

PADDLING ODYSSEYS OF 2016



Janet Moreland paddled the Mississippi River in 2016 and plans to paddle the Yukon in Canada and Alaska this year.

By Molly McGuire

Photos courtesy of the paddlers

Chart courtesy of John Sullivan

Every spring witnesses a new hatch of long-distance paddlers and rowers on the Mississippi River. Some travel its length, from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico, about 2,300 miles.

Sometimes their adventures get out of hand. This year a paddler was run over by a barge and another nearly froze to death.

Since 2014, the annual gaggle of river adventurers has become more of a community, thanks to the Mississippi River Paddlers Facebook Page, administered by John Sullivan, a

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retired water quality specialist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and a paddler himself. He invites long-distance paddlers to report their progress, share stories and photos, and help each other. An informal community of "river angels" also uses the page and helps the travelers. Through that site and the many paddler blogs, armchair travelers and river angels can share the travelers' journeys.

Sullivan keeps a tally of the paddlers who have come to his attention, but some stay under the radar. Sullivan figures he recorded about 95 percent of the long-distance paddlers who came down the river this year.

He estimates that about 35 traveled the whole river — at



Danielle Kreuzsch, Flipper of "Skipper and Flipper," sails Solvi, a homemade faering.



The "Oles on the Mississippi" celebrate at the end of their journey.

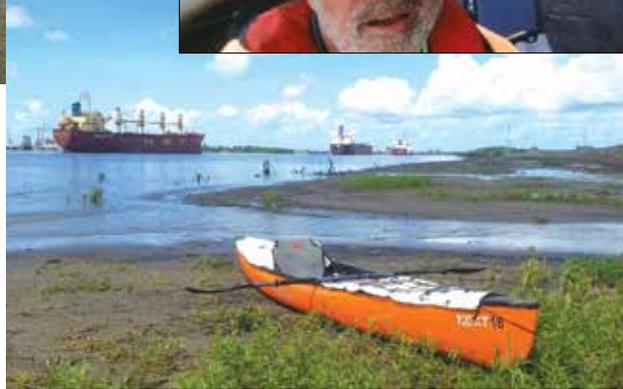
Paddlers	Boat type	Start Date	Start Location	End Date	End Location
Paul Spring, Sam Phipps	canoe	4/28/16	Lake Itasca	6/13/16	St. Louis, MO
Sam Voelker	?	4/30/16 ?	Lake Itasca	?	?
Michael Stone	inflatable kayak	5/1/16	Lake Itasca	9/6/16	Donaldsville, LA
Stefan Giersdorf		4/29/16	Lake Itasca	5/17/16	Winona, MN
David Rossow, Dustin Schramel	canoes & kayaks	5/9/16	Lake Itasca	8/1/16	New Orleans, LA
Elinor Israel	kayak	5/21/16	Lake Itasca	8/2/16	Gulf
Jesse Gourevitch	canoe	5/24/16	Lake Itasca	7/24/16	Gulf
Janet Moreland	kayak	5/25/16	Lake Itasca	7/28/16	Gulf
Bill Nedderman	canoe	5/25/16	Lake Itasca	?	Quad Cities?
Ethan Norton	kayak	5/25/16	Lake Itasca	mid-June	Red Wing, MN
Kristyna Gergen	kayak	5/28/16	Lake Itasca ?	8/15?	Minneapolis, MN
Park Neff, John Keen	canoe	6/1/16	Lake Itasca	8/2/16	Gulf
Jeff Buncie	kayak	6/1/2016 ?	Lake Itasca	11/1/16	Baton Rouge, LA
Mike Saunders	canoe	6/3/2016 ?	Lake Itasca	8/21/16	New Orleans, LA
Zach Meer	paddleboard	6/4/2016 ?	Lake Itasca	7/4/16	St. Paul
Bennie Giles	canoe	6/6/16	Lake Itasca	9/15/16	Gulf
Susan Rather, Jeffrey Tews	kayak, canoe	6/11/16	Lake Itasca	6/29/16	Minneapolis
Scott Hite	kayak	6/12/16	Lake Itasca	9/13/16	Morgan City, LA
James French	canoe	6/16/16	Lake Itasca	9/5/16	Gulf
Eric Landry, Jason Talamont, Sineod Sellick	?	6/23/16	Lake Itasca	9/5/16	Gulf
Jamie Buckley	kayak	6/26/16	Lake Itasca	10/24/16	Gulf
Coleman Elliot, Andy ?	canoe	7/6/16	Lake Itasca	8/22/16	New Orleans
Brandon Columbus	?	7/7/16	Lake Itasca	9/5/16	Gulf
Chris Matejick, Colton Upchruch	canoe	8/12/16	Lake Itasca	10/15/16	Gulf
Nate ?, Daniel Castaneda, Kevin Will	kayak	7/13/16	Lake Itasca	10/28/16	Gulf
Jonathan Zintek	kayak	8/4/16	Lake Itasca	9/7/16	St. Louis
Josh Roemer	canoe	8/5/16	Lake Itasca	10/14/16	Gulf
Oliver Simes	kayak	8/6/16	Lake Itasca	10/19/16	Gulf
Oar Northwest: Sam Freidman, Jordan Hansen, Eric Nathanson, Audra Tromly, Calli Vastaka	canoes to Twin Cities then 2 rowboats	8/15/16	Lake Itasca	11/24/16	Gulf
Cody Presny	canoe	8/16/16	Lake Itasca	12/9/16	Gulf
Haley Brasile		”	”	”	”
Matthew Furman	kayak	8/17/16	Lake Itasca	11/13/16	Gulf
Graham Montgomery	?	8/28/16	Lake Itasca	10/29/16	Gulf
Charles Chandler	kayak	9/4/16	Lake Itasca	11/29/16	Gulf
Matthew Burdine (continuation of 2015 trip)	canoe	3/29/16	St. Louis	5/14/16	Gulf
Perry Whitaker	?	4/30/16	St. Louis	?	?
Eric Reeves	kayak	5/20/16	Riverton, IA	?	?
Miranda Panda	canoe	6/5/16	St. Louis	6/19/16	Memphis
Spencer Meek		”	”	?	?
Aaron Stets, Perry Tetreault, Miles Tyler	canoe	6/6/16	Northfield, MN	7/17/16	Gulf
Zach Kersey	canoe	6/30/16	Savanna, IL	8/30/16	Baton Rouge, LA
Mike Malott, Dave Randolph	kayak	7/3/16	Lake Irving, MN	10/3/16	Gulf
Adam Springob, Claudia Troyer	canoe	8/12/16	Minneapolis	10/24/16	Memphis
Kyle Hawkins, Danielle Kreusch	rowboat/sailboat	8/15/16	St Croix Fall, WI	11/19/16	Gulf
Will Collins	?	8/19/2016 ?	KeKalb, IL	?	?
Kevin McNamara	canoe	9/1/16	North Juson, IN	10/23/16	Below Venice, LA
Bito Beitzel	canoe	10/01/16	Muscatine, IA	12/9/16	Gulf



Haley Brasile paddles into a storm over Lake Pepin.



Above: Two groups meet in a lock: Mission Mississippi 2016 (r) and Nature-Appreciation-Adventures. (Park Neff)



Left: Mike Saunders' kayak rests on a bank in the lower river.

least to New Orleans but most to the Gulf. About the same number made a major part of the trip. Some were solo paddlers, the rest were in small groups of two or three, except Oar Northwest, whose five members traveled the river in rowboats collecting samples and data, and visiting classrooms. They plan to publish a video of their trip. A large Google Trekker camera was mounted on the bow of one of the boats, collecting images that will someday be integrated into Google Street View.

Cody Presny and Haley Brasile, calling their effort “Amongst the Current,” paddled “to develop an organization that could promote the stewardship and conservation of some of our most important waterways and freshwater resources ... to meet, volunteer with, and promote those organizations that work diligently to protect the waterways and the people who depend on them.”

On their way to Moline, Ill.:

“We radioed in to Lock and Dam 14, just as we always do, about a mile upstream. We were both grateful and lucky that the facility was still operating, as we had heard of expected high water Lock closings, south of the cities. By this time, 90% of the Barge traffic and 99% of the pleasure craft traffic, on the river, had seized. When our transmission was returned, We heard a certain level of surprise in the Lock master’s voice; I suppose he had not expected to receive a request to lock through, and he most certainly did not expect the call to have come from a southbound canoe.

“He told us that he would have the gates open for us when we arrived, and urged us to stick close to the Iowa side of the river. We heeded his advise, and it was a good thing we did. At one half mile above the dam we felt the current begin to drag us in. At flood stage, the Army Corps has no choice but open all the dam gates, in order to avoid damaging the system or destroying it completely. We paddled our tails off in order to hold our position on the Iowa shoreline and safely navigate our way into the Lock Chamber. We learned a valuable lesson on the sheer power of the river, this day.

Janet Moreland kayaked from Itasca to the Gulf, her second river run. In 2013 she was the first woman to paddle the

Missouri and Mississippi to the Gulf, a 3,800-mile trip. This year she plans to do the Yukon.

Kyle Hawkins and Danielle Kreuzsch, calling themselves “Skipper and Flipper,” rowed and sailed a vessel they built, a beautiful faering (an open Scandinavian boat with two pairs of oars) named *Solvi*. They started on the St. Croix in August, joined the Mississippi at Prescott, Wis., and eventually made it to the Gulf, via the Atchafalaya River. After sailing east on the Gulf they rode a tandem bicycle to Florida. Videos of their trip and the boat’s construction are posted online.

Danielle wrote about arriving at the Gulf:

“And then not one dolphin, but two dolphins flew out of the water, in sync, and dove into the air at least 3ft before gracefully diving back in. Again and again dolphin jumping, sliding, slapping their tails and quite literally putting on a show before the setting sun. Tears filled my eyes — I felt like I was floating in pure joy. The last three months of extremely hard work and dedication led to this moment and I just couldn’t contain myself. I was running around and jumping all about.”

Mike Saunders ended his trip near New Orleans instead of continuing to the Gulf.

From his blog:

“Very rarely do my trips terminate at a random spot along the trail, yet here I was planning to pull off before the river’s end. After two and a half months traveling over 2200 miles, I had yet to reach the Gulf of Mexico but had at least reached “second base” on my first date with Ol’ Miss. Staring at the mangled mosquito mosaic across the mesh of my tent, I thought about the physical and mental endurance of a trip like this. I came close to my physical limit early on in the trip when I overexerted myself and took a week to fully

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recover. The stamina to keep my mind engaged and enjoying the adventure in the face of sweltering heat, terrifying tornadoes and rhythmic paddling was often a surprise to myself.

“The last few weeks have been quite trying. Other than the typical effort of constant paddling daily, some of my gear and myself is starting to fall apart! I’ve sewn my pants four or five times now with both knees flopping open ... My hat has been sewn a few times and patched but is just barely holding on. The rope I used to secure it has begun to mildew and the smell of it lingers in my beard. Everything has been wet, mildew and funky for two weeks and I’m happy the end is near.

“I’m admiring the size and design of the tanker to my left when I hear a ship horn blow behind me. Constantly scanning my horizon, I’m horrified and disappointed to see a downstream tow 5 barges wide barreling down on me. It must have been obscured by the fleeted barges and blended in. It’s narrow between the moored tanker center channel and the active petroleum barges nosed into the bank. The horn bellows once more and although I’m already paddling to shore, I get a small jump and paddle faster. The blades whirl over my head as spray splashes my face and pelts the canoe. I make out the heaping piles of coal on the approaching threat and consider how unlikely it would be that one of Appalachia or Pennsylvania’s mountains sunk me to my end.”

Utah resident **Michael Stone**, paddling an inflatable kayak towing two others, was caught in a snowstorm near Bemidji, Minn., in early May and tipped over. He sent a distress call to his wife (using his phone’s remaining charge), but before rescuers showed up, another person saw Stone in distress and flagged down a couple of Department of Natural Resources guys who rescued Stone. He went to the hospital then continued on his trip, eventually without the two extra kayaks. He ended the trip in Donaldsonville, La., on September 6.

He wrote in his blog, “How Not to Kayak the Mississippi River:”

“If I had to do it over I would not do it any other way; but I would do this, I would take you with me, for what I saw and heard and did cannot be described.

“For those who know me I ACCOMPLISHED EVERYTHING I SET OUT TO DO. FOR MY WIFE, I’M COMING HOME, I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ALONE AGAIN.”

Hans Frischeisen, 76, has been on many recent adventures, including crossing the country on a bicycle four times. His luck almost ran out on the river when he was struck by a barge. He survived, only after seeing what the bottom of a barge looks like underwater. According to the *Ottumwa* (Iowa) *Courier*, the barge rolled right over him and his kayak when they both turned towards shore. “I could see the bottom of the barge; very ugly, but I could also see light.”

He popped up, and so did his damaged canvas kayak, about 40 feet away. The tow crew pulled him up out of the water. He called it quits.

Three students from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., started on the Cannon River in Northfield. The light-hearted “**Oles on the Mississippi**” traveled in one canoe, made lots of friends and kept an entertaining blog.

From “Day 4, Locked and Loaded:”

“Ahoy. We are writing from our campsite just outside of Winona, we traversed about 33 miles today, once again battling the wind. The landmark of the day had to be our first (and second ... and third) lock experience. We approached the first lock with caution, armed with our paddles and marine radio. As we arrived a barge was heading north through the lock, stealing priority from us (how dare they). After an hour and a half wait — and crushing our first crossword of the trip — we identified ourselves to the lock master as a ‘south-bound pleasure craft’ which we were told is the proper nautical terminology. We then silently entered the lock alone and were greeted by the lock master himself. The doors closed behind us and the water level began to drop along with our fears. Soon we were out the door and back on the river. After completing this process twice more, with expert radio analyst Miles at the helm, it is safe to say we are lock masters in training. We are hoping for a big push tomorrow to get south of La Crosse and closer to the Iowa border. Having found the keys to the locks, the only thing that stands between us and New Orleans is Perry’s cooking.”

Josh Roemer, from Milwaukee, echoed a feeling that many paddlers express at the end of a source-to-sea adventure:

“This trip continually baffles me. I keep meeting the most random people who continually bestow the kind of love and caring that is usually reserved for friends and family. I can’t say enough how much this means in our current times. The way we treat each other, especially strangers, says so much about who we are as people. I will never be the same again.” 🙏 🌊

Molly McGuire is *Big River’s* managing editor.



Janet Moreland at the Gulf.