

Tom Bailey: BIO: Tom is a metallurgical engineer originally from Minnesota. He kayaked the Missouri-Mississippi river in 2010 starting in May from Montana and arriving at the Gulf in Sept. He was 22 years old at the time. He got his start in paddling in Pennsylvania when he rented a kayak from "Conewango Kayak and Canoe". He spent most of that summer of 2009 doing white water kayaking in Pennsylvania and New York.

Here is what Tom had to say:

#1: What was the most difficult part about your paddle trip and how did you overcome (if you did) the situation? “The grind of the lakes was probably the hardest part for me. I was fortunate to have someone there to share in the joy and pain of the wind and rain (Charles Vaught). While it can certainly be done solo, there is definitely some enjoyment of sharing the experience.”

#2 What do you feel was the most important thing that you planned for on your trip that you actually benefited from? “I’d say “supplies”, but there were certainly a couple things. A waterproof UHF Radio, a waterproof GPS (Garmin), full maps of all the lakes, and cheap military MRE’s. I used all of these quite a bit. The GPS was fantastic to have when journaling as well as just day to day progress checks. The radio was fantastic for checking the weather and then later when barge traffic got hectic on the Mississippi.”

#3 Was there anything that you planned for then you felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain. “Our trip was fortunately rather dry and I didn’t spend to much time in the mud. I also overestimated the cold weather, so was able to send home quite a bit of gear. I therefore had mud boots that I didn’t use. (The big rubber ones). If I did it again, I’d probably bring knee high duck boots.”

#4 What was the 5-most important pieces of gear you carried on the trip? Explain. “See #2 I also got some large cheap steel tent stakes that were from a military surplus stores which were worth their weight.”

#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? “My weakest asset was my inflexibility and inexperience. I had no idea what I was doing and didn’t understand how critical it was to be flexible and enjoy the experience. I was far to focused on the schedule, and less so on the experience.”

#6 What was the least important item(s) that you brought and discovered there was never a need for? “I brought along a full rubber paddling jacket that was way overkill when it wasn’t snowing. A skirt was plenty fine for even the worst weather we experienced on the rivers and lakes.”

#7: What was the biggest surprise of the journey? Something you did not anticipate. “The biggest surprise was the kindness of others. I was floored that complete strangers (even ones who weren’t paddlers) would take us into their houses and feed us. This was extremely humbling and really gave me a lot more faith in the human race. This was arguably the best experience of the entire 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? “I used a thermo plastic 16’ kayak by Delta. I’d have to say I really enjoyed a kayak. This particular one is the only one where there is a small day hatch directly in front that’s easily accessible. It also had a day hatch behind along with full hatches in front and back for large storage. I really liked the compromise of thermoplastic for weight and ruggedness. I would say it’s a good mix between poly and fiberglass/Kevlar. I had to patch the skeg a time or two, as well as occasionally the boat was a little creaky. I’d use the same boat again though.”

#9: How did you plan your meals/food? Did this system work good for you and what would you change regarding this? “I went through phases on this. At times it was mostly pop tarts, other times it was more homemade meals. Things I might suggest: instant mash potatoes, unboxing mac and cheese and being able to have multiple servings in one large container, cheap pasta mixes that just need to be boiled, stove top stuffing, natural valley bars, pop tarts, MRE’s. I definitely loved the MRE’s. I found a couple of cases that I got for cheap since they were a bit older. They were of a variety where there was 24 different meals, so they didn’t get very repetitive at all. There was nothing better than to set one up, and by the time the tent was put up, to have a full hot meal.”

#10 What was your system for obtaining drinking water and what were the benefits as well as the disadvantages you had dealing with water? “We used water from towns we went through or hydrants. We only filtered once though it was nice to be able to. Carried 1 to 2 gallons between our legs in large heavy duty tea jugs from grocery stores. I also used a couple big water

bladders, including a 2 Liter bag that would usually go in a backpack, in order to have giant straw available during paddling.”

#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?

“Don’t have a tight timeline. You will inevitably wish you had more time and will lose some of the awesome opportunities you might otherwise have. Other advice, don’t be too rigidly structured. Part of the experience is to be swept along with the adventures that inevitably you fall into. Meeting new people, figuring out where/how you are going to stay somewhere.”

