

23MAR2021 Edit

## Mississippi River Paddling History by Clark Eid

**(Current Guinness World Record co-holder with Bob Bradford for fastest run of the Mississippi River in 2003, set at 18 days, 4 hours, and 51 minutes during the Mississippi River Challenge for Rett Syndrome and Leukodystrophy)**

The Tunica Riverpark and Museum in Tunica, MS is expanding an exhibit dedicated to human powered racing on the Mississippi River. My family donated the kayak *Double Helix* and associated gear from the 2001 Great Mississippi River Race for Rett Syndrome along with items from our 2003 Guinness World Record from the Mississippi River Race for Rett Syndrome and Leukodystrophy. We're also helping the museum by collecting historical information about firsts, attempts, Guinness Records, and notable runs on the Mississippi River. I believe I've put together the most accurate list to date but need your help to make sure my accounting is correct. Look over the list below and let me know if you have any suggestions. If you do, please contact me at [clarkneid@gmail.com](mailto:clarkneid@gmail.com).

### Comments on Records

Keep in mind that each Mississippi River paddling record is accomplished under a unique set of circumstances. In terms of logistics, no two are exactly alike since the river and weather change day to day, season to season and year to year. Even the overall length of the river has shortened significantly over time. New roads, bridges, and river accesses have made resupply and land support easier. And while the lumber company logjams of the early 1900's are no longer an issue, now we face post 9/11 passage restrictions near bridges and nuclear power plants, plus COVID-19 pandemic challenges!

Technology has improved to make craft lighter, orienteering easier, clothing warmer, communication simpler, medicines better, and food more nutritious. Wouldn't it be a grand experiment to compare the same paddlers in a wood-and-canvas canoe, using wood paddles, wearing wool clothes and eating salt pork versus a Kevlar ultralight racing canoe, using bent-shaft carbon paddles, wearing synthetic clothes and eating nutritious meals!

Further complicating direct comparisons of records is there is *no set of common rules* to follow and no governing body to enforce them even if they existed. Guinness World Records, which began in 1955, has been vague (some may use other terms) in their definitions of a record and what is needed to validate a claim. Adding to this confusion is that one paddler may assume rules that are not unacceptable to another. Consider:

- How much does a canoe have to be "open" to be considered a canoe? Must a canoe have certain hull dimensions? Does it matter if the canoe is decked with a solid or fabric material, removable or non-removable? Can a canoe have spray skirts or a rudder?
- Can paddlers use more than one type of craft or paddle in route? Can a team swap identical craft to maintain a pristine hull surface?
- Must paddlers wear PFDs at all times? (We did, 24/7 when setting our record!)
- Should orienteering be restricted to map and compass, with GPS only for tracking?
- Do all paddlers always need to be present in the craft, beginning to end? Can substitute paddlers be used? If a paddler drops out, is the attempt over?
- Can you break the law to travel on closed sections of the river and still claim a record?
- Is purposeful wake-riding allowed?

- Should support be limited by land and/or water? Can you have a dedicated support boat? If you can have a support boat, can you hold onto it for any reason? Can you exit onto a support boat while drifting (e.g. toilet break, shower, transfer positions, etc.)?
- If claiming a run was “unsupported”, what does that mean? Can you accept a can of beans from a stranger? Can you buy supplies from a store in route?
- Can a sail be used? What constitutes a sail?
- Can you paddle over flooded land? Over a L&D (at flood stage)? Can you take the Aikin diversion channel?
- Are portages permitted because of bad weather or convenience? Can a L&D be portaged if not open, or to avoid waiting for barges to lock through? Can you portage both Upper and Lower St. Anthony Falls Locks and Dams (and maybe L&D 1) without first putting the craft back in the river section in between? Do you have to carry your portage cart with you? Can a non-paddler help transfer your gear in any way?

There’s no common set of answers to these that all paddlers will agree to. From a Quality by Design perspective, I suggest each attempt publishes their rules prior to their run so as to avoid later misunderstandings. For Guinness record attempts, talk with Guinness early because they may or may not have a requirement. Be honest and transparent. This was our approach in 2001 and 2003 after consulting with past record holders, Guinness, the ACA, and USCA. We “engaged in overkill” to make our rules as acceptable as possible. Ultimately, it’s the court of public opinion, namely the paddling community, who ultimately judges what is considered a legitimate record. Get it right the first time. There are no “do overs”.

Despite confusion about formal rules, remember that any undertaking to run the Mississippi River deserves respect. These attempts are physically and mentally exhausting, and usually encounter life-threatening situations. Paddlers have met both triumph and tragedy during these all-conditions, ultra-endurance marathons. The Mississippi River can change from being gentle and kind, to vicious and deadly within minutes.

While accounting for all river runs is impossible, I’ve tried to capture below as much historical data that I could find. I hope this list captures at least a few drops in the flood of adventurers. (Paraphrased from a tugboat captain’s remark to me over the radio during our 2001 multi-team charity run, “Are you the first drops in a flood of idiots?”)

Thanks again for reading. Paddle on!

## Canoe and Kayak Firsts, Attempts, Guinness Records, and Noteworthy Runs

**1872 First:** Julius Chambers is noted as first person to document their travel down the entire Mississippi River. Chambers used a canoe to Quincy, IL, two steamboats to New Orleans, and an ocean liner to the Gulf as he continued to New York City. He detailed his trip in a 1910 book titled “The Mississippi River and its Wonderful Valley. Twenty-seven Hundred and Seventy-five Miles from Source to Sea”.

**1881 False First:** Willard Glazier **fraudulently** claimed to be the first to not only canoe the entire river, but to have discovered an overlooked source. He wrote a book of his discovery and travels in 1892 titled “Down the Great River”. It was soon discovered that he had plagiarized other expedition reports and was subsequently discredited by both the MN State Legislature and the MN Historical Society. The MN Historical Society’s Historical Society Collections Vol. VII, 1893, by J. V. Bower titled “The Mississippi River and its Source” has an outstanding presentation of facts that led to the establishment of Itasca State Park. Bower also clearly presents evidence to disprove Glazier’s claims. The Library of Congress has this free link to Bower’s book: <https://www.loc.gov/item/01007920/>

Further analysis of Glazier's false claims can be found in H. D. Harrower's 1886 book titled "Captain Glazier and His Lake". Strangely (or perhaps to keep Glazier's theme going), a 1990 book titled "A Lake to the South of Itasca-Willard Glazier and the Mississippi Fiasco 1881-1891" by Gary Brannon, closely mirrors the contents of Harrower's 1886 book without ever mentioning it. Sadly, Glazier's fictional story causes confusion to the present day.

**1921 Attempt.** John Koors and Louis Neumann of Bemidji, MN attempt to canoe to New Orleans, calling it the "Pine to Palm Trip". They began from Bemidji on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1921 and ended sometime on or before July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1921 when they overturned after striking a wing dam near Hannibal, MO.

Newspaper reports: The Bemidji Daily Pioneer, June 29, 1921 article "Boys reach St. Cloud on Pine to Palm Trip" and July 25, 1921 article "Koors and Neumann Overturn in Canoe". The Little Falls Herald, August 5, 1921 article "Met Grief with Canoe".

Tousley (1925 entry below) briefly comments on page 28 of his book that he had communicated with the team, and that they had warned him about crossing Lake Winnibigoshish.

The Bemidji Daily Pioneer, June 29, 1921

**BOYS REACH ST. CLOUD  
ON PINE TO PALM TRIP**

**Mosquitoes Are One of Big  
Hardships on Trip to  
Gulf in Canoe**

John Koors and Louis Neumann, voyageurs of Bemidji, who are traveling by canoe on the Mississippi river to New Orleans, arrived in St. Cloud Tuesday morning and were to spend the day there before resuming their trip to the gulf.

Upon leaving St. Cloud this morning, the boys planned on scattering St. Cloud literature as well as Ten Thousands Lakes pamphlets in cities to the south. They were well received in St. Cloud, as evidenced by the account of their stop there.

Traveling at the expected rate of 50 to 60 miles per day when in the water, Koors and Neumann plan on reaching New Orleans early in the fall. The worst rapids encountered so far were those between Sartell and St. Cloud where portage was found necessary. So far, day visits have been made at Deer River, Grand Rapids, Aitkin, Brainerd and Little Falls. They are enjoying the trip as they go, since they are not traveling on a pre-arranged schedule.

Occasional hardships have been encountered, the worst of which have been mosquitoes. The canoeists, on one occasion, traveled all night to avoid these pests. Friends in Bemidji are hearing regularly from the boys and as far as can be ascertained, they are having a very enjoyable trip.

The Little Falls Herald, Friday, August 5, 1921

**MET GRIEF WITH CANOE**

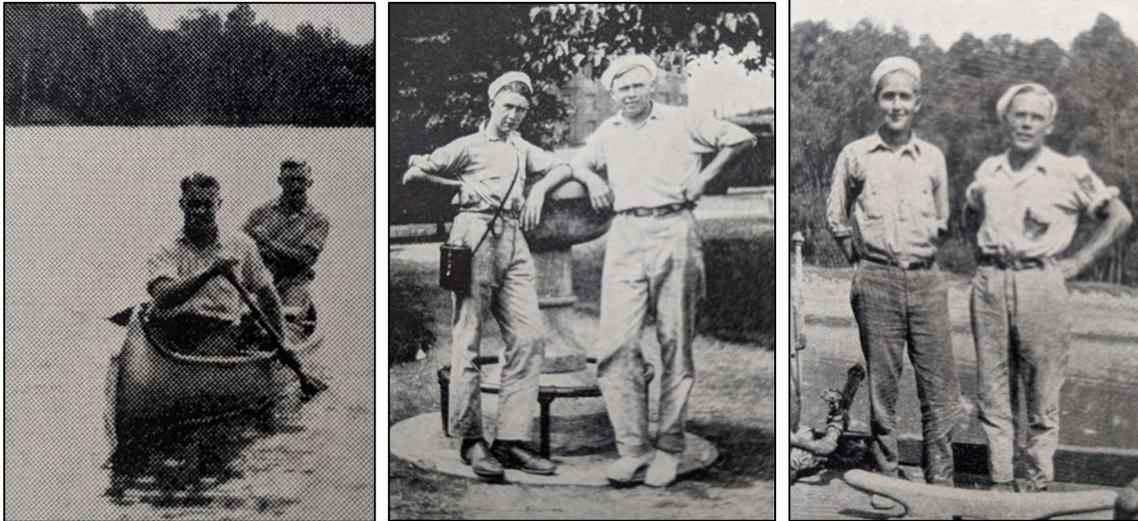
Bemidji Sentinel:—John Koors and Louis Neumann, who completed a large part of their proposed trip from "Pine to Palm," before their canoe struck a sunken wing of a dam near Hannibal, Missouri, arrived in Bemidji Wednesday morning.

The disaster occurred at a dangerous part of the river and Louis Neumann had a narrow escape: A spiral legging became unwrapped and caught his feet so that he had to call upon Koors for assistance in reaching shore. Their complete equipment was lost in the accident and although their canoe and paddles were saved, the boys decided, through paternal request, to return home.

The boys thoroughly enjoyed their trip, although hardships took much of the pleasure out of the trip. The boys were royally entertained by the cities along the route and have gained a world of publicity through their effort. Former attempt to traverse the entire length of the river have failed and so far is known, Koors and Neumann set a new record in reaching Hannibal. Had it not been for the disaster, the boys would doubtlessly have reached their destination.

The boys passed through Little Falls on their down river journey about three weeks ago.

**1925 First:** Albert S. Tousley of Minneapolis, MN (born September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1899, died March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1940) is generally recognized as first person to have canoed down entire Mississippi River, taking 105 days. Albert had three different paddling partners (William O. Forssell, Allen C. Sulerud and Richard Storrs Pattee) during his trip that ended in the Gulf at Lower Pilot Station, beyond Port Eads, and well past what is now the Mile 0 marker. No official record is known to have been applied for or awarded. (He passed away from a car accident well before Guinness World Records began in 1955.) Tousley detailed his journey in his highly detailed 1928 book "Where Goes the River".



Forssell (Bow) and Tousley (Stern); Tattee (L) and Tousley (R); Sulerud (L) and Tousley (R)

**1937 Attempt:** Glenn Gunderson (23-years old) and Emerson Gonnsen (21-years old), sophomores at Wheaton College, began their run on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1937. Sadly, the canoe capsized 1,900 miles later in a giant whirlpool along Caulk Neck Cut near Greenville, MS on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1937 and Goonsen drowned. (This section is still shown on present day river charts near Mile Marker 576.) Articles appeared in the June 1<sup>st</sup> and September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937 Wheaton Record that discussed their journey preparation and intent to photograph their adventure for *National Geographic* magazine. Their 17-foot, 75-pound canoe, named the "Mississippi: Source to Sea", was later recovered and sold near Greenville, MS for \$20 to provide Gunderson money for clothes and transportation home.

This attempt began two weeks before Tagg/Capers/Saunders started their run on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1937 (see next entry). Capers' 1938 Alumni article and 1977 book mentions the tragic event had happened two weeks prior to their arrival into Memphis, TN on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1937, indicative that the Wheaton paddlers were pulling further ahead. (Note that Capers' accounts misspelled "Gonnsen" as "Gunnsen" and varied as to which paddler had drowned.) While no articles have been found to indicate that the two teams were competing, but it was very likely that at least the Memphis team knew from talking with people along the river that the Wheaton team was ahead of them.

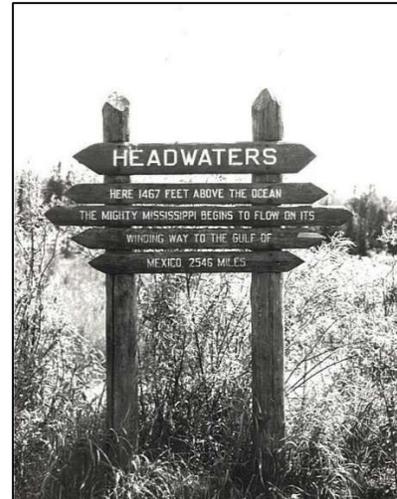
Glenn Gunderson's son and daughter kindly provided their father's story titled "Death in a Whirlpool" that was published in the September 1941 issue of *Field & Stream* magazine, a letter and telegram sent at the time detailing the tragedy, and photos from the start of their 1937 run taken by a friend of the paddlers. (I'll post these later.) Thank you both for sharing your father's harrowing story! These items will highlight that preparation alone does not completely eliminate the great risk faced by such undertakings. I wouldn't be surprised if his story will help save someone else in the future.



Glenn Gunderson (Bow) and Emerson Gonnsen (Stern) in the “Mississippi-Source to Sea” near Itasca, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1937.



Glenn Gunderson (Left) and Emerson Gonnsen (Right) at Lake Itasca.



Headwaters Sign in 1937.



Paddling through a log jam.

**1937 1<sup>st</sup> Guinness Record:** The Memphis team of Joe Laughlin Tagg (Jr), Gerald M. Capers (Jr) and Charles David Saunders set the first Guinness World Record for canoeing the river, from Itasca (July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1937) to New Orleans (August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1937) in 56 days. Tagg (born March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1920, died June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008) and Saunders (born October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1919, died August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1993) were both 17-year-old high school seniors at the time. Note that Tagg is the youngest known Guinness World Record holder to date. Capers (born May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1919, died May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1992) was 28 years old when the record was set.

Their record was reported to be in the Guinness Book of World Records in the fall of 1976 as the “first crew to canoe the Mississippi River from the source to the mouth.” Their trip was detailed in the second half of Gerald M. Capers’ 1977 book “The Mississippi River: Before and After Mark Twain” (ISBN 0-682-48845-3). Capers also authored an article titled “The Cruise of the Tonawanda” in the 1937 Commencement Issue of The Southwestern Alumni Magazine with trip details not disclosed in his 1977 book (link is below).

As far as “rules” are concerned, it’s worth noting that not all three paddlers were in canoe on some river sections, they had used a truck to portage part of Lake Pepin due to stormy weather, used a sail on several sections of the lower river, and ended their run in New Orleans rather than Mile 0. Nevertheless, it’s the 1<sup>st</sup> official Guinness World Record and stands as is.

[https://dlynx.rhodes.edu/jspui/bitstream/10267/20942/1/Alumni Magazine 1938 commencement issue complete.pdf](https://dlynx.rhodes.edu/jspui/bitstream/10267/20942/1/Alumni_Magazine_1938_commcement_iss_ue_complete.pdf)



(L to R) Joe Tagg, Jr., Gerald Capers, Charles Saunders

**1978 2<sup>nd</sup> Guinness Record:** British Royal Air Force (RAF) Team of Brian Smith (34), Peter Dodd (22), Mac Macboyle (23), Terry Riley (21), John (Steve) Stevenson (38) and Steve Pinkham (26) set the Guinness World Record using tandem kayaks, reaching Mile Marker 0 after 42 Days, 4 Hours and 59 Minutes. The record setting event was part of the Royal Air Force Diamond Jubilee and was documented in a booklet titled "Mississippi Paddle '78." The paddlers needed to qualify for the team through racing trials in England. The team's record appears on page 456 of the 1980 paperback editions of the Guinness Book of World Records.

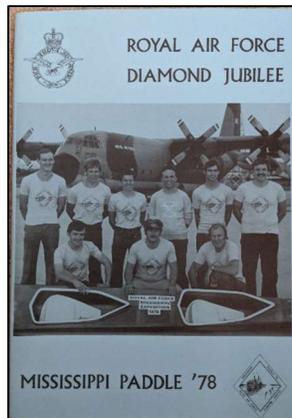
*Brian Smith kindly sent me items from their record run (event booklet, scanned photographs, event sticker, etc.), for the exhibit at the Tunica Riverpark and Museum. I'll scan their booklet and will post it later. Thank you, Brian!*



(L to R) Doleman, Smith, Riley, McBoyle, Dodd, and Young

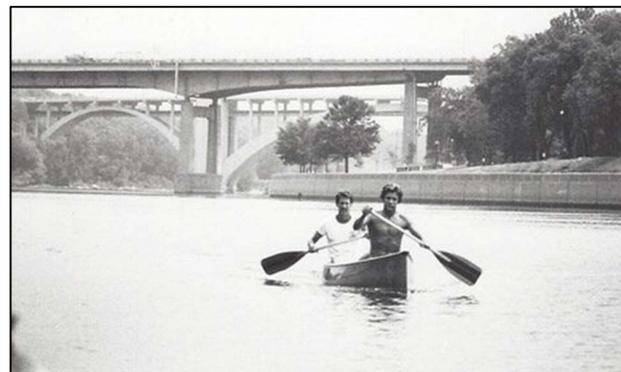


Kayakers in route



1937 Guinness Record holder Gerald M. Capers (L) talking with Brian Smith in New Orleans; Team publication.

**1980 3<sup>rd</sup> Guinness Record:** Steven M. Eckelkamp (23 years old at the time; born July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1956, died June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017) and K. J. Millhone (21 years old) of Minnesota set the Guinness World Record of 35 Days, 11 Hours, and 27 Minutes. Their two-man support crew (Terry Haltner and Todd Sandberg) drove a car pulling a trailer for equipment. An 18 ½ foot fiberglass canoe was provided by Sunkist and there was some support noted from the Univ. of MN Alumni Association Student Board.



Steven M. Eckelkamp (left) and K.J. Millhone (right); Steven M. Eckelkamp (bow) and K.J. Millhone (stern)

**1981 First:** Verlen Kruger and Steve Landick paddled **up the river** in 83 Days!

**1983 Notable Run:** Ron Bath, well known disabled Australian marathon canoeist, is believed to be the first to solo kayak the Mississippi River, doing so in 41 days. I don't have any more information if a formal Guinness record was applied for or awarded. Note that their video documentary (below) mentions a section of about 100 miles was not run because of an accident on the river.

Ron's inspirational run was documented in the 1983 movie "The Mississippi Challenge", found on YouTube in four parts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnbtFKPf6Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FDE2JQCYf8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFLmPU0mesw>

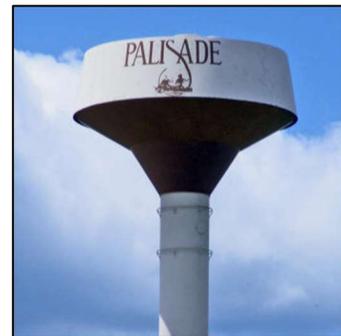
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijKwH46clGA>

**1983, Notable Run:** Kathleen and Curtis Saville rowed the entire Mississippi River in their self-made 18' long and 3 ½ beam rowing shell named "GUENEVERE" in 67 days. This was done between their Guinness World Records for rowing across the Atlantic and South Pacific oceans. They documented their trip in their book "MISSISSIPPI VOYAGE: How we rowed down the Mississippi River in 67 days." Note that Curtis rowed about the first and nearly the last hundred miles of river by himself. Both rowed the very last, small section to Mile Marker 0.

**1984 4<sup>th</sup> Guinness Record, Firsts:** Verlen Kruger (61 years old) and Valerie Fons (33 years old) set the Guinness World Record of 23 Days, 10 Hours, and 20 Minutes during the Eddie Bauer Mississippi Challenge, also sponsored by Mad River Canoe. Their support team of Jon and Marianne Fons, and Helen Broomell, followed by van with supplies. This was the first attempt that used a deliberate strategy to sleep one paddler in the canoe while the other paddler kept the canoe moving on the river.

Their Kevlar canoe was manufactured at the Mad River Canoe factory and outfitted with a rudder and full fabric deck. These (two were made) were the prototypes for what would later become the Kruger Cruiser. The motto "With Equal Effort" was painted on the craft. Valerie also raised money through the event to help Guide Dogs for the Blind purchase a dog, aptly named Mississippi, or "Missi" to her new family. Valerie also became the first woman to hold a Mississippi River paddling Guinness record.

Valerie has kindly provided items from their record run for the exhibit at the Tunica Riverpark and Museum. Thank you!



Valerie Fons (Bow) and Verlen Kruger (Stern); Canoe News 1984; Palisade, MN Water Tower honoring their record run.

**1985 Notable Run:** Eddy L. Harris is noted as the first African American to run the Mississippi River, starting in Itasca and ending in Jefferson Parish, before the city of New Orleans. Eddy wrote about his remarkable journey in the 1988 book "Mississippi Solo-A River Quest." Technically, several river

sections were missed (Montrose to Keokuk, a few miles below St. Louis, a section below Osceola) and he paddled with his brother Tommy briefly near Cape Girardeau. This still does not diminish his adventure. He would return 30 years later in 2015 for a second run for a film documentary (see his 2015 entry).

**1989 5<sup>th</sup> Guinness Record:** Bill Perdsock (25) and Mike Schnitzka (25) set the Guinness World Record of 23 Days, 9 Hours, and 51 Minutes. Their land support team was Rod Hanson and Mike Mlynarski. Budget Rental was a corporate sponsor. Mike wrote about their record run in Chapter 4 of his 2017 book "Escaping the Velvet Rut-An Adventurer's Guide to Chasing Your Dreams."

The team used an 18-foot, 6-inch Wenonah Odyssey canoe with no rudder during the initial, shallow section prior to Bemidji, MN, after which they switched to a fabric-decked, 18-foot 6-inch Wenonah SCR (Standard Class Racer) with no rudder for the remaining run. Portages were considered acceptable for obstructions and convenience. A very difficult land portage at the New Madrid, MO river bend was made, but the team concluded this portage option was not worth the time and physical effort to repeat. Upon reaching Baton Rouge, all extra weight from the canoe was removed for a tremendous sprint to Mile Marker 0, reaching their goal only 30 minutes faster than the existing record time of Kruger and Fons.

Initial efforts to secure the Guinness World Record were hampered by not having many witness signatures along the river near Memphis, TN during stormy weather. This was rectified by obtaining letters of support, including one from the American Canoe Association, that assessed their rate as equal to, or less than, their rate flanking the river section in question.

Mike has kindly offered to send items from their record run for the exhibit at the Tunica Riverpark and Museum. Thank you!



Perdsock (Bow) and Schnitzka (Stern)

**2001 Firsts, Notable Runs, Unofficial Records:** "The Great Mississippi River Race for Rett Syndrome" took place. This charity event was organized by Clark Eid and his wife Mary Potter in honor of their daughter Amanda to raise awareness and research funds for Rett Syndrome.



Mary and Clark with their children Amanda and Noah at the Headwaters.

The event holds the unofficial world record for the longest non-stop Canoe/Kayak Race in history. (Note Guinness recognizes the 1967 Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant as the longest canoe race, covering 3,283 miles in 104 days, but it was a multi-staged event with rotating crews. This race was sanctioned by the ACA and the USCA, had insurance coverage, medical officer, timekeeper, judges, race officials, and was coordinated with both the Corps of Engineers and Coast Guard. Detailed rules were established and published prior to the race, setting a new standard for future attempts to be judged against.

Record flooding and storms challenged all five starting teams. Miscommunication between the Coast Guard and local law enforcement caused a significant delay when Teams “Kruger” and “Double Helix” were forced off the river due to severe flooding. Eventually, Verlen Kruger and Bob Bradford of Team “Kruger”, using a fabric-decked Kruger Cruiser with rudder, won 1<sup>st</sup> place at 24 Days, 17 hours, and 51 minutes.



Kruger (Stern) and Bradford (Bow); (L to R) Hanson, Bradford, Wood, Young and Kruger

Verlen became the only known paddler to race a canoe twice down and once up the Mississippi River. Details of Verlen’s life and records, including his involvement in this charity event and the subsequent entry for the 2003 charity event, can be found in Phil Peterson’s excellent 2006 book titled “All Things are Possible-The Verlen Kruger Story: 100,000 Miles by Paddle” (ISBN-10: 1-59193-138-X).

Clark Eid and Kurt Zimmermann of Team “Double Helix” won 2<sup>nd</sup> place and set the unofficial kayak record of 26 Days, 6 Hours, and 40 Minutes. Their kayak (built by Eid) was called the “Double Helix”, and at 25 ½ feet long, is the longest craft to successfully run the entire river. (Eid’s family has since donated the kayak to the Tunica RiverPark and Museum to initiate their paddling exhibit.) Road Crew Captains

were Kent Spading and Tony Swenson. Road Crew Members were Jeff Romine, Andrew Gribble, William Schmitz, Eric Marshall, Johann Fembek, Edith Paule, and Bill Evans. Additional support was generously provided by Stephen Bertenshaw, R. Martin German, Christine Hendricks, and Jan White. Mary Potter sewed several versions of spray skirts for the kayak, developed the event website, was pivotal in providing communication during the event, and essentially kept the event focused in the right direction!



Zimmermann (Stern) and Eid (Bow) in the “Double Helix”; Gribble, Fembek, Swenson, Marshall, Hanson Family and Friends.



(L to R) Eid, Phil Melhorn, Jan White, George Karageorge, Omar Lopez, Jeff Romine, William Schmitz, Christine Hendrics, Eric Marshall, and Zimmermann at the BMS Wallingford, CT Facility.

Team “Alaska MSC” (Tony DeGange, David Hoffman, Will Miles, Kerm Ketchum, Bud Bourn) used a kayak and won 3<sup>rd</sup> place as they remained on the river when the event’s mandatory clock ran out at the end of May. Kayak teams “Rebels with a Cause” (Carl Johnson, Al Levine, and Eric Kocher) and “Amazon” (Cynthia Belbin and Megan Duffy) withdrew from the race earlier while still in Minnesota.



(L to R) Teams “Alaska MSC,” “Rebels with a Cause,” and “Amazon”

More information can be found at [www.BeyondTheFinish.org](http://www.BeyondTheFinish.org)

**2003 6<sup>th</sup> Guinness Record:** “The Mississippi River Challenge for Rett Syndrome and Leukodystrophy” took place, with all funds raised supporting research for these two rare diseases. Clark Eid (42) and Bob Bradford (60) of Team “Hope”, supported by a road crew led by Stan Hanson, set the Guinness World Record of **18 Days, 4 Hours, and 51 Minutes** following the same stringent rules as in their earlier 2001 charity event. The team used a full, fabric decked Kruger Cruiser outfitted with a rudder.

The Guinness World Records Certificate states: “Bob Bradford and Clark Eid (both USA) paddled the length of the Mississippi from Lake Itasca, Minnesota, to Mile Zero in the Gulf of Mexico in a time of 18 days, 4 hours and 51 minutes from 10 to 28 May 2003. The record was set during The Mississippi River Challenge for Rett Syndrome and Leukodystrophy.”

Of note is that Verlen Kruger was a race advisor. Clark Eid is thought to be the only person to have raced the river using both kayak and canoe, holding time records for each craft. Mary Potter built a combined 2001 and 2003 charity event website that contains detailed information, located at [www.BeyondTheFinish.org](http://www.BeyondTheFinish.org)



Pictures from “The Mississippi River Challenge for Rett Syndrome and Leukodystrophy”

**2014 Guinness Attempt:** Four-man team of Tim Muhich, Clinton Adams, Colin Bright, and Tom “Boot” Baweja. This was the first known four-man attempt at the Guinness record. Their attempt advanced to within 45 minutes of the 2003 record by L&D #11 in Debuque, IA, but gradually lost momentum by Greenville, MS where they were 24 hours off the pace. They stopped their run at this point given the unlikelihood of breaking the record. Overall, an outstanding run!



Tim Muhich, Clinton Adams, Colin Bright, and Tom “Boot” Baweja

**2014 First:** Grace Kluesner (24 years old) is believed to be the first woman to solo canoe the Mississippi River. Completed over 102 days during the months of September, October, and November of 2014.

**2014 First:** Ellen McDonah (60 years old) is believed to be the first woman to solo kayak the Mississippi River. This is documented in her book “One Woman’s River-A Solo Source-to-Sea Paddle on the Mighty Mississippi.” She began on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and ended September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 for a total of 107 days.

**2015 Notable Run:** Dale Sanders became the oldest person at 80 years old to canoe the entire Mississippi River while raising awareness for Juvenile Diabetes. Dale’s run took 80 days. His record lasted until 2020.

**2015 Notable Run:** Eddy L. Harris completes his second run from Itasca to New Orleans (his first was in 1985) while filming the documentary “River to the Heart” (2017). Technical details of his run are not publicly available. Harris described the film by saying “he wanted to experience and then show others that no matter what your color, the more we know of each other the less we fear, and the more unity we’ll have as a country.”

**2015 Notable Run:** Alyssum Pohl solo kayaks the Mississippi River.

**2016 Notable Run:** Janet Moreland solo kayaks the Mississippi River in 65 days, from May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

**2017 Guinness Attempt:** Tim Muhich lead another four-man team of Clinton Adams, Colin Bright, and Dale Waldo (replacing 2014 paddler Tom “Boot” Baweja). They set the fastest recorded pace on the upper river sections, outpacing the 2003 Guinness record by 24 hours by New Boston, IL. Poor weather near Burlington and Nauvoo deeply eroded their time advantage to a point they could not recover beyond Cairo, IL. Their time advantage eroded to zero when a paddler developed heat exhaustion ~30 miles upriver from Greenville, MS, forcing them to stop. Nevertheless, the team’s outstanding effort pushed many boundaries beyond what was thought possible!



Tim Muhich, Clinton Adams, Colin Bright, and Dale Waldo

**2017 Attempt:** Michael Waterford attempts fastest solo kayak run. Attempt ended in Dubuque, Iowa.

**2017 Notable Run:** Matt Rens and Jesse Richard, both 17-year-old from Bloomington, MN made solo kayak runs during their “Source to Sea” fundraiser for Lifewater, International. They started from the Headwaters on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and ended 51 days later on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. It’s unclear if they made it exactly to Mile Marker 0 from press reports.

**2018 Guinness Attempt:** Three-man team of Kirk “KJ” Millhone, Kevin Eckelkamp and Nate Lastinger attempt the record as the first three-man team to try setting the record since 1937. Lastinger departed from the team following Lake Pepin, MN and the remaining two paddlers continued to Guttenberg, Iowa before officially stopping. The run’s pace lagged the 2003 record pace by 5 hours at the Lake Winnibigoshish Dam and progressed to an 11-hour deficit by the end of Lake Pepin. Note that KJ was a 1980 record co-holder, and Kevin was the nephew of the late Steven M. Eckelkamp (the other 1980 record co-holder with Millhone).



(L to R) Kevin Eckelkamp, Kirk “KJ” Millhone, and Nate Lastinger

**2020 Notable Run:** Dustin Stensland became the first person on record to travel the entire Mississippi River in a birchbark canoe. He started on 19 JUN and ended 04 OCT.

**2020 Notable Run:** Stan Stark became the oldest person at 81 years old to canoe the entire Mississippi River, breaking Dale Sander’s 2015 record. Stan started on 15 JUL and ended on 03 NOV.

**2020 Notable Run:** Nate Denofre became the first double amputee to canoe nearly all the Mississippi River. Nate started his run “Paddling to Persevere” on 09 MAY and ended on 31 AUG after following the Atchafalaya River to the Gulf (last minute choice because of pending hurricanes). He also raised money for his nonprofit Courage Incorporated which takes veterans and other adults with disabilities on free wilderness adventures in the U.P. of Michigan and NE Wisconsin. Disabled combat veteran Don Jokinen

joined Nate for more than half the trip while Nate's wife Christa provided land support. The team was accompanied by their rescue dog Marcie.

Six of one and half a dozen of the other, Nate's a true champion! Inspirational run!

## **Notable accomplishments for SUP paddling the Mississippi River**

**2011:** David Cornthwaite first to stand-up-paddleboard (SUP) the Mississippi River in 82 days. Cornthwaite's journeys (there are many) are designed to raise money for two charities: The AV Foundation, which works in East Africa schools and communities developing water system infrastructures; and Coppafeel, a breast cancer charity.

**2017:** Dan Lee sets new record of 55 days for a SUP. He started on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017 and ended on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017; switching from an inflatable paddle board on the initial sections to a hard-shell paddleboard for the remainder. Lee raised money through his run for twin camps, Camp Lincoln for boys and Camp Lake Hubert for girls where he had been a counselor.

**2019:** LouAnne Harris claims to be first woman to SUP the Mississippi River, from August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

## **Notable Accomplishments for Paddling the Missouri-Mississippi River Complex**

This is an incomplete listing at best, sorry. And, yes, it's fair to argue that this route should really reflect the true headwaters of the Mississippi River. Let's put that aside for another day and list some of these great accomplishments. Some of these can also be found at:

<https://www.missouririverpaddlers.com/expedition-database-1962--present.html>

**1962:** Richard Messer (23 years old) and Jerry Sanders canoe from Montana to New Orleans in 3 months.

**1977:** Nicholas Francis (24 years old) claims Guinness World Record for solo canoeing (kayak) the Missouri and Mississippi River complex. (I've not confirmed Guinness World Record.) His story is told in the 1990 book "Mississippi Madness: Canoeing the Mississippi" by William Butcher. Nicholas helped to raise funds for the U.K. Cancer Research Center.

**1993:** Mark Spitzer became the first American to canoe the Missouri-Mississippi River complex. (Anyone have details?)

**2012:** Mark Kalch became the first American to solo kayak the Missouri-Mississippi River complex in 117 days.

**2013:** Rod Wellington became the first Canadian to solo kayak the Missouri-Mississippi River complex in 256 days.

**2013:** Janet Moreland became the first American woman to solo kayak the Missouri-Mississippi River complex in 223 days.

**2014:** Paul Gamache kayaked the Missouri-Mississippi River complex in 78 days.

**2019:** Mark Juras of Montana rowed the Missouri-Mississippi River complex from June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (130 days).

## **Longest Continuous Paddling Races**

- 1) **3,800 Miles.** "Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge" is a long-standing non-stop rowing race.

- 2) **2,348 Miles.** “2001 The Great Mississippi River Challenge for Rett Syndrome” at 2,348 miles. This non-stop, against the clock, multi-team canoe and kayak race was sanctioned by the ACA and the USCA. This one-time event had insurance coverage, medical officer, timekeeper, judges, race officials, and was coordinated with both the Corps of Engineers and Coast Guard. Detailed rules were established and published prior to the race. Five teams each paid \$2,500 donations to a Rett Syndrome research organization as entry “fees” to participated in the race. There was no prize money.  
Website: [www.BeyondTheFinish.org](http://www.BeyondTheFinish.org)
- 3) **750 Miles.** “Race to Alaska” is a multi-boat continuous race, involving canoes, kayaks, rowboats, SUPs, and sailboats.  
Website: [r2ak.com](http://r2ak.com)
- 4) **650 Miles.** “The Great Alabama 650” is a continuous race.  
Website: [GREAT ALABAMA 650 | THE WORLD'S LONGEST ANNUAL PADDLE RACE! | Events | ASRT \(alabamascenicrivertrail.com\)](http://GREAT ALABAMA 650 | THE WORLD'S LONGEST ANNUAL PADDLE RACE! | Events | ASRT (alabamascenicrivertrail.com))
- 5) **340 Miles.** “Missouri River 340” continuous race.  
Website: [rivermiles.com/mr340/](http://rivermiles.com/mr340/)
- 6) **300 Miles.** “The WaterTribe Everglades Challenge” continuous race.  
Website: [watertribe.com/Events/EvergladesChallenge/](http://watertribe.com/Events/EvergladesChallenge/)
- 7) **275 Miles.** “Tour de la Riviere Rouge” continuous race.  
Website: [tourduteche.com/races/tour-de-la-riviere-rouge/](http://tourduteche.com/races/tour-de-la-riviere-rouge/)
- 8) **260 Miles.** “The Texas Water Safari” continuous race.  
Website: [texaswatersafari.org](http://texaswatersafari.org)
- 9) **250 Miles.** “Kentucky River 255” continuous race.  
Website: [kr255.com](http://kr255.com)
- 10) **230 Miles.** “Suwannee River 230 Ultimate Challenge” continuous race.
- 11) **160 Miles.** “The Campus to Coast 160” is a continuous race.  
Website: [msuoc.org/calendar-2/campus-to-coast/](http://msuoc.org/calendar-2/campus-to-coast/)
- 12) **124 Miles.** “K2O Kingston to Ottawa” continuous race  
Website: [kingston2ottawa.ca](http://kingston2ottawa.ca)
- 13) **120 Miles.** “Au Sable River Canoe Marathon” continuous race.  
Website: [ausablecanoemarathon.org](http://ausablecanoemarathon.org)
- 14) **100 Miles.** “Colorado River 100” continuous race.  
Website: [coloradoriver100.com](http://coloradoriver100.com)
- 15) **100 Miles.** “California 100” continuous race.  
Website: [riversforchange.org/california-100/](http://riversforchange.org/california-100/)
- 16) **70 Miles.** “General Clinton Canoe Regatta” continuous race.  
Website: [canoeregatta.org](http://canoeregatta.org)

## Longest Non-Continuous Paddling Races

- 1) **3,291 Miles.** “1967 Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant” is recognized by Guinness World Records as the longest canoe race ever held, but this was a non-continuous, segmented event with rotating paddlers. (104 days in all, spanning more than 5,200 km on water and another 96 km of portages...and a number of sprint races along the way.)

- 2) **1,200 Miles.** “The WaterTribe Ultimate Florida Challenge” with five multi-day stages.  
Website: [watertribe.com/Events/UltimeFloridaChallenge/](http://watertribe.com/Events/UltimeFloridaChallenge/)
- 3) **1,000 Miles.** “The Finlandia Clean Water Challenge” was first run in 1993 was the first running of the 1,000-mile race from Chicago to New York City. In 1995 it added a 744-mile solo race category. The race had scheduled breaks in route for resting. Not sure how many years the event was held.
- 4) **1,000 Miles.** “Yukon 1000” started in 2009 and ran yearly until 2012, when it changed to bi-annual format. The race has restricted entry and runs for nine-day. Non-continuous requiring a 6-hour layover each day.
- 5) **450 Miles.** “Aquatennial Itasca to Minneapolis Mississippi River Canoe Race’ or “Aquatennial Canoe Derby” was held from 1940 through the early 1960s, with a few years missed in between. The longest of the varied formats ran between Bemidji to Minneapolis at 450 miles with 10 overnight, checkpoint stops where teams got off the water and celebrated.
- 6) **440 Miles.** “Yukon River Quest” in three legs with two required layovers.  
Website: [yukonriverquest.com](http://yukonriverquest.com)
- 7) **255 Miles.** “Lowcountry River Rats Savannah Challenge” in three stages over 7 days.  
Website: [lowcountryriverrats.com](http://lowcountryriverrats.com)
- 8) **250 Miles.** “Massive Murray Paddle” staged over 5 days.  
Website: [massivemurraypaddle.org.au](http://massivemurraypaddle.org.au)
- 9) **152 Miles.** “Berg River Canoe Marathon” over four days in stages.  
Website: [berg.org.za](http://berg.org.za)
- 10) **137 Miles (220 km).** “11-Cities SUP Tour” staged race over 5 days in Holland. (Note that there is a corresponding ice-skating marathon on the same canals when they freeze over that is continuous!)
- 11) **135 Miles.** “Tour du Teche 135” over three days in stages.  
Website: [tourduteche.com/races/tour-du-teche-135-2/](http://tourduteche.com/races/tour-du-teche-135-2/)
- 12) **120 Miles.** “James River Run” staged over two days.  
Website: [jamesriverrundown.org](http://jamesriverrundown.org)
- 13) **100 Miles.** “La Classique Internationale Canots Race” over three days in stages.  
Website: [classiquedecanots.com](http://classiquedecanots.com)
- 14) **77 Miles.** “The Dusi Canoe Marathon” over three days in stages.  
Website: [dusi.co.za](http://dusi.co.za)