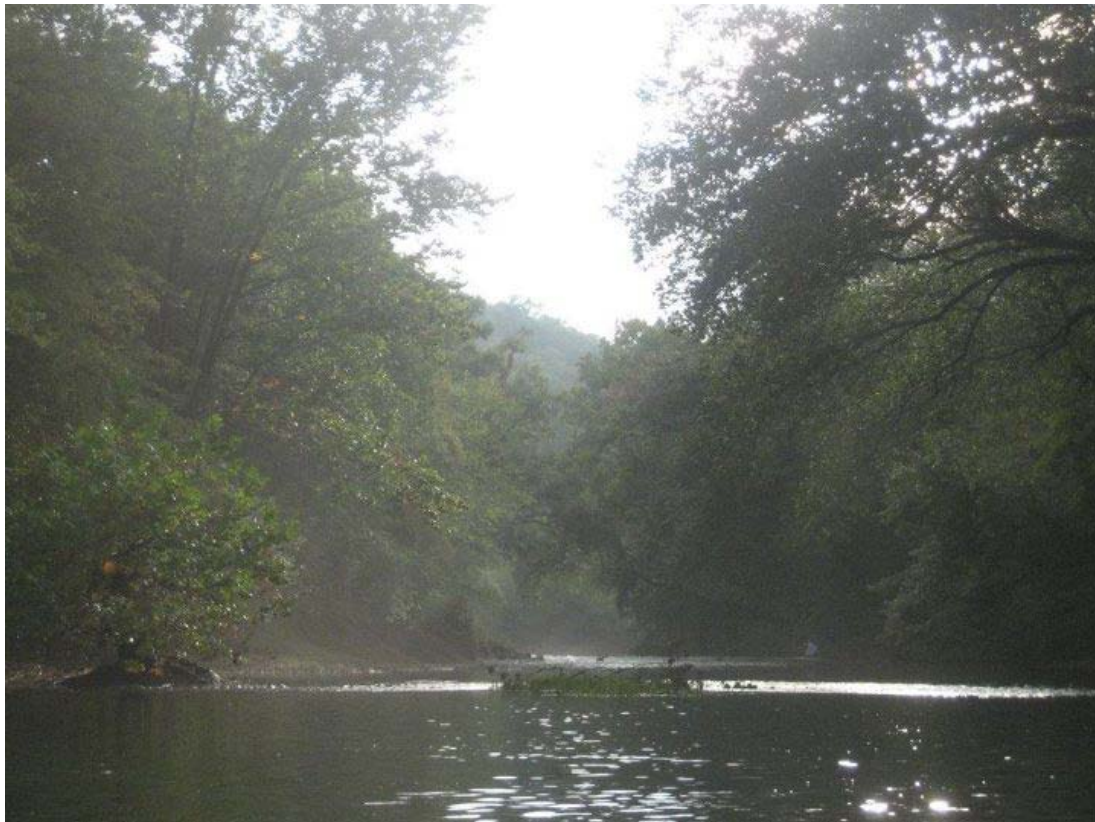


I have often wondered what life must have been like long ago... during a time of vast exploration and uncertainty about what challenges lied ahead, a time when the world, as we know it, was unspoiled, undiscovered, and far from understood. I try to imagine the overwhelming emotions that the first settlers of this country must have felt as they moved inland, anxious and unsure of what dangers and hardships awaited them around every corner, through every valley, and across every river. However, despite the tremendous physical, mental, and emotional obstacles they were faced with, their bravery and willingness to push on was not without its rewards. I do not know anyone that can honestly say they have fished in a river where no man has ever cast before...or reached the summit of a mountain and gazed upon land devoid of human influences as far as the eye could see. These were the simple rewards of life that were once so abundant and that now, for the majority of us, are real only through our imagination and our dreams...

I'm not saying that living in today's world is not challenging. Although different in many ways, we are still faced with the same basic obstacles that can cause an enormous amount of stress and anxiety in our life. In a world full of cell phones, traffic, crowds, and the philosophy that faster is better, it is difficult, but not impossible, to find a place to get away and experience the peacefulness and tranquility that so many of us need and enjoy. One such place is a little spot called Potomac River Maryland, where the journey began September 23. Whether you are at home or taking a few moments out of your busy day to read this, I hope that for the next few minutes I can take you to a place so beautiful and wild, that I will inspire you to go out and try it for yourself, realizing through my experience, that the Potomac River is just one of the wonderful getaways that the State of Maryland has to offer.



Our mission was to traverse 22 miles of the Potomac river from Cumberland, Md to Paw Paw, WV. As an avid fisherman and a great love for the outdoors, there is no better way to develop an understanding of an aquatic system than to experience it hands on. Being able to say "been there, done that!" can make you more confident with any decisions or obstacles that you'll face in the future.



Finally after intense discussion, preparation and planning we were ready to tame the waters of the northern Potomac River. The day had arrived and we packed all our gear, strapped the kayaks onto Brandon's Subaru and off we went without knowing what we were getting ourselves into. We didn't know what to expect and we were a bit nervous. We left the comforts of our homes and drove 3 hours north through a torrential downpour to get to our starting point. We had all the essentials, food for 3 days, our fishing gear, change of clothes, blankets, tents and flashlights. Although we had to leave behind Darryl's trash bag full of huge comforters and massive pillows, that we could not fit on the kayak. Although we should have brought them because Brandon felt like he only needed to bring 1 pair of shorts and a tee shirt.

When we got on the river it was absolutely beautiful. The rain had stopped, and away we went. I made the first few casts into the new waters and each time my lure passed behind a large boulder or through a deep pool I could feel my heart pounding, anxiously awaiting the first strike. Then it happened. Just as my lure hit the water I saw a flash and a few seconds later my line went tight. I set the hook immediately and was engaged in battle. Although the fight would last only for a few seconds, its rewards were unforgettable - the first smallmouth bass of the trip.

Daryl and Brandon were floating close behind me, Brandon casting away eagerly awaiting his first strike. Darryl paddled away trying to grasp how to paddle backwards and getting used to his kayak. We floated for an hour and stopped at a small island and finally accepted we were in the wild and the next three days we were going to make memories we would never forget.



As the day went on I was rewarded by a half dozen more beautiful smallmouth bass throughout the evening and as the sun set to my west I sat down and closed my eyes, trying to take in all that surrounded me. For that moment I was in peace and felt like the river had accepted me. Little did I know that in the morning I would be awakened from this dream engaged in yet another battle, this time not as sure about the outcome.

A night of light rain ended with the Rising sun. Brandon and I rolled out of bed onto the soggy ground and began to relight the fire. After we had the fire roaring again, Darryl stumbled out of the tent anticipating what the day would offer. As we sat around the fire drinking our coffee and laughing and smiling about the events the day before, we were about ready to break down camp. However, first things first... BREAKFAST! I prepared a protein filled breakfast consisting of bratwurst and jalapeno cheese hotdogs with a side of granola bars which we all ate and enjoyed. We loaded up all of our kayaks with fishing gear and other necessities before we finally pushed off down the river.



The air was crisp and clean as we pushed off. It looked like the rain from last night had passed and the sun was going to shine today. And it did! The forecast was rainy and wet, but the sun was out shining and it was turning out to be a gorgeous day. Immediately the fishing was on. Brandon was throwing out his rainbow trout lure and nailing them as usual, he was excited as he caught the biggest bass the day before and was ready to get an even bigger one today. As we worked down the river a ways, we came upon our first obstacle: white water all the way across the river. Brandon and I being the more experienced kayakers went through the light rapids without a problem. But Darryl, the less experienced kayaker was not prepared for this, as he was about to hit a big drop off, about a foot down, then it happened... his kayak began to spin. As he was about to hit the drop off I realized he was in trouble. I thought to myself there is no way he can make it, the river is going to eat him alive. And just as I thought that, Darryl bailed out of his kayak placing his bare feet on razor sharp rocks. As he did this the cooler of beer fell off his kayak and began floating down the river. When I saw him in trouble, I immediately turned around, and like any good friend would do, I quickly scooped up all the lost soldiers (beer) that were floating down the river. Phew! That was a close call. Oh and Darryl was alright too, he walked his kayak downstream a bit, got back in and was ready to roll.

As we were feeling more comfortable now and after a few hours on the water gave me the opportunity to look around and soak up some of the sights and sounds that were swiftly passing by. The scenery throughout this section was breathtaking and at times I wished the river would just stop so that I could appreciate more fully the beauty of the landscape. However, the river didn't stop and we were surged forward to our lunch destination, an island just passed where the Southern Potomac and Northern Potomac meet. We had a delicious lunch that consisted of more sausages and granola bars.

We were all a bit tired so we hung out here for a little while. We had a catfish rod in the water and tried to catch some minnows with a makeshift net I had made the previous day with no luck. We ate and drank a little, and then we all sat in our kayaks and rested, taking in everything we have overcome so far.

As the day went on we stopped at more numerous points along the way and indulging in one of the simplest pleasures of life, catching a fish. But the most exciting part of the trip for me was when I was engaged in the best battle I have taken part in on the river yet. I cast my green crawfish crank bait into choppy water just after some white water. I hooked up with something big! At first I thought it was a monster catfish because it was staying close to the bottom of the river. After the fish was pulling my kayak around for a few minutes, it finally got up to the side of the kayak and i realized it was not a catfish or a bass, but it was a walleye! I quickly grabbed the fish out of the water and threw him in the kayak. Wow! That was fun. I was watching out so his his gnarly teeth didn't catch my finger. I shouted with joy and quickly yelled to Brandon and Darryl to come over and check out this awesome fish. We stopped and took pictures and measured it. It was 19 inches! I have heard walleye were in the river, but I did not know anyone who has ever caught one. This for me was my fish of the year! Soon after this, it was getting late, and we started to look for a place to make camp for the night.





Over the years I have spent a lot of time kayaking and fishing rivers and lakes and I must tell you that this float was by far the most fun I have ever had. The views were spectacular and the fishing was even better. Limited access points make for a peaceful and quiet trip. We rarely saw anyone on the river. It was so quiet sometimes we got close to deer that were near the banks of the river. However, what sticks out in my mind are the 2 bald eagles that we saw during our trip. They flew over head as if watching us, clearing the path for any danger that may lay ahead.

The day ended with finding a nice camping spot on Coconut Point Island, a delicious dinner, and a beer to wash it down. We had chicken breast with more hotdogs and sausages. I pondered on the previous day's events realizing just how lucky I was to get the opportunity to do this.



I had awoken the next morning with a restless night of sleep. I kept hearing Darryl snoring like a little baby and could not find that comfortable spot on the ground. Once the sun came out I had awoken to a nice fire Brandon already started. We had a nice breakfast that consisted of granola bars, a coconut, and apples. The sky was loaded with clouds and a dense fog was hovering over the water this morning made for an eerie sense of what was to come. We loaded out gear once again, and pushed off for our last day on the river.

Just as we got on the water the sky began dropping water on us. It was a light rain for a couple hours, but the fishing was great. Top water was getting a lot of strikes, I even rigged up a live crayfish on one of my rods and as soon as it hit the water my bobber went underwater. After a short fight, I had a nice 20 inch kitty to admire. We didn't do much fishing after that. We still had 6 miles to kayak before we reached our end point. As we floated down to Paw Paw WV, we were all very quiet. It was hard to believe that in a little bit we were going home and that we wouldn't be here any longer. We will be home doing out normal activities, going to work and school, but as I do, I know that I will not be able to clear my mind of the journey I just completed. It saddens me to know that it is over, however, each time I feel the end it near, I remind myself that this is just the beginning. Brandon, Darryl, and I had traversed approximately 22 miles of the Northern Potomac River and there are still many more miles to go. Even though our travels for this year are done we will be back next year to tackle yet another chunk of the Nations River!