

David Langhorst Bio – *I grew up in Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Alabama. Received my BA in History from Auburn University at Montgomery, and did two years post-grad work in Latin American Studies and Int'l Business at University of Texas. After college I taught high school for a couple of years before moving into conservation and political non-profit organizations working on various issues including protecting the Mobile-Tensaw delta in Alabama, and wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies. I spent 17 years working for the State of Idaho, first as a Representative and Senator, then as a Tax Commissioner and finally as Director of the Idaho Dept. of Parks and Recreation. I retired from the 9-5 world in September of 2000. I've dabbled in canoeing and whitewater rafting all my life, and I had some prior experience kayaking flat water, including a six-day paddle in SE Alaska.*

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

A long time ago, a friend gave me a copy of Eddy Harris' book Mississippi Solo. It resonated with me because I had decided that I too needed to do something epic; something difficult and life-affirming. At the time, I was somewhat new to the American west, and fully enamored of its history and geography, so I decided I needed to emulate Harris' experience, but on the Missouri. It would be almost 30 years later, after retirement, for me to find the time to actually do this. It helped that for those decades between the initial dream and reality, whenever I had the chance, I'd claim to another person that yes, I was going to paddle the Missouri by myself. I suppose I was purposely setting myself up by putting my reputation at stake. After making the claim so many times, how could I back out? So I took the voyage over two summers, reaching the Mississippi River on my 66th birthday, (a true coincidence).

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

Reading The Complete Paddler was the single most helpful thing, followed closely by the MoRP Website. I also read many books on the river and its history which greatly enhanced the experience.

#3 Was there anything that you planned for that you felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain:

Not really. I spent a lot of time thinking about water supply, which a paddler should. It never became an issue for me. Reading the prior trip Q & A's, talking with Norm, and lots of previous outdoor experience had me feeling well prepared without stressing.

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

For navigating, my iPhone with the OnX mapping software App worked perfectly. (If relying on cell phone navigation, you'll of course need to have the maps pre-downloaded since there are many areas out of cell range.)

Tent: REI SuperLite (SL 2+). I already have a half dozen tents of all shapes and sizes, but I followed the advice of a MoRP'er to start the trip with a new tent. (No holes, leaks, weakened zippers, etc.) Good advice! The REI tent performed extremely well through the hail storms and heavy wind and rain that you are guaranteed to experience.

Specialized sand stakes for securing tent on sandbars: they really worked well.

Nemo Moonlite chair: having a super-light, packable chair with adjustable backrest for dinner and morning coffee – or just kicking back - was sublime.

C-Tug wheels. I used them a lot. They opened up many options for camping, including just getting up and down steep ramps. Learn to balance gear weight and find proper placement of wheels under your boat

and you'll be surprised how effortless it is to move everything. Hint: Move as much gear weight as possible to the middle of the boat to avoid "oil-canning".

I enjoyed having a light cotton sheet for hot nights. Under me, over, or both.

I was glad I brought a cheap (\$15) radio with AM, FM and weather bands.

Also Important: quality sunscreen; the largest brimmed sun-protecting hat you can find that fully covers your neck and ears, and which absorbs water (for dipping).

#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 a fair share of paddling experience, and I've practiced making self-rescues, but I worried that I should be more experienced. More practice and experience would have been good, but at some point you just have to go. Turns out capsizing was never an issue, and as you might expect after months of paddling I became very confident and comfortable in my boat. Because I paddled solo, I was careful in my choices. (Mostly.)

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

Spray skirt: took up lots of room in the cockpit and I never used it once or felt that I needed it. I know some others here might differ. And as much as I LOVE to fish, I hardly used the fishing gear I brought. I still find that hard to believe but it was just unwieldy trying to paddle and fish at the same time.

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

I was overwhelmed by the goodness of people all along the way. I could write many pages about folks offering me a portage before even saying "hello". Or a sandwich or beer or a place to sleep. Like family. Considering the divisiveness playing out during a presidential campaign, it was remarkable to be invited into all kinds of people's lives for a minute or a day, and be able to learn about their world. It seems there is something disarming to people when they meet another soul on a quest. So yes: the goodness of people.

But I should also mention how great it felt to be alone without human contact, or even signs of people, for days at a time. Everything is reduced to just one thing: the river. Amazing time.

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

Three years ago, I started watching for used kayaks for sale on line, locally. I bought and resold several and finally felt right in a Prijon Kodiak 17'. (I named her the "Made of the Mud".) The thing is probably 20 years old or more, but still very sound. Overall, I love this boat. It was built intentionally for expeditions so it carries a LOT. The cockpit is also designed for a larger person (I am 6' 2" and weigh 205 and it fit me very well.) It tracks straight very well but the obvious trade-off for that is that it is not a quick-turning boat. It has a rudder which I really appreciated. On the downside the seat back is a little low, and I'm sure its size and weight makes it a little slower and wind-prone than most.

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

I tried several different instant coffees and they were all just fine for me. Breakfast was cereal or granola. Powdered milk is much better than it used to be, or maybe it was just being on the river, but breakfast was often my favorite meal of the day. No real lunch usually, but a number of snacks like peanut butter and crackers, GORP, dehydrated fruit, nuts, or jerky. For dinners, my main staple was either ramen noodles or

instant mashed potatoes enhanced with dehydrated veggies and/or dehydrated hamburger, bought in bulk, and a little powdered bullion. I brought several brands of dehydrated backpacking type meals for variety. Whenever possible, I'd resupply with some fresh fruit and veggies. For heat, I relied on a jet-boil cooking setup. (Boiling water for rehydrating meals.) I thought I might try frying fish so I brought a suitable pan, cooking oil, flour but never used it.

#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?

I usually carried 6-8 gallons. I used flexible plastic water bladders that could be filled to various levels. Instead of filling them to capacity, I found it better to fill a number of them part way. Their flexible nature allowed them to be fitted into various corners of my kayak's hull for space saving and weight balancing purposes. When maxed out I had 3 gallons front hatch, 3 in back hatch and 1 or 2 gallons in the cockpit which happened to double as a leg rest. The downside was their limited durability. Late in the trip, I had a couple that started leaking very slowly but I had extras. They fold up small and weigh nothing, so no problem. The only time I became worried was when I arrived at the James Kipp Campground and found out the water supply had been contaminated by flooding. I needed more water before the next long, lonely stretch. Thankfully, I met some friendly RV campers who shared 5 gallons! I had intended to bring a water filter, but somehow it didn't make the trip. I also brought a small bottle of povidone iodine, which I've used successfully while backpacking or hunting. But I never needed it on this trip.

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

*My strategy was pretty simple and obvious. Follow the leeward shore whenever possible. Cross open water only after carefully assessing conditions like wind and the direction and disposition of clouds. Keep track of your location on maps so you can plan the direction of travel with the above in mind. If wind or waves are concerning, err on the side of safety. David Miller's book, *The Complete Paddler*, offers a lot of information about the nature of certain reaches, prevailing winds, hazards, etc. I found it very helpful to read about the coming sections as I had coffee in the morning. I also regularly listened to NOAA Weather Radio to keep track of weather trends and coming storms.*

#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?

I posted every few days on my Facebook page (when possible) and had a good number of friends and family following me. It was definitely worth the time for two reasons. First, it was fun to share my story with people who I knew would enjoy the vicarious experience. Getting feedback from them was always a boost. Secondly, it added discipline to my journaling. Without the folks following me I might not have put my thoughts to paper as often, or as thoughtfully. It is a real pleasure now to go back and read my notes and remember the sensations.*

**A blog would have been a better tool, I think, but I failed to get one established before I launched my trip.*

#13: Did you use solar power to recharge any equipment? If so, what system did you use and any tips on using it out on the river?

I carried a Big Blue, 21-watt, 3-panel charger which did a good job charging my phone and iPad. Folded up, it's about the size of an iPad and iPad case. I also had an extra battery, about the size of a cell phone. I'd charge everything fully when electricity was available and that would last me for several cloudy days.

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

If you are reading this, and if you have that itch, then scratch it! I encourage you to do everything you can to fit this trip into your life and you won't regret it. You will be rewarded beyond your imagination. Plan and be safe and smart, but don't overthink everything. Don't concern yourself with the expectations of others; it's your adventure so do things your way. Give yourself plenty of time. Enjoy the diverse people, the historic river towns, and the flora and fauna. While I had wanted to make the trip start-to-finish, I didn't leave myself enough time the first summer and had to come back for a second stint. That allowed me to take a somewhat slower pace. But I wish I had spent MORE time really getting to know so many places.

#15: Something about your personality that helped you succeed, whether it being a personal belief, lifestyle, family upbringing, mental state or learned quality?

I'll go with the "learned quality" factor. A trip like this helps you learn what you're capable of. I have had at least a couple of prior experiences (Marine Corps OCS and being a crew member on a Bering Sea crab boat) which taught me that with the right attitude I could do or endure whatever it takes to achieve a challenging goal. (I think that is probably true for most people.) It also helped that I had dreamt of this journey for almost three decades so for me, it HAD to happen.

#16: Worst moment of the journey?

Lake Francis Case, late August. 25-30 mile SE headwinds with whitecaps that defied common sense so, windbound. Unrelenting sun, 104 degrees. There were no trees for shade so I cobbled together a few pieces of driftwood to make a frame over which I unfurled a tarp with maybe 16" clearance. After I crawled in I was amazed that, even with a stiff wind and some marginal shade, the heat was insane. Like a convection oven. And somehow the biting flies were able to maneuver, mostly to my feet and ankles, which were difficult to reach due to the low ground clearance of my tarp. After about a half-hour of this, plus the incessant, loud, tarp-flapping, I gave up and decided to proceed by lining my boat along the shore. This was a slightly better scenario, although it took me several hours to go maybe a mile or two. Another unpleasant moment: I felt that over the duration of the trip bugs were (surprisingly) not a serious problem at all. But one evening I was having a hard time finding a decent campsite near the Hutton Bottom area (upstream of Ft. Peck Reservoir). I finally settled for a narrow flat strip up a 10 ft. mudbank where I encountered the worst mosquito infestation I've seen. Neither bug dope nor a smoky fire I built gave much help, so I scrambled to set up my tent, got in and shut it quickly, swatted the ones that made it inside, and had a good night's sleep. Never had issues with bugs again except for chiggers near Vermilion, SD.

#17: Did you use personal locator beacons such as SPOT or inReach? If so, how often and what was your strategy for using it and did you feel was necessary to have?

Cell phone GPS has come a long way, but I thought it was a good idea to have some redundancy. So I brought a Garmin inReach Mini 2 partly because of the "follow me" mapping feature that my family could use to keep track of me on the Garmin website, satellite messaging while out of cell range, and of course the emergency function. (FYI: Newer generations of Apple phones are now capable of text messaging via satellite. Partly due to this, the price of used Garmin inReach units has dropped considerably.)

#18: Did you modify any gear to help in the safety or efficiency of your trip? (A rudder, Spray cover, sail, pontoon, tent etc?)

I know that some paddlers eschew rudders, but I sure appreciated having one and wouldn't go without. I considered a sail but decided it would be more trouble than its worth (but I could be wrong since I haven't experienced one before.) I did bring a spray skirt that I never used. One tool I've already mentioned but

feel is worth repeating: tent stakes built specifically for sand, and extra para cord for guy lines. You'll encounter some extremely windy situations. I had my 64 pound kayak moved 12 feet during one storm. Thankfully I had it secured well to a tree.