

I would like to begin by dispelling the common misconception that planning a trip actually does anything to improve the quality of said trip. First, a strict schedule is bound to have errors, if only by human error. Over-reliance on an itinerary that is certain, at some point, to fail can cripple the traveler. Second, the element of adventure is completely destroyed. If the point of a voyage is to experience the unknown, to brave the wilds of a foreign world, the elements of adventure and surprise must not be eliminated – rather, they must be cultivated. Third, planning too much hinders one’s ability to simply enjoy the journey. Paying too much attention to detail or to a schedule restricts time and focus, forcing the traveler to sacrifice appreciation for the volume of tourist traps he/she can pay admission to. It is much wiser to relax – to enjoy your surroundings for what they are. Though I have more reasons for not wanting to plan trips, in general, those were (I think) my best three and they sufficiently prove my point.

I would like to request funding from the Goliard Scholarship to canoe the stretch of the Rio Guadalquivir in Andalucia, Spain, from Cordoba to the port of Sanlucar. I’m sure that you’re already making the paragraph transition in your head: “This kid probably doesn’t know too much about this river.” And you’d be 90% correct in thinking that. Though my Spanish is passable, I am by no means fluent. I don’t know much about the river itself, other than three important facts: 1) from Cordoba to Seville, the river is not navigable by commercial boats; 2) the river is about 400 miles long, which means that there’s probably less than 300 miles of it between Cordoba and Sanlucar; 3) it is possible to do this. I have never navigated any river this long. I have never been to Spain (though I have been to Oklahoma).

My plan is simple. I will begin in Cordoba with a reliable, inflatable canoe that, pending carrying costs, I will bring from the United States. I will transport the canoe (which is easily deflatable) using a special frame pack. I will apportion more than enough time to spend several days in Cordoba, Seville, and Sanlucar, as well as the smaller towns along the way. I will use cities along the way as mileage checkpoints. Probably, I will not canoe the entire stretch, both in the interest of being able to spend time in the Spanish riverside cities of historic Andalucia and in the interest of skipping reservoirs. The entire trip should be rather cheap, though I will be prepared if it is otherwise.

I am incredibly interested in Spanish culture. I am incredibly interested in the Islamic and Christian histories of Andalucia. I am incredibly interested in the prospect of learning more Spanish. I am incredibly interested in canoeing the Gaudalquivir.

Yes, I applied for this scholarship last year. Yes, my idea (rafting the River Shannon in Ireland) was crazy. Yes, this idea is crazier. No, I have not learned my lesson.

I have two statements that I would like to make in conclusion: 1) I am crazy with wanderlust. I am wildly passionate about being able to go on such an adventure, to have this learning opportunity of a lifetime. I am desperately, psychotically, feverishly set on canoeing the Guadalquivir this summer. Pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease help make this possible for me. 2) Mom, I’m sorry for not asking to go to Ireland this year. Don’t take it personally.

Tommy Belanger