

Norm Miller: Bio: The creator of the Missouri River Face Book Page. Norm grew up in Northern Michigan where his interest in history and paddling were born. Norm retraced the westward journey of Lewis & Clark during the bicentennial in 2004 from St. Louis to the Pacific ocean by canoe & foot, raising awareness for the L&C Trail Heritage Foundation and American Rivers Org. In 1998 Norm retraced the 1789 journey of explorer Alexander Mackenzie through Canada to the Arctic Ocean. The last major paddle trip was in 2010 when he paddled the coast of Thailand to the border of Malaysia solo, island hopping for a month.

Here is what Norm had to say:

#1: What was the most difficult part about your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did) the situation? For me it was the mental fact of going so slow--upstream against the current. I could have walked much faster. So in reality it became more "mental" than "physical". This would hold true for paddling downstream too. Psychological factors can wear you out. So my solution was breaking it down into small sections and focusing on that. I had to quit thinking about the final destination as that was too overwhelming! I focused on what I could see ahead...either a hundred yards or ½ a mile away. Live the moment and seize the day! Don't think about tomorrow or next month or you will go mad! Just really stay in the moment. I think this became the entire lesson of the journey...which in turned out, was about life in general. I think anyone who does the whole river never imagines that its never about "paddling, or camping, or being on an expedition"....it's way beyond that.

#2 What do you feel was the most important thing that you planned for on your trip that you actually benefited from? My meal planning and pre dehydration of all my meals. I spent 4- months with a food dehydrator making meals and vacuum sealing them all. I bought large amounts of bulk food I got at a discount and planned two-week food drops which I then had mailed to me "General-Delivery" to certain US Post Offices along the way and I would pick up when I got there. This saved me a lot of space in my boat and I had control of my BIGGEST cost by purchasing it all ahead of time. Buying food in stores can be pricey but by planning ahead, I think i guaranteed having something healthy and nutritious to eat rather than taking the chance and settling for whatever.

#3 Was there anything that you planned for that you felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain. Maybe too focused on dealing with my web-site and updates, which took away from my personal experience. I was thinking too much about all this high tech gear and not living the moment at times. I don't think I would go as high tech next time. Same also for maps...I had all sorts of detailed maps which I like to read and study but there was too much detail. I think one could get by without detailed maps...even a road atlas would work! My trip was in 2004 and the whole cell phone/update thing was new and not very efficient with limited coverage or non existent. I think now with all the info and all the members on our Missouri River Paddlers FaceBook page that have used high-tech gear, it would be more effective, or at least you could get the information from those that used it. For the most part people are not going to remember all that in a year and neither will you. Stay focused on the journey or you will miss so much of your surroundings.

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

1. A strong, comfortable, efficient boat/canoe/kayak. 2. Lightweight paddle--Mine was 7oz...so at 50-strokes a minute x's 12 hour days, adds up to lifting nearly 15-tons of weight...you can wear yourself out having a heavy paddle! 3. Good tent that is seam-sealed with heavy duty tarp and at least 10 good stakes and extra tie-downs for wind. 4. Good quality knee high rubber boots. Ever wonder what would happen if your feet never dry? You get trench-foot like the soldiers did in WW-!! A serious condition and could cause you to end your trip. Stay dry!!! There is so much mud along the Missouri especially the lower parts where there is no way not to wade in the mud when you get out. Stay dry and you will be much happier. 5. Comfortable life jacket! You will wear it all day for months!!!! Make sure it does not rub anywhere!!

#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? Since I paddled upstream, I had to learn how to read the water, wing dikes, and other challenges differently than if you paddled downstream. I learned quickly how to read the current in order to stay in the slack current or upstream eddy lines which helped in paddling against an opposing current. I think again maybe my "mind" was my weakest link and I had to overcome those voices in my head saying "give-up". Read the section in Dave Miller's book regarding "upstream" paddling that I wrote for him to give you a better idea.

#6 What was the least important item(s) that you brought and discovered there was never a need for? I had too much high tech gear which included plug-in attachments for phones and computers that I never used. I also somehow managed to carry in my dry-bag a part of the lock for a set of dumbbells that keep the weights from coming off....no idea how I ended up carrying this thing for 6-months.

#7: What was the biggest surprise of the journey? Something you did not anticipate. The mental aspect of paddling upstream making slow progress. I did not anticipate the mental drain as I did. There are always a lot of little surprises too, trying to find drinking water, wind blowing from all directions--not just east; people I met who had no idea that Lewis & Clark traveled up the Missouri River, the lack of water in the reservoirs causing tree stumps to be exposed which became a big unexpected hazard. (It was a drought year and the reservoirs were at an all time low. Lots of little surprises.)

#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 solo-expedition canoe built by the late Verlen Kruger called a Sea Wind. The boat was designed for expeditions and to me it is the best boat made, and Verlen proved it by paddling the same boat for 28,000 miles--and that was just one trip! The boat is a hybrid sea kayak and canoe...which has a bigger cockpit than a cramped sea kayak. The boat holds a lot of gear, it's easy to portage and comfortable enough that I easily sit in it the entire day without the need to get out and stretch....sometimes 15-hours without the need to get out. The boat too is the strongest production boat on the market with 12-layers of kevlar making it "log jumping and rock smashing tough" as Verlen puts it! No better boat on the market!!! There is no way I was about to sit in a cramped sea kayak, always wet. The little things add up and considering my boat design holds 11 world records for expedition paddling, I wasn't about to use anything less. Period! (I'm biased, but have paddled a lot of boats ;-)

#9: How did you plan your meals/food? Did this system work good for you and what would you change regarding this? I purchased and planned basic 1-pot meals...either a pasta dish or a rice dish then only changed the main ingredients to give variety. So I ended up eating the same meals over and over. I think variety would be better as not to get tired of the meals. I did use a dehydrator to dry fruits, veggies,

sauces, etc then prepackaged meals. I then placed two-weeks worth of food in a box and had a friend mail the box to me to a nearby post office-- so I could pick it up. This method is probably best if you are on a budget as you can control your food cost much more easily rather than buying in a store or restaurant which can get costly. This system worked great, I just would improve by bringing in more variety!

#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 4 one-gallon jugs and two quart bottles which I topped off/ filled whenever I encountered a pump etc. I NEVER FILTERED water as there are way too many agricultural chemicals in the water---pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and industrial pollutants in the river....thus not healthy to drink and the filters do not remove those chemicals from the water! Why risk it? There are plenty of towns, campgrounds, houses, resorts, marinas, farm houses etc to obtain drinking water. My Kruger Canoe easily carried 50lbs of water. It might be more challenging in a kayak, you would have to stop more frequently to obtain water. I don't think there was any disadvantage other than the bulky size of carrying them from town...you may want a small pack to bring to help carry things when in town. Make sure you buy SCREW top jugs and NOT the pop-off kind or they will pop off and pour in and on your gear!

#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? Chose good gear, a comfortable boat, spend time being alone, camp a lot, consider your goal and purpose--is it realistic?, cover your body and wear 100-spf sunscreen- hat, gloves, long sleeves and pants as you will be amazed at the skin damage after the trip! I go to a doctor to get skin cancer burned off every 6- months now because of the sun damage! Learn observation and dead-reckoning to navigate so you don't have to use a GPS (which I never used and still don't). Good tent with 10-14 extra tie-downs and good stakes as you will encounter 60+ mph winds and even tornado like conditions. ALWAYS TIE YOUR BOAT UP AT NIGHT!!!! Wear your life jacket---shit happens fast! Keep a good journal and take a lot more photos than you think...you will wish you had decades later. Live the moment ...one paddle stroke at a time will get you there.

