

Charles Vaught: Bio: *Originally from Florida and receiving my degree in 2012 for Hospitality Management, I first got the inspiration to paddle long rivers when meeting John Rusky from Quapaw Canoe Company at his home in Mississippi. I remember hearing him say “back when I did the river” and not really knowing what that meant. When I inquired, I learned he had built a raft with a friend and paddled the Mississippi during a summer after school. I didn’t think it was an option to travel like that, but when I learned it was, I looked at my father and said “I think I want to do that”. Almost exactly one year later I was back at John’s home after having completed the trip from Wisconsin on the Mississippi River. I met Mike Clark, John’s best friend, in St. Louis on that first trip. We paddled together for a day coming into St. Louis and he gave me the idea of doing the Missouri River the following year. So about a year later I was back at the same place with Mike after having done the Missouri River....one month after that I was at John’s home again. On the first week of the Missouri River trip my father called and said he had met a man who works in Vietnam and might be able to get me a job next summer. Things worked out and I eventually ended moving to Vietnam where I currently live and work on Phu Quoc Island.*

Here is what Charles had to say:

#1: What was the most difficult part about your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did) the situation? *“The most difficult part, was stopping. I remember “finishing” and thinking...do I really need to stop? Of course, financial calculations come into play, but after several months of living on a river, you learn many ways to cut costs and live minimal. In the end, I stopped at my predetermined “finish line”, MM “0” on the Mississippi. But to this day my mind travels to that moment where I was at the MM “0”, looking at the passes and contemplating going left-coast of FL-island hop the Bahamas-South America....and so on.”*

#2 What do you feel was the most important thing that you planned for on your trip that you actually benefited from? *“I’m tossed between two answers: 1. The most important thing I planned for: was having no plans to where the success of my day was based only on the quantity of miles paddled, and even with that mentality there are still successful days where you don’t even sit in the boat. 2. Getting a dog along the way.”*

#3 Was there anything that you planned for then you felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain. *“I had many clothes when I first started...which quickly lessened and turned into: 1. My town clothes – black shirt, cargo pants that zipped into shorts. 2. Paddling clothes – long sleeve shirt, board shorts 3. Sleeping clothes – underwear”*

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

“1. Portable Chair – it’s nice to sit above the ground. 2. Shamwow cloth – sounds strange...but a cloth that can easily absorb moisture and is durable was really useful to clean and keep cool with. 3. GPS/maps 4. Carabineers 5. Laminated sign saying what I was doing that could be tied to the kayak when going into town. Of course, this excludes tent, sleeping bag, etc.”

#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? “Being alone. I can’t remember a time in my life where I didn’t speak to anyone for several days at a time before going on that trip. I didn’t realize it was an asset until loneliness became my friend.”

#6 What was the least important item(s) that you brought and discovered there was never a need for? “Candles, knife (hardly ever a need)”

#7: What was the biggest surprise of the journey? Something you did not anticipate. “After the first day on the river, the rest was easy and I found myself surprised with how not difficult it really was. I think with trips like these, most people mentally prepare themselves for the worst though it usually never happens.”

#8 What kind of boat did you paddle and what were its good qualities and also the things you did not like about it? “I had a Wilderness Systems Tempest 170 kayak. A 17ft beast and I couldn’t be happier. I would not recommend for people with large wastes, and next time I might get a rudder instead of using a skeg. I went with plastic instead of fiberglass and I’m also very happy with that decision.”

#9: How did you plan your meals/food? Did this system work good for you and what would you change regarding this? “I knew approximately how long it would take from town to town and based my stock and consumption from that. Dried foods all the way with oranges rolling around in my cockpit. In the towns I would get as much fruit and produce as possible to eat for the next day or so after leaving.”

#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 have developed an Eagles eye for water spickets alongside houses, buildings, schools, etc. I had a 10 liter soft bag to hold water in the back of my boat (though it was normally not full just to alleviate some weight), and two gallon containers between my legs. There were only a few moments where I was concerned about the quantity of my water and/or did not have when pulling up to a place to refill. But the reality is, I was on floating on fresh water so I was never really concerned about it.”

#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?

“Don’t worry about a plan, just have a start and finish goal with a few checkpoints in between. Don’t get emotionally attached to gear, it comes and goes... Watch the weather. People can be the best and worst part of these trips. Don’t stress out, you’re on a river at the beginning and end of everyday...no worries.” Charles Vaught

