**A short BIO— Where from, what you do, where educated, how you got into paddling or what got you into doing this trip?**

I was born and raised in North St. Louis County. Recently retired after 40 plus years working in the Computer/IT field. My father and Uncles had all us cousins paddling the Missouri Ozark streams at an early age. In my teens I worked at a bait and tackle shop not far from the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi. We spent a lot of time fishing the “big” rivers out of jon boats. It wasn’t until I got involved in the MR340 canoe and kayak race that I actually paddled on the Missouri. In 2019 my friend Mark Fingerhut completed the full Missouri paddle and wrote up a great blog about his adventure. After spending so many hours on the river wondering where all this water came from, I decided then that when I retired, I would attempt the same trip and see for myself.

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

Missing my wife and family. This was my first experience with a prolonged absence from my family. I found about 4 weeks in I really started to miss seeing them. Somewhat paradoxical but it didn’t hinder my enjoyment of the trip. Just another emotion to deal with as I continued. Daily communication helped. Post trip was another difficult part for me. Probably since I timed my departure soon after I retired, after I completed the journey, I ended up in quite a funk that took a while to work through.

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

Taking my time and deciding on the best boat to use. I paddle quite a bit and have several boats that I could have used. Most of my paddling is in kayaks. But I did not want to deal with the small portals and the subsequent smaller dry bags. I wanted options for larger packing containers. Also, I didn’t relish the idea of a standard canoe on the large lakes. I decided on a Clipper Sea 1. Has a large open cockpit and a hull very similar to a kayak. It proved to be extremely stable, roomy and with good glide.

**#3 Was there anything that you planned for then you felt was unnecessary or overdone? Explain.**

Not really. I had 4 years to go though the Missouri River Paddler site. The information and trip reports provided there helped immensely to whittle down any unnecessary gear. I did buy a sail kit for this boat prior to leaving but decided not to bring it along and had no regrets.

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

1: Proper boat and paddles. Other than my choice of boat that I described above I brought a good double wing paddle and a Bending Branches bent handle single paddle. I would switch between those to break up the stress on the various muscle groups.

2. A good tent. Picked up a Nemo Aurora 2 person. The tent proved to be easy to set up. Strong. Withstood a few strong storms and hail without any damage. It also has covered areas outside each door to store equipment and keep it dry. Compact. There were a few others a bit lighter but not enough for me to worry about. And as a bonus it has a cool star chart sewn into it.

3. Garmin inReach 86i. Provided location, tracking, weather forecasts and texting to stay in contact with my wife and fellow paddlers.

4. Jetboil system with the French press coffee option. Compact reliable stove. And daily coffee. A must for me.

5. A good first aid kit and a can of bear spray. Never needed the spray but good piece of mind. Used some tape for blisters on the hands. Went through a couple of tubes of A&D cream. Be prepared for an extended wet behind.

**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?**

Although I spend a considerable amount of time outdoors and camping, I never spent more than a week or two out. The extended time this trip was going to take had me a bit nervous. But as the song states “nothing to it but to do it”.

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

I had a small waterproof spiral notebook that I used to track my daily progress, people I met, things that happened, etc.. And I also brought a larger bound notebook that I planned on transferring and expanding on my notes each night. I never used that larger one and gave it away. The smaller one proved to be adequate. I know most will probably use their cell phone or tablets for this but I intentionally did not. Also brought a water filter that I never had a need for.

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

The people who came out of nowhere to help you. You can find a list of the known “river angels” and their contact information. So, you sort of expect to have some help along the way. But the extent of that help is astonishing. And the amount of complete strangers who step up to help after asking where you are going with that “loaded canoe” just kept surprising me all the way down river. Truly restores your faith in humanity.

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

Clipper Sea 1. It is a decked tripping canoe. Handles a load well. Myself, gear, food and 26 liters of water weighed in at 400 lbs at the start. Didn’t feel like I was overloaded in the least. It is a hybrid canoe with a hull very similar to that of a kayak. It has good speed, glide and stability. However, it turns like a bus. I cut a new rudder for it prior to the trip and added 1 ½” to the width. That helped the responsiveness.

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

Oatmeal and dried fruit or pop tarts with coffee to start the day. Packed a small drybag with tuna or chicken packs and soft corn tortillas for lunch. Packs of jerky, dried fruit, nuts, sunflower seeds in the drypack as well. Dinner was a mix of instant potatoes mixed with a can of deviled ham (better tasting that it sounds) or packs of Knorr’s rice and noodle sides mixed with either chicken or rice. I do not eat much candy but in one of my resupply packs my wife sent me some licorice. I tried to keep some onboard from then on. Tried to hit restaurants every chance I could. All in all worked out well.

**#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 had two 10 liter and two 3 liter bladders for a total capacity of 26 liters. I mostly only carried 20 liters or less. I also brought a filter and purification tables. I never had to use the filter or tablets. I was able to find places to refill when needed. The one place that I thought I was going to have trouble with was at James Kipp. The water was turned off due to failing a health test. I would have had to use the filter but had a fisherman give me a case of bottled water.

**#11: What was your strategy for getting across the large reservoirs, including dealing with bad weather?**

I took a pretty direct route across the reservoirs. Having a boat that could handle rough water. And having the confidence and knowledge of just what that boat could handle allowed for some wide crossings. I normally paddle a 5k once a week. Prior to the trip I used this boat on a few of those, so I had a very good idea of just how long 3 to 5 miles may take me to paddle. Once I committed to a crossing, I treated it as I would a 5k and bore down until I was close enough to the other side to feel comfortable. I relied on my Garmin unit for weather forecasts along with keeping a visual eye and the current weather. And always checked those before attempting any crossings. The only time I did get caught out was on Lake Oahe. The smoke from the Canadian forest fires made visibility extremely poor. A storm built-up right-on top of me without me noticing. Luckly I wasn’t in the middle of a crossing and was close to shore.

**#12: If you were going to give advice for someone planning the same journey, what do you feel would be the best advice and things to consider that you now know about this journey?**

Get a copy of the Complete Paddler. Invaluable. Get as much time in the boat you will be taking prior to the trip as you can. Get to know its capabilities as well as your own. Paddle a few 3 to 5 miles stretches on lakes to know just how fast you can go and how long it would take to cover that sort of distance. Work out any equipment or setup issues. You will be in that boat for days on end and getting your seating right will save you some pain on the actual trip. The same goes for your sleeping arrangements. If you haven’t camped much, get a good quality tent and test any pads and bags to make sure at the end of the day you will have a comfortable place to recharge. Good rain gear and check those out as well. I changed out my rain pants at the last minute to an older pair of bib style that I thought would be better than a new pair of standard pants I had. The second day of my trip I encountered rain and put those on. The minute I sat down I ripped out to bottom. I’m blaming dry rot. If you are not comfortable being by yourself for long time periods you will be at the end of this trip. There are some very remotes sections where you could not see anyone else in days.

**#13: Something about your personality that helped you succeed, whether it being a personal belief, lifestyle, family upbringing, mental state or learned quality?**

My “happy place” has always been outside. Hunting, Fishing, paddling, hiking and such. I grew up close to the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri and have been playing around and on them for years. I have paddled the MR340, a canoe/kayak race from Kansas City to St Charles a few times. So I had the experience of paddling on a large river for long distances. So for once being a stubborn German river rat paid off.

**#14: Worst moment of the journey?**

All my own fault. Last day on Fort Peck. Left The Pines and paddled to the dam. Started raining soon after starting out. Steady rain all day with no wind. So kept paddling. I had heard how the marina had the best burgers and cold beer. That thought kept me motivated to keep going. Overcast and low visibility when I arrived. I remembered that Dave Miller mentioned the campground was across the bay from the marina. So when I saw a campground I pulled in. Sloppy mud banks all around. I looked for the best place to get up to the campground but didn’t find anything but mud. It took multiple trips to haul my gear and boat up to the campsite. When I was done, I was covered head to toe in mud. Wet to the bone and cold. But the thought of a hot juicy cheese burger and cold beer was still in my head. So that’s when I decided to check the Garmin and see how to get to the Marina. That is when I found out that there are 2 campgrounds down by the dam. Duck Creek Rec area and West End Rec Area. West End is the one by the Marina. I had pulled into Duck Creek. Too far to walk to the marina. Dejected, I pulled out the jetboil and cooked up a batch of instance potatoes with a can of deviled ham while standing out in the rain. What should have been a great uplifting ending to completing my first major reservoir ended up a wet ,cold, muddy night kicking myself mentally for not verifying exactly where I was before pulling off. I never let that happen again.

**#15: High tech Gear– Did you bring solar or computer/ gps/ inReach type of gear and what strategy did you use for it?**

I intentionally didn’t bring much in way of “high tech”. A cell phone, inReach gps unit and 3 battery packs were all I brought. I kept my cell phone turned off for most of the day. Only checking it in the evening when I made camp. I used the inReach for tracking and to text my wife when I would get on and off the water each day. Also used it for navigation and weather reports. I did purchase a new Ricoh digital camera to bring on this trip. I decided on a camera instead of using the cell phone camera for a couple of reasons. One, I knew I was going to keep the cell phone off for most of the trip and I wanted to be able to snap a quick picture if needed. Cell phones take a bit to boot up. The Ricoh powered on very quickly. Two, I wanted to have a little more functionality when it came to taking pictures. The Richo had a better zoom and higher resolution than my cell phone.

**#16: Did you modify any gear to help in the safety or efficiency of your trip? ( A rudder, Spray cover, sail, pontoon etc?)**

I cut a new rudder for my canoe in an attempt to make it more responsive. Helped a bit. I did buy a sail kit but did not end up bringing it along. I had limited amount of time learning how to use the sail before leaving and did not think this was the trip to learn on. Also, was not sure how often it would come in handy versus the space it would take up. I did have a full spray skirt and used it every day.

**#17: How did you determine where to camp and did you have a specific place that you preferred such as secluded as not to be seen by others?**

I preferred to camp away from any possible contact with outsiders. So looked for nice open banks that didn’t have any access roads to or around. I added the optional topo maps on my inReach and could check for roads and buildings close by. Tried to avoid camping at any boat ramps. Islands and isolated sand bars were my favorite. Cows were another thing that I grew to detest camping around. But on the Lakes they were almost impossible to avoid. I took to scouting the sites and checking the age and number of the cow tracks and poop before I would settle on a site.

**#18: What was your typical meal plan/food and snacks? (Did you resupply, and how?)**

That was the hardest thing for me to plan. I packed about 20 packs each of the Knorrs noodles, rice and instant potatoes. About 20 packs of tuna and 20 of chicken. About 12 small cans of deviled ham. A box of crackers, a couple of packs of soft tortillas, 2 boxes of pop tarts, 40 plus packs of instant oatmeal. I spent a few weeks dehydrating apples, pears, berries, and bananas. And made multiple batches of beef jerky and biltong. Vacuum packed all those items. One large bag of sunflower seeds, one large bag of trail mix. Various flavors of mix for my water bottles. One bottle of Bourbon. I had one major resupply shipment sent when I was at Tobacco Gardens. And I supplemented that with a couple of shopping trips in between, compliments of river angels.

**#19: An interesting unknown fact that may surprise someone and/or has nothing to do with the trip? (This may include an accomplishment, hobby, former job or experience?**