



Scott Robinson Q&A: **Bio:** Scott Robinson lives in Boulder Colorado and is a USMC veteran, Mechanical Engineer, TWJKD practitioner, and graduate of Gone Feral's Primitive Living Skills Apprenticeship program. In 2019 he took part in the *Corps of Rediscovery Expedition* with Tom Elpel from Three Forks, Montana to St. Louis.

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

- **Gear Organization:** Beyond paddling the river, we hiked and explored a lot in remote places as well as in towns. It was challenging to have what you needed with you to take advantage of opportunities or solve problems. My bag solutions below took some time to adjust by trial and error. My 22-liter bag became my default bag with me at all times.

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

- **Being backpacker centric** gave me an organization platform to start with and options to adapt to changing conditions. I could scale up or down as required for a given challenge or opportunity.

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

- **Cell Phone / GPS combination:**

- Garmin In-Reach Explorer Plus was pre-loaded with our float schedule destinations and allowed for external communications as well provided an SOS feature should it have been required. The device blue toothed to my phone. Unit needed recharged weekly.
- Samsung Galaxy 8 with Verizon service became a multitool used every day: Navigation details (GPS blue-tooth or Google maps when available), communication with outside world, my only camera taken, Facebook postings, note taking, reading material, ... A Life Proof case and associated belt clip worked perfectly for me. Unit needed recharged daily.
- Solar was required to keep this going:
 - 2 sets of Anker13000 mah batteries + Big Blue 21-Watt panels worked well for me. One solar panel was insufficient at times to power both batteries.

- **Footwear:**

- Barefoot for muddy conditions, Teva sandals for wet walking, hiking shoes for dry hiking, fly fishing boots with hip waders for cold conditions. "wet shoes" prevented my feet from drying and did not work well walking on rocky or gravel terrain.

- **Bags**

- 22-liter backpack: for hiking and town trips, quick access in the canoe: Water and snacks, extra layers, headlamp, ...
- 65-liter backpack: for quick camp setup in a package, also used to fetch re-supply items once or twice. Lined with contractor bag. Also served as a backrest for seating by tying it in place with a quick release knot.
- Dry bags: for food and cold weather gear storage when not needed.

- **5-liter bucket:**

- This worked well for easily extracting extra items from the canoe for camp and provided a place to sit as well: First Aid kit, Books, dry shoes, ...

- **Kayak paddle for solo canoeing:**

- When solo, I oscillated between the kayak paddle and the canoe paddle. They each have strengths and weaknesses and use different muscle groups.
 - Canoe paddle worked best for power strokes and maintaining control in a cross wind. Best choice for lazy paddling.
 - Kayak paddle worked best for hitting both sides with a positive power stroke. Best choice for speed and efficiency.

#4 Prior to your trip, what was your weakest asset or least skilled or qualified trait for the trip and how do you overcome this?

- **GPS use.** I purchased a GPS device for the trip and discovered there is not much clear guidance distinguishing between the following.

- GPS handhelds: Massive data and waypoint capacity, but incoming communications (data) only. PC software is Basecamp.
- Satellite communicators: Less data capacity with a 500-waypoint limit, allows for incoming and outgoing communications (texts, emails) including an SOS button that will trigger rescue operations to your GPS location. Outgoing data capability allows for Map Share capabilities. Straight line navigation only. PC software is their In-Reach Portal on the web.
- Salespeople, Garmin support, and internet information about these distinctions are not clear.
- The Garmin In-Reach Explorer Plus (satellite communicator) worked well for us. I was able to send out nightly updates that all was well when there was no cell phone coverage. The device cannot load every known waypoint on the river however. Our float plan was generated by our expedition leader Tom Elpel. This worked well effectively resulting in a daily schedule with a known camp destination. We had no “waypoint noise” which I think was beneficial to the overall experience.

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

- Fly Rod: Knowing there was excellent trout fishing north of Canyon Ferry, I thought it would be worth bringing my fly rod in addition to my spinning rig. Although great fly fishing is available in certain sections in Montana, a spinning rig also works in these sections.
- Fishing suggestions: Plan ahead.
- Spin caster is all that is needed
- Clear river or lake water: Flicker shads, Rapalas, and Panther Martins were my top lures.
- Muddy water: True natural bait appears to be required. Gulp brand “simulated worms” were not very effective catching only a few catfish. Did not attempt much muddy water fishing but wish I had.
- Miscellaneous: Prepare for large fish (large net, 12lb line minimum). We lost numerous large fish most likely for teeth cutting the line (Walleye? Pike?). Steel leaders suggested. Needle nose pliers or Leatherman extremely helpful.

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

- **The wonderful support by the River Angels.** The generosity of people in supporting the adventure was simply magical.

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

- **Old Town Discovery 169 Canoe:** It worked well for both tandem and solo applications. This includes day paddlers without gear and duration paddlers with a full complement of gear. In going solo, I sat in the front seat and oriented the canoe backwards. Appropriate weight distribution

allowed for control of the nose while sitting in the seat. For challenging situations (wind, barge waves, ...), I could drop to my knees on the floor of the canoe to lower my center of gravity.

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

- Most of our meals were group meals of normal grocery items cooked in a wok over the fire or single burner Coleman stove. Green propane bottles were readily available in the small towns, butane / backpacker stove fuel was not.

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

- We elected to rely on municipal water over filtering.
- Each canoe in our expedition carried a 15-gallon supply. Our expedition speed was slower than most with all the sightseeing and hiking we were doing and nearly ran out just before the Fred Robinson bridge in Montana.
- I think we filtered water only on Fort Peck Lake.
- If you plan to go fast and cover miles, much less would suffice. At our slow speed, the 15-gallon plan worked well.
- I liked having 3-gallon Reliant brand containers. They broke the weight of the water down into more flexible weights for balancing the canoe as well as extracting each night at camp.

#10: 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?

- Study the information on the Missouri River Paddlers Web Page (www.missouririverpaddlers.com)
- Read the Complete Paddler by David Miller

#11 Worst weather day? What happened?

- I would say Canyon Ferry Reservoir: Stormy few days with high winds. We chose the right coast to follow which was a mistake. Wind put us on the bank and waves swamped all canoes.

#12: Biggest source of inspiration?

- Knowing that others have done it. Simply an amazing trip in so many dimensions. Many, many permutations possible in doing this trip. Make it unique for yourself. Tom Elpel made a

wonderful agenda of sightseeing and things to do. I think we maximized seeing most of what there was to see. Paddling and making miles was not the sole objective of the expedition.

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

- I quit my “secure, good” engineering job to do this trip. Adventure is important in life. Go, Do, Share, and Enable others. The river is an excellent metaphor for letting go and trusting the current of nature. Trust your boat like David Miller Says and the river will teach you what you need to know.