

**Gators & Freighters Day 5,6,7:
Paulina to Bonne Carre Island**



Poche Park -- Paulina LBD 149

*Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No 211
Tuesday, Oct 27, 2015 - Bonne Carre Island*

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For the completion of the [www.rivergator.org](http://www.rivergator.org)

*1 million words describing the Middle & Lower Mississippi River.  
Written for paddlers and any others seeking the “wilderness within”*

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Recap: The paddlers get slammed by gusting winds and bands of torrential rain lashing outwards from Hurricane Patricia, which incredibly has crossed Mexico and is funneling winds and moisture our way! We take shelter at Paulina with the good people of the Poche Family. They are happy to see us. It's been a drought in south Louisiana. They know when I come to visit it's sure to rain! (Like last time I was here with the Brett Roger's Old Man River Expedition in 2009). We strike camp and then seek refuge and resupply with Momma Marylee Orr back at the LEAN-to home base.

Day 5,6 - Paulina - Poche Park -- "Paddlers Paradise"



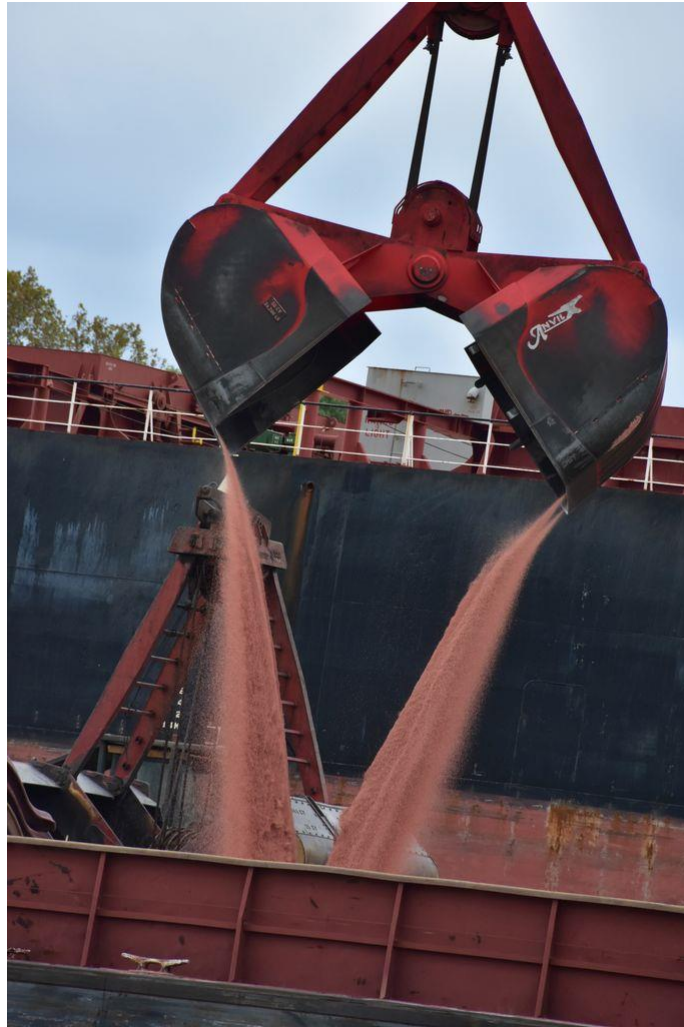
Our camp site in Paulina, LA. is owned by a huge, multi-generational family of Cajuns. A designated place for paddlers between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. A place like no other. Someone, out of the 30 family members living in this homestead, will greet and make sure your crew has what's needed. Firewood stacks in strategic locations. Willow trees covering the area. A beautiful lake with an alligator. If you're lucky, you receive homemade sausage or my favorite - hogshead cheese.

At 3am the torrential rains returned. It's now 7am. It's too wet to start a fire, so everyone hunkers down in their tents. I get dressed in rain gear to consult with our captain to assess the day. I step out of my tent and sink in 10 inches of mud. The campsite has turned into a floodplain. The river was beautiful with a thin layer of haze with drops of hard, but calm, rains barely breaking its surface. Towboats and ocean freighters patiently plowing through the blissful water. Cliff swallows fishing with no deter. I never knew such a hard rain could be so peaceful, nature going about its business.

We decided we would have to evacuate the campsite. Storms and high winds were predicted throughout the day. It would be unsafe on the Mississippi River today. The warm rains had relinquished our cooler of its ice. We had to grab our necessities and haul food to the levee; leaving tents, kitchen gear box, cooler and voyageur canoes. Full evacuation!

The crews regrouping, working together to make this the most efficient process as possible. Everybody is drenched. The campsite has become a swamp and with us churning the mud walking, it has become a mud-pit. Some build trenches to channel the water away from their tents. I pack light. I leave some heavy clothing in my large dry-bag and set it in the middle of my tent, an act of true faith. We start to haul provisions to our rendezvous spot on the levee. Batteries, computers, maps, personals, and food. Multiple trips walking back and forth to the levee in in muck. Moral is high as the adventure endures.

Having participated in many expeditions, I have discovered and valued the unexpected trials and tribulations that make our day to day conveniences irrelevant. I look around at our crew, smiling, wet, tired - really wet. And you can have all the right gear, vessels, and gadgets, but you can't control mother nature. She humbles us every time.



Day 7 - Paulina (RBD149) to Bonne Carre Island (132) -17 miles

The rains finally stop, as we pack up from base camp, headed to resume our voyage. We load up the vehicle and head back to Paulina, LA. to assess our tents and belongings we left behind the previous day. My soul is still wet from the torrential rains that delayed us. The one convenience I like to have more than anything else is a dry tent. As I see it from a distance, I know it's soaked. We all drain and hang them from the willows, hoping the breeze would expedite the drying process.

We all sigh for awhile, but the mood starts to change as we pack the canoes. We have survived adversity, and now it's time to get down the river. I linger for a little longer, knowing I will miss my other team at the Mississippi River Network meeting in New Orleans. My first couple of paddle strokes brought me instantly out of my funk. It was good to back on the river.

We paddle under the Wallace-Gramercy Bridge flowing towards Bell Point. We come across a bauxite factory at Willow Bend called Kaiser Bauxite . Past the complex, an orange substance was being pumped into the Mississippi River. This can't be good. We take pictures and head pass the bend to stop for lunch as three bald eagles serenade us in the sky. After lunch we continue pass Tigerville, to Bonne Carre Point, and stop for camp at Bonne Carre Island.



Behind Bonne Carre Island, the last Island on the Lower Mississippi River

There is deep narrow pool behind camp, which is the start of the back channel of the island. Some of the crew jump in the Cricket canoe and set off to explore while the rest cooked dinner. They returned hours later with a alligator skull. What a find!



We find the River Gator -- his skull anyway!

We enjoy our meal of red cabbage salad and lentil/turmeric/red potato/cauliflower stew and then go over the map of today's paddle. While we are discussing our route, the mosquitoes ambush us. I look down at my boots and they are covered! Not hundreds - but thousands! We retreat to our tents for the evening. I stare at the ceiling of my tent as I write. Thousands of mosquitoes are patiently waiting for me to exit. I've had numerous cups of ginger tea, and it's only a matter of time before I face the swarm.

- Mark River



What adventures await the paddlers downstream? Tune in tomorrow for the next episode.

For photos and more reading, go to www.rivergator.org

The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch

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