

Janet Breuer: Q&A

Janet lives in Washington state with her husband Peter. "I started in 2000 paddling the Columbia River during a rough time in my life. I took 5 years to complete the Columbia. I then went on to paddle the Missouri from 2008, then 2013 to 2016. I paddled the 1800 miles of the Yukon River in 60 days this summer (2017) for my 65th birthday. I find that the time I spend on the rivers to be a deeply spiritual experience for me. I am looking forward to paddling the Mackenzie River in northern Canada in 2019. I am in the early planning stages of this endeavor. ~ Janet Breuer

Here is what Janet had to say:



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

"Lake Sakagewea was the most difficult for me 180 miles seemed harder than any of the other lakes on the Missouri. I spent lots of time praying that I could do it and just kept going. That lake beat me up mentally and physically at the end. A ranger at the end said 25 year old buff guys come off the lake beat up. I really appreciated that comment and it really encouraged me.

I also have continual fears when I read the word rapid on any of my trips. I had a bad experience on the Columbia River up in Canada. I survived but continue to be fearful even today. Lots of prayer gets me through my hard times."

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

"I do a lot of planning prior to my river trips. Phone calls, emails, talking with people who have done the trip before. Reading books. For the Missouri River I found that David Miller's book, "The Complete Paddler," was extremely helpful. The other book I always read before I go out is "Expedition Canoeing" by Cliff Jacobsen. I line up people who will portage me around the dams. Mark on my maps information that I need to know such as mileage, phone numbers of people who would help me and hazards and

then cover them with contact paper. I tried Thompson water seal but I like the contact paper better.

Stephen Ambrose's book, "Undaunted Courage"

3. What was the 5 most important pieces of gear that you carried on the trip?

"Kayak & lightweight paddle, comfortable life jacket with emergency survival gear and EPIRB in pockets. Tent I used a REI half dome and was very impressed with its ability to keep me warm and dry no matter what the conditions.

stove- Coleman 1 burner. We tried the canister stoves in the past on other trips and had to sleep with them and then heat them over a fire to get them to work. Down sleeping bag and air mattress. If it is too hot I use the bag as a comforter."



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

"Technology has always been my weakest asset. When I started the Missouri, I'd never used a GPS or a cell phone. I'm still not the greatest with either but I can figure out the basics that I think are important. This summer on the Yukon, I hit the GPS one day and ended up with a map of Siberia and my screen all in German. Quite helpful. It was in an area where I needed the map. I did figure out how to return it to normal.

The cell phone company I started out with said I had coverage when I asked about it. I did for the 1st day and the last day of a 25 day trip. I ended up borrowing fisherman's phones to let my husband know I was OK. The fishermen were all using Verizon so I switched to that company the next time I went out and didn't have any more problems."

5. What was the least important item that you brought and discovered there was never a need for?

“The water filter clogged up continually. I stopped at campgrounds or private home and filled my water bags. Most of the equipment I had with me I either used or would have used if the weather turned awful. I've done this enough that there is really nothing that I need or would want to get rid of.”

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

“The generosity of the people along the Missouri who would help me out. Meals, showers, visits, and rides around the dams. The river angels and the Missouri River paddlers website. Jim and Phyllis Mead of Great Falls, Montana were the first. They took me around the falls and the dams. out to dinner and to church. Somewhere in Nebraska I found out about the website from a guy who was not a paddler but let me camp at his home, gave me a shower and dinner. Towards the end it was the Missouri River Relief clean-up crew who befriended me, fed me and told me about Robin and Connie Kalthoff who told me about others along the last couple of hundred miles who would help me out.”

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

“I have a 16'4" Viking Seda fiberglass kayak. I love this boat and if I had only one boat it would be this boat. It can carry a lot of gear and is extremely stable in all kinds of water conditions. It can hold up to 450# of gear. My only complaint with it is like most kayaks it is slow to load and unload but I sort of have a system.”

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

“My meals for lunch and breakfast are all the same. I have a zip-lock bag for each day with 2 packages of instant oatmeal, 2 granola bars, 2 homemade fruit roll-ups, 1/2 to 1 cup homemade trail-mix and 1 oz jerky. I tried string cheese but it didn't hold up. For dinners I started out using only Top Ramen because it was cheaper than Mountain House and with basically the same nutritional values. Then a couple of years ago I started experimenting with homemade dehydrated soups, chili and casseroles along with dehydrated ground beef after reading an article in a paddling magazine. I have been really pleased with the results. “

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

“I would go after Labor Day in September so it wasn't as hot as it could have been but finding water was always a problem.

I carried 2-3 different water bladders and 4 quart bottles and still went low on water several times. I stopped at various campgrounds and people's homes to get water.”

10. 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 know now know about this journey?

“Bring lots of water.

The upper 2/3 of the Missouri campgrounds are relatively easy to find. Lots of great ones. The lower 1/3 you have to take whatever you can find and be happy with it.

The weather determines whether you can paddle or not. Pay attention to the weather. Don't go out if you have concerns.

Enjoy the day and read a book

I have 3 mantras that I use paddling:

Never trust the water- always wear your lifevest

Know when to hold them; know when to fold them again be careful around the water, know when to get off

Never trust a fishermen. Their information is not always accurate. “ ~ Janet Breuer

