

Amanda Hoenes

Missouri Headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico

7/11/2021-1/18/2022 (175 paddle days)

17' Coleman canoe retrofitted with a sail

Branson, MO High School graduate

United States Marine Corps combat veteran, three deployments

Bachelor degree in History and MBA

Entrepreneur and small business owner

IT Professional (Project Management and Business Analysis)

Life Coach

Business Coach

Wilderness First Responder

#1: What was the inspiration or what sparked this journey, and how did you begin planning for it?

I grew up reading a lot! Mark Twain, The Adventures of Jacques Cousteau, Jeremiah Johnson, and then I got a hold of the Lewis and Clark Journals. When I got laid off in 2020, I decided to take some time to reflect before jumping back into another job. I spent eight months researching, learning about the different regions, what I would encounter and possible places to camp.

#2 What do you feel was the most important thing that you planned for on your trip that you actually benefited from?

I'm glad that I camped on shore rather than staying in establishments or at homes. It allowed me to really stay face to face with the environment and in the elements. The level of solitude and reflection was greater than it would have been otherwise.

#3: What was the most difficult part about your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did) the situation?

THE WIND. I read about this, and it still surprised me how hard the wind can and does fight back. The hardest part about staying patient with the weather is that it goes on for so long. It's a marathon, not a sprint. I'm blessed to be persistent to a fault, but also I got so much continued encouragement from MoRP (Norm and others) and my family.

#4 What were the 5-most important pieces of gear you carried on the trip? Explain why.

- Dry Barrels - made the canoe unsinkable
- Duct Tape - fixes anything
- 550 Cord - so many uses, also fixes things
- Rain Gear - Not staying dry was not an option
- Sail - This changed things up from paddling every now and then and added a bit of speed

#5 Prior to your trip, what was your weakest asset or least skilled or qualified trait for the trip and how do you overcome this?

Lack of paddling experience. We grew up canoeing Missouri's small rivers and creeks, but our longest trip was 20 miles. On this trip, I was doing that every day. My hands and forearms were unprepared for that type of use. I stretched a lot and stopped when I needed to, but for the first three weeks, it was pretty painful.

#6 What was the least important item(s) that you brought and discovered there was never a need for?

All of my knives and leathermans. Lots of extra weight, and I really only used my one favorite, so kept one and sent the rest back home once I reached Missouri.

#7: What was the biggest surprise of the journey? Something you did not anticipate.

The people. New friends along the way will stay friends for life. The people I met were so encouraging, friendly, and generous, each loving to take a small part in the adventure.

#8: What kind of boat did you paddle and what were its good qualities and also the things you did not like about it?

17' Coleman canoe. It's a tank, very hard to tip over, so I could take it into the bigger reservoir waves with no problem. But it's SLOW.

#9: How did you plan your meals/food? Did this system work good for you and what would you change regarding this?

See question #13. The only thing I would change is to plan for much higher calorie burn than expected.

#10 What was your system for obtaining drinking water and what were the benefits as well as the disadvantages you had dealing with water, and how much did you carry at a time?

I carried 7-8 gallons at a time. For me this would last about 6 days. I refilled when able at access points, but I also carried a filter and purification tabs. I used the filter a lot, and almost wore it out. I used the tabs twice when my best option was to fill up in the middle of Fort Peck. Trusting the sun and the tabs was an uneasy feeling, but it worked out fine.

#11: If you were going to give advice for someone planning the same journey, what do you feel would be best advice and things to consider that you now know about this journey?

Do a lot of research to know your options, but be true to your preferences and your abilities. Sticking with the gear that you know will ensure you are comfortable and prepared to respond to anything that pops up.

#12 Worst weather day? What happened and how did you cope or spend the day?

I had several wind days where I would walk, or build rock castles or play in the sand. But my worst weather by far was my last night on Oahe. The wind blew up so bad that it flattened the tent and storm tarp over the top of us. It blew the lake waves so high they were reaching past the clear high water point. I had to unstake and move the tent around 2 am to higher ground. Not an easy task in those winds and no flat ground higher up, so I slept poorly rolling down the hill all night.

#13: Food planning and prep: How much did you take, how did you resupply, best and worst foods of the trip?

I underestimated the calories I would need. Had to purchase another bucket of freeze dried food. My approach was to carry at least three weeks worth with me at all times, and I planned my resupplies accordingly. I dehydrated whole racks twice a day for a month, and it still only amounted to about two weeks of meals. I bought two buckets of freeze dried meals as well. I pre-packed packages for resupply with these meals and located post offices along the river. I called to confirm they could handle General Delivery packages and how long they would hold them. It worked pretty well the whole way. I never really got low on food, and only one of them sent my package back early.

#14: Something nobody really knows about you? (Hobby, skill, previous job, talent?)

I know people know it, but my time in the Marine Corps is something that really came back and helped me on this trip. Resourcefulness and situational awareness that I developed were critical for this expedition.