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descended the Big River all the way to Cape Disappointment.

We were determined. We were cold and wet. Mind you, that same route and farther routes have been swum and paddled and rowed by more than a corking boatload of athletes. One brave friend, Mark Hamilton, went overland from Missouri to

the Pacific, hiking, rowing and paddling much like his pioneer heroes, the Corps of Discovery. He traveled alone.

This, then, was our challenge, even if it was a smaller one. But that's the point of an adventure: You can choose your own. You can follow your own bliss. You can add up what matters in your own head. Nobody can take that away.

And that Sunday, as a stiff wind blew over the mouth of the Columbia and into Baker Bay, I decided to recreate an adventure from older days (12 years ago at 58, being the last) and paddle my small kayak to the mouth and attempt to catch a salmon. I hauled my dejected kayak from the rafters in the garage and set forth.

It's three or four miles from the China Beach property to my fishing hole. I wasn't so sure I could complete the passage, out and then back, *aller et retour*, as the French say. That is where a sense of adventure reached out like a friendly hand and poked me hard.

Fishing the Mouth

I launched the boat into a narrow slough in front of the B&B and paddled into rough water. It felt so good: the sea spray, the salty breeze, the strain of muscle. Waterfowl and geese. Two eagles circling while appraising their chances of a free meal. And miles of lovely water that beckoned in front of me.

Choppy river waves lapped at the sides of the kayak. The tide was flooding and pushed against my steady paddling. The sky was gray, almost the color of ash. A seal broke water, and then, a huge sturgeon surfaced, rolling up and onto his side, reminding this ol' boy of a humpback whale. And then, for a deep intoxicating moment, it was deathly quiet.

The shoreline slipped away. Sand Island approached. Over a deep chan-



DAVID CAMPICHE PHOTO

Gulls on Sand Island, gathering before a summer storm.

nel on a full flood tide, I fed out the neoprene fishing line. The orange diver sunk onto dark river water, murmuring prayers as it fell. If only I could have translated! The silver herring flapped like a wind-blown flag. I paddled on while the sea chop slurped over the 12 inches of freeboard. Other fishermen stared. Their motorized boats were equipped with relative comforts and high prows.

Paddling became more difficult. I maneuvered the vessel into place and

checked the bait, all the time moving backward rapidly. Even rowing with determined strokes, the kayak slid backward against the surge of flood tide.

Nearby, a heavy-set man on a motor boat yelled, "You're crazy!" I ignored him. Suddenly a fish struck, and the pole was nearly jerked from its resting place between my legs. I grabbed the pole and set the hook. For the next 10 seconds, my heart raced. Then the salmon was gone.

I paddled against the tide for another hour, fishing, but nothing happened, at least in terms of the expectation of a salmon dinner. I checked the time. I had a check-in at the China Beach cottage and realized it was time to return.

Return voyage

Before me was 3 miles of sea. I turned and followed the tide. Bad luck. Now the water was ebbing, and I was

fighting a choppy sea and Northwest wind that struck my face insistently like an unwelcome visitor knocking at the door. I thought about an old poem I had written one afternoon on a following sea in a sailboat in the Gulf. We had inadvertently sailed into a small hurricane. I have forgotten many of the words, but not the memory.

Charge on sea. Charge on, you! That's me, a 70-year-old adventurer. That was the message.

Like the sturgeon rising above the dark gunmetal water, I dug the paddle into the sea and rowed for home. My heart beat smoothly now. I was happy. The smell of salt water and small accomplishment wafted into my nostrils. I felt flushed by a fleeting spirit of adventure. Flushed by this Columbia-Pacific vista that touches us with so much grace.

And I had met myself and liked what I found. CW

Crossword Answers

B	E	T	T	I	E	S	P	I	C	E	R	U	B	T	G	I	F		
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