

**Jim Emanuel:** *I am a husband, father and retired career firefighter/paramedic. I retired 6 years ago from from the Oceanside California fire department and promptly moved my family to Helena Montana. The move was mainly to be close to the rivers and mountains in Montana. I grew up on the plains of South Dakota and spent my childhood hunting and fishing there. Now that I am retired I spend most every day on this great Missouri river fishing for trout and walleye, looking for wild roosters, ducks and geese and chasing elk with my longbow. In the winter ice fishing fills my spare time. This canoe travel is new to me. Slow is good. I raised almost \$15,000 for Alex's Lemonade Stand a non profit organization in children's cancer research.*

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

*The difficulty was just deciding to go. For almost 40 years I have wanted to do a long river expedition. I have always wanted to row the Green and Colorado rivers from the wind river range in Wyoming to the Gulf of California. And I still may do that someday. Logistics and permits for that trip make it very hard these days (and no water actually gets to California gulf these days) so I had been considering other options. In August 2017 I was anchored on the Missouri river fishing one of my favorite holes when a guy in a cedar canoe came paddling down river and latched on to my boat. We talked for about an hour while his Labrador retriever treaded water behind us. This guy, who's name I don't remember, was traveling from Twin Bridges on the Jefferson to Ft. Peck dam. He was really stoked about his trip and he was so relaxed. After he left couldn't get this conversation out of my head. By the time I got home that night I had decided I would paddle the length of the Missouri river. After all, it originates in my backyard. That night I told my wife of my plans. She said "Your nuts. You should do it!" Even more difficult was sitting through our looong Montana winter waiting for ice out. But definitely the most difficult was stopping. I originally planned to stop this journey in st. Louis. When I got there I missed the takeout so I went on down the Mississippi to the Gulf. I stopped there but now wish I had missed that takeout too.*

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

*I think the long Montana winter helped teach me patience and prepare me mentally for the trip. I was able to read others blogs and trip reports and knew that this is much more mental than physical. The best advice I had gotten from several people is "paddle your own trip." I went into it knowing I would spend a lot of time windbound on the big reservoirs. That's o.k. It would give me more time to fish.*

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

*Fishing gear! For me this trip was as much about fishing as anything else. Good tent and stakes. I used 20 year old 4 season tent and 25 heavy duty military surplus sand stakes. My best advice is leave the light weight backpacking stakes at home. They are next to worthless on a trip like this. Several nights I had my tent staked out with over 20 stakes*

*A good sleeping pad. I used an exped synmat 7 that inflated to about 3 or 4 inches thick. My 60 year old body needed it.*

*Electronics--smart phone, radio for weather reports on the big reservoirs and communication for ships once I got on the Mississippi, Inreach explorer for tracking and texting home when out of cell service. These were all charged off a couple battery packs at night in my tent. I charged the packs during the day with a little fold out 18 volt solar charger. I never ran out of power. I really contemplated on whether to bring all this electronic stuff but glad I did. Friends could follow my progress and I met up with many along the way that tracked me down. It was one of the highlights of my trip. My phone had maps downloaded on it and I used it as my camera. The phone had a waterproof case and was kept in my chest pocket of my life jacket. It was so easy to access for pictures.*

*I also really enjoyed using a small sail. It blew away in the wind on Ft Peck and I really missed it later.*

*Also, David Miller's book The Complete Paddler. Don't go on this trip without it.*

## **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?**

*That's easy. I hadn't been in a canoe since 1982 when I took a trip with a college buddy in the Whiteshell area in Manitoba. We lived off Whiskey and Walleye. That was a fun trip. I do have almost 40 years experience rowing most major rivers in the west including a dozen trips down the Grand Canyon but these are all whitewater trips in big rubber rafts. During and after college I worked for an outfitter for several summers guiding whitewater trips and since then have continued to spend most of my summers on various rivers. I wasn't too concerned about finding my way down river but I was really pretty nervous to do it in a canoe. I had even contemplated using a drift boat before I decided on canoe. That would have been a poor choice.*

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

*Probably my big camera and my portage wheels. I used the wheels one time to portage Hauser dam. They took up too much room in the boat and didn't want anything tied on top. It was easy for me to leave them behind as I live only a few miles from the dam and left them in the truck after my wife and son helped me portage. I never need them again and never had a problem getting a portage down river. I found the camera to be a pain to get out of the case and took all of my photos and videos with my phone anyway. I left that too.*

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

*Biggest surprise was the generosity and kindness of the people I met going downriver. People were river angels even when they didn't know they were. I didn't make a list of know angels and just kind of winged it. Somehow they found me. My advice to future Mo paddlers is to make a list and look these people up. You will be glad you met them. You will also meet many people along the way that are unbelievably nice. I have many new friends from this paddle.*

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

*I used a Clipper Sea 1. It is 18 foot long decked solo canoe with a rudder and made for trips like this. I'm no expert at paddling a canoe or kayak but I was really happy with my choice of craft. She is a 1999 model made of fiberglass. I found her for sale in British Columbia and made a trip up to get her in November. I was surprised to find her in like new condition. During the winter a local guy made a 3 piece skirt. He had never done it and I had never seen one but it actually turned out real nice. I seldom used the waist skirt except for the big lake crossings in the wind. After I got used to her I never felt uncountable or felt like I was in trouble. Even in the big waves of Ft. Peck and Oahe. I used a Zaveral bent shaft paddle as my primary paddle. It weighs 8.5 oz. I also took a beautiful bending branches straight shaft paddle as a backup. This paddle has many autographs from the people I met. It is a treasured keepsake from my trip. I was a little worried about fiberglass canoes so I added extra layers of glass to the bow and stern areas and a strip of keel tape along the small keel. I also took enough repair material to build a new boat if I had to. When I got to the Gulf of Mexico I sold her Martin Trahan. There wasn't a scratch on it. Some of the keel tape was scraped but that is what it was for. I had traveled with Martin for the last 40 days of this trip. I was sad to sell her but He needed a solo boat to finish his trip from Astoria Oregon to Miami. It also great to see such a fine boat continue on.*

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

*My wife and I dehydrated food all winter. fruits, vegetables, chili, tacos, spaghetti, etc... I also used a lot noodles, rice, and small packets of different knorr type foods. Mac and cheese was one of my favorites. I would add vegetables to these and eat pretty well. Also a lot of nuts and dried berries and protein bars. I would buy apples, bananas and fresh veggies when I had a chance. I usually had about 3 weeks worth of food with me and had 3 packages sent to drop off points. I had way to much food.*

**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 started off with a 5 gallon collapsible jug, a 10 lt dromedary bag, a 1 gallon juice jug and a 1 gallon canteen. I needed all of these until I got out of Montana and then got*

*rid of the 5 gallon jug. I would top off any time I got a chance and I never ran out. I did have a filter pump but never used it.*

**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?**

*I would say just get off the couch and go do it. The hardest part is just that. Once you are on the water the hard part is over. I would also advise not getting too carried away with planning. I didn't have a schedule I had to be back for so it was easy for me. It was so nice to be able to plan for just the day ahead of you. Most of my focus would be 5 miles ahead of me. That's about as far as you can see point to point on the big reservoirs. When I got to that point I may head to the next. It is impossible to plan weeks or even days ahead. That is the beauty of a trip like this. Things just have a way of working out on the river. Don't stress the small stuff. Enjoy the moment for this will be the best trip of your life. And never turn down a beer or meal when it is offered! You will make some good friends over a couple beers.*

**#11 Worst weather day? What happened?**

*Wow. Not sure I have enough space for this question. I was definitely in the bad weather cycle weather in the Dakotas. I had experienced plenty of thunderstorms and wind in the first weeks of the trip. It was simple enough to pull over and wait them out. Sometimes for a couple of days. I had beautiful conditions across Sacajawea and didn't want that lake to end. At Garrison dam the storm cycle caught me. I was extremely lucky for the first storm. A great guy named Nate portaged me and gave me a room in his nice hotel. It was pure luck that I just happened holed up in Nate and Johns hotel. Heavy rain, 80 mph winds and baseball size hail pounded the area. In the morning we found Nates boat and trailer picked up and moved about 60 yards. My canoe would surely have been destroyed had we not put it in the garage. Part of the roof of his restaurant was blown off and many old trees uprooted. Several camp trailers were tipped over and blown into lakes and one man died just down stream when his camp trailer tipped over on him. I cheated one here. A few days later I experienced the same type storm with 85 mph winds and heavy rain. The*

hail didn't materialize that night but I spent a couple hours holed up in a vault toilet waiting it out. My tent held but bent some poles pretty badly. The next night I was camped on the SD/ND border and was lucky enough to see the biggest storm yet with 85 mph winds and gust to 105 mph. That night I laid prone in the tent with my life jacket on and was sure I was going to be blown into the river. This storm lasted all night and as I found out later did major damage to the region. It wiped out corn crops, denuded tree groves and killed wildlife and cattle. I saw a couple houses that were totally destroyed by the hail. These houses had large hail go right through the exterior walls. I again was really lucky that night that I didn't see the large hail. I talked to several old timers that told me they can't remember seeing a storm this bad. These prairie storms are no joke. I also had an incident just above Glasgo Missouri. It was raining very hard and a thunderstorm moved in. I don't much like lightning and when it gets to within about 1/2 mile I go to shore. It moved in very quickly and I searched for a place to land. I found a large eddy and pulled the boat entirely out of the water in knee deep mud. As I stood on shore in the what might be the heaviest rain I've ever experience I noticed I had picked the nastiest place possible to pull out. The trash, mostly plastics, was several inches deep. This eddy must catch everything that floats down river and deposit it on shore when the water recedes. As I was contemplating how disgusting it was I noticed my boat slide down the bank and into the river. The whole sloped bank just kinda gave way and took my canoe with it. I slogged through the mud to retrieve it and found myself stuck up past my thighs in the river. Mud, rain, trash, sticks, bottles (lots of bottles) all sliding down the slope in a disgusting slurry. I was really stuck bad and in a bad way. I pulled the boat in and was trying to use some leverage to get on top of her when I felt the hair on my neck stand up followed by a KABOOM and instant white light. Whiter light than you can imagine. Lightning strike in the middle of the river not more than 80 yards away. I couldn't help but laugh and I got hysterical over my predicament even though I thought I was doomed for another strike. How could this happen and who will find my charred body clinging to my canoe. Kinda like Jeremiah Johnson finding his rifle. All I could do was lay on my back with the bow line between my teeth and collect all that plastic trash and wood and try to get it under me so I could back crawl back to shore. It took about 15 minutes to crawl out of the mess. Another strike never happened. True story I could never make this up. This is probably the most vivid memory of the entire trip.

