

## Gators & Freighters Day 10:

### Will's Point (Jesuit Bend) to Bohemia (Point a la Hache)

*Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No 216*

Posted Halloween, Saturday, Oct 31, 2015 - from Bohemia (LBD46)

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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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**Day 10 - Will's Point (Jesuit Bend/East Bank/LBD68) to to Bohemia (Point a la Hache/East Bank/LBD 46) 22 miles in East headwind 10-15mph gusting to 25mph, sunny and hot (in the 80s)**



*The "gypsy folksinger" Zoe Sundra with her group of "journalists, novelists, bandits and romantics" getting ready to shove off several days ago from Paulina*

***In today's dispatch, our newest Mighty Quapaw, Zoe Sundra takes the helm and shares her story.***

*Quick Intro: the voyageurs paddle hard into increasing headwinds yesterday, another storm system approaching. We are trying to get 30 miles to Port Sulphur (for a beer pickup from our good friends Linda & Barbara & Ruskey -- who just happen to be driving along the same stretch of river!). But the fates have something else in mind. The wind intensifies. Five more miles to Port Sulphur. Our muscles are screaming. We feel like crying. But then three freighters pass by in a solemn row, and we spot an osprey atop a tall sycamore, as if signaling us. At LBD46 a possible campsite at Bohemia swings into view. Dry sand, humps of grass, a beautiful beach several hundred yards long. It looks like paradise. It is! It's Bohemia in the Louisiana Delta. It's "magical!" We feel like "Delta Bohemians." With one hour remaining before sunset a decision is made. We strike camp. Supper is made and tea put on to steep in the glowing coals. But oh no! At full dark a huge container ship passes and the waves crash high up the beach and quench our fire. Is this a safe place to be? Our nerves are rattled by the upset. We fall into an uneasy sleep as severe storms advance across the south. Note: We are running out of battery power, so the next dispatch will not be sent until Monday. Photos by John Ruskey.*



*Zoe Sundra at the prow of the Cricket, Donovan Hohn to the left*

## **Zoe Sundra: Thoughts and observations from the first half of Rivergator Baton Rouge to the Gulf**

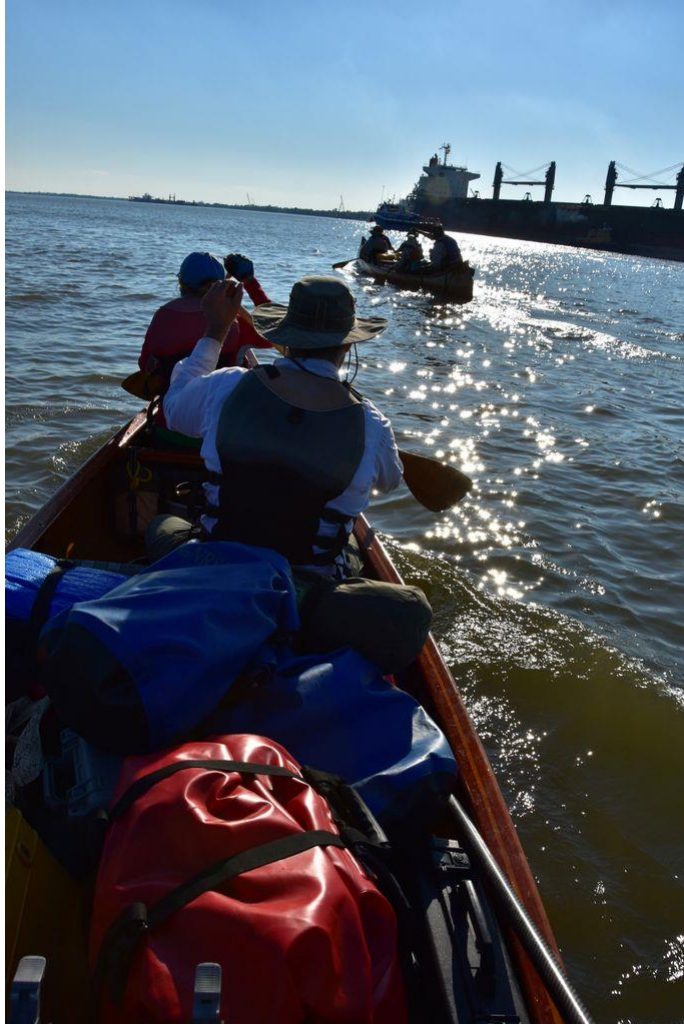
Today was a strong day. Yesterday proved how strong I am and how strong the team is after pushing through 37 miles to an unsure camp at Algiers Point, New Orleans. We spotted a sandbar in the distance that

may as well have been a desert oasis and pulled Cricket and Grasshopper onto shore. Celebration m&ms all around and Chicken Fricassee for dinner courtesy of Wolfie's mama. Beers at the bar later that night, just over the levee.

Around hour 5 of each day my mind drifts and wanders to the same few topics:

Boyfriend (paddle stroke), debts I have to pay off (paddle stroke), what are we going to cook for dinner? (Paddle stroke), call your mother (stroke), call this friend (stroke), call your mother (stroke), call your sister (stroke), boyfriend (stroke) and so on until we have a water break, bathroom break or lunch break.

The freighters seem like dinosaurs, living monsters of an extinct era now tended to by foreigners unable to leave their docks. Some of my favorite names have been Alpine Hibiscus, African Griffon, Monica and best of all Glovis Maple.



*Zoe and Paul Orr pulling the heavy canoe through the heavy waves, swinging paddles like "toothpicks through peanut butter"*

There's been a headwind on and off throughout the trip and has created some of the biggest waves and rollers I've ever seen, John too it turns out. Paddling through the chop and wind feels like stirring peanut butter with a toothpick. It is hard and I can do it, but I am tired and the days are long. The first 2 days I was pushing off feelings of incompetence but now I am so much stronger, the boat is well balanced and team morale is high, even in the rain. Mark and John have been saying that just when you can't paddle another stroke, just when you think you can't make it another day, the wind turns and the river rewards you. I have found this to be true over and over again. The river takes care of us.

Our mornings are calm. Even if we have to push off by 8, there's about 20 minutes before everyone gets up and after breakfast is made where it's the river, the sun and us. John, River and I sometimes talk, sometimes don't and let the hum of barge, freiter and now distant car traffic make the unnecessary noise for us. The river turns from steel grey to lead to blues and pinks as the sun rises, silhouetting the willow trees and creating perfect feathered fingers from the leaves.

I would rather paddle through a 15 mph headwind in the rain past barges and through rollers than work another day in NYC.

But that headwind can be a bitch.

Our crew consists of paddlers, journalists, novelists, bandits and romantics, all of them men, and one bossy gypsy folk singer/rockstar. I fit in surprisingly well.

I'm pushing for a river name and occasionally will throw out suggestions (although I understand river names must be given, and earned). Sea Queen, Heron, Roller...none have really stuck but it's been entertaining to hear Mark River and Wolfie test them out at meal times.

One of the main challenges I've faced on this expedition is having to use the bathroom at night. Not only is it a trial to leave the comfort of my tent, but I will have to battle an army of mosquitos in order to relieve myself. Not to mention I'm a woman and it requires a different set of skills. I put this problem to the group and River suggested a ziploc bag that I keep outside my tent. Two gallon size freezer bags later I am sleeping soundly, stress (and bug bite) free.



*A friendly tugboat pilot comes close and offers advice*

Yesterday a tug captain pulled up right next to our canoe, stuck his head out his door and yelled.

"Where y'all from?"

"Mississippi!"

"Where you goin'?"

"The Gulf!"

"Where'd you start from?"

"Baton Rouge!"

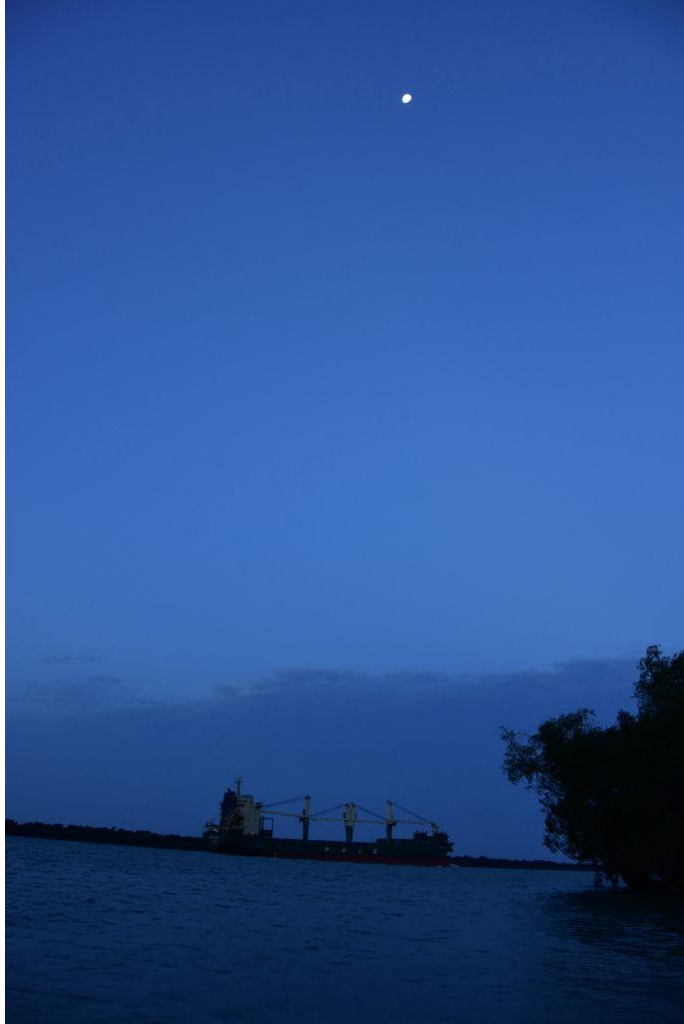
"Y'all are crazy!" and he pulled away, but not before doing a small circular maneuver around us that was either a show of support or intimidation.

We guessed it was the former because about 2-3 hours later he found us again after rotating a freighter and insisted we have marine radios tuned to channel 67 in order to hear the river traffic. We smiled and gave a thumbs up, even though we have radios and are constantly listening and navigating around them. This conversation was about the 4th one we'd had in the past 2 days.

Today was a strong day. I only cramped during our first hour, afterwards my pacing was easy to find and we cruised along downstream, at times (as River puts it) I felt like we were flying over the water.

John has taken to "playing" with the freighters. He'll steer us straight into the bow and then quickly turn us to float in between the ship and her anchor chains. It's very fun, would give the coastguard (and my mother) a heart attack and it again reminds me that I am alive. We are actively creating an adventure we will never forget.





*Waning hunter's moon over Bohemia Beach on Halloween morning*

One night it was dry and windy, with clear skies. I took a walk in the moonlight because I could and it was gorgeous. The wind blew hard and chased away the mosquitos and I was free. I returned to my tent and made my nightly phone call to my boyfriend. He and I are currently on the definition of different planets. He is backstage in a 2000 seat theater in another country, and I just smashed a blood filled mosquito against the wall of my tent.

Still we make it work, and we do it well.

I am grateful for the marvels of technology.



*Oh the joy! Zoe and Paul celebrate a safe landing at Bohemia Beach after a difficult day's paddle*

There is no way to describe the experience and shift my life has taken this year. From 10 years of working in the NYC fashion industry to paddling at the front of a wooden canoe through swells, rollers and wind on the Mississippi River...it's f---ing amazing.

-Zoe Sundra

*For more photos of the Lower Miss and more reading, go to [www.rivergator.org](http://www.rivergator.org)*



*Halloween sunrise: Two osprey circle over Bohemia. "Red sky at morning, sailors take warning." We decide to stay at camp and let the storm blow through! Next dispatch: Monday or Tuesday. See y'all after the storm! Happy Halloween!*

## *The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch*

**is a service of the Lower Mississippi River Foundation**