59

[Vertical Oar Q&A](#)

Many thanks to Shane Perrin for putting together this Q&A shortly after the completion of my trip. Shane not only promotes SUP through his own expeditions, radio show and writing but gets people on the water with his rental business. If you are ever in the St. Louis area check out <http://www.supstlouis.com/>

2 days in Omaha - Musicians and Keel Boats - 2013-10-02 16:05

I was in Omaha, tired but happy. The morning air held a slight chill that reminded me it was now September. Upon exiting my tent I found Janet making breakfast at the picnic table of our shared campsite. We hadn't had much time to get to know each other the night before among the large group of Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage members. I sat down ready to compare river stories.

As Janet made coffee in her french press I sipped on a much less impressive mug of instant brew. Travelling by boats gives you the option to carry some luxury items that would have to be left behind on a backpacking trip. An extra ten pounds is barely noticeable among 100 pounds in a boat. It was clear that Janet was taking full advantage of this fact as she sorted through her library of books that was kept in a sealed five gallon bucket. After all, her trip was 1300 miles longer than mine so more creature comforts were necessary.

Stories of storms, mud, upset animals, and long days were shared. We also compared notes on the greatest sunsets, the virtues of time on isolated lakes and the comfort that can be found in solo travel. However, we agreed most strongly on people's seemingly irrational fear of the river. Both of us had been warned about some killer aspect of the river by practically everyone we encountered. People have a penchant for the bombastic aspects of the Missouri. More recently we had been warned, "Watch out for those barges, they'll suck you under and they throw a big wake." Before that it was warnings about the indians like we were travelling through undiscovered lands. Preceding that were the HUGE wind and waves of the big lakes, the "rapids," the rattlesnakes, floating trees, dams, quicksand, and the list goes on and on. Oh, did I mention the HUGE waves on the big lakes? We weren't sure why people seem so afraid of the Missouri. It seemed to us that if you go out prepared the river is a perfectly safe place to recreate. It must be the stories of drunk or uninformed people getting caught off guard that the media surely replays incessantly.







Mary Langhorst arrived in the afternoon with lunch and a truck to transport Janet's stuff back to the boat ramp so she could paddle on as I took two days rest. We got everything transported and the packing process began. Janet's boat is like a puzzle. Each bag has its own spot, sometimes supporting other bags in their place. I have the advantage of being able to use a small number of large bags and just strapping them down. Janet strategically stuffed bags into every nook and cranny of her kayak, Blue Moon.



Off she floated and into the city I went. Mary drove me to the National Park Service building to pick up some packages I had shipped there. It was better than Christmas. Most importantly, I got a loaned sleeping pad from Thermarest since mine was leaking air which made for some uncomfortable nights. I was then dropped off in an area of Omaha known as the "Old Market" where I wandered through the streets and shops during a busy Labor Day.



Alma Royster, founder of an Omaha SUP company named Meander, picked me up from Old Market and took me to an outdoor store called Backwoods. She had been following my trip and organized an event at the store for me to show a couple videos and talk about my trip. It would also hopefully help build interest in the sport locally. Alma was busy building her brand and getting people on boards at nearby lakes. If you are in the Omaha area, Alma would love to take you out for a SUP lesson. Also check out their line of boards



It was a fun evening with an attentive crowd. Alma drove me back to my campsite 20 miles south of the city and I figured I'd relax and read in my tent. It being the Monday of Labor Day, the campground had cleared out by the time I left in the afternoon. I was a bit surprised to find that new RV's filled the small park when I returned. As I was getting settled a gentleman came over to ask about my board. He had wondered how I arrived since there was no car at my site and was quite taken aback when I told him. Turns out he was part of a large group of musicians, made up of smaller groups, who were on their way back for a large folk festival in Iowa.

I found myself sitting around a campfire as about 9 people of varying age strummed their instruments and sang beautiful folk songs. The fire glowed off their carefully crafted wood instruments for a few hours while the musicians took turns singing. Yet another great unexpected, off-river experience.



One of the LCTH Foundation members, Kira Gale, came to get me the next morning. She wanted to take me about 80 miles north to meet the foremost expert on building Lewis and Clark replica keel boats and to take one out for a ride. On the way we stopped off at her house for a breakfast of fruit smoothies as she showed me her vast library. When Kira got her first computer years earlier she decided she wanted a project which eventually led her to becoming an American historian.

With lunch packed we headed on the road. The drive passed quickly as we discussed the current state of technology. Unlike many of her generation she has jumped head first into learning and utilizing much of today's technology. Her outlook on the world was refreshing. She would say things like, "Isn't the world just wonderful," many times during our day together. Always looking for something new to learn, she has begun learning video editing techniques and has a local film student come over once a week to tutor her.

From our talk of modern advances we arrived at a place set 200 years prior. We were at the Lewis and Clark State Park in Iowa which is situated on an oxbow lake. An oxbow lake is formed when a wide meander from the main channel of a river is cut off to create a lake (wikipedia). This means that the 60 foot keel boat that was tied to the dock was floating in water that was once part of the Missouri River.



Butch Bouvier the boat builder and his friend Russell Field arrived to take us out on the water. The many-ton wooden beast was powered away from the dock by a 50 hp engine that was mounted inside where the captain quarters were on the original boat. We quietly cruised up and down the lake at a speed probably not exceeding 3 mph. The fact that people pushed and pulled these boats upstream is simply amazing. When I took a hand at the helm I felt first hand how long it took to initiate a turn.

We floated under a perfect blue sky and sat beneath the shade of a canvas canopy. I asked Butch a bunch of questions he has probably answered a million times. Butch was a relaxed, white-bearded historian that chose to tell history through the creation of these massive crafts. He talked about how his path hasn't always been easy but he doesn't waste his days and he doesn't talk about what he is gonna do but goes out and does it.

<https://vimeo.com/75666794>













The experience was well worth the drive and I was thankful Kira was so eager to take me. We headed back to old market to grab a drink as I waited to meet up with someone who contacted me back on my second day on the river. Shawn McInay learned about me through a CLCboats.com newsletter and wanted to take me to dinner. Over a meal we talked about the opportunities to get on the water around Omaha and Shawn's plans for building the Kaholo paddleboard kit he ordered. It was great to finally meet him after having his name written down in my phone's reminders for three months.

After I got dropped off at the campground I went to hang out with the folk musicians for a second night. Although instruments were in many of their hands we just sat around talking for several hours. I joked that I was hoping they would walk along shore and play their instruments as I travelled down the river.

As I packed up to hit the water in the morning the group came over to offer any assistance and inform me that they had written a song for me! The song was titled, "Scott Will Paddle," and was set to the tune of, "Michael Row the Boat Ashore." I stood back and listened while not believing it was happening. Never had I expected to be written a song, especially after a chance encounter with a random group of people. Guitar strings were plucked and voices sang out in the late morning air.



Mary arrived at the campground to help transport my stuff to the dock. She had been more than welcoming to me while I was in Omaha and I'm very thankful to her for her support. The musicians came down to see me off, most with an instrument in hand. I bid farewell to everyone with a thankfulness that couldn't touch my actual gratitude for the moment. The current carried me away from this great group of people and distance slowly faded the lyrics to my song as they sang it again. "Scott will paddle his boat on down the Missouri, Scott will paddle his boat on down the Missouri, Built with his own hands, Built with his own hands, From Three Forks to Old St. Lou, From Three Forks to Old St. Lou..."

[Omaha to Kansas City - 2013-10-02 22:30](#)

Six hundred more river miles to go. At 40-55 miles a day the rest of the river would fly by. However, I was only planning on paddling 15 miles this day. Janet had been staying in a river cabin just down from

Omaha and sent me a message saying that the family who owned it would welcome me and I should come check it out. With no pressure to make distance I spent significant time just floating and letting the current carry me. After a few hours I saw Janet walking by the shore and I located the boat ramp that led to the cabin.



We carried my gear to the cabin which serves as a guest house for the owners who live up the hill. I took the opportunity to cook lunch on a real stove and started to charge camera batteries as Janet and I filled each other in on our experiences the last couple days.



Brad Krauth arrived in the early evening to take us up the hill to his family's house for dinner. At the top of the hill was a large home with grand views of the river valley below. Inside I met Brad's wife Traci and their two kids. After a hot shower I sat down to a great meal of salmon and vegetables as we got to know each other. The Krauths have put up kayakers a few times in the past and love entertaining. Brad is quite an adventurer himself so there were many stories to swap.



Janet's "river family" arrived in the evening. The Missouri River Relief crew from Janet's hometown of Columbia, MO happened to have a river cleanup in Omaha scheduled for the next morning so they came by to see their hometown hero. We all sat outside on the patio, which overlooked the river, and hung out until it got dark. I was very happy I decided to keep the miles low and hang out with the Krauths. Their hospitality was genuine and appreciated.





We packed our boats in the drizzling rain in the morning with a goal to paddle over 50 miles. It was nice to paddle with someone else. The last time that happened was back in Eastern Montana when I spent a couple days paddling with David Forbes. He made great time since then and actually finished in St. Louis almost a week prior.

Brad had suggested we get lunch in Nebraska City, Nebraska since we would hit the town right around the appropriate time. Following his directions we paddled up a narrow creek that was just wide enough for us to turn around in. Janet was in the lead as I gave a startled shout. A big fish soared through the air just inches from my leg. Soon asian carp started torpedoing from every direction. We paddled slowly with our eyes focused on the water ready to deflect any fish that came our way. Luckily we avoided any collisions and tied our boats to a rock under a road bridge and scrambled up the steep brush to solid ground. We found a bar a short ways away where a patron informed us they had the best burger in town and ate a quick but delicious lunch before heading out to make some more miles.

The following 3 photos were taken by Janet Moreland:







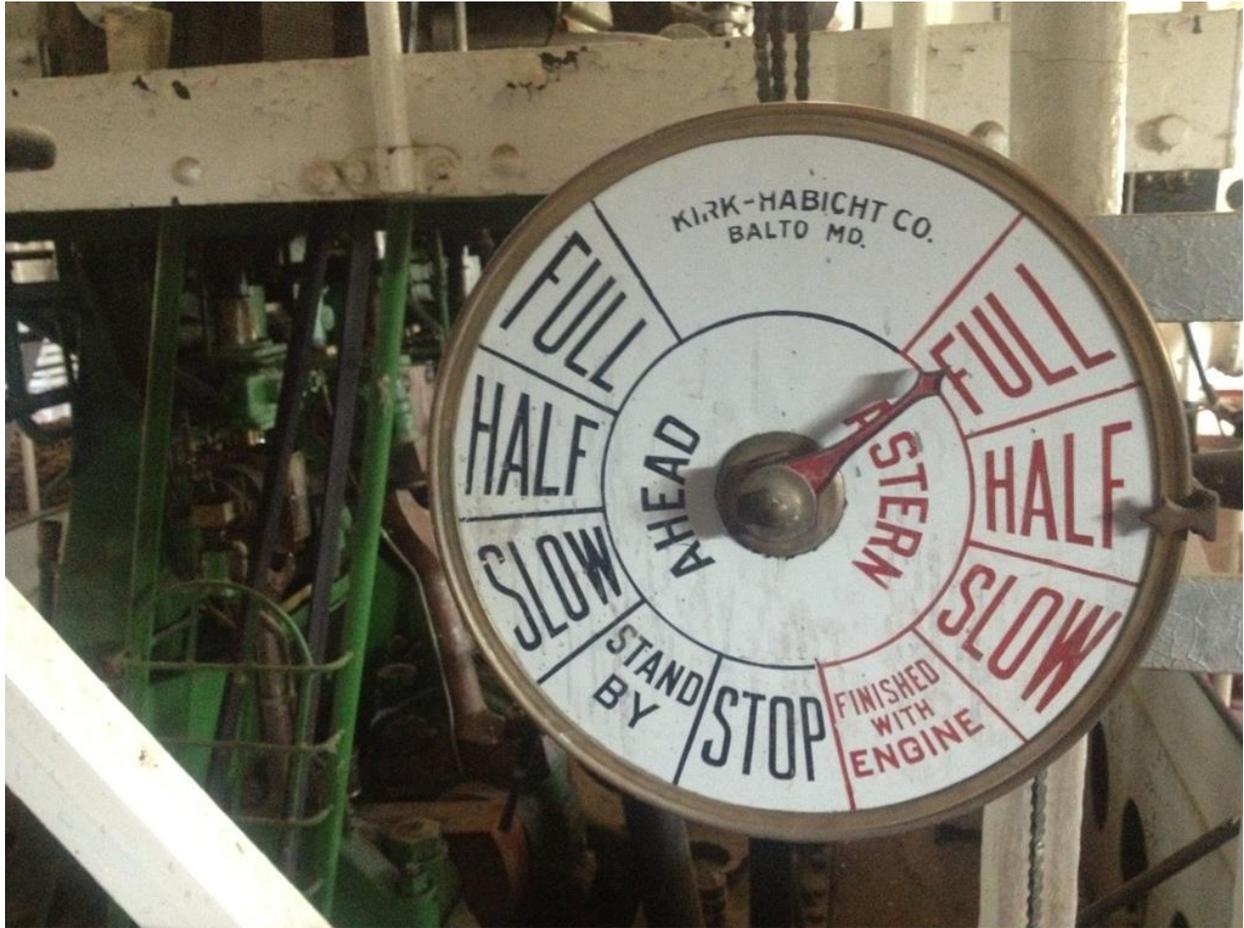
Late in the day we hit the state of Missouri. I could tell reaching this milestone had special meaning for Janet since it was her home state. It was an occasion to celebrate after all. We had reached the state where the Missouri ends. I knew there would be many more long days ahead but I also knew they would seem like they flew by after they passed.

We pulled into Brownsville, Nebraska after 51.1 miles. A man by the name of Phil Reid was there waiting to help us move our gear up the ramp. He had been following Janet's journey on Facebook and decided to drive out to see us. We set up camp in the grass at the top of the boat ramp with a view of a landlocked steam-powered dredge boat that now serves as a museum. Unfortunately it was closed. It was now dark so Phil lit the site with the headlights of his car and we quickly set up our tents as the mosquitos thickened.



As we packed up in the morning I saw a man working around the steam dredge so I walked over to ask him about it. Although it was only open on the weekends he said he would give us a tour. The boat was in rough shape but this man (neglected to get his name) was working on fixing it up.









We got on the water later than we had hoped and fought a headwind. This didn't stop us from reaching the 500 mile marker. Janet and I had been talking about how little time we had left on the river (and she was going another 1000 miles down to the Gulf on the Mississippi!). Seeing that marker was a reminder to enjoy the rest of the trip because it would be over before I knew it.



I had hoped to reach Kansas by water but it was not to be. The plan was to meet up with a guy who runs a local paddling outfitter business who offered to put us up for the night. We had two choices of boat ramps. The one that came after 40 miles of paddling appealed to us much more than the one ten miles downriver just across the Kansas border.

Just after passing under some bridges we unloaded by the small town of Rulo and soon after Casey Rush and his cousin Tyson arrived with a canoe trailer. We called ahead for a pizza and into Kansas we headed. This was the only state of the trip I had never been to. We crossed into the state on a low lying road with corn fields on the left and steep hills on the right. This part of Kansas was not nearly as flat as I would have expected but you could say that about every state I passed through. The river has worked to carve the landscape for thousands of years so it may be boring to drive through many of the states that the Missouri cuts through but traveling down the river was a different story.





Tyson treated us to pizza and drinks and we headed for Casey's house. There we discussed the fear that surrounds the river and learned about Casey's river business which he does on the side of farming.

Tyson joined us on the river in the morning. He paddled the first ten miles with us until we reached his car near a boat ramp. During the paddle I asked him questions about his farm. Like every other farmer I met on this trip he loves it and wouldn't want to do anything else. He said the cyclical nature of the job meant you hardly do one aspect of the job long enough to get sick of it before its time for a new task.



With St. Joseph looming late in the day we decided we'd lay up short of the city to avoid getting caught in the dark trying to get past town. We set up camp in a sandy area behind a wing dam and set about planning the next couple days. I wanted to make it the 94 miles to Kansas City in less than two days so I could have more time in the city while I stayed with a friend. Janet was planning on spending a couple days in Atchison Kansas and then paddling past Kansas City since there are few safe camping options by the city.



I headed off into the sunrise aiming to make the most mileage yet. St. Joseph came into view and as I passed by old steel bridges a horrible stench hit me. A south wind was blowing some sort of awful smell upriver from a factory just past town. I was later informed that it was either a slaughterhouse or leather tanning business. With a smell that bad I could only imagine what was being dumped into the river from the pipe spilling brackish water into the Missouri.

A packet of freeze dried food was cooked and consumed without leaving the board. I received a Facebook message shortly after finishing lunch from a guy named Mark Dierking who is originally from Atchison, KS and wanted to treat me to whatever I wanted from a place on the water called Ruby's Landing. He'd already phoned his credit card info in. Though I just ate and I was only an hour from Ruby's, you can never eat enough food while paddling so I took him up on the offer. I tied my board up and ordered some more food.

On the way out I was greeted by a man with a serious expression on his face. He grabbed a hold of my hand to shake it and wouldn't let go until he warned me about the dangers of the river, his grip tightening as he talked. After warning me of the barge wakes he moved on to the undertow. It was a bit extreme so I started laughing a bit which didn't sit well with him. He said, "That smile ain't gonna save ya."

This marked probably the 100th time I'd been warned about barges (among other things). Now, I understand that it would not end well if one happened to hit me or if I paddled into a parked one and got sucked under it by the current but give me a break. For those wondering, you can see and hear a barge from a mile away and they travel at a speed that gives you plenty of time to get out of their path. Their course is dictated by the channel markers so it isn't difficult to avoid them. The wake they throw is big yes but my board can't be swamped. The waves splash my bags a bit and I keep on down the river. It seemed that you would almost have to try to come into contact with a barge. More Missouri River fear.



At the end of day I had paddled 59 miles and set up camp on the sandy shore across the river from a very busy railroad track that would wake me many times in the night. One of these times, I awoke to my fingers locked in a curled position like they were holding a paddle. I painfully wiggled my fingers to get the kinks out. This would happen almost every night for the rest of trip. I just hoped I wasn't doing any permanent damage. During the first hour of paddling each morning, various parts of my body felt a bit tender but it usually worked itself out.



As I approached Kansas City there were numerous pipes dumping yellow or chalky brown colored liquid into the river. The skyline came into view as I paddled along a noisy highway on my left with thick trees on my right. A headwind kicked up waves to splash my feet with the polluted water as I continued toward an ugly waterfront.



I made landing where the Kansas River meets the Missouri and waited to be picked up by my friend Nick to spend two days in the city.









[Quick update - 2013-10-09 00:27](#)

I figured I should post an update while I'm between blog posts. For those of you who didn't also follow along on Facebook (Missouri River SUP Adventure) I completed my trip on September 21st. Keeping a blog up-to-date while on a trip is very difficult when photos and video are worked in. I will complete the blog over the next couple weeks. After that, keep checking back for updates on the trip documentary that I have started working on.

Kansas City to Columbia - 2013-10-17 21:52

My friend Nick Yecke had recently moved to Kansas City from Chicago. It was great to have a familiar face along the Missouri. I also really needed a couple days to rest my aching hands and feet.



We tied my board to the top of his car and headed onto the highway, hoping the single strap and a bit of rope would hold. After a stop for Mexican food we arrived at his house, my basecamp for the next three nights. I threw my laundry in and sat down to digest the two entrees of food I'd just consumed.

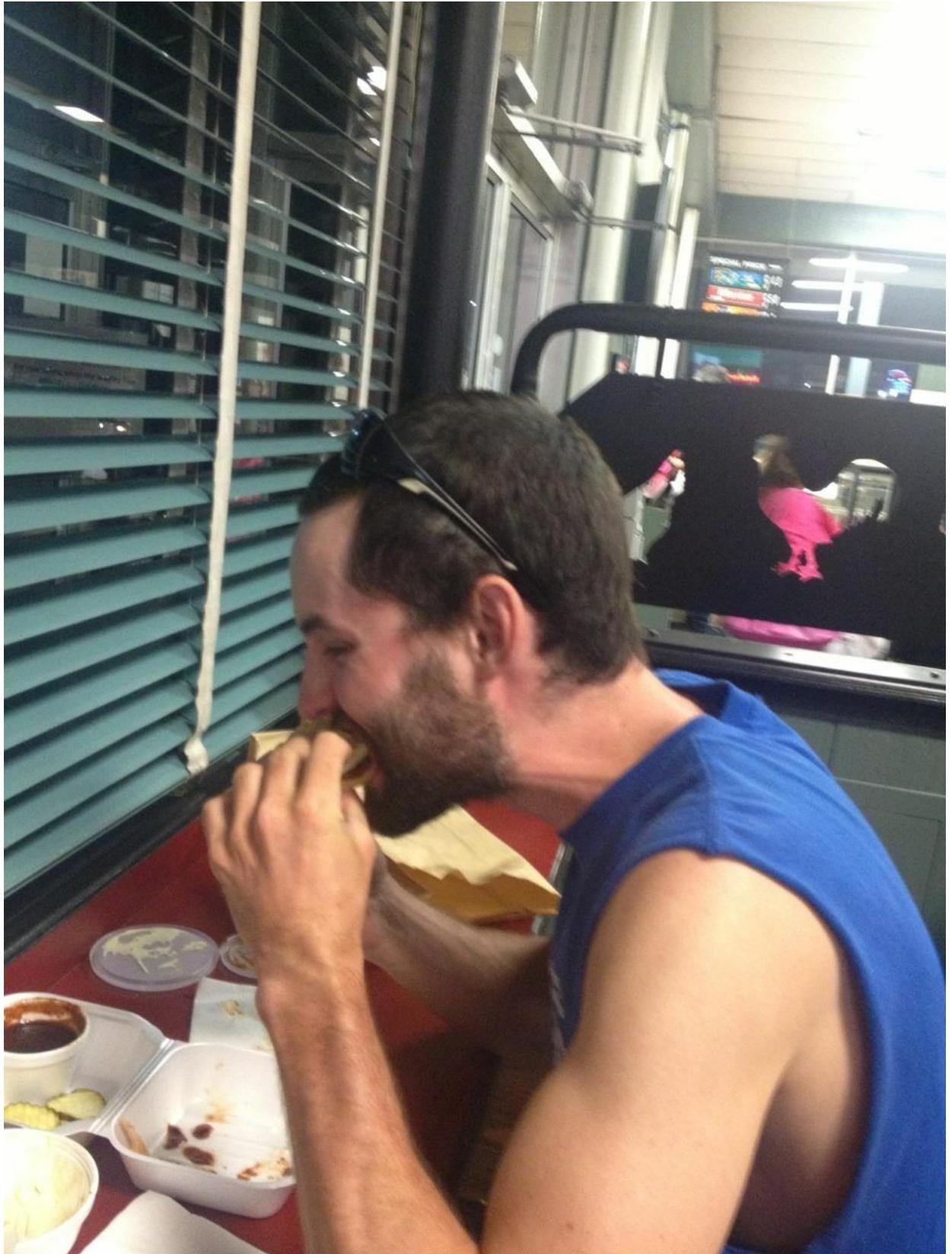
Lindsey, Nick's girlfriend, came over and we all headed into the city for my first Kansas City experience. Dinner was crawfish cakes and hot pretzels followed by craft beers. The town was busy for a Monday night.

With bleary eyes I looked at my watch and realized I'd just slept over ten hours. Dragging myself from a comfortable bed, my hunger led me up the road to a crepe restaurant. I ordered a large coffee and crepes filled with strawberries and ice cream. It was as good as it sounds. That wasn't enough so I went back up and ordered another round, sans the ice cream this time. The rest of the day was spent organizing and editing pictures and video.



Nick left for the east coast on a business trip so I spent a second day eating crepes and relaxing before Lindsey picked me up to fill in for Nick at their volleyball league. Quite a ways outside of town is a man-made beach volleyball arena with probably ten courts. Though we didn't win, we kept it close and I had a great time. On the way back Lindsey took me to Oklahoma Joes, a BBQ place with a constant line but food that's worth it. I was quite happy I got to tag along for this night.





Lindsey was kind enough to take me back to the river before she had to be back at work on Thursday so I headed downriver as a light rain fell. The Kansas City waterfront is easily the ugliest part of the Missouri. Tall and steep cement banks run along the neglected and forgotten river. Images of brackish water dumping into the river just upstream flashed in my mind. However, there was a certain satisfaction at seeing thousands of people cross the many bridges into the city on their morning commute.



Janet had spent a couple days back in Atchison and camped just past Kansas City so I figured I was close. My early start allowed me to catch her in the afternoon so we decided to paddle together for a few more days. After 52 miles of seeing less than ideal camping options we pulled off at a boat ramp and lugged our gear to a nice patch of mowed grass.

Right after getting our tents set up a lady by the name of Susan Maples Tretter came by with snacks and refreshments. She had been following Janet's journey way back when she was just debating doing it. Susan is new to kayaking but has thrown herself right into it and even plans on doing the MR340, a non-stop paddle race 340 miles from Kansas City to St. Charles, Missouri.



Around 9pm, as I was getting ready to go to sleep, a group of people rolled into the area and park their car on the boat ramp. There was a lot of ruckus and shouting. I decided this would be a good night for ear plugs since they seemed to be gearing up for a long night of fishing. Sometime in the middle of the night I awoke to the calamity of these tireless fishers landing a catch. Startled, I pulled my ear plugs out and tried to figure out what was happening. I sighed and went back to sleep hoping they would leave.

The rising sun lit the inside of my tent. I looked out to see that the people fishing were still there. They had even set up a couch at the edge of the water. We packed up and hit the water just as the night casters drove away.



We had a lunch destination planned. Robin and Connie Kalthoff had contacted each of us weeks prior to offer to meet us at a boat ramp with food. It just happened to work out that we were together as we passed their “river angel” territory.



After lunch we headed back out with a plan to meet Robin on the water a few miles down after he took care of a few things. A couple hours later I spotted his canoe in front of a football field sized sandbar, unlike anything we'd seen in over 500 miles. From here we paddled to the Kalthoff-owned land along the river. We got our tents set up on level, cut grass (the best) for a second night in a row and were treated to dinner over an open fire. I fell asleep instantly.





The morning was the first cold one since Montana. My plans to get on the water at first light were foiled by the best sunrise I'd seen on the trip. Sometimes you just have to slow down and enjoy the environment you are in. I watched the sky change colors as the thick fog rolled up the river.





With an extra layer of clothing I pushed off before Janet, who would catch up easily. A stiff breeze blew the fog toward me, giving me the sensation that I was going about 20 mph when I looked down at it flying past. Alas, I was probably going less than 5 mph with the wind.

The destination was the town of Glasgow, 53 miles away. The wind made for a long day but it was one of the most peaceful days of the trip. The sky gave a show all day. The crisp morning fog burned off as thin, stretched out looking clouds rolled past throughout the day. An hour before sunset the earth was lit by soft golden light with the clouds painting slow movements above. There was no anxiousness in making the distance, only appreciation for all that led me to this day.



The waterfront of Glasgow is lined with historic looking buildings with a sleepy, safe feel. As we approached the boat ramp I caught site of a Jeep clearly checking us out. I asked Janet if she was expecting anyone and she indicated in the negative. We docked and walked up the ramp to scope out the camping options. The Jeep driver and his passenger came over to talk. They had just competed as a tandem in a paddle race earlier that day and had wondered how far we came and were going.



Dan and Sheena loaded our dry bags into their vehicle and drove the combined 300 lbs of gear up the ramp for us. We set up under the cover of a pavilion with the aid of overhead lights as we got to know them. Turns out they placed first in the tandem division but most interestingly they were competing as a divorced couple. Paddling a tandem canoe involves a lot of cooperation and communication and is the last thing you would expect a divorced couple to do but they were clearly a good paddling match.

Megan Haskamp, a MR340 finisher and Janet follower, came by to say hello and the five of us headed into town for food which was wonderful. As was now customary, I fell asleep minutes after laying down.

My body fought back with soreness as I packed up in the morning. I had 56 miles to make it to my goal of Cooper's Landing in Columbia, Missouri but I couldn't manage to get on the water before 8:20. The days now seemed so short. There wasn't much light before 7 am and it was worryingly dark by around

7:15 pm. I didn't mind the intermittent rain since it was the first calm day since before Kansas City.





Ten miles from Cooper's I passed Katfish Katy's Campground. The spots along the water were loaded with people and I debated stopping but the current was particularly strong and I felt good despite knowing it would be dark when I reached Coopers. As I cruised by at 6 mph campers spotted me on the water and started cheering. They were quite lively. I then realized that these were probably all friends of Janet, waiting here for her arrival the next day when they would paddle to Coopers together, and they had been expecting me.

Soon after, a small metal boat pulled up to me to ask where I was headed. They were part of the Missouri River Relief crew based out of Cooper's and said they would make sure I arrived or would head back out and search for me. As they pulled away the skies opened. It was now pouring and getting dark fast. Luckily I knew I would see lights along the otherwise dark shore when Cooper's came into view. By the time I hit the ramp I was totally soaked, and in the complete darkness, except for my headlamp and the frequent lightning to the north.

I left the board at the base of a wing dam and headed for shelter and hoped the Thai food trailer was

still open. Luckily I made last call and ate as a dog gave me his best sad, I'm hungry face.



I was not looking forward to setting up my tent in the pouring rain but luckily Mike Cooper, of Cooper's Landing let me stay in "the dungeon." It was an enclosed area dug out from under a mobile home. It was dry and had a bed which is all I needed.



My push to get to Cooper's was so I could take one last complete day off before the final 170 mile stretch to St. Louis. I wanted a day where I didn't have to pack up, move and unpack again. It would have been a quiet day but Janet was arriving "home" to Cooper's in the early evening. Her home being just miles away, a big party was planned for her landing.

People and news crews started to gather a couple hours ahead of time. The first to arrive by water was a large 1930's sternwheeler. Soon after Janet led an entourage of more than a dozen boats to the ramp. She landed her boat "Blue Moon" to a hero's welcome as her boyfriend strummed "Blue Moon" on guitar.

It was a homecoming 2500 miles in the making. Margaritas were poured on the dock by the sternwheeler as people wandered around the magnificently restored old boat. Party goers lingered long into the night.





The campground now empty, I moved my gear down the ramp and picked my board off the rocks that comprised the wing dam. Janet came down with her dog Rio Oso to bid me farewell. I paddled past the sternwheeler and out for my last four days on the Missouri.













2013 - 11

Video post - 2013-11-01 17:42

<https://vimeo.com/78311709>

A video featuring some of the Aquapac dry bags I traveled with.

One day away - 2013-11-05 16:32

The campground now empty, I moved my gear down the ramp and picked my board off the rocks that comprised the wing dam. Janet came down with her dog Rio Oso to bid me farewell. I paddled past the sternwheeler and out for my last four days on the Missouri.

I hadn't been on the water for two hours when I decided to pull off after looking at the weather radar. One thing was certain, rain was coming, but I wanted to be sheltered if lightning came with it. I unpacked my rain fly and tied it to some tree branches. There I sat for four hours before deciding I needed to make distance.





With no lightning present I paddled on. Heavy rain drops plunged into the River, to be carried 1200 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, as fog floated on the hills. The thick, often viney vegetation along shore gave the feeling of paddling in some far away rainforest. I set up camp at the end of a huge sand island just above Jefferson City. The mist in the air locked in the silence of my surroundings.



The orange of the morning's sunrise fought off the gray that carried over from the previous day. Rain saturated my tent all night. With no chance of it drying quickly, I stuffed the wet and sandy mess into its bag and paddled away from my strangely fantastic beach. An oasis only when viewed in hindsight when comfortable and dry.



Barges worked their way into docking position on my left as I passed the Missouri capitol building on my right. Occasional dark clouds and distant lightning rolled past as the paddle strokes whittled away the hours. Toward the end of the day I spotted a channel marker that read 99.0. Down to double digits to the Mississippi. I knew the miles would go quickly from here. It felt like just a couple days ago that I was going past the 500 mile sign.







As I passed under the Hermann bridge a huge rising moon rose directly in front of me. With the sun and moon the same distance above their respective horizons I quickened my pace to get past town and the parked barges to find a secluded camping spot. I set up my tent as the thick clouds turned from grey to a red matching the color of my pruned, cracked feet. Three days remained.



I left Hermann for an unknown destination for the night. Dark clouds once again rolled in as I reached Washington City. I had planned on paddling past and I had already eaten lunch but I figured I could always eat more as I waited to see what the weather did. I tied my board to a dock and walked up the road in search of food. The weather cleared and I was back on the water less than an hour later, having eaten a second lunch.



Right at the 47 mile marker I found a rare gap in the rip-rap on an outside bend. A level spot had been cleared by a bulldozer in the dirt. Knowing it was going to rain again that night I couldn't pass up the opportunity to camp on anything besides sand, even if it was a fine dirt. I waded into the water under another brilliant full moon rise, careful not to lose my footing in the current, and rinsed off a few days of sweat and grime. Feeling refreshed I climbed into a well staked down tent, ready for more ominous weather.

My last full day paddling on the Missouri would only be 35 miles. I hit St. Charles for lunch. A large bird of prey remained uncommonly comfortable with my presence as I walked by on my way to the Lewis and Clark Boat House to say hello to the director who I met back in Bismarck.

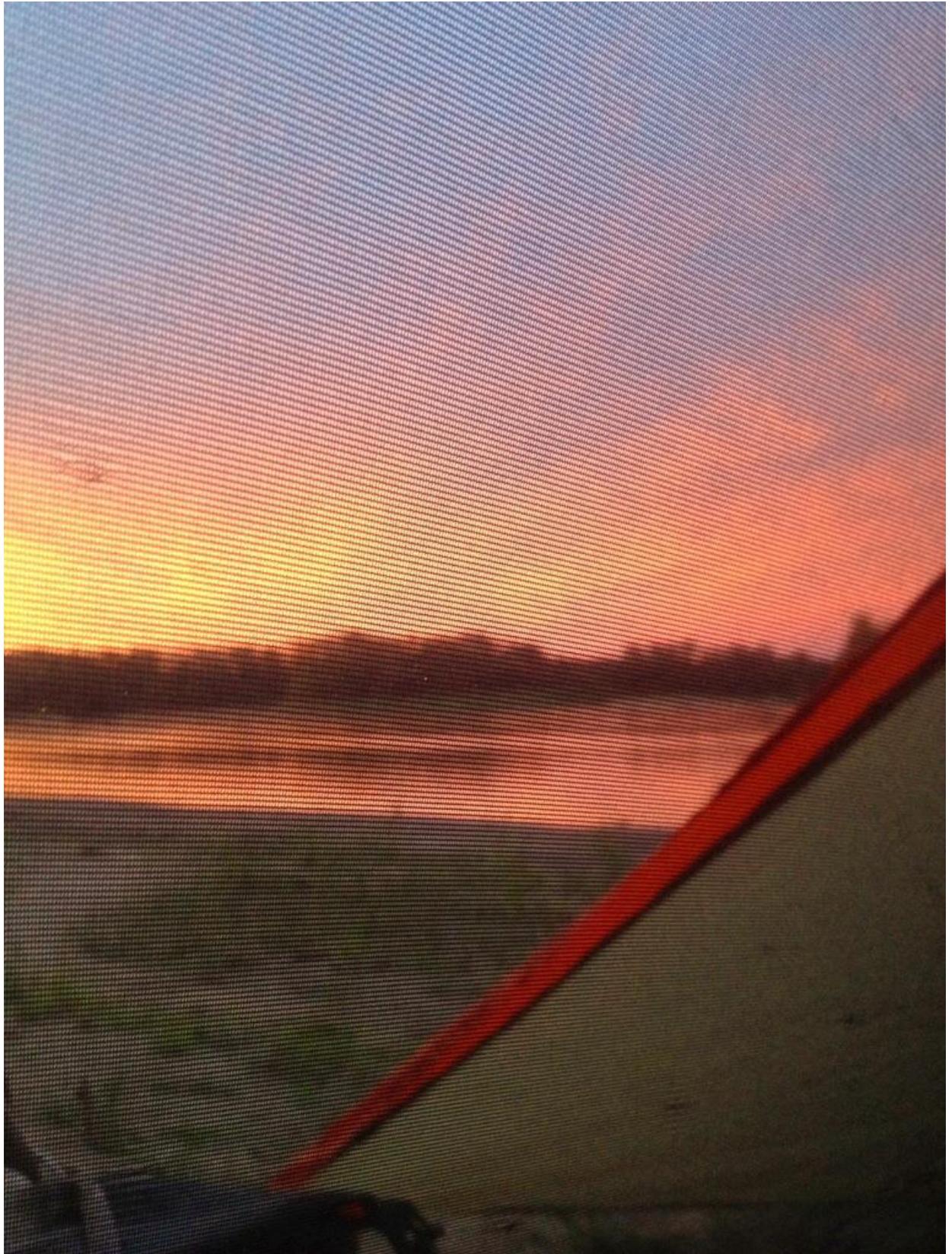


With days of clouds and rain preventing me from using my solar panel effectively I needed to get some more juice in my batteries while I ate. The only table by a plug was far away from the other patrons, probably for the best. Not only did I look homeless and dirty, I now had an eye infection that left my eyes bright red. Keeping contacts clean when everything was caked with wet sand is apparently a task I failed at.



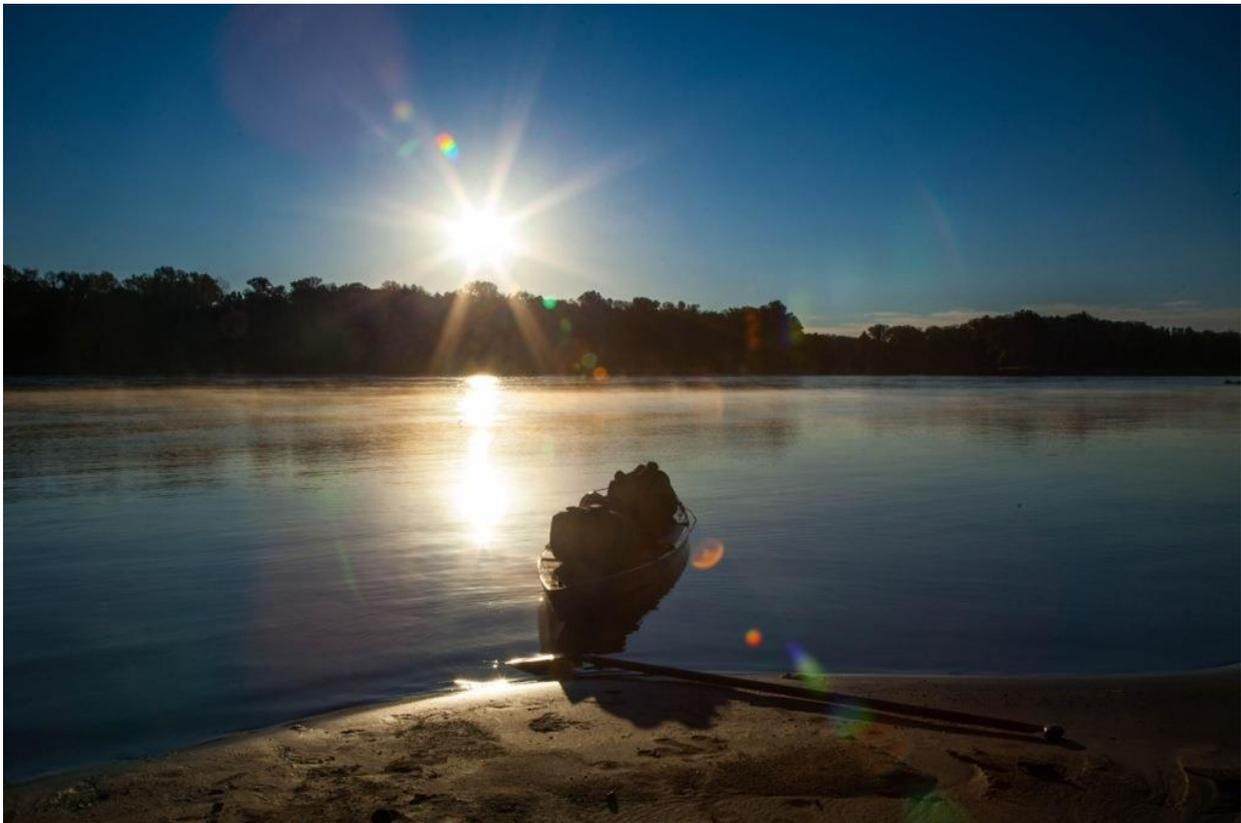
The miles melted down to 11 to go. I pulled off at the end of Pelican Island, a land mass spanning several miles in the shape of its namesake bird's head and beak, and set up my tent for the last time. With city noise to the south and a smoke stack to the north I made sure my cameras had fresh batteries for the next day and watched my last sunset through the mesh of the tent.





I'd wondered if I'd get used to living in a tent each night and sleeping on a two inch thick, inflatable camping pad. Fact is, I had. I was quite comfortable and slept better than I had at any other time in my life. This was probably largely due to the great expenditure of energy I put forth each day but none-the-less, I was happy in my mobile shelter. The tiredness at the end of the day wasn't like what you feel when coming home from a nine to five. That drained and listless feeling wasn't there. In its place was a feeling of relaxed satisfaction in having covered miles on the largest river system in North America. So many days I looked forward to having my camp set up and drifting off with images of the day's landscape running through my head. I can only count two mornings the whole summer where I woke up remembering dreams I had. Maybe there was too much stimulation during the day or I was simply too tired. Interestingly enough, the last night on the river was one of the two nights. The first one was my last night on the first of the big lakes, Fort Peck.

On September 21, 2013, the last day of summer and two days before the 209th anniversary of Lewis and Clark's arrival back to St. Louis, I stepped out of my tent to complete the journey. As I took my first steps of the day a flock of birds flew a couple dozen feet overhead. They were silent except for a whoosh of wind as they flew by in a small murmuration. A last farewell from nature as I headed toward the cement and steel world down river.













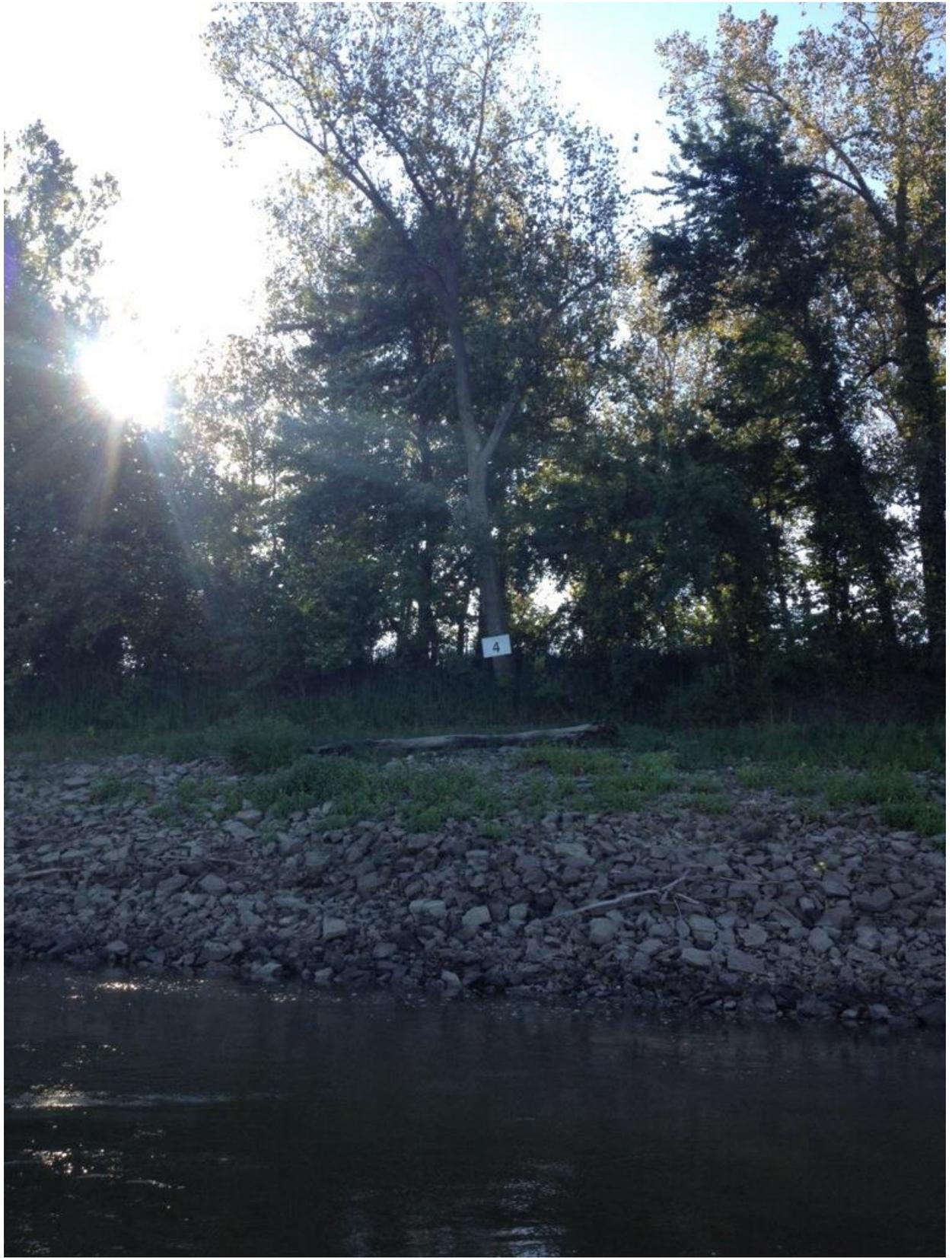
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I have delayed writing this entry for a while now. There is no way to accurately wrap this trip up in words. None-the-less here is a description of my last day.



Just two hours remained on the Missouri. I paddled as hard as ever, not because I was in a hurry but because I enjoyed a certain rhythm. A rhythm that got me 2300 miles down North America's greatest river. City noise melded with chirping birds and the sound of the current rushing past a rock lined shore. I spotted the "1" mile marker around the same time I saw huge barges motoring up the Mississippi.



Before the trip started I'd imagined reaching the arch would be a flood of emotion at having completed the trip. Toward the end I realized this would come instead where the Mississippi meets the Missouri. The remaining ten or so miles to the Arch (located on the Mississippi not the Missouri) was just icing on the cake. It was at the confluence where the trip was complete for me. After the waters of the two giants mixed, I paddled over to a wing dam and tied to a rock. Looking to the north I sat for 15 minutes and watched the barges go by as I bid farewell to the Missouri.





It was not just a river to me anymore. I would never see it as a line on a map again. Instead I would feel its motion and hear its sounds. Every point along that winding line will instantly produce images of driving rain or spectacular sunsets viewed from the solitude of my night's camp, each with a waterfront view. It took me on an incredible journey that far exceeded my lofty expectations.

Reluctant to leave the Missouri behind, I paddled into the Mississippi and to the Chain-of-Rocks. This is a section of whitewater full of jagged rocks that I had no desire to run.







I hauled my gear up the bank to the parking lot above that allows for an easy route around the Chain. Michael F. Clark, aka Big Muddy Mike, arrived in a van pulling a trailer with a 19 foot canoe. Big Muddy Mike is all things confluence. He knows this section of river better than anyone and so kindly agreed to loan me a canoe for friends and family to use. Soon after, Shane Perrin of SUP St. Louis arrived with a trailer full of boards. Shane is an ultra endurance SUP racer, completing massive distances in seemingly impossible amounts of time. He had me on his radio show, *Going the Distance*, on Stoke Radio several times as I travelled down the river. Just so happens that he also had a rental business and agreed to set me up with six boards to borrow.

A couple carloads of people I hadn't seen in months arrived to paddle the last nine miles to the arch with me. My ever-supportive parents even made the trip up from Florida. I gave everyone smelly hugs, my girlfriend getting the worst of it, and we got set up to head into the Mississippi. A colorful array of SUPs rested on the sand as everyone got fitted for PFDs and listened as Big Muddy briefed us on safety and what the conditions would be like down river.



St. Louis is a huge port with a lot of barge traffic. I had been nervous for days about being in charge of a group of people heading into heavy barge traffic on a fast river. My mom and my friend Kyle were in the 19' canoe and Rachel's Uncle Mark was in a solo canoe. Friends Stephanie, Corey, and Josh, were all on SUPs along with my dad, brother and Rachel. After some initial wobbles everyone got settled and to my great relief we were easily able to stick together. My fear was that people would get spread out all over the place and not able to help each other if a couple people went in the water. A tailwind pushed us right along and allowed us to make the 9 miles in about 90 minutes. We got lucky and only had to deal with the waves of one barge.









It was a surreal experience being with so many people for these last few miles. It really meant a lot to me and I am thankful to each and every person that came out to paddle or welcome me in at the arch. I led the way to the landing spot at the arch and toward a gathering of people. Many of Rachel's family are from St. Louis so they came out to meet this weird paddleboarder guy she was dating. There were also parents of friends and people who had followed along on Facebook such as Alice Tinklenberg who drove down from Quincy, IL. Also there were my river brothers Josh and Reed who I met on the isolated shoreline of Fort Peck. They had arrived a few days before in their kayaks and stuck around for me to arrive before setting out just hours later for 1000 miles more paddling to the Gulf of Mexico. Janet even drove down with her daughter from Columbia, Missouri. She would arrive back in this spot 10 days later in her kayak and reach the Gulf on Dec. 4th after over 7 months of paddling and 3800 miles!













We gathered on the ancient cobblestones that lead into the water and spent a couple hours enjoying the afternoon and watching barges go by. Eventually, we made our way to Morgan Street Brewery for beer and pizza. Fatigue hit me as I sat down. Taking off my sunglasses I revealed a worsening eye infection. With my bright red eyes I looked and felt a bit like a zombie but I ran on the satisfaction of completing my goal and on a summer full of amazing experiences.



The night wore on and I found a second wind. I couldn't believe how many friends and people who didn't even know me came out for this day (thanks to Corey's mom for hosting many of us at her house that night). It was surreal. I didn't even feel like I did it. It was just an idea that at one time I couldn't even fathom getting the opportunity to do.

I had many people send me messages along the way saying they were living vicariously through me and would love to get a chance to do what I was doing. Setting off on this trip wasn't without its compromises. I had to quit my steady job to get the time off and plow a good amount of savings into the gear costs. The trip became the ultimate priority. It's the only way something like this can be accomplished. There are a million reasons not to do it but at some point I had to examine if those were legitimate reasons or just excuses. I feel very fortunate for having found a way to do this. The hardest part was the lead up to head west and start the trip, not the trip itself. I had followed along on other people's adventures for years before I couldn't sit on the sidelines any longer.

Life was simple those 107 days. I had only what I could carry on my board. Inconveniences became accepted parts of my days and slow speed developed into my pace of life. I will forever remember my chance encounters with random people I met along the way and carry with me an appreciation for simple pleasures. Paddling for all hours that held daylight became a comfort.

Perhaps even stepping in a puddle and getting my shoes wet will produce fond memories of the summer of 2013. I may not know what lay ahead in the coming months and years but I know one thing for sure. I can never regret travelling down the Big Muddy.











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