

Endurance Paddling

By Jen Fuller



So you have decided to go for “it” and you are wondering what you got yourself into?

Don't worry you can do it and we have some great strategies for you.

- Rethinking distance paddling – why it's not as crazy as you may think
- How to physically prepare for a long paddle (race or adventure) – body and mind
- Nutrition and hydration – what, how and why
- Equipment and gear – how to think through what is needed for boat and body
- On the water – how to successfully complete the race or adventure AND have fun doing it

You picked your paddle challenge and now it is time to dial it in, get it straight in your head and begin a smart plan of attack.

The goal here is to take the guessing out of your training.

Instead of thinking of the entire race and freezing like a deer in headlights, remember that you only want to think of a race in small sections. That way thinking about the entire distance at once doesn't overwhelm you. After all, you can't do the whole thing at once anyway. The race is one mile at a time.

Your training plan will build up over time so that by the time you do your adventure it is just like your training.

The Breakdown

Deciding on how far to paddle will depend on how much time you have to train. You will not want to decide to paddle 100 miles if you only have a month to train.

- 25 miles will take about 6 to 8 hours a week of training
- 50 miles will take about 8 to 12 hours a week
- 100 miles will take about 12 to upward of 20 hours per/week

For 100 miles, you really want nearly 3.5 to 4 months to build up. For shorter distances, you can take 2 to 3 months.

Let's say you start your training plan February 1st, you now have until May 26th, 2019 – if you plan on doing the California River Quest. That is almost 17 weeks – 4 months.

For the first couple of months, you **are not** going to have to train hard. You build up slowly, so you feel great and are ready for the event. If you start too hard too early, you will most likely not get to the event. In training terms being ready and feeling great is **peaking!**

Know the Territory

You need to think about how to experience the conditions that you will be paddling in. For the California River Quest, paddling on a river and learning how current works is important. You do not have to go to a river to experience this. Other water can simulate conditions of a river. For example, there are many spots in SF Bay that offer current and flow that is much like a river.

Note that Sean Morley will be teaching a great class on March 17th from 9am to 4:30 pm in Sausalito (Yellow Bluff). This is well worth attending as he is an excellent instructor and will cover current and boat skills. (See clinic schedule on California River Quest site.)

It is optimal, however, to experience the place where you are going to have your adventure, so you know the way there and the logistics of getting around, etc. Because this is not always possible, asking others that have raced or who know the area is extremely helpful. Local knowledge is priceless!

You should also know the flow of the river (speed), obstacles (where the white water is on the river, how much of it), and weather (potential and current forecasts).

Nutrition and Hydration

This is a very in-depth subject, so I will only go into the basics for now.

When you are training, you want to make sure to carry water with you. The first rule of thumb is to be hydrated. This does not mean just the day of the race. This means all the time. The two days before you race are very important. Don't skimp on it during that time! Your most important nutrition is taken in before the race.

Figuring out what foods work for you and how you will take them with you is also critical.

Your training over the past 6 to 12 months will dictate the ratio of carbs to protein that you will need to consume and when. In general, it is impossible to replace all the calories you are burning. So, the strategy is just to stay far enough ahead of the decrease in glucose to ensure that you don't run out of energy – a.k.a. bonk.

Example: You are going out to train for an hour and a half at a low to medium effort. Eat about 60 to 90 minutes before workout – an apple with nut butter is perfect. The apple has fiber in together with the protein will keep your blood sugar from spiking, giving you some nice slow burning glucose that will keep you fueled for your workout.

Many people try to force 250 to 300 kcal per hour. This is completely useless. There is no way you can process or absorb that amount in an hour. Most people end up feeling sick about 2 hours into the race on that many calories.

Let's look at the quality and ratio of carbs to protein. When you are doing an adventure or race of long duration and high intensity, you will be depleting your glucose levels. Glucose is in limited supply, while fat is in higher calorie supply to your body.

On average, there are about 2000 kcal of glucose stored in your liver and muscle and 70,000 kcal in of fat. The trick is that you need glucose present in the body to burn the fat. When people run out of glucose, the body goes through a brilliant process of converting muscle into glucose just so the body can burn the fat. You want to avoid that. It takes knowing when to start taking in glucose and when not to. Too little or too much causes gastric distress, but more often too much is the problem.

If you have been training using Gu shots or the like, you will want to start fueling with glucose type nutrition about 45 minutes to an hour into your training. If you have done metabolic efficiency training and are an efficient fat burner, you will probably not need to start fueling with higher glucose nutrition until about 90 min into the adventure. Higher glucose is a ratio of about 3 carbs to 1 protein or even 4 carbs to 1 protein.

Here is what I do for long race/adventures – over 2 hours. I use my Dakine or Camelbak water pack and put 50 oz. of regular water in one pack with 1 teaspoon of salt or a Nuun tablet, and another close to that of water with either Tailwind nutrition or other high-glucose drink that I digest well. I then put a different color drinking nozzle on the hose that has the glucose in it. Then, I cross the tubes across my chest securing them so that I can easily drink out of each nozzle.

A general rule is that in base training weeks, you do not have to take in as much glucose as when you are training long and hard (over 90 min and in heart rate zones of 4 and 5).

All nutrition products should be tested during your training and not on race day! The worst mistake is trying a product while you are racing.

Equipment

Clothing, along with your nutrition, can make or break your race. The basics, for a race like the California River Quest, include:

- PFD (has to be Coast Guard approved Type III for the California River Quest)
- Small portable multi-tool if needed for fin, etc.
- Extra fin, if you're paddling a SUP
- Paddle in good condition (check for stress cracks in blade and shaft, etc.)
- Some people bring extra paddles
- Tie-down straps or way to carry your water and extra clothes.
- Extra clothes

- Duct tape
- Lightweight windbreaker
- Hats (sun and warm)
- River shoes
- Sunblock (long lasting & and not eye stinging)
- Sunglasses with strap

*****Note:** Be sure to check race rules as there will be a list of mandatory equipment that may have items not listed here.

I am a huge fan of layers and specifically of natural origin. Merino wool is made in a number of weights. I use a very thin layer (tank top) and, depending on the temperature, I layer another thin or thick layer. The thing about wool that most people don't know is that in very hot weather a thin layer will help regulate your temperature superbly. If you get wet, you will be less likely to get hypothermic due to the ability of the wool to dry fast and regulate your body temp. Silk is also a fantastic regulator of body temperature.

In any temperature, nylon is terrible at regulating body temperature. Basically, nylon does not let the skin breathe well and you are screwed if the temperature cools, wind comes up or the sun goes down.

Footwear is important because when you need to get off the water, there are often sharp rocks and sticks. The last thing you need is an injury. Plus, footwear can help provide padding between you and the board decking, if you're on a SUP.

Mind Set

Keep your mind positive. Singing songs and talking to yourself may sound silly, but it keeps your mind sharp and your attention on what needs to happen along the way.

I am not a big fan of music, but, for long adventures or races, it can take your mind off the discomfort and mental nonsense that creeps in. In many races, music is not allowed, because you cannot hear if directions are being broadcast or yelled at you. This is potentially hazardous to you and others.

Remember, each time you complete a mile that is one less mile to go.



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