



**Allen Palmer-
Source to Sea:
2015-- May 1st to
October 1st.**

I have been an outdoor enthusiast all of my life. I grew up in a family that would hike, fish, and hunt. Lots of camping and time in the woods prepared me well

for adventurous activities. I started kayaking in 1987, after several years of whitewater boating. My first big trip was a solo 16 day trip in Glacier Bay's North Arm. Paddling mostly saltwater trips in Washington and British Columbia for many years, but also made some international trips in Panama, Bahamas, Palau, Baja and Australia. I always wanted to do a really long, multi-month trip before I got too old. So glad I took the time to pursue the dream in 2015! Five months, start to finish, using an Easy Rider 18-6 sea kayak for most of the trip. A 13 foot sit-on-top for a short part.

Now, five years later I want to do another and another, if the body is willing. These 80 year old people doing fantastic things gives me hope.

#1: What was the inspiration or what sparked this journey, and how did you begin planning for it?

I was going through a difficult period in my life from 2006 until 2013. I needed to have a future dream to give me some hope and energy to forge ahead. I had always dreamed of doing a grand adventure, particularly when some friends did an around-the-world trip in 1999/2000. Then I saw Rod Wellington's videos of his source-to-sea of the Missouri. I was hooked after that. The planning process was so fun and generated so much excitement. Reading trip reports invigorated me even more.

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

I relied on my ingenuity and resourcefulness to make the trip a success. I have planned for this to be the case in other adventures; this source to sea trip was no different.

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

The most difficult part of the trip was letting go of the idea that I could micro-manage every aspect of the trip ahead of time. It is simple enough to plan out the beginning but trying to anticipate every potential problem throughout is an overwhelming, futile endeavor. I left wide open the plans for getting back to Oregon from either St Louis or New Orleans. The uncertainty ate at me for a while but I finally let it go somewhere around Lake Oahe once I realized that there were so many great people out there who were willing to help. Eventually it did work out.

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

- 1) *Boat Cart – critical for manually portaging all of the dams*
- 2) *Weather radio – keeping track of storm locations is very important*
- 3) *Map – need to be managing food and water; good to know when resupply is coming*
- 4) *Phone – used mostly for texting; this was a flip-phone; really valuable for contacting river angels.*
- 5) *Tablet computer – served as a smart phone for connecting to wi-fi. Backed up photos, recorded trip journal, used online maps to find stores and other facilities.*

#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?

Asking for help and graciously receiving help. I'm too independent, to a fault sometimes. I still am at times but this trip helped me to appreciate the kindness of strangers and to realize that traveling in isolation can be quite boring.

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

Headlamp or GPS, not sure which. Only really needed the headlamp on one occasion for night paddling on Oahe. The GPS mostly sat in the dry box. There are enough

landmarks along the way to keep track on the map. If paper maps aren't available, then a phone with navigation app would be important. I generally don't get too caught up where I am at until I get close to a large town or city and the camp sites get difficult to find.

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

I was surprised how fast the weeks went by after I got past Great Falls. Sure, I was out for five months but it sure didn't feel like it at times. I miss the river often, the casual, simplistic style of traveling.

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

I paddled a sea kayak, fiberglass construction, Easy Rider Eskimo 18-6. I can paddle through just about any kind of water in this boat. Big waves, high wind, no problem. It cruises along at 3+ mph without huge effort. Loads of room. Perhaps a little too long. It was a bit of a barge to pull at the Great Falls portage. Crashed through whirlpools and eddy lines like they were nothing. I paddled a 13 foot Necky Spike, sit-on-top, when I was making my way down the Red Rock and the Beaverhead. This was a plastic boat and was suited well for the shallow, twisting water.

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

I brought a lot of freeze-dried meals such as Mountain House. I did send a few resupply boxes and a friend dropped me a couple as well but there are plenty of food resupply options along the way. I liked the fast-fix convenience of freeze-dried but I wasn't getting enough calories from them. I got a bit anorexic-looking during the trip. Started eating more sardines and other higher calorie foods which helped. In a do-over, I would definitely plan to eat more.

#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 carried MSR 6L Dromedary bladders, enough to carry 5 gallons of water. Only came close to running out of fresh water on two occasions. I did have a filter and tablets as backup. Pre-filter and allow settling is vital if using a pump filter. I would only drink river water, filtered or not, as a last resort.

#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?

Slow down in the section between Fort Benton and James Kipp but it's hard to do when it is so early in the trip. Don't try to plan out food for the entire trip unless you have some special dietary needs or have to stick to a very tight budget. Well stocked grocery stores are available. Don't get overly spooked by the potential for bad weather. Be prepared but don't let it haunt you. Enjoy the comradery along the river. Reach out to people and engage with them. I had some really great interactions with people, on both the Missouri and the Mississippi, both river angels and members of the public who appeared unexpectedly.

#12 Worst weather day? What happened and how did you cope or spend the day?

Cannonball, ND, south of Bismark. Kept hearing on the weather radio of the tornado warning and could see the lightning, hear the thunder. I was camping on a very narrow shelf with a high bank behind me that was dropping mud and rocks. Scared that the entire slope might come crashing down on top of me due to the rain. Quite the nervous night but the storm went to the north of me. A very nerve-wracking night for sure.

#13: Biggest source of inspiration in life?

I'm inspired by people who find adventure in unique and unexpected places, those who follow up on trip ideas that others scoff at. Think outside the box for your life quests, don't let others limit your journey.

#14: Something nobody really knows about you? (Hobby, skill, previous job, talent?)

I can actually be quite an emotional person. I don't often show it so I leave people with an idea that I am somewhat cold and distant. I need to work on my first impression with people but that's going to be difficult given the independent life I have led.

EDITORS NOTE: Allen has a very detailed account of his experience on the upper Red Rock River, and Beaverhead River for those doing a Source to Sea. He has detailed descriptions and many photos of this difficult section, which can be found in our Brower's Spring section on our website.