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'Voice of Rivers' provides unique opportunity

By Brian Randall
Contributor

Not very often does a professor pause a lecture to note how many alligators are splashing into the water.

Voice of the Rivers is, and I mean this with the utmost sincerity, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

What is so great about it? Over the past several weeks we have seen lots of peer-and career-related benefits in emails, flyers and articles, so I won't touch on those again except to say they are great benefits of the program.

I went on the 2008 trip and I did learn a lot. I have some new great friends, but what I have that only Voice of the Rivers could have given me are stories of a lifetime. In a similar way to Huck Finn, you float down a river and make the best of all your encounters.

I met a man named Kenny Dugger one very hot afternoon after a 21-mile paddle. He came up to ask me why my "boat



Photo courtesy of VOR 2008

The 2008 VOR team reached the Atlantic Ocean at Tybee Island, Ga., on June 4 after 21 days on the Savannah River. Pictured are Clyde Carter, James Davisson, Margaret Ann Medley, John Wargo, John Greene, Joe Raymond (VOR alum), Carrilea Potter, Scott Brown, Merek Slagle, Liz Thompson, Kelsey Bracewell, Brian Randall, Graham Tolbert, Ken Chamlee and Jenna Pace.

didn't have no motor" and just where I was going.

I simply said, "The ocean."

About that time he threw his Chihuahua he called Guberhead out of his johnboat onto the shore. And he started asking us all these questions. Where are you from? What are you trying to do?

Once he figured out we were from a college, he got to quizzing us about the river's history. Well, he sure knew a lot more about the river than us fancy college folk, but he wanted to share some of its history with us so he invited some of us to go in his boat with Guberhead to see what the river was all about.

Clyde Carter and I hopped in that boat and we went on our way. I opened a couple of beers for Kenny on the way down the river and Guberhead looked like George Washington at the front of the boat. We pulled up to this random shore and hopped out.

Kenny had been explaining all about the Civil War and the river's significance and some geological history, so I was curious what was significant about this shore.

He pointed to a fossilized shell and explained it was a couple thousand years old. He tried to pick it up and it snapped in half, he shrugged it off and told us there were plenty.

I was looking at Clyde and trying not to laugh but his expression made that near impossible. Then he took a sip of his beer and a deep breath and told us why that shore was so significant.

Slogan of the week:

Of the students, for the
students, by the students

"My daddy used to drop me and my brother off here when he went off with his whore." Kenny was a serious man, hardened by a life of factory work and I am just a goofball college kid who was giving it everything I had not to be like Jimmie Fallon.

Clyde was standing behind Kenny wide-eyed with his mouth open and a huge smile.

"You all don't know much about those days. But my bother and I would sit here fishing for a couple days at a time then daddy would come back and pick us up. Well, that's it—let's go."

We got back in the boat he yelled at Guberhead to jump back in and we were on our way 20 minutes back upstream. Then Kenny said something I didn't expect: "Life is like a river. If I could do it again, I would take it slow like y'all are doing."

He dropped us off. Scott Brown, who was writing our daily blog, asked how to spell his name and Kenny said, "You're in college and you don't know how to spell Kenny?" That was the only time when I was with Kenny when I felt it was safe to laugh.

"Come on Guberhead!" And just like that Kenny Dugger was off.

Everyone who went on that trip has several stories like that. Voice of the Rivers is a real life adventure. We are all young, but it is better to have more stories than dreams and that is what a trip like that is all about.

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