

John McFarland aka Tin Can McFarland:

Bio: "I'm John McFarland and I'm 61 years old. I began paddling with the Boy Scouts at the age of twelve where our troop was based in a small town on the Colorado River. My earliest experiences were canoeing that stretch of river from Hoover Dam down to Yuma, Az. and I still put in some river time there each year. In later years I began long distance cycling and have bicycled across the United States five times. In 2005 I decided to return to my love of river travel so I took my canoe to the headwaters of the Missouri River and paddled to the Gulf of Mexico. Truth is, Katrina hit that year and by the time I got to Vicksburg the mess below Baton Rouge was more than I wanted to deal with so I ended my journey. None the less I had paddled 3,304 miles in 114 paddling days. In 2010 I left the headwaters of the Columbia River in British Columbia with the intention of canoeing to the sea, however circumstances occurred and I had to break up the trip into two parts. I paddled the top 636 miles in 2010 then returned in 2011 to complete the journeys last 600 miles to the ocean. I am currently planning a different type of trip for 2014 where I hope to row a circumnavigation of Puget Sound in Washington. If all goes well and I'm still able I plan to take on the Mississippi River, source to sea, in 2015.

" Here is what John had to say:

#1: What was the most difficult part about your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did) the situation? *"The most difficult aspect of my journey was being away from my wife for such an extended period of time. I 'overcame' the situation by communicating as often as possible see question #2 and by arranging periodic visits with her throughout the trip albeit we had as long as two month separations."*

#2 What do you feel was the most important thing that you planned for on your trip that you actually benefited from? *"Although I planned to have this piece of equipment for other reasons it proved to be beneficial as per question #1. As cell phone service would be sketchy to non existent in the wilds of Montana I took a rented satellite phone with me. The obvious reason for having it was the safety factor, being solo and so far from any immediate help, but during some of the loneliest paddling days I was able to share my experiences with my wife. This*

however was a double edged sword and after the first 10 minute conversation at a cost of \$200 we determined that I would only call every third day and the conversation would be kept to 5 minutes. Today I rely on my SPOT for emergency backup as well as communicating that all is well to my loved ones.”

#3 Was there anything that you planned for then you felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain. *“On every expedition that I have endeavored I seem to take too much gear. Sitting at home and planning for every contingency one can imagine a need for this and that item as a necessity but I have slowly learned this lesson, “if you haven’t used it in the first two weeks you probably won’t need it for the whole trip” therefore I have always had to send a package home of totally unneeded equipment. Now I try to consolidate by taking items that have dual or multiple functions. Clothing can and does get worn over and over so why a weeks worth of changes? Food drops are a great way to get supplies as required so why take eight weeks worth at a time. One pot, one stove, although on one occasion out of the whole journey I had the need to fry some Walleye so maybe carrying a skillet for 3000 miles was a good idea.”*

#4 What was the 5 most important pieces of gear you carried on the trip? Explain. *“In this I immediately think of my canoe and paddles but it goes without saying that one should have the best right gear in this regard. I am amazed however with people getting out on the water with some rickety old flat water boat or some tiny little whitewater playboat and making it. Otherwise let me enumerate those five items, 1. A quality tent able to withstand 70 mph winds and 46 hours of uninterrupted rains. 2. A sleeping bag rated to 15 degrees made of synthetic poly that dries quickly and holds its loft.” continued “3. A rain/shade tarp that can be easily stuffed into a small compression sack. On long sunny but very windy layovers it was shade where no trees existed and at times gave me a covered space during rain where I had more room to be other than just sitting in my little tent. 4. A foldable saw. I was advised about one particular brand that served me well and easily made lengths of firewood that hacking away with a hatchet would have taken much longer. At this point let me say that this is one of those incidents of having too much gear. I also had, besides the saw, a hatchet and a machete. 5. My fifth item may be controversial with some others but I always travel well armed. In this case it was with my 9mm semi auto pistol but when off the beaten path in Canada I carried a shotgun. Few places in*

America have the remoteness that brings savage beasts but I was more concerned with encounters of a more domestic nature. Logic and sensible planning kept me from most danger but I still felt most comfortable when I had my otherwise concealed friend backing me up”.

#5 Prior to your trip, what was your weakest asset or least skilled or qualified trait for the trip and how do you overcome this? *“It’s always the same for me before any journey whether cycling or canoeing, I am generally out of shape physically. Of course one could start a trip and get stronger along the way. That’s going to happen regardless, but starting a workout/training regimen gave me an edge up front. I made a rig set up on my Bowflex where I used an old wood paddle in place of a bar and did ‘paddles’ instead of ‘rows’. I would spend long periods of time ‘paddling’ at a heavier pull rate(weight) than would have been expected on water. I believe this also helps prevent injuries that could be trip ending whereas at home in the months prior to the trip one can heal and get stronger.”*

#6 What was the least important item(s) that you brought and discovered there was never a need for? *“A funny thing happened on Lake Peck. I was shore bound in a 46 hour rainstorm that put huge waves into my canoe. Later I was to find that all the detailed maps that I had printed from satellite sources were ruined. Maps for the whole trip were simply melted in a blur of ink. Surprisingly I never got lost on the whole trip. Other items that proved worthless or near worthless were the machete, the hatchet, the canoe trailer (I always managed to get a lift around the dams)and underwear.”*

#7: What was the biggest surprise of the journey? Something you did not anticipate. *“The biggest surprise was something of a spiritual nature. I don’t need to explain it to those of us who have experienced it and could never get the true essence of it across to someone who hasn’t spent weeks of time alone in nature becoming ‘one with’.”*

#8 What kind of boat did you paddle and what were its good qualities and also the things you did not like about it? *“My canoe, Desio, is a Wenonah Encounter. Its design was superb for the Missouri or any other large river/lake system. This boat has a slight flare in the bow going to a tumblehome amidships and into a straight wall*

in the aft. She tracks like a dream and takes on waves and rollers with ease. Mine is a Kevlar layup and the only problem I had was a wearing on the bow keel. I had a snap on cover made for her and recommend having one on any otherwise uncovered boat. Besides keeping rain out it also deflected the occasional rogue wave that broke the bow.”

#9: How did you plan your meals/food? Did this system work good for you and what would you change regarding this? *“I planned all my meals well before leaving to the put in and carried eight weeks of food at a time. I went with backpacking freeze dried meals, homemade jerky, Cliff bars, dried fruit and instant oatmeal. Care packages were mailed to various points along the route and I resupplied three times. I took advantage of real food whenever possible and if I was in a civilized part of the world I ate as much junk as possible. This did work for me and between the stuff I brought and that which became available I was never really hungry.”*

#10 What was your system for obtaining drinking water and what were the benefits as well as the disadvantages you had dealing with water. *“I have learned over the years that water is a commodity to be very concerned about when tripping. My first choice for obtaining water is through a clean source and preferably free source. I carry several 1.5 liter bags and one larger bag that I like to keep near full at all times so I make sure to take every advantage to resupply. In the upper reaches when the water was clean I would use my Katydine camp size purifier, a larger bag that works on a drip filtration system. Further down the river this became difficult because the sediments would continually clog the filter requiring constant flushing. It did help to let the water settle a bit but it took hours to get a few liters and I needed to let the bag hang over night most times. Letting it settle would have taken overnight for the best results. I also use a salt ionization kit that would allow me to clean a single bottle of water at a time but in such a case I would be subject to any floaties not removed by a filter. At Sioux City, Iowa I saw some black sludge pouring into the river from a factory and never used water from the river after that point. As if cattle and carrion weren't bad enough in the upper river.”*

#11: 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? *“Accept the wind. Do not worry about anything further than the next bend. Persevere. Being alone does not equate to loneliness. Let yourself be a part of all that is about you. Paddle when the wind stops no matter what time it is. Revel in nature. Take enough time to meet people along the way and be willing to accept their gifts; you’ll pay it forward someday. For the best time, remember that it’s about the journey, not the destination. Accept the wind.”*

