

Dan Faust- Three Forks, Mt to St. Louis 2024– 84 Days by kayak.

Bio – Born in 1958 in Fairbury, IL. I live in Pontiac, IL with my wife, Carol and our daughter, Jennifer. I began paddling in 1969, at the age of 11, when I joined the Boy Scouts of America. Troop 77, out of Dwight, IL, took a 100 mile canoe trip down the Spoon River that summer. We ended our week-long trip near Havana, IL where the Spoon River joins the Illinois River. I have been hooked on paddling ever since.

Around 1985 I began paddling kayaks, because I didn't have a regular paddling partner and a solo kayak was much easier to handle in then wind than a tandem canoe paddled solo. I dabbled in whitewater kayaking for several years, but I was never very good at it.

Most of my paddling experience, prior to paddling the Mississippi River in 2021, has been on small to medium sized rivers and streams throughout the midwest. Those rivers were mostly easy moving water with difficulty levels of Class II or below. Most of those trips were day trips, but I did do some canoe/kayak camping trips whenever possible.

I joined the Mackinaw Canoe Club of Central Illinois around 1990. I learned a lot by participating in the scheduled club trips and made many great paddling friends through the club.

I paddled the Missouri River, from Three Forks, MT to St. Louis, MO with Joe Speldrich. We began our trip on June 29, 2024 and ended our trip on August 20, 2024. Our trip took 84 days, including 14 zero days.

#1. What was the most difficult part of your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did overcome) the situation?

There were many difficulties during our Missouri River trip. We experienced some pretty cold temperatures (mid 30's), high temperatures (mid to upper 90's), deep sticky slippery mud, lots of strong winds, and violent thunderstorms. I also suffered sciatica pain and blisters on my hands. While the weather was clearly the most dangerous part of our trip, the most difficult part of the trip for me was dealing with the long lakes and reservoirs. I was not 100% mentally and emotionally prepared for the lack of moving water once we entered Lake Oahe. I have expected for there to be a significant amount of moving water between the last few lakes on the trip, but there wasn't. Once we entered Lake Oahe, there wasn't more than a couple of hours on moving water below each dam, and then we were on another long lake. This resulted in about 400 miles of lake paddling without much of a break. Those last few lakes were very difficult for me. I was also suffering from being homesick. It was a grind paddling across those lakes. I started to have dreams about being back home ... about snuggling with my wife. I was determined to finish the trip, but those thoughts and dreams worried me. I wasn't enjoying paddling the lakes any more. I was ready to be back on the river, with some current.

The breakthrough for me came near the end of Lake Sharpe (Day 54). My paddling partner, Joe Speldrich, noticed that I was being extra quiet. He asked me what was bothering me. I hesitated to tell Joe about the dreams that I had been having and how much I was not enjoying the lake paddling, but I knew that I couldn't lie to Joe. He would see right through it. So I told Joe what was bothering me. I reassured him that I was NOT going to quit our trip. Just saying it out loud reassured me and made me feel better. We had a nice conversation about the toll that the lakes were taking on us physically and emotionally, the weather that we had endured, the crazy winds, and how much we missed our wives. I've never been one to talk about my feelings, but that simple conversation turned everything around for me. That huge weight was lifted, that dark cloud disappeared, and my entire outlook improved dramatically. I started enjoying the trip again, almost immediately. I'm not sure that I could have done it without Joe.

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

Well, I like to do a lot of planning and be as prepared as I can be. I think all the planning is important. What was the most important part of that planning? I would have to say that the food drops and places to resupply our water was probably the most important part of my planning. The upper part of the Missouri River is so remote at times that if you didn't plan your food and water resupply, it could be a serious problem I suppose. I did mess up on one of our water stops. Somehow, I didn't realize that there isn't any potable water at the James Kipp campground. We were lucky (blessed) and got good water from a local paddler who was camping at James Kipp, otherwise we would have had to make-do with some pretty nasty water.

#3. Was there anything that you planned for, but then felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain.

I always pack too much food. I know this, but I have never been able to get away from this habit. I guess I would rather deal with too much food than not have enough food. I packed three resupply/food drops before I left home. I only used two of them. I probably could have gotten by with just one.

For some unexplained reason I packed a full sized hand operated can opener and hauled it all the way to Fort Peck. I left the can opener at Fort Peck. We never had a need for a can opener during our trip. I still don't know what I was thinking or why I packed a can opener.

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

I would say that the five most important pieces of gear that I took on our trip down the Missouri River were, my kayak, my paddle, my life jacket, my tent, and my phone. If we qualify this question to exclude the obvious answers of boats, paddles, life jackets, tents, and sleeping bags (I would call those "The big 5"); my answer would be my phone, my sandals (the ones Peggy Hellandsaas gave me), my hat, my two inflatable sleeping pads, and warm clothes to wear when I wasn't paddling.

Your choices for the "The Big 5" are the most important and have the biggest impact on your trip. Any paddle camping trip. Choose wisely. How do you choose wisely? Get out and paddle camp as often as you can. The more experience you have, the better you will be able to determine what works best for you.

My phone was my communication, navigation, information, and entertainment tool. I would have been literally lost without it. My sandals proved to be very important. The mud on the upper part of the river was difficult to deal with and ruined the shoes/sandals that I brought with me. Without a descent pair of footwear I was nearly crippled. There are sharp rocks and thorns everywhere. My hat protected me from the relentless sun, wind, and rain. I probably wore my hat more than any other single piece of clothing or gear. As I have gotten older, sleeping on the ground has become more difficult for me. Using two sleeping pads has become an absolute must if I am going to get a good night of sleep. I hate to be cold and I can't sleep if I'm too cold. My warm clothes made the first part of our trip possible for me, otherwise I wouldn't have made it.

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

I had never even been in the states of Montana, North Dakota, or South Dakota before this trip. I had no idea what to expect in many ways. For instance, we didn't know what the prevailing winds or typical weather patterns would be. I was surprised by how dry the air was. I didn't realize how arid the Upper Great Plains states are. Whenever something got wet (clothing, tents, tarps, etc.), it dried out very quickly. That was great, but the skin on both of my thumbs got so dry that they split. It wasn't a big deal, but it was painful and could have turned into something worse If I hadn't gotten some hand crème from Peggy Hellandsaas at Tobacco Garden. We basically overcame these challenges just by persevering, adapting, improvising, and because of the help we received along the way.

The other big weakness in my paddling resume was paddling big lakes. Joe and I have both paddled the Mississippi, but neither of us had ever paddled lakes anywhere nearly as big as what we faced on the Missouri. We didn't really know what to expect. We learned a few lessons the hard way, like how dangerous it can be to get caught out in the middle of a big lake during a storm, but we changed the way we paddled and treated the big lakes with respect.

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

The can opener. I can't explain why I took that along in the first place. I left it at Fort peck.

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

I mentioned this in my answer to question #1. My biggest surprise was paddling the big lakes and specifically the lack of any significant moving water between the last few lakes. There were many surprises though. I also mention how we learned the hard way that it can be very dangerous to get caught out in the middle of a lake during a thunderstorm. We had been warned that the weather often changes very quickly, but as someone who has no experience being in the mountains, you don't realize how quickly the weather can sneak up on you because you don't see it until it's right on top of you. Another surprise was the fact that there hasn't been potable water at the James Kipp Campground for several decades. Somehow I missed that fact and we got caught short on water. Luckily another paddler who was camping at James Kipp bailed us out and gave us plenty of fresh water.

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

Joe and I both paddled plastic Current Design Storm sea kayaks. These kayaks have ample storage and load weight capacity. These kayaks are incredibly durable, have pretty good speed, good stability, good maneuverability, and they handle pretty good in wind and waves.

There is a trade off when choosing between a canoe or a kayak for a trip like this. A canoe can haul more and it's also quicker and easier to pack and unpack than a kayak. The trade off is that a kayak is probably faster and easier to paddle than a canoe, especially if there is a headwind, which there was, a lot of the time. I own and paddle canoes and kayaks. At the end of the day, I feel like I can paddle more miles with less effort with a sea kayak. I feel like a sea kayak is far superior to a canoe on a trip like this (paddling the entire Missouri River). That's just my opinion though.

My least favorite thing about my Storm kayak was the seat. I should have replaced the backrest with a back band before this trip, but I failed to do that. I also should have come up with a seat cushion that works for me. I was lucky enough to find some yoga mat material in Yankton that worked well as a cushion for the seat and for my feet.

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

I basically used the same meal system that I used on the Mississippi River. I ate energy bars for breakfast and lunch, and then I would boil water to rehydrate a freeze dried meal for supper. I do not recommend this system for anyone else. My main goal was to consume enough calories so that I didn't lose a bunch of weight and so that I would have enough energy to paddle all day, everyday, day after day for the entire trip. I achieved those goals. I lost about 20 pounds during the trip, which was acceptable for my body weight. One of the advantages to this system was that it saved me time by not cooking each morning and by not stopping to cook during the day. Joe cooked on an open fire quite a bit during our trip (breakfast and supper), especially at the beginning. Having a fire was nice, but it took time and effort. By the end of the trip, at the end of

the day, we just wanted to get something to eat and get some rest, without a bunch of extra time and effort. We eventually used pocket rocket stoves more and more when we did cook.

I should mention that Joe and I would supplement our diet with fresh fruit and other perishable foods, when we would resupply. Apples, cherry tomatoes, and oranges were popular foods that would last for several days in our kayaks. Bananas are usually good for a day or two, but they get over ripe quickly.

Some of the disadvantages to this system is that it's heavy and it can get expensive. It's obviously not the healthiest way to eat either. Another disadvantage was that I eventually got tired of eating certain energy bars, even though I had about 10 – 12 different flavors of various energy bars.

There are many improvements that could be made to this system. Almost anything would be better.

#10 What was your system for obtaining drinking water and what were the benefits as well as the disadvantages you had dealing with water. How much water did you carry when you left Ft. Benton, since this section is the greatest distance between fresh water sources?

Generally, we tried to obtain water whenever it was convenient, assuming we hadn't just filled up in the last day or two. We also took into consideration when our next opportunity to replenish our water supply was likely to occur. If our next opportunity was more than three or four days away, we made sure that we filled up whenever possible. I carried a Sawyer Squeeze water filter as an emergency backup.

I carried about 5.5 gallons of water when all of my water containers were full. This was my standard practice for the entire trip. Joe carried a little less water than I did at the beginning of our trip. He eventually increased the amount of water that he was carrying when we got to the more remote parts of our trip.

I researched and noted all of the water sources that I could identify prior to our trip. This helped us plan out our water resupply. One mistake I made was thinking that we could replenish our water supply at the James Kipp Campground. Other than that, the plan worked well and we didn't have any problems.

11: What was your strategy for getting across the large reservoirs, including dealing with bad weather?

We started out crossing big bodies of water taking the shortest route possible, which was often right across the middle. This cutting the corner strategy saved some distance and time, but when I decided to take a shortcut across Lake Fort Peck on Day 18 of our trip, we got caught in a violent thunderstorm while we were far from shore. That was scary and from then on we stayed close to shore most of the time. From then on we picked one side of the lake, or the other, and stayed on that side of the lake. We made a conscious effort to NOT paddle far from shore for the rest of the trip. Sometimes we found ourselves in a situation where we needed to paddle across a large expanse of open water because of the logistics of the trip. When this happened, we were very careful to watch the weather and paddle across as quickly and efficiently as possible. If it looked like there might be some bad weather, we didn't risk paddling across a big open expanse of water.

#12: Did you do trip updates for a website or social media? Was this worth your time and are there any tips on how to do this from the river?

Yes. I did a daily blog post for each day of our trip. These posts can be found at: www.Missouri2024.wordpress.com . I have been blogging about my long distance kayaking trips (I've done three now) since 2020. I even blog about my preparation before each trip. I find it very

rewarding and I encourage everyone else to make a record of their big adventures too. I have already enjoyed going back and reading what I wrote about these trips. It has also been very helpful when I'm trying to figure out when or where a certain event took place. I can just refer back to my blog and figure it out.

I use Wordpress.com. It's free and fairly easy to use. There are a lot of different websites that you can use to blog. I've tried several other websites and didn't like them as much as Wordpress.com, but that's just my personal preference. Find one that you like and then start writing.

I did all of my blogging right from my phone during our trip. There were a few places where I didn't have any cellular service or where service wasn't good enough to post my blog, but in those instances I just posted everything whenever I got to a place where I did have good service. You don't have to blog, vlog or post anything publicly online. I encourage anyone who is going to paddle the entire Missouri River, or do some other big trip, to make a record of some kind about what happened during their trip. It can be as simple as a diary or a journal that you physically write in. It can be an electronic record that you keep on your phone that only you can see. There are also ways to write a blog and keep it fairly private or control who you share it with. There are many options. It's up to you. You can do it any way you want to, but by all means, do it. Record your thoughts, your feelings, and anything else that you think is significant during your trip. If you don't, most of those details will be lost forever within a short time. Memories fade quickly and details get blurred during a trip that might take two or three month or longer.

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"That's my story and I'm sticking to it!"