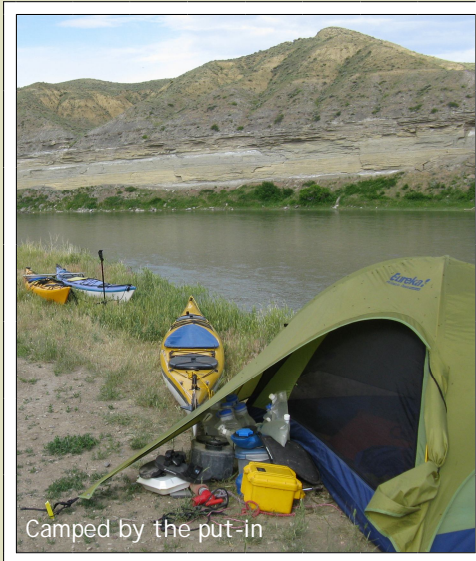


ZIPPING THROUGH THE MISSOURI BREAKS

By Kathleen Ellis



The author, showing off her clean mukluks, a situation that never lasts long on the river



Camped by the put-in

Pam Noe, Eric Niles, Ray Van Dusen and I had a great time paddling the Missouri Breaks in late June. The trip was longer than some because we put in at Carter, upstream of Fort Benton, and took out at Kipp's Landing, 164 miles away, but we did it in five days.

The ferry operator in Carter and his dog were helpful and friendly, there were no concerns about leaving my car at the landing (five miles south of Highway 87, west of Ft. Benton) and the Kipp's Landing take-out was also a safe place to leave vehicles, but the drive and shuttle logistics were daunting. When I got home, my trip odometer showed over 2,000 miles. The shuttle to get gear and cars situated before we put in took seven hours, and it took another three and a half hours for Ray to return my gear and me to Carter after we took out. If you prefer, it is possible to hire an outfitter to help; they'll meet you at the take-out to drive you and your gear to the put-in, or move your car to the take-out while you're on the river.

The BLM sells very nice river maps for only \$4.00 apiece. You will need two maps, which you can pick up in their Ft. Benton office or order ahead of time their website. The BLM website also contains other important information about requirements for paddling this area.

The stretch of river we paddled is Class I with no actual rapids, although there are many named rapids in areas that were dangerous for steamboats, for example, Deadman's Rapid. Ray almost hit 10 mph in one of these stretches. The days were long, with sunrise at 5:30 am and sunset at 9:30 pm, which made it relatively easy to get up early to put in several hours of paddling; we were on the river at 7:00 or very shortly thereafter every morning. One day we paddled 47 miles, courtesy of the tail winds and a long day on the river.



Kathleen and Pam catching a tail wind and moving right along

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One morning there was a simultaneous sunrise and rainbow. Listening to Ray sing the birthday song to Eric at full voice before put-in that day was unforgettable. Much of the time the paddling was idyllic with clear skies, calm breeze, and beautiful scenery. Air Force jets practicing maneuvers provided some unexpected entertainment. The birds, wildlife, old homesteads and geological formations were amazing. The journals of Lewis and Clark describe the area, which is rich with history.

There were times when rain seeped through

my neoprene skirt, leaving me soaked and occasionally chilled until I figured out how to deal with the wet stuff. Next time I will take the Gortex pants with zippered legs instead of snug cuffs so I can put them on over my mukluks. Although we did not see any rattlesnakes, we always had to be aware of where we were putting hands, feet and, well, everything. There were no mosquitoes to speak of. The wind was strong for a couple of days but for the most part, it was a tailwind.

After we took out, we headed for the nearest real food, which we tracked down at the American Legion in Roy, population 387. The Legion Burger was as big as your head, and loaded with bacon, cheese and fried mushrooms. I felt no guilt about all of that artery-clogging grease after our long paddle. The art work on the walls added to the ambiance and was unique, especially in the ladies' room. It was the perfect place to end our trip through the Missouri Breaks.



Photos by Kathleen Ellis, Eric Niles, and Ran Van Dusen



BUGS ON THE MISSOURI

Roger with the BLM office, who helped with maps for an earlier Missouri Breaks article, wrote:

Insect activity varies on how wet the spring is and how quickly the puddles dry. Normally:

- Mosquitoes run from June to mid-July
- Biting flies and deer flies start about July and run through August
- Gnats start in July and run through August, mostly in the lower section



Photos by Pam Noe

SHUTTLE ARRANGMENTS: Pam Noe reports, "I picked up a business card from an outfitter who was dropping off paddlers at Coal Banks. His company will drive vehicles to the takeout, or if there are five or more people, they will pick up paddlers, boats and gear at the take-out and drive everyone to the put-in. Nice guy, from Adventure Bound." [Coincidentally, these are the people that Dick, Larry and George used, and were pleased with, on the trip they made to this area a couple of years ago.]

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