



(All photos in this issue by videojournalist/artist David Hanson, except where otherwise noted)

Utram Bibis? Aquam an Undum?

(Which do you drink, the Water or the Wave?)

Special to this Issue: Mark River Atchafalaya Journals

(Keep reading below...)

Leaving Wednesday: 5-Day Arkansas Delta Exploration

(Keep reading below...)

May 2-3rd: Canoe Outfitting & Guiding 101

(Keep reading below...)

**Special Notice: Canoe Outfitting & Guiding 101,
May 2-3, University of Louisiana at Monroe**

Utram Bibis? Which do you drink, the Water or the Wave? Are you going to sit on the bank the rest of your life and wonder what it's like downstream? Are you ready for a career change? Want to start your own small business focused on Canoe/Kayak/Paddleboard Rentals, Guiding and Outfitting? Nature Tourism is a budding

industry just beginning to flower throughout the greater Mississippi Valley/Deep South. We are teaching a 2-day workshop called Canoe Outfitting & Guiding 101 which will take place at the University of Louisiana in Monroe during the weekend of May 2-3, 2015. If you've ever entertained any dreams in this regard, we'll help make it a reality! Come join us for a helpful and fun workshop. Keep reading below for signup and more info.

From the *News-Star* of Monroe, Louisiana:

ULM to hold canoe outfitting and guiding course on Black Bayou

April 17, 2015

The Office of Continuing Education at the University of Louisiana at Monroe provides various certificate, licensure, leisure and learning, technology, and personal development courses for those seeking to gain extra experience, or learn a new trade. From May 2-3, the office will offer a two-day course for those seeking to start their own canoe guide and rental service business.

The course will run May 2-3, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. Deadline to register is April 23. The class will feature indoor and outdoor classroom opportunities to learn the basics of guiding and outfitting.

The cost is \$199 per person, and includes all necessary canoeing gear (canoes, paddles, lifejackets, safety ropes, and rescue ropes). Each participant will receive an introductory printed package for starting a small business in nature tourism.

Participants will learn techniques to safely guide canoeists through local bayous, rivers and lakes; the many challenges and opportunities associated with a nature tourism business; how to proceed in the pursuit of an outfitting business, and more.

No previous canoe experience is required, but participants must be comfortable in water settings, and must be capable of physical exertion, including lifting and loading.

John Ruskey of Quapaw Canoe Company will teach the course, assisted by Mississippi River Guides Braxton Barden and Mark River.

Indoor portions of the course will be held at ULM, and outdoor sessions will be held at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

For more information, or to register for this course, visit
<https://webservices.ulm.edu/ce/content/canoe-outfitting-guiding-101>



Mark River Journals: The Atchafalaya Expedition

Dear reader, Here it is! The much-awaited Mark River story... The journals freshly carved from the illustrious pen of Mark River Peoples, his heart-felt observations and introspections from the recent Atchafalaya Expedition for the Rivergator: Paddler's Guide to the Lower Mississippi River. As my father used to say over and over to us kids as we were growing up: "Enjoy!" With photos featuring the artistry of video-documentary pro David Hanson of Hood River, Oregon.



Day 1 - Woodville Hospitality

The alarm clocks sounds at 3am. The Quapaws arise excited about the expedition at hand by finalizing the packing of the Grasshopper canoe. Our plans are to head south on highway 61 to Cleveland where we will meet Boyce and Rory, two photographers documenting the trip for The Bitter Southerner online e-mag. The sun is barely visible upon the horizon, as we continue on towards Vicksburg, hoping to catch the Tomato Place opening their doors. We stop and grab some cinnamon bagels, continuing on to Natchez to grab some extra equipment from fellow Quapaw Adam Elliott and fellow river rat, Gail Guido.

With the team intact, we head for Fort Adams, our planned put in. We stop in one of my favorite Mississippi towns, Woodville, deciding to have lunch at the town hangout right along the highway. The local gathering place where the people are warm and welcoming, with plenty of food from smoked pork steaks to fried catfish, with all the trimmings. It's also a place for information. Once the local crew found out our expedition plans, we were informed the boat ramp we were hoping to launch from was inaccessible. With the help of the head of the Chamber of Commerce and the Mayor, we were led to a ditch in the farm fields which connect to the Buffalo River, and then the Mississippi River. The locals made phone calls to assure our safe passage through this close nit community.

We find our exact location by stopping at the general store at the end of town. We supplied them with rivergator.org maps, while marveling the hundreds of deer skulls and racks covering the exterior. After that we discussed the river infrastructure south of Woodville and how it affects the farming community. I really enjoy stopping and talking to locals. They have information you can't find in books or the internet. People truly connected.

We said our goodbyes, head through the farm fields and find the ditch which locals use to access the river during high water. You can hear towboats and fishing boats in the distance. Thousands of fire ant rafts float buoyantly throughout the ditch. The water is warming, showing signs of the spawn. A lone straggly raccoon sleeps high in the trees as if it had a long night. We paddle through the flooded forest onto the Buffalo River, continuing to the Mississippi River, headed for Shreve's Bar where we will spend the night. What a great start.

Day 2 - Shreve's Bar

Wake up to a great fog covering the Mississippi River. Great nights rest as the beavers occasionally splash in the shallows close to camp. Tow boats roar in the fog, not visible from land, unless you ran to higher ground. We make the channel crossing and head for the lock. One towboat staged in the harbor. Looks like a maintenance boat, with a large selection of tie downs. The lock master drives his truck to the ramp to make introductions and to decide if he wanted to let us through or not. From experience, this is protocol for locking through. They also want to see the canoe. Seven mile flat water paddle to the confluence of the Red River and the Atchafalaya River. Fisherman at the point with a pink four wheeler and stories about the Opelousas catfish run in the early summer. His fishing partner died last year and he misses him. 15 miles to camp. Stuffed peppers. Fir ant mounds. Great day of paddling and fun. I hear turkeys in the night, or could it be the frogs in the lake.



Day 3 - Porcupine Point

We arrived at a high bluff full of green grass and decide this is the place for the evening. We quickly realize the deep green of the grass is from a herd of cows frequenting the area. We pay no mind, but marvel at the small runnel of water feeding the small pond filled with beautiful yellow rockets. The river is still on the rise and the rate of the water is increasing in the small stream. These small creeks play a huge role in the beginning of the spawn and the reproduction of reptiles, amphibians and mammals. The small pond will be full of frog eggs, which is a treat for spawning fish fattening up for the spring reproduction. They provide plentiful water supply for young mammals.

The sunset is beautiful, as I try to find an elevated spot to assure myself of a dry night of sleep. Driftwood Johnny reminds me of the time we camped at the mouth of the Arkansas River, when it was in the process of changing channels, after the 2011 flood. I placed my tent in a low lining area, only to wake up to a lake forming outside my tent, with fish splashing around. It was a lesson learned about rising rivers.

The morning came quickly as I was serenaded by frogs and the sound of turkeys. I've never heard turkeys call at night, and I figured some local was practicing his call. I paid no mind and slept like a newborn. The stream had increased its velocity and fish were starting to enter the small pond that turned to a lake. The canoe was tied in the stream and a spotted gar used the canoe to take a break from the current. Gail, one of our teammates, lunged out to successfully catch it. We admired its beautiful pattern of spots and released it unharmed. I take a walk to explore the terrain and noticed a unusual hump on a exposed tree branch. Looking closer, I realize, it's a tree frog. After further research, I learned it was a Mexican Tree Frog. Usually this frog ranges throughout the southwest states, but to see it in northern Louisiana could bring up the argument about global warming.

We load the boat and head downstream. Small cottages rested on the cut banks, with homemade revetments lining the bluffs. A family of cormorants ride a falling tree down the middle of the channel gives us the same idea, so we take a break, tie to a fallen tree, and imitate the cormorants.

We head towards Melville. There we will be losing two of our teammates, Rory and Boyce. Melville is considered the "catfish capital" of the Atchafalaya River. Some locals reminded us we were crazy like them for paddling the river. One lady claimed she lost two brothers to the river. I wanted to ask if they were wearing floatation devices, but restrained. I noticed that many were not wearing them in their fishing boats.

We ate lunch and head down river searching for the next campsite. There is a chance of rain so we want to set camp and prepare dinner early. A family of eagles is spotted spending time together in the trees as if to welcome us, so naturally we pick this spot for the night.

Day 4 - Owl's Hoot

We rise to the unique call of the barred owl high in the trees. It was so close and personal, I thought Brax was using his owl call. We set off into a foggy river, occasionally announcing our presence, with the banging of the lid of the dutch oven, to let commercial fisherman know of our existence in the channel, eventually continuing on to make our lunch appointment with the Atchafalaya River- keeper. Dean Wilson and family are the watchful eyes of this unique ecosystem teaming with wildlife. We discuss illegal logging, while we float as one down the river, eating lunch. We discussed the adaptability of the coyote, who become silent in order not to give up their position to a landscape full of domestic dogs. We converse on the tendencies of the river and how it effects the animals who thrive in this wilderness, watery environment.

We head downstream to meet the Lower Mississippi River keepers, Paul and Michael Orr, for our resupply at the infamous Whiskey Bay. Large flocks of double breasted cormorants take flight around every turn. Eagles perch high in their nests watching us float by. An osprey builds a nest on the pipeline bridge. The navigational channel is lined on both sides with house boats, cabins and hunting camps. We pick the first available campsite to end a 32 mile day and have wild catfish and potatoes for dinner as we watch the sunset.



Day 5 - Swamp Spawn

I wake on a tiny peninsula along Whiskey Bay navigational channel next to a tiny swamp full of yellow rockets and driftwood. The evening before, Driftwood Johnny took a swim in the debris infested swamp and noticed the temperature was quite warmer than the main channel. That let me know the spawn is upon us. Large gar and black bass splash in the swamp

throughout the night preparing for the most exciting time for animals of all kinds- the spawn. The spawn is the time of plenty for most animals. The flooding and warming of these waters triggers reptiles and amphibians of the arrival of spring, the time to reproduce and celebrate the welcoming of new generations.

We let the fog burn off the river and head towards the entry to Grand Lake. A maze of bayous and slough threading throughout the natural floodplain, loaded with houseboats, homesteads, and hunting camps. Bayous named Jakes, Bloody, Indigo, Florida, Bee, Flat Lake Pass and Keelboat Pass. Hunting camps and homesteads like Willow Bend, Ruttin Buck, Hog Island and Broad Road. Some looked cozy and well kept; some looked like my room, disorganized and chaotic, but home sweet home. Many commercial fishermen roared by scoping out potential spots for the upcoming crawfish season and some looked as if to be joyriding celebrating the rise of the bayous. We surprised alligators relaxing, waiting on the water temperature to climb, and large gar suspended in the channel getting fat before the peak of the spawn. Small frogs and turtles skip between logs, while kingfishers stealthily fly across the channel hunting for baitfish. Raccoons scramble up trees, while great blue herons and hawks occupy the trees. Large palmettos sit on the high grounds of the swamp, while large cypress trees thrive in the shallow lake marshes.

We found a campsite on a peninsula at the confluence of Grand Lake, Keelboat Pass and Hog Island Pass. We set up camp in good spirits, but the mosquitoes wouldn't let us enjoy the moment, so we ate fast and hurry to our tents to savor the day.



Day 6 - Grand Lake

The morning doesn't disappoint as the sounds of the night prepared me for the sunrise on Grand Lake. Coyotes sang songs from across the channel. Barred and Shriek owls harmonize their

unique calls from both sides of the lake. A beautiful swamp with tall young cypress trees and bright green grasses looked like delta heaven. A great blue heron lands on a tall cottonwood tree in our camp which is rare; they are very sketchy animals, but quickly flies on for breakfast. Two fancy crawfish boats blare by with traps that could hold up to 300lbs. The fog burns off the lake quickly and we start to pack for the day.

We start our long paddle through Grand Lake, paddling pass a archipelago of islands and many sloughs, heading towards Morgan City. We come upon a cypress village of trees lining the lake with spanish moss and numerous ospreys nest. From a distance the trees colors look like various shades of purple. It was like the Mississippi River floodplain many years ago. Some of the sloughs are filled with water hyacinth and we spotted two black crowned night herons. We finally make it to Duck Lake and paddle to the Bayou Butte. The day was long and tedious, but we paddled late into evening looking for high ground so we can camp. We find a small strip of land between the American Pass and Bayou Butte; a swamp full of raunchy bullfrogs, whining nutria, fighting raccoons and tree dropping beavers.



Day 7- Frog Dog

I step outside my tent and to my surprise the water has risen to a point just below my tent tarp. The night was full of sounds of nature. The swamp filled with yellow rockets came alive as we laid our heads after a long day of paddling. Crawfish fishermen checked their traps deep into the night, as bullfrogs bellowed sounds that resembled yapping dogs. Raccoons fought in the trees, eventually falling to the depth of the swamp, sounding like an unplanned belly flop. A beaver downed a tree in the distance. Various owls hooted in a-cappella as if to be competing for originality. The acoustic campsite entertained throughout the evening. A few raindrops teased me to the point where I left my cozy tent to reassure my fly. The fog clears and the sky opens, as we prepare to pack the canoe for our journey to the gulf.

We leave our campsite, which is slither of land between Bayou Butte and the American Pass. We enter Bayou Big Joe headed to Flat Lake. The cypress trees spanish moss is getting thicker and darker in color. Entering Flat Lake, we noticed a large eagle high in the trees. This is a good sign. Our morality rose to a high level as we start to synchronize our paddle strokes and attack the flat freshwater lake. As we glide across the lake, I notice more bald eagles lining the channel, as if to direct us back to the Atchafalaya River.

We arrive in Morgan City-Berwick to pick up Quapaw Wolfie and resupply. It was welcoming break from all the flat water paddling. An old railroad/towboat drawbridge is still in use. Local fishermen admire our canoe and wish us luck completing the journey. Lunch at the dock and on to our campsite at Blackbird Island.



Day 8 - Blackbird Island

We find an island downstream, that looked like an Caribbean oasis. The first piece of sandy land after Morgan City. A small island with tons of water hyacinth washed onto its shore. Some type of tern selected this island to lay its eggs. Soft sand with a freshwater swamp behind the open landscape, slowly filling as the river continues to rise. The alluvial fan is starting to show as the landscape gets wider and flat. A nice breeze accompanied us throughout the afternoon, as I explore the small lake behind our campsite. A red winged blackbird lands on a reed of grass very close to where I was sitting. I study his bravado as he calls out, "Wok - wok - wwwwee - eekk!" I continue to watch and study, joining the call, until he realizes I'm a lot bigger than him, and flies off. I go share my new talent with my teammates as we sit around the fire feasting on lentils, gumbo and shrimp.



Day 9 - Delta

We head towards the delta. The trees start to disappear as the landscape starts to flatten. Private islands with gates across waterways start to appear, with houseboats scattered throughout. Pipeline infrastructure, new and old, in every direction. Alligators slither into the water on every turn. Nutria feed in the new growth. We stop for a break on an island of seashells and mussel shells. We spot and immature bald eagle dead on a pipeline deck. It takes away my smile for a short while.

We begin our upstream paddle in the Wax delta and start to see more wildlife and birds. We saw some beautiful roseate spoonbills. Hundreds of nutria moaning and squealing. Shorebirds feed in the shallows. Not very many humans, as this place looks like heaven for animals. The eagles are so large, they make the tree they're perched upon look small.

The landscape starts to rise as trees reappear. We find a stretch of land with a row of willow trees to camp. The sunset looked like Africa. This is truly wild habitat. I heard nutria moaning through the night and spontaneous thrashing in the bayou. Sounded like alligators feeding on nutria. Tomorrow we will paddle up to Berwick where we will end our journey.



Day 10- Headed to Berwick

We start our last paddle headed towards Berwick to end the trip. We are paddling upstream, so it's important to work as a team. The current is strong, but for some reason, I enjoy the challenge. We weave between channels taking advantage of the slower water on the inside of the meanders. As we get closer, we start to hear the sounds of towboats in the navigational channel. The willows start to appear and finally, the first signs of humans in two days.

The Grasshopper glides on the water making the paddle easier than it looks. I am a fan of the voyager canoes. I think they are the best canoes ever built. We continue on and we enter the navigational channel. Friendly towboat drivers blow their horns and take pictures of our vessel. One towboat guy gets on the megaphone and says, "the guy in the back has the easy job", taking a shot at our captain, but we know that's not true. With the complex sloughs and bayous of this incredible ecosystem, you better have a great captain, because you can make the wrong turn, and not see people for days. Thanks brotha Driftwood.

We paddle our last stretch. I'm overjoyed with emotion, having the opportunity to finish another expedition, and to see a place unlike no other. When you talk about deltas, we often think of the Mississippi River, but the Atchafalaya River Basin is magnificent distributary of the Mississippi River which accommodates a third of the discharge of the Mississippi. It's a place of old cypress trees and bountiful wildlife. As I said before, a place unlike no other.

-Mark River



Mark River Peoples is a guide and teacher with Quapaw Canoe Company and is also the 1 Mississippi Southern Region Intern representing the Lower Mississippi River Foundation. Please go to www.bigmuddyisland.org for the Mark River Blog with photos, maps, videos, and other depictions of the Big River!

Canoe Outfitting & Guiding 101 - University of Monroe - May 2-3, 2015

Always wanted to start your own canoe/kayak river business and didn't know how or where to start? This 2-day workshop is for you! For details and enrollment please go to: <https://webservices.ulm.edu/ce/content/canoe-outfitting-guiding-101>

Title: Canoe Outfitting & Guiding 101: A 2-Day Primer for Starting Your Own Small Business as Canoe Guide and Rental Service

Description: Learn the ins and outs of starting a small business dedicated to canoe livery and outfitting. Learn to safely guide canoeists through our local bayous, rivers and lakes for supplemental income. Introductory workshop lightly covering the many challenges and opportunities for a nature tourism business. This class will set the stage for how to make your dream job come true. This two-day class is ideal for the person who loves the great outdoors and wants to share that enthusiasm with others. Half indoor classroom, half outdoors. Participants will know by the end of workshop whether or not to pursue this kind of business, and how and where to proceed if they so desire. No previous canoe experience required, but must be comfortable in water settings. Most aspects of this program are applicable to kayaks and paddleboards also.

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For more information, or to register for this course, visit
ulm.edu/ce/content/canoe-outfitting-guiding-101

(From the ULM Newsletter: <http://www.ulm.edu/news/2015/0417-canoe-course.html>)



Arkansas Delta Exploration

Wed, April 22nd to Sun, April 26th 2015

Note: Due to high waters below Baton Rouge we had to postpone the Baton Rouge to New Orleans to Gulf Expedition. Postponed until October. In its place we are going to explore the Arkansas Delta, which needs updating on the Rivergator website. See below for details for this exciting 5-day expedition!

During the Great Flood of 2011 the Arkansas began carving a new outlet to the Mississippi in a violent explosion of water bursting behind Cat Island. In the low water 2012 it was discovered that the new route was completed, and the Arkansas River had once again demonstrated its

ability to meander in the way rivers have naturally done in the Mississippi Valley for millions of years.

The purpose of this exploration is to survey Cat Island and the newly formed Mouth of the Arkansas River, and the stretch of Mississippi River downstream to Greenville including the alternate route known as “The Greenville Bends.” The results of this exploration and documentation will be added to the 2015 update for the Rivergator www.rivergator.org.

The explorers will paddle approximately forty miles of the Arkansas River and fifty miles of the Mississippi, down one of the most remote stretches of big river in the deep south, here surrounded by floodplain, deep forests, including the edge of the White River National Wildlife Refuge and Choctaw Island Wildlife Management Area. Various camps will be established for the exploration of some of the most remote bayous and backwaters in the Mississippi Valley. One of the goals is locating examples of giant Bald Cypress, a favorite haunt for bears, raccoons, prothonotary warblers and bald eagles. The rarely seen Swainson’s warbler prefers canebrakes and lowland thickets along this route, particularly on Big Island and surrounding floodplain.

Itinerary April 22nd to April 26th

Wed, April 22nd: Arkansas River

Put in at Nortrebes Dam (near Dumas, Ark)

Thurs, April 23rd: Arkansas Delta

Fri, April 24th: Arkansas Delta

Sat, April 25th: Mississippi River

Sun, April 26th: Mississippi River

Takeout at Warfield Point (near Greenville, Miss)

Please contact John Ruskey john@island63.com for more information.

Congrats to Adam Elliott!

April 15th, 1st Anniversary of Quapaw Natchez

Last year on TAX DAY 2014, a group of adventurers descended out of the north on board a Quapaw vessel *The Grasshopper* and made landing under the gangplank of the *American Queen* (who just happened to be docked there also!) and walked up the ramp at Natchez-Under-the-Hill to declare peace with Natchez people and officially open the NATCHEZ OUTPOST of the Quapaw Canoe Company -- all under the leadership of the erstwhile Adam Elliott. [Adam Elliott](#).

Congratulations Adam! From all of us Quapaws up and down the river, PADDLE'S UP and a resounding WHOOP! WHOOP! HOORAY!!! [Quapaw Natchez : Outpost Natchez](#) You done good. We are proud of you! — with [Adam Elliott](#), and 1442 others at [Quapaw Natchez : Outpost Natchez](#).

RIP Melvin Carpenter 1949-2015

Anyone who has been on one of our trips in the last decade will fondly remember our shuttle driver Melvin Carpenter. He took us to the river and brought us back. Mr. Melvin was well-loved by many in Clarksdale, especially by his doting wife Miss Martha (Carpenter). Originally from Port Gibson, he moved to Chicago where he drove taxi amongst other occupations. He returned home last decade to get away from the chaos of the city, and enjoyed being with us in the heart of the south. He was a hustler of sorts, and had more lives than a cat. He would have outlived all of us if he could have given up that tough nicotine habit. "Mr. Melvin" also known as "Mel" was best friends with another Quapaw shuttle driver Ellis Coleman. Whenever they were together laughter, stories and good-natured pranks were sure to follow. Our sympathies and condolences to Miss Martha and all of Mr. Melvin's Family.



(photo courtesy of "Magical" Madge Howell)

The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch
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The Lower Mississippi River Foundation

www.rivergator.org

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