

Gators & Freighters Day 4: Bayou Goula Towhead to Point Houmas



Saturday, Oct 24, 2015 - Camp Point Houmas (RBD173)
Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico
Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No 211

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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 (the middle of  
the country)*

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Day 3- Bayou Goula Towhead to Point Houmas - 23miles

Mark River

My morning starts at 5:10 am. I take the time to walk across the long sandbar at the top end of Bayou Goula Towhead enjoying the pristine beach, but mainly to spend some time with myself for awhile before preparing breakfast. I've come to a conclusion. The illumination of the sky is not from the moon, but the glow from the paper mills, refineries, grain operations, and waste management companies in this heavily saturated industrial complex. It looks like an Alaskan summer. I sit in the semi-darkness questioning how this might effect the nocturnal wildlife in the region. I have been hearing great blue herons squawking in the night and maybe they have adjusted to this setting. I also realized that the ex-foliate the crop-dusters spray on the cotton to make the leaves fall off, causes the trees in the Delta to miss their fall color. My thoughts get interrupted when a large towboat comes cruising through the channel with all its lights beaming and spotlights me on the beach. I blew my cover by wearing my headlamp.

We start the day paddling down the back channel of the island, headed across the main channel to Nottaway Plantation of White Castle, LA. to refill our jugs of water. I stay with the boat to make sure the crashing waves from the towboats didn't damage the Grasshopper canoe. I give a Quapaw Who-ute! to warn the others that two towboats, an up-streamer and down-streamer were converging on the bend . This would send crazy waves toward us and it's better to be in the canoe paddling. The ground crew guys luckily brought our jugs by golf cart and we launched right on time.

After the towboats we paddled through rough, choppy water for the next two hours. The smell of sugar cane is in the air, as we plow towards New River Bend. At a distance two ocean-liners are docked in the middle of the channel. We go between them waving at the crew. I seen five today. The SeaQueen, the USB Tampico, the Scarlet Falcon, the Darya Moti, and the Tequila Sunrise. They where being loaded with grain, coal, and petroleum.

We stop above Philadelphia Point to have lunch. Before we got close to completing our meal, a security guard from Borden Chemical harassed us until we left. It wasn't scary, he only had a walkie-talkie and a flashlight, but he treated us like we were terrorists. He eventually threaten to call the sheriff and the Coast Guard, "you have 3 minutes to leave!" he yelled over and over again. So we packed up and moved on.

We continue on to Smoke Bend. Two fishing boats where anchored at the buoy line fishing for catfish. One asked, "Where y'all headed ?" I replied, "to the Gulf." They respond in unison, "To the gulf?!!!!" We laughed, made the Smoke Bend Crossing to Bringier Point, and made camp just before Point Houmas.

There are no more islands to camp on from here to New Orleans, so we are finding selective sandbars for the rest of the expedition. With all the industry and towboat traffic, the river feels crowded, but I still feel the essence of the Mississippi River's existence.

-Mark River



Is the Wind your Friend?

Driftwood Johnnie

Saturday, Oct 24, 2015 - Bayou Goula Towhead to Point Houmas. Miles 196 - 173 or 23 miles in SE wind 10-15 gusting to 25. Even though we have made tried to please the four Unoli, the Cherokee word for the winds, and made offerings to the four directions, the wind has definitely not been our friend so far on this expedition. Just the opposite. Several weeks ago we enjoyed nothing but tail winds for a whole week while paddling with Dave Cornthwaite and Emily Penn and their group of adventurers. But this week the tables have turned and a relentless East or Southeast wind has slapped us silly. We have enjoyed a few moments of respite while circling around some long bends in zig-zag directions, like

coming around Point Manchac, and Point Claire, where 5 miles of tailwind buoyed us along, and a wonderful pool of smooth green water coming past Philadelphia Point and around 81 Point. But elsewhere the wind has awaited us, sometimes stirring the main channel into a boiling cauldron of rocky white-capping waves. At the same time we are paddling low water (hovering around 7 on the Baton Rouge Gage) which means slow water. Painfully slow. As slow as the Sunflower through Clarksdale, it seems, which means not moving at all in some pooling places. This creates a double-whammy for long distance paddlers.

The wind creates bigger waves in slow water... I wonder why? The same 10 mile an hour wind in high water would make rolling one-foot waves, but for us it's two feet waves. At 15 they rise to three feet. At 20 they start haystacking into 3-4 foot rollers and the big canoes, while still not taking on any water, rise above the biggest wave, nose in the air, and smack the one following. The big waves to come in periodic trains, with lulls in between. There seems to be an inverse property between water speed and the height of the waves. I am guessing the high water turbulence has a dampening effect. Long distance paddlers coming down the Mississippi take note! I would highly recommend to try and reach this stretch of river when it's at least 20 Baton Rouge gage. Higher would be better for distance made, but your campsites become extremely limited above 20. Below 20 we have been discovering (so far) one beautiful campsite after another, tall rolling dunes with easy access to the shade and protection of young willow forests. Good landings, and quick exits from the waves of passing freighters and tugboats (meaning real tugboats -- the ones that frequent ocean harbors and

help freighters in and out of dock -- as opposed to our Mississippi River towboats, which push barges up and down the river).

-Driftwood Johnnie



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The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch

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