

Title: *Down the Mississippi with Stinky*

Subtitle: *Two Women, a Canoe and a Kitten*

Author: Dorie Brunner

Published: 2000

Publisher: Prairie Oak Press, Wisconsin USA

Contents: 136pp, 1 map, 9 b&w photo plates

Cover: softcover

Size: 153 x 230 mm

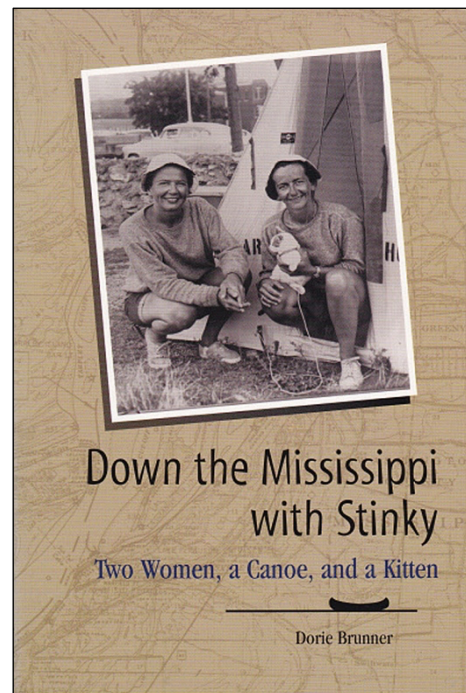
Price: US\$ 15.95

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Availability: AbeBooks.com

Review: Paul Caffyn

So many of the narrative paddling titles published in the USA in the past 15 years are what I call 'Vanity' print runs. Authors paying for print runs that are top heavy with up to 550 pages of diary style text, whole pages without a paragraph break, very light or totally deficient with maps, clumped together photograph sections (sometimes), cheap paper quality and no bibliography or index.



When buying such narratives via new and second-hand websites, it is not the same as picking up and fondling a book in a bookshop, getting a feel for the ability of the writer to spin a good story, and viewing the illustrations and maps. These websites are a trap for paddling literature bookaphiles such as myself. But occasionally the rural postie delivers a wee treasure of a book.

The title – and subtitle - of this one intrigued me, and what a corker book. It is the story of two teachers, Dorie and Lou, who decide to paddle a Canadian canoe down the 2,300 mile length of the Mississippi River in the North American summer of 1960. For the two lasses, it was choice of teaching jobs in North Africa or the Mississippi paddle - the long paddling trip won out.

The author Dorie Brunner must have been 34 years old when the duo started the paddle. Although neither Dorie nor Lou Germann kept a dairy, the text is based on Dorie's 40 year old trip memories and some notes penned on map margins. As the author writes in her preface, it is a rescued kitten that provides the 'main driving force' for the book. Not long after launching their red fibreglass canoe from Lake Bemidji, an unusual mournful cry is heard from a mud flat. The women turn back to find a scrawny kitten stuck in the mud, covered with insect bites and perhaps not much longer to live. They called the kitten *Stinky* for where they found him.

This was quite an ambitious challenge back in 1960, especially for two young women. There is not a lot of background, up till when they started the paddle, aside from brief mention of prior paddle training in Canada, seeking sponsorship for a canoe and kit, and research for maps and background information on the river. Aware of the nasty affects of encounters with poison ivy, both women took a pill for three months prior to gain immunity from the 'miserable poisonous plant'. And it worked.

Encounters with river bank dwellers and boaties are described. From a little newspaper publicity on the way, most folk were aware of the trip but were most interested in meeting and hearing stories about Stinky. It was not all smooth paddling; a night encounter with a rabies ridden skunk, and two occasions when the women had to bring out their hand guns for

protection from male 'river rats'. A warning shot fired in the second encounter, sent two rats scurrying for their dinghy.

In the lower part of the river, they were nailed on several occasions by very powerful and swift moving tornados, having to dig themselves, Stinky, the canoe and paddles from under layers of river sand - frightening encounters.

Dorie and Lou (and Stinky) made quite a team, with only one minor disagreement when tempers frayed and Dorie hurled the chart book into the river. Fortunately the book floated and was quickly recovered. The women had a terrible night with Stinky missing from the tent, but made up by recalling stories of their 'Canoe Commander'.

They get almost royal treatment when they finish at New Orleans, and even Stinky gets to stay in the hotel's baggage room.

Nine black and white photo plates bring the story to life; the single map shows the states, the major cities and major tributaries. A nice cover design also, a photo of the two women with Stinky, with a background 'watermark' of a river map.

An 'Afterword' provides advice for anyone considering paddling 'The Father of Waters'.