



Andy Bugh: Beaverhead River, Dillon, Mt to the Gulf of Mexico. 2011-12.

Naturalist, Photographer, Artist, Gardener, Family Man

My background has been in management, horticulture, and construction for many years. These have been a means to an end, not my

life priority. My passions in life are my family, friends, the great outdoors, paddling, gardening, fishing and photography.

I began my journey down the river in July 2011 and got off the river just before Thanksgiving of the same year. The following April I got back on and finished my trip at the end of May 2012.

My paddling experience began at age 11 and continues today. Through the years I have paddled on several rivers around Texas Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana in addition to paddling the greatest river system in North America. I have paddled well over 6000 miles and counting.

I still dream of paddling a few more big trips like paddling from Alaska to Mexico, or Mexico to Canada on the eastern side of the US. I might even try paddling the Missouri River system again when it's not flooded. I definitely still hope to make it to Brower's Spring some day too.

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

I took my first paddling trip with the Boy Scouts at age 11, then at age 15 another BS trip. I was hooked! At age 17 and 18 I was leading Boy Scout troops on 1-2 week trips and dreamed of paddling the Mississippi River which I thought was the longest river in North America. Life happened and many years later, after raising a family, my mom gave me a book about a couple who paddled the Amazon River. I shared my long forgotten dream to paddle the river with my wife and she said I should do it. I figured she was not really serious so I waited a few months and asked her again. I didn't want to invest my time and emotions in it if she was going to say no. When I asked again, she said she was serious, and I began researching and planning. That is when I discovered that the Missouri-Mississippi river system is actually the greater trip and that Brower's Spring is actually the furthest point that water originates and flows to the gulf.

My planning consisted of several months of researching and reading all I could find about the region I would be paddling, what gear is needed, what type of vessel, food options, etc. Then I started making purchases to fill out my list of needs.

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

It's hard to narrow down to one thing, so here are a few.

- a. A good boat. Several people suggested a kayak would be better especially on the lakes. This turned out to be really good advice. With wind and wave issues, my Eddyline Shasta proved to be a great boat for the journey.*
- b. A good tent. Every account I had read of other long distance paddlers included a tent failure during a storm. I decided to invest in a good quality tent. I researched the best tents recommended by Backpacker magazine and went with one of the top 5. It was a good choice and never failed on me.*
- c. Meals. I like variety and flavor! I looked into many prepackaged meals but they were all very expensive. In the end, I crated my own combinations and ate very well without duplicating meals more than about once a week. I based my daily intake on 4000 calories per day and only lost 10 pounds on my trip. My average meal cost was \$5.50 per day.*

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

Two things were difficult, both weather related.

I did not prepare well enough for winter to catch me. I did not have enough cold weather gear and many times had to sleep in wet clothes so that my body heat would dry them during the night. When it is below freezing and you are going to bed in wet clothes, it's not very comfortable but it does dry the clothes.

I got stuck down on the Mississippi with a series of very windy and rainy days. In a three-week period, I was only able to paddle 10 days. It was so windy that the Coast Guard issued wind warnings for all traffic on the river, saying to not travel due to the high winds. I got stuck once on a very small island just south of the confluence with the Ohio River. I was stuck there for three days and then a huge rain came during the night. I was up all night checking the rise on the river and by 5 AM the island was almost under water. I launched into a swelling river filled with debris that had washed in. After 11 hours I was tired but trying to reach New Madrid. A cold front was also blowing in and there is a spot where the river turns back north just above New Madrid. I hit that stretch tired and faced 5 foot waves churned up by a narrow river with steep banks and wind blowing straight up the river. It was by far the worst day of my trip! Exhausted and no place to pull out, I battled wave after wave, some crashing all the way over me. To make it worse, I also encountered a couple of tows moving up river through that section. When I finally got to the next bend, I was so done with the whole trip! I called my brother and said I just didn't know if I could go on! I had been fighting the winds for so many days in a row and falling behind. The river was high from the rains, I pitched my tent in the mud up in the trees and went to sleep. The next day I heard a weather report that said for three weeks that region had been experiencing above average wind and rain and below average temps. The forecast was for several weeks more of the same. I decided to pull off at New Madrid and start again in the spring. That was one of the best decisions I made! Spring was glorious!

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

a. *Eddyline Shasta Kayak, this is a great boat capable of handling the wind and waves without fail. This boat allows for easy access of gear and paddler.*

- b. *Tent, I had a top rated REI tent and it never let me down. Only issue was not enough ventilation on hot nights. I have replaced it now for one a little lighter and with better ventilation.*
- c. *Self-Inflating sleeping pad. I read of another paddler who splurged on one of these and I decided to do the same. It was a luxury item as far as space is concerned but so worthwhile. I did not need to inflate an air mattress and I slept well each night.*
- d. *Life Jacket, I invested in a good quality life jacket and thankfully never needed it. If I had an emergency, I was prepared though. I cannot over emphasize the importance of this!*
- e. *Water purification system, I carried purification tablets with me and I know there are other solutions for this issue. I never expected to use them but if you get stranded due to wind and weather for several days, you might, as I did, run into a situation where you must purify the river water.*

#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?

I got up to Montana from Texas, with no real snow experience and no contacts. The MO River paddling group did not exist yet. I found out right away I was no match for 10 foot snow drifts and a mountain of snow between me and Brower's Spring. I had to make a plan B and go on from there.

I discovered on my very first day on the flooded Beaverhead River that my lack of swift and white water experience was a big deal! All I could do was try to keep the boat heading down stream and all of a sudden something caught the bottom of the kayak and tore a 12 inch gash in the bottom of the boat. Water was pouring in but there was no place to get out because of the flooding. For a few more miles I bailed and steered until I finally found a place to get out and make repairs. I had traveled 34 miles in 3 hours! I sat on the bank of the river and thought there is no way I can handle this! The next morning, I got up, looked at the river and felt confident again. I was off!

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

HAHAHA, I got to Montana and realized I had left Dave Miller's book, The Complete Paddler, and all my maps back in Texas. I highly recommend Dave's book but as it turned out for me, with the flooded river much of the information about stops and campsites was not applicable.

I did bring some books, a camp chair, a wood burning stove, and other things that I mailed home as soon as I got to the end of Ft. Peck Reservoir. There is something about paddling about 140 miles with no current to assist you that causes you to want to jettison all nonessential weight.

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

I did not expect the journey to be a spiritual one but that was the greatest blessing of the trip for me. There is so much alone time and it turned into a lot of one on one time with my creator.

Also, paddling a flooded river, I was concerned until I got on the Missouri and found that it was not more dangerous but just spread out over more territory. I did see destruction that was incredible! I saw so many destroyed homes, even paddled through a home that had walls blown out but was still standing. I talked with many people who had their homes and farms destroyed but were still in love with the river.

Another big surprise was the eagles. I saw bald eagles pretty much every single day all the way to the coast. From Morgan City to the gulf, on my last day of the journey I saw 13 bald eagles. I had no idea there are so many eagles, even down to the coast.

#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 an Eddyline Shasta. I LOVED that boat for the trip! It is much faster than a canoe, tracks well, it's roomy, pretty much cannot turn over even with waves up to 3-4 feet from the side. Eddyline also provides great support when you need it. It is easy to repair on the river when needed too.

The rudder is vulnerable to damage when drifting backwards. I suggest carrying a spare with you at all times to be safe. The kayak is designed with steer with the rudder and does not steer well without it.

At the time of my trip, Eddyline did not have a good spray skirt design. This may have improved now. I suggest checking with Eddyline on this if it is important to you.

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

After researching the number of calories burned on a long distance paddle, I based my meal plan on 4000 calories per day. This worked well for me and my metabolism.

#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 7 gallons of water in the upper regions. This was adequate for most of the upper area but I was not in a hurry and took a few days off to hike through areas such as the White Cliffs and Bad Lands. Because of that, and the flooded river system which caused many areas to be closed, I did find myself needing to purify water on occasions. In the White Cliffs I hiked up Eagle Creek a bit and got the cleanest water I could find to resupply and then used purifying tablets. I arranged with the BLM manager in Ft. Benton to get water from a BLM location between The White Cliffs and Ft. Peck Reservoir. When I arrived at that location the BLM crew told me I could not have water but when I mentioned that the manager gave me permission, I was allowed to refill my bottles.

#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?

So many people say to me that they wish they could do a trip like this. My greatest advice is to go do it! You can either keep talking about it, or get out there and do it. I say Go Do It! Make it happen!

Secondly, I would say you must be prepared for anything. Be physically and mentally prepared, this is not the right trip for everyone. Take your time, do not get discouraged over the little things. Enjoy each moment. Take time to find and see what you are there to experience. Embrace the unexpected events that will happen along the way.

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

As I mentioned in #3 above, my worst weather day was on the Mississippi river.

#13: Biggest source of inspiration in life?

My mom was my greatest source of inspiration in my life for many years. She was an incredible woman and mother to 8 children. She worked so hard for many years to provide healthy meals, transportation, a good education, love and support. At age 65 she began her final career, as a water and chair aerobics instructor at the YMCA. She was forced to retire from that job at age 94 after a series of falls. Mom loved life, loved her family and her friends. She had a very active class of devoted students and also planned many extra trips and activities for the groups. She passed away at age 96. I hope to have her zest for life and good health for so many years. She always encouraged me to follow my dreams even when it worried her that I would be out alone on a flooded river.

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

I was a commercial greenhouse grower for 17 years, then I owned a construction company for 11 years where I traveled all over the US building commercial greenhouses and other buildings. Currently I am a supervisor with Plano ISD Transportation Dept. My real love is the outdoors though. I am an award winning photographer, dabble in other forms of art, love my garden and produce extra food for local needs when I am able. I love to encourage and uplift people in need. I am blessed to be surrounded by loving family and friends including many in this group!