

## **Mike Clark:**

Bio: Big Muddy Mike is an educator for St. Anns of Normandy school in St. Louis Missouri. He also operates Big Muddy Adventures , a canoe and kayak outfitting , guiding and educational service located at the heart of the Great Rivers of America in St. Louis, MO. Mike paddled the entire Missouri River with John Ruskey in a dugout canoe they built. During the 2006 Lewis & Clark Bicentennial, he and several reenactors built dugout canoes in Livingston, Montana and paddled them back to St. Louis. Mike is a key support and logistics person for anyone paddling the Missouri River.

### **Here is what Big Muddy Mike had to say:**

**#1: What was the most difficult part about your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did) the situation?** “There are three parts to the expedition each with difficulties of varying type. For me they are... Dream, Then Plan and Budget , Shut Up And Paddle, Beat the Expedition Blues I'd say that the easiest was doing the actual expedition. There is a point, actually many points during expedition, that the utterance of "Shut Up and Paddle" is music to the ears. There are moments when emotions, fueled by fatigue, harsh conditions (like 40 straight days paddling below the freeze point) play strongly against the dream and goals, when you simply must find the wherewithal to demand of yourself and on occasion others, to beat down the negativity or the defeatist feelings. The levity is actually in saying it out loud, and then by virtue of its nature, the river and the river time offers nuggets of awesome to inspire and rejuvenate the spirit.”

**#2 What do you feel was the most important thing that you planned for on your trip that you actually benefited from?** “Much of expedition success for me has been in developing a very adaptable plan. Most notably, not being to completely tethered to a strict timeline. Realizing that planning for conditions on the river is inherently difficult, I think that having a foundation of gear that is easily handled and maximizes the ease of moving daily and balances creature comforts with space and multiple uses is now a big deal. Most folks end up with gear that they rarely use and much of which could be handled by being creative with the possibility of additional functions of things that are necessary. Like a storage box as a kitchen prep table or a bucket as a camp chair.”

**#3 What was the 5-most important pieces of gear you carried on the trip? Explain.** 'Multitool. Multi compartment thwart bag. With a modified belt strap for wearing as a fanny pack or river rat purse. Waterproof. My favorite paddle and life jacket. Large water boiling pot. Heavy duty tarp 10x10 as tent , bivvy sack, rain water collection, sail, gear cover, kitchen shelter.'

**#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?** "Campfire cooking. I used stoves often until I found that the art of choosing great, safe, weather resistant, efficient camps was tied to learning and looking for places with desirable cover and easy access to driftwood piles. The cooking ability is questionable but the system for kitchen, food and storage is really important."

**#6 What was the least important item(s) that you brought and discovered there was never a need for?** "An axe. It got sent or traded right away."

**#7: What was the biggest surprise of the journey? Something you did not anticipate.** "How often I found staying at the camp rather than going into town(except for some resupplies or recharges) turned out to be the best choice. People who love the river are found by the river usually."

**#8 What kind of boat did you paddle and what were its good qualities and also the things you did not like about it?** "Canoe! I have paddled a variety of canoes and the ability of the canoe to manage the navigational hazards and carry the load makes it the optimum choice for me. At times there is a desire to increase the speed of craft I.e. like a kayak might, but over the long haul, I think the tradition on the Great Rivers of the canoe suits me best. That and a single blade paddle."

**#9: How did you plan your meals/food? Did this system work good for you and what would you change regarding this?** "I'm happiest when I am on a diet of unpackaged foods so my preference is to stock up and use up locavore type fresh foods and supplement with the packaged. Again having a stock of things like rice, breads, veggies allows for creativity and nutrition. It is a much bigger deal to make meals but it is worth it. Lunches for me are packed in the morning while coffee and breakfast are

underway. Usually a half hour stop helps rejuvenate for the afternoon session of paddling, but short lunch or a floating lunch require a bit of storage planning.”

**#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 just used the rule of 1 that is having a gallon of water per person per day. With the longest between water stops being four days. Water has proven to be low issue.”

**#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?** “Think about your goals. If time is a factor, that will change many choices from boat to gear to food and food prep. And don't get too strictly tethered to a long range schedule. Rough goals of timing help but making plans for things on a clip board kind of schedule add stress. You will find that proposed arrival dates and meetups are tough to plan even just a day or two out. That said, a daily routine is really helpful. I love to be on the water early and enjoy the freshness of a new day and a rested body. I like to make camp and enjoy sunset and cook with some natural light. The sun becomes the clock. That is an X factor for enjoying river time.”



