

Q&A with Gary & Linda Dekock: In 2018 they canoed from Three Forks, Montana to St. Louis.

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

Severe weather was the most stressful aspect of the trip for Gary and me. We had about a month of almost daily severe weather warnings and several nights of hunkering down and watching the radar. After our “tornado night”, we selected campsites early and carefully, and tried to camp near boat launches so we were near help and could take shelter in the cement toilets if necessary.

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

We pre-arranged two major food resupply stops along the way and found we didn't need to find additional food because of the generosity of river angels, saving lots of time and energy.

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

Carbon fiber paddles- huge energy savings considering the number of paddle strokes on a trip like this

Bug nets-important for sanity as well as avoiding bites

Pea bottles and Go Girl funnel, because you don't want to leave the tent and join the insects after sunset

Leatherman tool kit

Cell phones to get weather info, plan portaging, and stay in touch with your “river family”

Lastly, although paddling partners aren't gear, Gary and I rely upon each other for both physical and emotional support...and for jokes! I have huge respect for solo paddlers, but paddling with a kindred spirit adds exponentially to the experience.

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

Whitewater skills- neither of us has much experience with white water and one of us (me) hates it. Luckily, there was only one set of rapids that required some maneuvering, Pine Island Rapids, and David Miller's book prepared us for it. I could also list age as a weakness, and we definitely felt our age on this trip more than on previous trips; however, age also provides more patience, and that may make up for needing to take things a bit more slowly and carefully.

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

We had an extra sleeping bag packed in case of cold weather which we never used and eventually sent home along with solar panels which we also never needed. We also sent our spray cover home...decided that if it was too windy to handle water coming into the boat by bailing, we would rather get off the water, so we sent that home.

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

We were almost run over by a fishing boat going full speed on a reservoir. The driver never saw or heard us...he was too busy talking with a passenger standing directly in his line of vision.

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

Ralph Frese-designed 17 foot Old Town Canadienne- had plenty of room, was comfortable, handled well in waves and wind...no complaints

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

We carried three weeks of high calorie food that required as little fuel to cook as possible. We used a Trangia alcohol stove. We resupplied twice, stopped whenever we were close to restaurants and bars, and we were well fed by river angels. Often people we met would come up and offer us whatever extra food

they were carrying. We lost very little weight on this trip! Food has never been that important to us on a long trip, as long as there is plenty of it!

#9 What was your system for obtaining drinking water and what were the benefits as well as the disadvantages you had dealing with water?

We had the capacity to carry up to 14 gallons of water, topped our supply up whenever possible,

and we never ran into a problem. We also carried a filter as well as alum and purification tablets just in case.

#10: 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?

The hardest thing on any long trip is dealing with uncertainty and starting out every day having only limited control of how the day will end. This is both the bad news and the good news. You can make your plans by getting sensible advice from people who have been there, but surviving also depends upon how well you can accept what the river gives you, adapt to changing situations, live one day at a time, and say yes to the wonderful people you meet who want to help.

#11 Worst weather day? What happened?

On Lake Oahe, a severe storm came up unexpectedly after midnight. We were camped at a boat launch just down from a campground and had met one of the campers earlier in the evening. He drove to where we were camped at 12:30 AM, apologized for waking us, and said there was a huge storm on the way. We threw on our GoreTex, grabbed our headlamps and phones, and ran for the cement vault toilet, abandoning our tent. Gary had staked it as well as possible in the gravel, tied the canoe to a guard rail and weighted it down with our water. We spent about an hour in the toilet listening to the chaos outside. When it settled down, we opened the door and saw our tent in the distance, but it was damaged and our gear was soaked.

Meanwhile at the campground, the guy who drove down to warn us had barely made it back to his trailer in time to get his kids and grandkids out and into his truck before the tornadic winds picked the trailer up, turned it over a few times,

and dumped it over the cliff and into the river. He and the other campers were walking around looking at the devastation when one of them wondered how the “campers” were doing. As we were looking at the remains of our tent, two pickups drove down to check on us. One of the guys brought us and our wet gear up to their cottage and put us up in their spare bedroom at 2:00 AM. We were taken in by this community and will never forget their kindness.