

Kathy Kurzhals:

Helena, Montana to St. Charles, Mo: 2004- 54 Days.

Kruger Sea Wind Solo Expedition canoe.

Kathy paddled with her husband Bruce, who was also paddling a Kruger Canoe. Kathy and Bruce recently retired from operating a family dairy farm for 35-years. They live in St. Johns, Michigan.



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

I was in the Lansing paddle club with Verlen and other prominent paddlers so the idea of a long trip didn't seem out of the ordinary. I was always fascinated with the idea of long distance paddling and traveling on just the items I was able to carry.

I figured a long trip would always be just a pipe dream until I heard that the Lewis and Clark bicentennial would be in 2004. That would give a date to be committed to and perhaps employers and family would understand the reason for the journey.

Kathy and I already had some tripping miles under our belts so we knew the joys and discomforts of spending days at a time in the boat.

We took longer trips in preparation for the event and experimented with different foods and tried to whittle down the list of items we thought necessary.

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

I think our strategically spaced food drops at post offices along the route were important. It encouraged us to make miles each day to make it to the town and savor the food we sent ahead and the goodies our families sent us.

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

Maybe it was the time of year or just bad timing but the winds were incredible from Montana to South Dakota. Even at night they would be 20 mph and sometimes

twice that during the day. The catamaran system for the 2 Sea Winds really made the difference. Although it slowed our speed by half a mile per hour we would have been wind bound many days. On some days we did get up and start paddling just as it became light and made some big crossings or at least got in some miles early.

That region had been in a drought for 5 years prior to 2004 and the levels of Peck, Sak, and Oahe were down 30 to 40 feet and this created an ankle deep mire of silty sticky mud to trudge through to reach an adequate campsite above the old water line. We used Tingly pull over boots and removed them when we reentered the boats and then strapped the boots on our decks.

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

Not necessarily in any order:

Graphite paddles-reduced fatigue over a long day

Catamaran system-although slower, it made the trip much safer and we made miles even in waves up to 6 feet! I bet we did 1000 miles with the cat system.

Spirit sail system-not even sure if it is still available but we mounted one on each deck. The V shaped sail only weighs a pound or two and rolls up to the size of an umbrella.

Tent-get an expedition one to shed the wind.

Tingly boots-being able to strip those dirty boots off and paddle in clean dry sneakers for 10 -12 hours really was good for moral.

#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?

Kathy was not a hard core paddler and this trip was my scheme so I worried about a mutiny. She did, however, love to travel and write about her journeys and was the most detailed planner and organizer I ever met. After paddling in the rain for 11 hours early in the trip with minimal complaints, I knew we could make it. Getting a few hundred miles under our belts and past Fort Peck was encouraging. I think the thought of paddling toward home with each stroke kept us motivated on bad days too.

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

I threw in an extra small Coleman burner figuring it would at least store some fuel for use in the other stove. I made the mistake of putting some freeze dried food packets in the same bag as it. Do you know what it is like to burp up white gas??

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

People wanted to help us and showed an interest in the trip.

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

Kruger Sea Wind This boat can store a lot of gear and with the catamaran system you can keep moving in bad weather or if one person needs a rest.

Although it never happened, those rudder cables do break and you should carry spare ones and know how to install in the field.

The spray covers for the boats really keep the rain, sun, spray and wind out of your boat.

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

We figured 2 lbs. of food per person per day and we would supplement with "town food" along the way whenever it worked out.

A typical breakfast might be my mile maker granola plus pop tarts. Lunch might be crackers or home made corn biscuits with cheese and PB.

At dinner we would break out the stove for coffee plus mac n cheese with pepperoni and dried veggies.

#10 What was your system for obtaining drinking water and what were the benefits as well as the disadvantages you had dealing with water?

There were enough parks and campgrounds along the way to fill the 5 gallons of containers we carried between us. We had a pump filter too but i don't think we used it.

#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?

expect weather delays

drop food supplies at post offices along the way

take wheels to portage around the dams

skip the sail unless catamaraned-just something else to fuss with

unless it's an official campground, stealth camp away from towns and parties

you'll be moving right along after the last dam

consult with someone who paddled the route as questions arise during planning

starting your trip early may mean unsettled weather but it may be better than the summer heat on the prairie

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

We were paddling through the UL bend of Fort Peck and were somewhat protected until we hit the lake proper. The wind was blowing at least 40 mph as we hit the main East -West section of the lake and the waves suddenly became tremendous. We headed for the right shore when we were pleasantly surprised by Bone Trail campground. We spent 2 days there with our tent tied to the outhouse as the wind was a constant 30 to 50 mph. Although 70

miles to the nearest town it was fun watching the wildlife and the great expanse of the lake in front of us. A couple of big bulls kept us amused on the other side of the cattle guard gate.

#13: Biggest source of inspiration in life?

Thankful to be married to someone who wanted to take this journey and life's journey with me.

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

I worked with dairy cows since I was 17 and it was probably good training for the trip. It kept me in shape and taught me to get up early and to work efficiently in sometimes undesirable conditions.