

Bob Bellingham's Q&A about his Missouri River paddler trip:

#1: What was the most difficult part about your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did) the situation? *“Making the decision to actually do it, switch off the over cautious voice inside my head telling me why I shouldn't, it's too far, too hard, too dangerous and I might get injured. Realising that well meaning friends and acquaintances who question why and raise all the negatives are really voicing their fears and that many would like to have the audacity, courage and vision to do it themselves.”*

#2 What do you feel was the most important thing that you planned for on your trip that you actually benefited from? *“The "Shasta", lots of research on canoes and kayaks via Google, and emails to previous paddlers led me to the right boat for me. Stability was my main concern plus ease of entry / exit for a 6ft plus overshape wannabe paddler. Also the WindPaddle sail was a great asset that was a lot of fun on the lakes with a tail wind made 40 miles one day without getting the paddle wet.”*

#3 Was there anything that you planned for then you felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain. *“Not really, on a practical level, for a first endurance river trip, I think my planning and the things that I considered important was about right. On another level I knew that long stretches alone can be a negative experience for some people especially those with issues in life not properly dealt with. I found my time alone on the river to be a positive experience that allowed me to reflect on the people and events in my life and put them in the right place. Not many reach the age of 60 without some regrets about relationships that ended badly and the loss of people close to them, of actions and words that should or should not have been said or done these can fill the mind on long lonely stretches while paddling.”*

#4 What was the 5 most important pieces of gear you carried on the trip? Explain. *“ The Complete Paddler by David Miller a mandatory*

reference for any Missouri River thru-paddler. Swift Paddle, light weight and comfortable. SPOT Emergency /Personal location device, good insurance should I get into difficulties and peace of mind for my wife who received daily checking messages confirming all's well. Sealed 20 litre plastic buckets (2 of), kept all my electronics (laptop, cameras, phone chargers etc), passport, insurance doc's and food dry. I kept a cotton bag filled with cheap rice in each to absorb any condensation. Clothing, good water/windproof jacket and light t-shirts to layer up/down throughout the day. Good grippy gloves that cover the wrists to help stop biting black flies. I also kept a clean set of town clothes (trousers and shirt) on hand to change into while ashore in company. MSR HubbaHubba tent, easily put up/down in minutes, always dry and 110% mosquito proof, and a two and half inch thick blow up mattress.”

#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? “No paddling experience worth speaking about. Apart from a couple of hours on the Swan River in Perth a few weeks before leaving for Montana I'd not been in a canoe (never in a kayak) since I was 12 years old on the duck pond back home in the UK. Made up for by an adventurous spirit and confidence in my ability to learn on the job and enough life experience to see me through whatever situation I got myself into. “

#6 What was the least important item(s) that you brought and discovered there was never a need for? “A compass. A radio for weather reports, never used it once. **I never believed fishermen---** only farmers and local old timers. Specialised paddling clothing such as dry vests, shorts etc are unnecessary. The ability to stay dry, warm and protected from the sun are all that's needed no need to spend a lot of money to achieve that. I'm a bit of a map junkie and had lots of them but they're unnecessary, you can get by with *The Complete Paddler* and a road atlas that shows you the shape of the lakes and allows you to estimate distances between towns and villages along the river. A laptop computer, and good cameras with detachable lenses are nice to have but

unnecessary, and the amount of leads, chargers and adaptors required compound the problem.

#7: What was the biggest surprise of the journey? Something you did not anticipate. *“I'd experienced American hospitality before while hiking the Pacific Crest Trail but had not anticipated the genuine interest, kindness and generosity of Missouri River people I met all the way down the river. There are too many to name here but the Kalthoff 's around river mile 278 are an example of the best people you could hope to meet anywhere you travel.”*

#8 What kind of boat did you paddle and what were its good qualities and also the things you did not like about it? *“Eddyline Shasta, a double open kayak rigged for a single paddler. The Shasta is a joy to paddle, it glides easily over flat water and holds a true course with little need of the rudder to steer and it cuts through oncoming waves and troughs holding a steady course. With a following sea it will ride the swell and be pushed forward as though surfing. The rudder is quick to respond when manoeuvring to avoid obstacles in fast river conditions and when turning to come upstream into a ramp it is simple with a bit of back paddling to assist the turn. Having no previous paddling experience I have nothing to compare it with so can't think of a negative.”*

#9: How did you plan your meals/food? Did this system work good for you and what would you change regarding this? *“I always left towns with about two weeks of food in case I got held up due to bad weather or some other delay in a remote location. Mostly rehydratable food like noodles, rice, macncheese etc with some dry bacon bits, parmesan cheese, cupasoup and sauce mixes for flavour. I'd always have trailmix and savoury biscuit snacks and muesli bars on hand. I'd eat a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables while in town and I'd buy a big bag of oranges and a raw veg and ranchdip platter to eat on the first day or two paddling. While in town I'd make up day packs for the number of days I knew it would take to get to the next resupply stop. Just cheap snap lock plastic bags that would contain breakfast lunch and dinner for each day.*

I'd put them in my waterproof bucket on top of all the reserve food and take out one every morning. Having walked for 6 months along the Pacific Crest Trail in 2010 I learned that this regimen ensured I always had enough food to last and I wouldn't eat all the stuff I really liked in the first few days ...and be left with the bland stuff for the rest. I carried a light weight 'Calder Cone" stove that could use alcohol, esbit cubes or timber as a fuel with a 2 pint titanium pot and lid to boil water and add the goodies. I'd eat out of the pot with a spork (spoon / fork combination). Everything for the stove fitted in to the pot and lid for easy storage."

#10 What was your system for obtaining drinking water and what were the benefits as well as the disadvantages you had dealing with water? *" I had 3 X 1 gallon plastic containers that I filled at every opportunity from campgrounds, bars and peoples homes. I carried AquaSafe tablets to treat the water if I had to fill up from a source that was suspect i.e. rainwater tank of dubious cleanliness. I never drank from the river due to sediment and possible chemical contamination from farm runoff . Three gallons was enough, I only ran short on one occasion where I considered drinking from the river but walked to a village just of the river the next day and filled up; 4 gallons would ensure you never run out."*

#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? *I noticed on receiving advice from experienced paddlers when planning my trip that nobody gave hard and fast rules as to what was right or wrong. All, without exception, told me what worked or didn't work for them and why they would or wouldn't do the same again. I appreciated this approach and have tried to do the same when people ask me about equipment etc. The success or otherwise of anybody's journey rests with the decisions they make i.e. hike your own hike and paddle your own boat. So At some stage you have to get in the boat and push away from the shore, the 1001 things that seemed important in the early planning stages are either done, forgotten about or given up on just go. If you've got food ,*

water, warmth and protection from the elements you'll be fine. If you wait for the planets to line up and for all your ducks to be in a row you'll still be sitting there in another 5 years reading about those that have taken the plunge. There will always be unknowns, people with more experience, sleeker boats, bigger budgets and the weather will always be unpredictable but at some point you have to make the decision to trust in your own decisions, abilities and resourcefulness. If it's something that you really want to do "you don't fail by not finishing you only fail if you don't start".

