

Down the River of Time

Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No 346

Tuesday, May 3, 2016

Tomorrow night in Memphis:

1 Million words describing the Middle/Lower Mississippi River!

Rivergator Slide Show and Presentation, 6pm tomorrow night, Wed May 4th, at the **Memphis Central Library** (Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library, 3030 Poplar Ave) for the monthly meeting of the **Bluff City Canoe Club**. The room is on the main floor of the library, in the SE corner (towards Poplar). Enter main doors, and them go left. Room at end of hallway.

The ***Rivergator*** overflows with 1 Million words describing the Middle/Lower Mississippi River for paddlers. 1,000s of photos, videos, and stories to help understand this mysterious but powerful muddy body of water, which has been primarily associated with industry and transportation. Creator John Ruskey will share slide show depicting the colorful stretch of river from Osceola Arkansas down the Chickasaw Bluffs (including Memphis - 4th Chickasaw Bluff), and into the Mississippi Delta (highlights: 20,000 acres Big Island and the mouth of the Arkansas River, the Mississippi's highest tributary — from the Central Colorado Rockies).



Fundraising Update: Next week: May 9th deadline!



This is the last week of our fundraising drive for the recovery and rebuild from the 2016 Sunflower River Flood. With your help we will reach our twenty-five thousand dollar goal for recovery and rebuild. Thanks to the support of our

friends, family and many river rats around the world we are very, very close to making it! At last count we were at \$23,119 (some commitments not yet received). It looks like we might make it!

May 9th Deadline: We are approaching our Monday, May 9th deadline for this fundraising effort. Please consider joining the good faith and spirit demonstrated by our friends and share your support for the cause. You can do this by sending a check or donating here: [Quapaw Canoe Company Flood Relief](#)

Donation By Check: If you don't want to make a donation online, you can send a check to us by mail, and it will be counted into the total.

Quapaw Canoe Company

291 Sunflower Avenue

Clarksdale, MS 38614

Our goal is to raise \$25,000 to offset recovery expenses and to rebuild lost infrastructure. Whatever we don't use will be turned over to the Clarksdale Community fund for others in the same dire straits as us. We will be transparent about costs and funds raised.

Please contact me john@island63.com or Zoe Sundra zoe@island63.com for more info, or if you have any questions.

Reconstruction Update: We are finished cleaning out the Cave, and are rebuilding all our areas for guiding & outfitting, kitchen, library, and offices 30 feet above cave level, at street height (Sunflower Avenue). The storage areas are about completed. Now we are concentrating on the food prep area. For the next month we will be re-building a kitchen space at street level where we can

arrange and prep food for our river expeditions. This area will replace the kitchen we lost in the Cave.

Lessons Learned: We have learned many lessons from this flood. We will never move headquarters back to the cave. We are rebuilding our offices, library, outfitting & storage 30 feet up above the old location. What will happen with the Cave? At this point we are not sure what its future will be. It might become a youth training center, or Sunflower River rental center, or maybe an interpretive center for Mississippi River fossils and driftwood. We're not completely decided on that. At this point, we still have our hands full organizing gear and rebuilding offices, storage, kitchen, library, and etc. The one thing we do know, the river rose higher than it ever has before, and it would be foolish to rebuild at the same low level we were at. These kinds of storm systems seem to run in cycles. I wouldn't be surprised if we see another rise of the Sunflower River. This time we will be prepared.

The Final Steps in the Reconstruction will be rebuilding our offices, library, and lastly the carving shed (that almost collapsed into the river). This might require all summer to complete. We hope to complete the rebuild within six months, by October 2016.

Flood Tour: If you are in the area, come visit the reconstruction site. We have been giving post-flood tours to anyone interested, the highlights being the high-water lines still visible on walls and windows, the rescue hole cut into the ceiling, and the new location 30 feet higher than cave level.

Quapaw 24 Big Paddle: Last weekend across the waters in England a big group of paddlers with the Quapaw 24 Big Paddle finished up their 24-hour marathon adventure in support of Quapaw Canoe Company! This took place on the River Wey in Surrey, England, Inspired by the outdoor leader Dave Cornthwaite, Chris Barnes, Andy McLean, David Ardill, Tamsin Shakespeare, Terri Witherdon, Anna Lund, and a host of others from over the Atlantic made

a 24-hour marathon paddle on their River Wey in our behalf. Check out their 24 hour marathon adventure at <http://quapaw24bigpaddle.strikingly.com>

We've been blessed with sweat assistance (cleanup), equipment (kitchen appliances, tables, chairs) and cash donations. But mostly we've been inspired and deeply touched by the outpouring of sympathy and acts of commiseration. Your belief in our work and the spirit of the river that flows through everything is what keeps us going! We are blessed in many ways: 1) we are still alive and functioning, 2) we having saved our paddles & lifejackets and can continue our business of guiding & outfitting, 3) we can maintain our "Leave no kids on Shore" commitment with schools like EAS, and youth programs like Camp ROCK, GRIOT Arts, Carpenter Art Garden, and Spring Initiative, and 4) we have a great building that we can rebuild from within. The Sunflower Building -- built like a fortress of concrete and bricks — a great foundation to build upwards from!

Humbled and Inspired: We are humbled by this experience, and by the power of the river. But we are furthermore humbled and inspired by your belief in us, and generosity in helping us recover. You are helping us get back on our feet. We hope in some way, that further on down the river of time, that our work will help others find rejuvenation in the wilderness. What goes around comes around! It is friends like you that give meaning to the work we do, in sharing the wild beauty of the biggest river this side of mother earth.

Our Commitment to the Clarksdale Community: We at Quapaw commit to make best use of any funds raised, and share any un-used funds with others affected by this disastrous flood.



One With the River By Mark River

It was a great Wednesday. The "Dragonfly" canoe is a couple steps away from its first layer of fiberglass. Driftwood and I closely comb over its curvature looking for places that need attention before the next phase. We smile at each other to celebrate our team's progress. It's an honor to be a part of building a voyager canoe. The bonding experience is priceless and it lasts forever. Little did I know, our bond would be tested within the next 24 hours.

The phone rings early. I smile knowing it's my big brother reaching out to me for our daily morning talk. I turn over to answer, and it's not my brother, but Driftwood.

"Hey River, I think we have a situation at base. You should get here right away."

By the tone of his voice, I knew there were challenges ahead. The rains had been coming down in sheets for two days, so I started to prepare myself mentally for the adversity ahead. I arrived at the headquarters and the Sunflower River had overcome the parking lot behind the canoe shop. The Levee Board was en route with sandbags. The water was rising so fast, you could literally see the fluctuation. Driftwood made a great plan, having a carpenter come in and cut an evacuation hole into the ceiling of the cave to the youth hostel. He also called in a favor, having the Habitat for Humanity of Urbana, Ill. come help with the task. We put a ladder up through the hole, formed a human conveyer belt, and saved computers, artifacts, artwork, books, and river gear.

That day we were on auto pilot. I made eye contact with the Mighty Quapaws throughout this ordeal and not once did I see any doubt in the eyes of the team. It made me proud that I was apart of this company. The same bond we share on the Mississippi River to safely navigate and introduce its beauty to all walks of life, carried over to a very stressful situation on land. Being stewards of the Mississippi River, we understand nature and its influence on human existence. Living next to a river brings you great joy, sites, and sounds daily, but we knew someday we would see the other side of living within its banks. We also know something great will come out of this experience.

Just like a river that flows continuously to the delta, through and around manmade structures, taking the path of least resistance, being totally unapologetic, and changing courses. We must be one with them. Our rivers supply our communities with freshwater, incredible topsoil for farming, and is the conduit for life for all species.

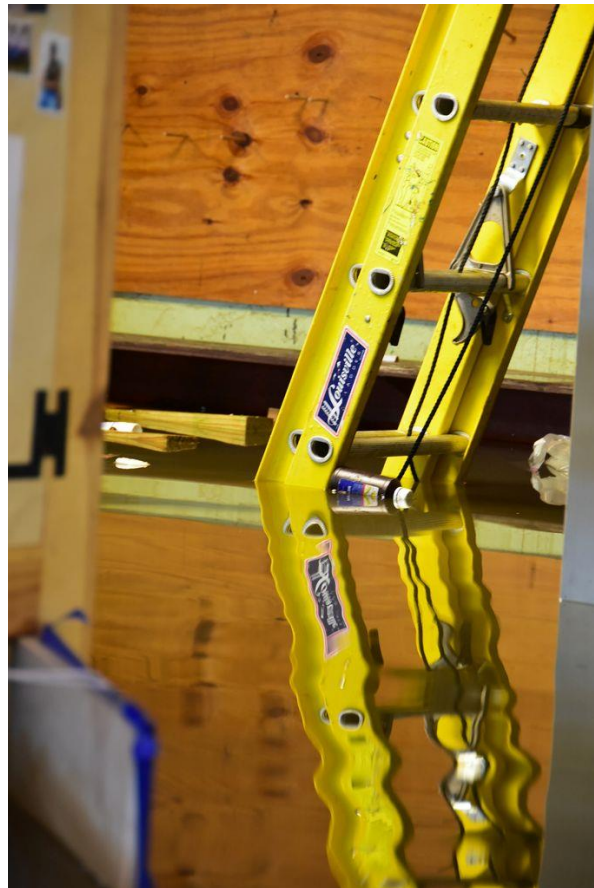
The rebuilding after the flood has started. The Sunflower River has receded back to its original channel. Everything is green and renewed. Wood ducks are pairing off looking for the perfect tree to nest. The photogenic green heron leap from limb to limb stocking prey. Shore-birds and songbirds sing their song, while combing the banks gobbling up small insects and invertebrates. Owls are perched on low hanging branches, teaching their young how to ambush lethargic water snakes basking in the sun. Natures engineer, the beaver, enjoy the access

to fresh trees in the floodplain. Otters swim on their backs eating bighead and silver carp. The Quapaws are busy with the clean-up, restructuring, and the reorganization of our workspace.

The Mighty Quapaws would like to thank everyone who helped us through this unfortunate event. We realize we were not the only victims affected and our hearts and blessing go out to all. Thanks for the words of encouragement and moral support from friends and family. Thanks to our friends from the Surrey River Wey, England, who held a 24 marathon paddle in support our rebuild. And a special thanks to all the rivers that flow and supply us with the thirst of life.

Here's to the River!

-Mark River



Some Lingering Feelings (from Driftwood Johnnie)

It is with many mixed emotions that I share my feelings as we pick ourselves out the mud and keep on keeping on down the river. For so many years (since 1992 in fact) my identity has been at least partially tied up in the cave. My career as a blues musician and museum curator all evolved in the cave. The “Riverman” CD was produced there. Quapaw Canoe Company was born out of the cave. I met my wife Sarah living there, and later for a while, it was our 2nd home. (when she walked in the door for the first time in the new millennium, she remarked “I like the smell in here!” and I knew that I had found the woman of my dreams). Over the decades I have been accumulating piles of artwork, writing, family photos, and etc, etc amongst all of the tools of our trade, and equipment necessary to running a small business. I learned a lesson about hoarding last month.

I had to let everything go, and watched with pangs of bittersweet lightning bolts of emotion as memories were grabbed by the river currents and gently pulled away and swirled out of sight. I was grief stricken one moment, and then feeling peace the next. Curiously this experience brought me an odd feeling of resolution, seeing a place I inhabit fill with water, like a dream world -- even with stinky overflow from the stormwater/sewer system, and then everything loose floating away and disappearing in the mud. I felt peaceful, in a way, free of the old stuff I was hanging onto. Maybe the same feeling that comes from a spring cleaning. Spring cleaning, Sunflower River style. It hurts when you’re forced to do it. But it feels rejuvenating when it’s over. Justin Riney wrote a soulful piece about the same experience which you can read on his latest blog posting at [Riney Earth](#).

And yes, this is a cause for appreciation. This all took place before Easter, in the time of rebirth and rejuvenation. We have been counting our blessings: To see the power of God. To be humbled, and then released. Every season is a new opportunity for life. Every day is a new day. We will pick ourselves up out of

the mud and keep going. Our hands might be in the ditches but our eyes are on heaven.

And even as we have suffered through the awesome power of the natural elements, we have also simultaneously been allowed a glimpse into the soul of our community and the spirit of all of those around us. And this is one of the most beautiful results found amongst all of the destruction and loss. And we thank everyone in our community for your kindness and attention to us and the other hundreds who suffered the same in Clarksdale/Coahoma County.

For more photos of the Lower Miss and more reading, go to www.rivergator.org

The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch

is a service of the Lower Mississippi River Foundation
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