

FRIDAY, 20 JUNE 2014

By 6:30 we're on the road to Jud's house in Ft. Collins; Marsha and Sue are there and Marsha's boat is already on Jud's car. Sue seems to have come down with a really bad cold. We make a stop at Walgreens for cold medicine and head out on I -25 toward Cheyenne. It's not very windy, which is a huge treat!

We stop for the inspection in Cheyenne then continue north to Glendo. Sue is feeling worse and is having second thoughts, so we pick an exit in Sheridan and agree to meet there. By the time we arrive, she has found a motel room and Marsha's gear has been transferred to Jud's car. We bid Sue goodbye. She did a great deal of the coordinating so this is not a happy ending for her.

The remaining four of us—Gary, Jud, Marsha, and me—continue to Billings and north to Roundup, where we grab a bit to eat at a local kitchen; then we are on our way again, with about 100 miles to go. On the trip north, even Wyoming was green because of the extraordinarily wet spring, but Montana is downright lush—lots of fields of good grass, rolling hills, and rock outcropping,

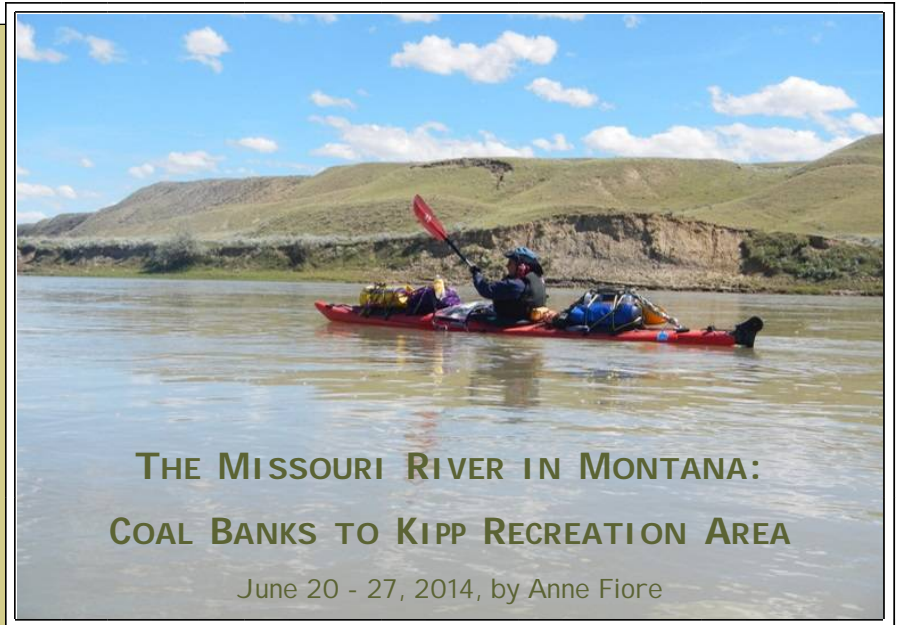
It's still light when we arrive at the Kipp Recreation Area, so we hurriedly set up the tent and prepare the pads and sleeping bags and have a beer. We are camped in a huge grove of old cottonwoods and our tent is on grass, definitely a treat from the dry gravelly areas of Colorado and Wyoming. Gary and I walk down to the entrance area where the pay booth is and we see an owl perched on the electric wire.

**SATURDAY, 21 JUNE 2014
DAY 1**

The shuttle arrived at the take-out at Kipp Recreation Area promptly for our 9:30 meeting time. Boats and gear were packed up quickly and we were on the road by 10:00 AM. Our driver's route took us north and then west through Ft. Belknap, Havre, and quite a few other towns. Havre is big enough for all the modern conveniences: McDonald's, Pizza Hut, etc. It is pretty country,

flat and rolling, with many named drainages, called coulees. I remember a line from a Ferlinghetti poem, "...towns held to the tracks as if by magnets." In this case, they're held to water as if by magnets.

We arrive at Coal Banks around 1:30 PM and sign in with the ranger. We unload, pack up and are on our way by 2:30. It is a nice flow (11,800 cfs/5 mph), definitely not pushy and once I get going, I can easily ferry.



The sun is out, the sky is blue and we have a nice tailwind. The landscape surrounding today's section is mostly the soft rolling hills similar to those I remember from the Ft. Randall Dam area on the Missouri River in South Dakota. There is pastureland and lots of cows.

The camp at Coal Banks is downriver about a mile or so on the left, in a nice grove of cottonwoods. Once we pass the campground, the river braids into three though I see only two. Gary mentions he is going right and suddenly he is nowhere to be seen. The remaining three of us eddy out at the end of the left-most branch and wait...and wait...but he does not come. Then finally Marsha and Jud see him downstream, beyond the end of the island on the far right. We paddle down and meet up and then continue down being more aware of where everyone is and their possible routes.

We simply paddle. At one point we go down the left channel. There are cows on the left but also one on the island and I wonder if he swam there. Actually, we are all wondering the same thing when he steps out into the water and walks across! He's hardly up to his haunches, which gives us an idea of how deep the river is (or isn't).



Our original itinerary had us paddling five or so miles the first day to Little Sandy Boat Camp so we pull out there. It is a nice setting with an outhouse and two fire pits but it's pretty early yet. Marsha suggests continuing on down to the Eagle Creek Camp Site, another 10 miles so perhaps two more hours of paddling which would get us there at 6:30. The weather is great and we have lots of energy, so we decide to go for it. On this leg, we put more effort into paddling and move right along. Marsha says we are traveling at 7 or so mph; based on that, we'll be at our destination in less than 2 hours.

After Little Sandy, we enter the point where the White Cliffs begin. And here I expected that both sides of the river would be public land but it seems like it is mostly private.

I keep looking at the guidebook and then at the map to figure out where we are. There is a feature called "Black Butte". Many of the round points we pass have a dark layer toward the top so I think

any of them could be it. But then I read closer and see it is made of igneous rock and realize I should be looking for a pillar of black rock. Before long, I look ahead and see a butte shaped rock that is dark from top to bottom. Finally, Black Butte! But I look again and see the name is actually Burned Butte. Our camp is not far beyond.

I am the last in our procession, so by the time I arrive, Gary is already pulled up on a sandy/pebbly shore. Ahead, I see a camping sign and start to pull ahead. Jud is already out and gives a thumbs up but I notice there are two canoes pulled ashore and decide to move on down a bit further where there is a nice wide beach and pull out there. There are no parked boats, so that is a good sign. I convince Jud to move on down. Gary arrives and is OK with this site. We are home for the night. We unload, setup camp, and settle down to beer and cooking. A great river day and a great place to be!

Wildlife today: in addition to the cows, there are hawks and ducks. Gary, on his right river branch foray, saw two sets of geese with goslings. We also see barn swallows that are dark on top and orange underneath. They make nests on cliffs and there are plenty of cliffs in the "breaks".



Swallow nests



SUNDAY, JUNE 22, 2014

DAY 2

Our original plan called for two nights here at Eagle Creek with a full day of hiking. So after breakfast we start in to hike. We look across the river at a huge dark bird down at the shore which we expect is a golden eagle. Also, along the way we see an eastern kingbird with its white tail band scurrying from bush to bush.

Our first stop is a Lewis and Clark campsite which turns out to be on the other side of Eagle Creek with no easy way to cross, at least not without taking our shoes off. We decide to come back later with river shoes so for now we hike up the creek. We follow it until we reach a spot where it isn't passable without getting our feet wet so we backtrack a bit, remove our shoes and socks, and cross and continue up the other side until again we cannot continue without getting our feet wet.



In all, this hike is much like our Utah wanderings of cliff bands which have been worn into monuments and pillars of various shapes, but the rocks are mostly white and there's much more vegetation. I look but don't see any rock art and actually wonder why.

We head back with the intention of finding that Lewis and Clark campsite (since we are now on that side of the river). We find many places that look ideal for a camp but do not find the plaque. We give up after awhile and cross the stream to our camp to rest.

Jud and Marsha stay in camp while Gary and I head over to investigate Neat Coulee, the next coulee heading downriver. This is a different kind of hike as compared to Eagle Creek; it is a narrower canyon to start with, becoming more narrow as we progress. We pass a window high up in the wall of the canyon and stop to take a picture. Again, this is reminiscent of Utah, except the color of the rock is different.

This canyon does neck down into a slot-like canyon. There are puddles to pass over and in a couple of spots we stem and chimney. I realize that both are easier once you get started. There are also a couple of chockstones we pass up and over. Then we approach a very large one. We might have been able to shimmy underneath and then through, but I am starting to get tired and this seems like the standard turn-around point so we head back. In retrospect, I should have tried; it may not have been hard, but my mind was on snakes.

Here's the snake story: I was a bit behind Gary and looked down at something flat and striped, almost like a child's beaded bracelet. Then it moved! I realized it was a flattened-out snake that might have inadvertently been stepped on. But by the time we got back to that place, it was gone.

We head back to camp, make supper and sit up for awhile before turning in.



Walking back toward camp from Neat Coulee

MONDAY, 23 JUN 2014

DAY 3

We were up at a reasonable hour and on the river by 10:30 or so. We decide we like the developed camps simply because of the convenience of a toilet, so our goal today is Slaughterhouse River camp, about 20 miles or so, which is also the site of another Lewis and Clark camp. It was a very pleasant paddle downriver, again with a tail wind which was not too strong, and again the day was through white walled canyons.



We see another bald eagle at the top of a dead snag guarding its nest...and a couple of smaller birds harassing it. At the Slaughter River camp, there are yellowish birds with dark colors, species not determined.

Also today there is a deer at the shoreline and four different families of geese and their goslings floating across the river. And, as every day, there are the sounds of birds in the pre-dawn hours.

We had lunch at Hole-in-the-Wall camp, another developed camp with an outhouse but very little in the way of trees, so named due to a window in the rock outcropping downstream from camp. Evidently folks will hike on the outcropping above hole-in-the-wall but I imagine it's a bit more exposure than I prefer plus its access point is another half-mile downstream. Before leaving, we haul a bucket or two of water from the river and water the cottonwood saplings the BLM has planted.



Hole-in-the-Wall



The Citadel

Then back in the boats and again turn downstream. Another point of interest along the way is the Black Butte Campground, another developed campsite.

The book notes that this is a place for hiking and indeed it looks like there are cool canyons and hills to explore behind camp; it's a good place to keep in mind for another time.

We continue on and we pass Pueblo Springs Campground; this one is labeled 'primitive' with no bathroom but it's in a small grove of cottonwood trees.

Around 4:00 or so we arrive at the Slaughter River campsite. The take-out is pretty muddy but we manage to get our boats hauled out. There is a nice stair-step approach to the camp which is fenced to keep the cattle out. I am tired and take a quick rest before helping to set camp up. I turn in by 8:00 or so and sleep very soundly. I wake up when Gary comes in, take some naproxen and fall back asleep almost immediately.



The Seven Sisters

TUESDAY, 24 JUN 2014

DAY 4

We wake up fairly early, by 7:30 or so, make breakfast, break camp, pack up and paddle away by 10:30. Today we have a short paddle, our goal being Judith Landing. We alternately paddle and float, taking in the surrounding landscape. We do have a moderate headwind, not ferocious, and not a struggle to paddle into.

As we approach Judith Landing, I expect to see a strong-flowing Judith River coming in from the south but we pass without even noticing it. What is notable is a group of horses at the river's edge, enjoying the shade of the cottonwoods and a drink of water.

An aside about the river, and the landscape in general: The river is wide and flat, moving along but by no means rushing and I have been able to paddle upstream.

The surrounding landscape has been a variety of flat benches, grassland, sagebrush, the white cliffs of the 'breaks' and other land forms of barrier hills of layered rock of different hue and colors. In all, much like Ruby Horsethief but differently colored.



We arrive at Judith Landing at about 12:30 or so. Turns out, there is no country store (and hasn't been for at least four years), so no cold beer or ice or twinkies or whiskey. Lucky for us, we did not count on these supplies. We take out, eat lunch, dispose of trash, and walk up to a marked Lewis and Clark site.



Then we climb back into our boats again. We have not really reached a consensus about where to spend the night. In 8 miles (at mi. 96) there is a grove of cottonwoods mentioned in both the guide and in *The Complete Paddler*. We assess the campground, but opt to keep going (the lack of a toilet impacts this decision). We had planned to camp at McGarry Bar but it is closed, according to the sign at Judith, due to nesting eagles.

That posting mentions camping at the McClelland Ferry but when we arrive there are no appealing camping areas and no sign of a bathroom (although there is a ferry) so we continue paddling. The sky is beginning to look threatening and we wonder if we should just pull off at a nice cottonwood grove. At the ferry, we have paddled 27 miles and need to think about finding a place to camp. We check out spots down river from the camp at McGarry Bar but none seem like home. (Along the way Gary and Marsha spy a snake swimming across the river. The Missouri was not that wide but I'm sure it's an ocean to a snake. Gary stays with him until he is safely across.)

The book mentions Greasewood Bottom. We raft up, discuss the situation and decide to head there since we are using time and energy checking out places that are not panning out. I take a closer look at the maps, trying to line them up with landmarks. Having the topo maps is now paying off as I can count the creeks and landforms between where we are and Greasewood Bottom. Though, of course, the cottonwoods are really the telling landmark, and before long they are visible. We paddle, pull up, unload, and set up camp. Everyone is tired. We've gone 33 miles, making this the longest I have ever paddled. I am tired, but not bonked, and my arms and shoulders do not ache, a very good sign.

We decided to spend two nights at Greasewood Bottom. It seems like a rest day would be wise and this is a recommended hiking area.



Gary, headed up the canyon for a hike from our camp at Greasewood Bottom

WEDNESDAY, 25 JUN 2014

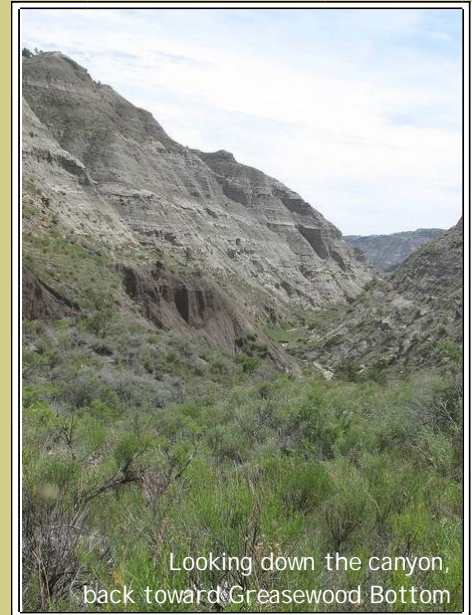
DAY 5

Gary and I decide to hike today so we leave from the Greasewood Bottom camp in a northwesterly direction at the sunny hour of 11:30. First we step up to the bench above the tent area (our tents are on a landing above the river at the same level as the cottonwoods). On the bench above is sagebrush and another plant similar to sagebrush but with much greener and shorter leaves. Gary wonders if it is Greasewood; here is what Wikipedia says:

Greasewood is a common name shared by several plants:

Sarcobatus vermiculatus is a green-leaved shrub found from southeastern British Columbia and southwest Alberta, Canada south through the drier regions of the United States (east to North Dakota and west Texas, west to central Washington and eastern California) to northern Mexico (Coahuila). It is a halophyte, usually found in sunny, flat areas around the margins of playas.

The *Sarcobatus* plants are deciduous shrubs growing to 0.5–3 m tall with spiny branches and succulent leaves, 10–40 mm long and 1–2 mm broad. The leaves are green, in contrast to the grey-green color of most of the other shrubs within its range. The flowers are unisexual, with the male and female flowers on the same plant and appear from June to August. The species reproduces from seeds and sprouts. *S. vermiculatus* was discovered in 1806 by the Lewis and Clark expedition's westward exploration of North America.



We have our sights set on a canyon that snakes its way between two ridges made of huge mounds of what looks like mud and expect to flow away in the first big rainstorm. Yes, they are wearing away but not any time soon!

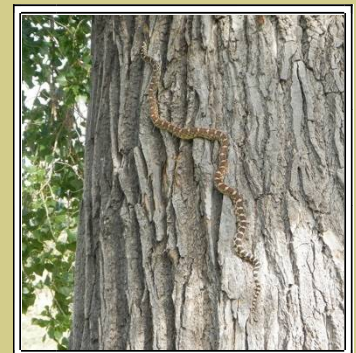
We hike up into the gully which is a bit of a canyon of the worn down leftovers of the mounds littered with various types and colors of pebbles. I pick one up, brick red in color. Later, Gary spies a bit of quartz, which is interesting as there are not many pieces of quartz to be seen. There are bits of agate plus that cement-like composite we've seen elsewhere in the west. We continue up, winding along the gully bottom which is wet enough to sink our feet in every now and then.

After about an hour or so, the gully narrows with higher walls. So we hop out and climb up unto the bench and continue upward. It's obvious we are nowhere near the top so we take a lunch break and look out over the canyon, though we cannot quite see the river.

After a bite to eat, we retrace our steps, arriving back in camp around 2:30. On today's hike, there was no sign of early habitation although this would appear to be a likely area for human dwelling, though perhaps not as inviting as the Eagle Creek Area.

We rest a bit then head down to the river to wash clothes. Then we swim, a nice respite from sun and sweat, going in only chest high so the current is manageable but it feels strong enough to push us around some, although where we enter the water is in a big eddy so we are protected from the main force of the current.

Once done back at camp, I write. Everyone is resting and relaxing, a nice R and R. After a bit, Gary calls us over to the next tree where a bull snake is slithering up, being chastised by a small yellow bird (this one had a yellow head, white underbelly and long pointed dark beak) which Marsha thought was a warbler.



THURSDAY, 26 JUN 2014

DAY 6

This is the only place where there is a mud wallow to cross, and the vault toilet is about full. Other things about the last camp at Lower Woodhawk: finding a landing spot definitely takes some time. There is no post as is the case at nearly all the other established camps, primitive or developed. We first stop just past the halfway point of the cottonwood grove. Big surprise as we sink in up to our knees. Gary goes down on all fours and makes some headway. I follow suit and find this to be quite effective. Once across, I scurry up to camp, locate the picnic tables and vault toilet, then look for a beaten path to the shore. Once found, I follow it and there is Jud, debarking in a more solid area. Meanwhile, Marsha paddles back upstream to where he is. Gary and I re-cross the quicksand, and paddle upstream and debark.



The trail at Lower Woodhawk Camp, with Jud's bug house in the background

FRIDAY, 27 JUN 2014

DAY 7

Today, our last day, Gary is being attacked by gnats nearly the whole way out and is quite envious of Marsha's bug hat. So a word of advice: bring a bug hat and another hat like a ball cap with a brim to keep the net away from your face.

We arrive at Kipp around 2 PM. We drive straight back to Lyons arriving about 5 AM.



Jud and Marsha, wearing her bug hat



Flowers: The Prickly Pears were blossomed out yellow with a very orange center as compared to those at Eagle Creek which had

yellow centers. There was also a purple aster-like flower, and white morning glories near the shore with white flowers similar in size to those that grow in my yard, much larger than the bind weed along the front range.

Speaking of these observations in nature, I think again of pursuing yet another avocation, that of a naturalist as well as gaining more knowledge of native American history and migration: Where did they live? In Montana, what does one look for to find a site? And so on...

Did I mention I would do this again? Absolutely. The memories of just sitting and floating and/or paddling: Bliss beyond measure!

Article by Anne Fiore;
photos by Anne and Jud Hurd

Another aside, about other groups on the water: Actually, there were not very many people along the way. When we first got to Eagle Creek campsite, there were already two canoes. We chose a site down at the far end to allow them as much privacy as possible. They left the next morning and were replaced by a flotilla of two rafts, two canoes and a standup paddleboard.

Also stopping by to visit at Eagle Creek were two men from Missoula, Montana, who recommended hiking the Neat Coulee. They planned on continuing on to Hole-in-the-Wall campground that day. At lunch on Monday at Hole-in-the-Wall two men paddled up in canoes with outriggers. And at Pablo Springs there was a green canoe, perhaps the two Missoula guys.

Definitely the most interesting was a young man who stayed at Slaughter River on Monday night. He had been on the river since June 3rd, putting in at Twin Bridges, Montana (on a tributary of the Missouri) and intended to paddle home to Dallas, Texas; the last leg would be up the Red River in Texas. Here is his website: <http://www.canoevoyage.com>

MISCELLANEOUS POST TRIP NOTES:

- 7 gallons of water in my sea kayak turned out to be not that big of a deal, although I had supplies strapped on top of both the front and back hatches. Definitely do a practice pack. Those long narrow liters I bought worked well but platypuses might have done as well.
- Jud's bug house/group shelter would be an essential for this trip. I think overall our bug encounters were small (compared to the Flattops and the South San Juan Wilderness) but without it I would have cooked and eaten and pretty much stayed in the tent. It was nice to be in the bug house and socialize after a day of paddling.
- We definitely could have put in at Ft Benton and taken out at Kipp. If we did this again, that would be my plan. We should have planned on 20 – 30 miles a day instead of 15 – 20. Also, we could have done half-day hikes and done a few river miles instead of doing two nights in one place. (This comment does not apply to canoes or rec kayaks. On this river, I'm not sure how mixed boats would work.)
- It doesn't get dark till about 10 PM and sunrise is about 4:30 AM. So, not much time was spent star-gazing if you are like me and like to be in bed at 8:00 and up at 7:00.
- On the last day out, I lost count of the number of beaver holes in the bank. I always saw them in the banks with steep sides and with a curtain of branches.
- The flow at Coal Banks was 10,800. By the time we were at Kipp it was a moving lake, so either the flow decreased or the river widened.
- I would ask the UMRBNM or BLM rangers what their favorite campsites and hikes are.
- My personal perception of what the Missouri River is like is based on readings and learning about Lewis and Clark's adventure in the wilderness. For an east coast child, this means thick forests and fast rivers; the Missouri through the Missouri Breaks is neither.
- The primary reference we used, in addition to the river maps from the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, was David L. Miller's *The Complete Paddler: a Guidebook for Paddling the Missouri River ...*
- *Montana's Wild and Scenic Upper Missouri River* by Glenn Monahan is a picture book recommended by Larry Kline and well reviewed on Amazon.

