

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Please Note: MARATHON PHOTOS, A GRAPHIC COURSE MAP AND OTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AT THE MARATHON'S WEB SITE: www.ausablecanoemarathon.org

Oscoda and Grayling Teams Paddle Historic AuSable River Non-Stop .

AuSable River Ready For Summer Canoe Traffic

After less than 24 hours of paddling two canoes traveled 126 miles from Grayling to Oscoda half-way across the Lower Peninsula. Teams of six paddlers had pushed paddled and pulled two recreation canoes over six portages and 126 miles of river. Each pair of paddlers covered equal shares of the river through the day and night. The canoes, standard 18 foot aluminum recreational canoes, were equipped with lights for night-time paddling and foot braces. Oscoda paddlers included Chris Rudolph, Marie Matthews, Kari Wainwright, Sarah Jenkot, Rod Matthews. Guest paddling spots were filled by Jeff Mertz, Ted Matthews and Dan Gary. Grayling paddlers included Stacey Fifield, Fred Fisher III, Wayne Koppa, Pete Kocefas, Rob Read and Jim Laurent.

The AuSable River winds itself between Grayling and Oscoda with six hydro-electric dams that require portages of 50 to 100 yards that include severe elevation changes. The dams produce lake size backwaters that create navigational challenges. Paddling from Grayling to Oscoda under any conditions is a challenge, to do it through the night non-stop easily ranks as a first class adventure.

The two teams lined up for a 3:00 P.M. Saturday downtown start in Grayling. A threat of thunderstorms was on everyone's minds as last years event included rain, high winds and sleet. Hopes were for better weather this year. Additionally, the Grayling paddlers were looking to settle the score with Oscoda after being beaten for overall time by Oscoda.

The river was divided into nine stages . The first paddlers arrived at Wakeley Bridge in 2 hours and 53 minutes. First time event Grayling Paddler Stacey Fifield was paired up with Fred Fisher III on the first of her three stages. Fred would disappear for a few hours to attend daughter Anna's dance recital and return , with hot pizza, for later stages. Stacey would go on to do a night stage and bring the Grayling boat into the finish line. Paddlers experienced light rain but nothing like last year.

During the second stage two men from Grayling, Pete Kocefas and Wayne Koppa were matched up with Christine Rudolph and Marie Matthews of Oscoda for one of the longer stages, 18 miles. Kocefas commented "the ladies took off and there was nothing we could do about it for the first 14 miles. We finally passed them and they passed us right back and much of the time was spent just a few yards apart. They made a small mistake and we got by them and fortunately Parmalee Bridge came up just in time."

The first portage would take place at the Mio Dam. The first canoe arrived in 7 hours and 39 minutes at 10:39 PM. The Grayling team was 15 minutes back.

During the long hours of the night the skies never cleared but nothing other than a mist developed. Fog was not present as last year and visibility was generally very good.

As the teams entered the vast Alcona Pond impoundment the local knowledge of Ted Matthews paired with Christine Rudolph made short work of GPS equipped Kocefes and Koppa. Alcona offered up everything from Trumpeter Swans to a debris field of trees that can provide you with the late night opportunity for a swim. The water and wind provided a pretty good chop that kept the paddlers attention. The Oscoda team arrived first at 3:21 AM. Now on to the flat waters of the lower ponds.

The Teams arrived at Loud Dam just after 8:00 AM and a moderate headwind was developing. Jeff Mertz, a Saginaw Valley college student, dating paddler Sarah Jenkot, got the surprise of this life when he was thrown into the Oscoda canoe for a chance to see the AuSable from the front seat.

Team Oscoda finished the race at the Mill Street Bridge in Oscoda in 19 hours and 41 minutes, while Team Grayling crossed the finish line in 20 hours and 27 minutes. Times were significantly improved over last year.

All in all, the event was a great success. Money was raised for the AuSable River Marathon in July in the way of pledges by businesses and individuals, but more importantly new friends were made and horizons were expanded. Wayne Koppa commented “There is a lot of buzz about the price of gas and how it affects tourism. The AuSable offers a great chance to see one of the Nation’s most storied rivers without having to drive that far, and the prices will most likely be higher next year. Don’t waste away your opportunity to paddle a section or more of a river that will leave you with great memories.”

Jim Laurent, Marathon Paddler and event participant stated “It was quite a night and we paddled the river from Grayling to Oscoda and it’s safe to say that it is ready for summer canoe traffic”.

Many photos organized according to the order of take-outs, bridges and portages from the Spring Trials are displayed on the Marathon Webb site at ausablecanoemarathon.org.