



Paddling the Missouri River

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By Terry Chase

Celebrating the anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition by paddling a 25-mile stretch of the Missouri River that the historic expedition paddled 200 years ago, Terry Chase and Sharon Blackburn, RMSKC members ventured with 23 folks from around the country on a 3-day trip in mid-September organized by Peer Spirit Wilderness Adventures.

The Missouri River is a big, wide slow moving river rich in natural history, wildlife and historical roots. The 25-mile stretch began just east of the South Dakota town of Yankton. Local guides from Missouri River Expeditions (www.missrivexp.com) provided the camping and kayak equipment, exquisite cuisine and historical tales of the Lewis & Clark expedition. Each day we completed a section of the river returning to a base camp located on private property. Hot breakfasts and dinners were provided by the gourmet talents of Tony Kellar, author of *Camping and Cooking with the Bare Essentials* (North Country Enterprises, 2004). This book is packed with easy to follow gourmet recipes and techniques for the campfire as well as sage, practical advice on many of the finer points of outdoors living.

The river can offer challenges due to changing sandbars and snags of old trees and logjams. The wind is also an issue on most days. Our original trip plans were changed last minute due to high winds and lack of safe take-outs available on the sec-

tion above Lewis & Clark Lake.

While the normal rate of flow is 2-3 mph, the river can have a current of 7 mph when the dams are releasing water. Knowing your paddling ability and understanding the challenges of the Missouri are key to a successful trip. Our trip completed the 25-mile section of the river east of Yankton in increments of approximately 8-15-5 mile stretches. Natural beauty and wonder abounded as we spotted eagles, cormorants and birds. Fish were jumping but not biting as some kayakers trailed baited lines to no avail. The trip was only 3 days long but we really saw firsthand the views of our nations' earliest explorers, the sharp steep banks of the Missouri River, the wind swept prairie lands and the birds, bugs and beauty. Before heading out to our respective homelands the group took a land based tour of Spirit Mound, a striking isolated hill of bedrock knob that was shaped but not leveled by the last Pleistocene glacier 13,000 years ago. Chronicles of the Lewis and Clark expedition indicated that the Captains took 11 men and Seaman (Lewis' dog) to Spirit Mound describing the day in vivid, enthusiastic detail. They were deeply impressed with their view from Spirit Mound. Clark wrote: *"from the top of this Mound we beheld a most butifull landscape; numerous herds of buffalow were Seen feeding in various directions... without interruption as far as can be seen."* Buffaloes were not seen this time as farms, building and loads of trees have grown up filling the view in the 200 years since that

famous expedition.

This trip had elements of both the immersion in the natural world as well as the community building and communication support of the Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, founders of Peerspirit, Inc (www.peerspirit.com). PeerSpirit is an educational company that offers clients a unique blend of compassionate leadership, creative innovation and pragmatic skills in the wilderness as well as retreat and conference settings. Ann Linnea has been a wilderness guide for nearly four decades. She has devoted her life to sharing the wonder and wisdom of the natural world with people of all ages. In her book, *Deep Water Passage: A Spiritual Journey at Mid-life*, (Pocketbook, 1997), she chronicles her courageous journey around the 1800-mile shoreline of Lake Superior by sea kayak. Christina Baldwin, author of *Seven Whispers, Listening to the Voice of Spirit* (New World Library, 2002) is an eloquent and witty speaker and educator, who integrates the spiritual journey and the practical path. Christina and Ann expertly lead the evening circle process fostering a sharing of experience and growth for all paddlers adding a unique touch to the typical kayak adventure.

We highly recommend to our fellow RMSKC paddlers to venture onto the Missouri River. It is a calming and powerful experience of both inner and outer exploration not that far from our own Rocky Mountain paddling paradise.