

A Guide Book for the AuSable River Canoe Marathon - By Dave Foley

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by *Dave Foley*

After having raced with the Michigan Canoe Marathon Race Association since 1985, I had developed a strong desire to compete in the AuSable Marathon. However the thought of paddling all night in a race that would take me downriver for 120 miles and last more than sixteen hours raised some real anxieties in me.

I worked as a bankrunner in 1988 and 1989 for Lynne Witte and began to understand just how big an undertaking the marathon would be. These bank running experiences also whetted my desire to be a participant in the race. I found the task to be immense, as I realized how much river there is between Grayling and Oscoda, and how important it was to set up an effective system for receiving the proper food and drink at the right times during the race. Then there was the eight hours of nighttime paddling, the fog on the ponds, and all the equipment that had to be procured.

I had a million questions that needed answers. The Michigan Canoe Racing Association paddlers were helpful and especially Lynne Witte, who not only provided a pro boat but also much encouragement and information. Steve Southard, the owner of Ray's Canoe Livery and major organizer of the race, also was available whenever I needed some help.

This year my partner, Brent McCumber, and I raced to a 16:06 14th place finish and I gained insights that could only be obtained first hand. The result of all my research is this guidebook which I hope will simplify your hunt for information as you prepare for the AuSable Marathon.

Dave Foley

August, 1990

What words of advice would you offer a first time marathoner?

Jeff Kellogg (Winner 1974-5) - *Don't try to cut all those corners short in first hours of the race when you're up in that narrow twisty part. You won't cut much distance and*

you'll wear yourself out. Wait until the North Branch comes in (below Wakely Bridge) before you start cutting corners.

Dave Shepard (3rd in 88 & 89) - *Pace yourself. With all the screaming and the crowds cheering at the bridges, it's hard to slow down, but you can kill yourself by starting too fast.*

John Nemeth (second fastest amateur time ever) - *Don't let the mental thing get to you. Take it a bridge or a dam at a time. It's a long, long time to paddle.*

Rick Joy (fourteen times a finisher, four times under 15:00) - *Eat like a pig the week before the marathon, you're going to need a lot of energy to paddle that long.*

Lynne Witte (Recordholder for mixed & women's race) - *Be careful about going out too fast and wearing yourself out in the first hours of the race.*

How to prepare for the AuSable Marathon without moving to Mio (or Grayling or Oscoda)

The AuSable River is not unlike rivers and lakes found throughout North America. There are no rapids, waterfalls, or real opportunities to get lost or down another river. A few years of canoe racing and few hundred hours of paddling history will more than qualify you to finish the marathon.

What is unique about this race is that it runs all night and takes 14-19 hours to finish. You must have paddling skills and strength that are sufficient to cover 120 miles of river and impoundments in less than 19 hours; that is a race rule.

Night paddling can be learned on any river that resembles the upper half of the AuSable. Essentially this is a moderately fast flowing stream 20-40 feet wide with occasional rock or log obstacles, shallow spots, and overhanging trees. We paddled about three hours at night on the Manistee River and felt that was adequate.

Gaining the stamina to paddle 14- 19 hours obviously requires a lot of hours in the canoe. My partner, Brent McCumber, had 104 hours of training in for the year. Most of it, however, was done in the last two months before the race. He generally paddled hard when he practiced. I had 180 hours in and felt totally prepared for the experience.

Both of us crosstrain as Brent runs and cycles. I usually run about 60 miles a week and compete regularly in road races. This may have enabled us to get by on less paddling. Lynne Witte, who has run the marathon eleven times and holds the mixed and open records, paddled over 300 hours. Butch Stockton, who has won the race five times feels you need at least 250 hours.

Brent and I paddled one six hour session and half-dozen that were about four hours in duration. We had no trouble going the distance and paddled faster than during the second half of the race. The key to going the distance, I believe, is making the right choices of what you eat and drink, and then making sure you keep eating and drinking throughout the race. I heard of few paddlers that paddled longer than six or seven hours a practice.

In talking with veteran marathoners prior to the race, I keep hearing the same advice. Pace yourself. Virtually everyone cautioned against going out too fast. While cutting straight lines through the bends may save time, doing this in the upper part of the river can wear you out as the river seems to have a thousand turns and often depths on the inside of bends that was measured in inches. Only after the South and North Branch come in (the North enters below McMaster Bridge) does the river start to have much size.

Obviously there is great advantage to knowing the river. The best thing that happen to a rookie marathon paddler is to be able to follow a veteran team all the way downriver. However, don't count on that happening. We paddled over eight hours during the night and never saw another canoe.

You may spend hours without seeing another canoe such as we did, even if you are with other racers, marathon seems to go on forever. Emotionally it is draining and thoughts of quitting come to everyone. Yet those who drop out often regret their decision. Mentally you and your partner must be determined to finish and work together to get your canoe to Oscoda.

When you spend that many hours in the same canoe with someone, teamwork becomes essential. Just matching a stroke rate and switching in unison isn't enough. You need to work on your relationship during your practice and try to anticipate problems you will encounter in the marathon. I couldn't have chosen a better partner than Brent McCumber. Throughout the race he remained optimistic and we discussed all the challenges that came to us and worked as a team to conquer these difficulties.

I wouldn't recommend doing the marathon without ever having paddled on the AuSable. Yet if you had two days on the water, you could become acquainted with critical sections. Here are the stretches I feel need to be paddled:

1. **The Mio Dam cuts and Mio Pond** - Put in at Camp 10 Bridge and paddle upstream past the cuts and then come down through them. Then continue on until you can see Mio Dam. Information on the cuts is found in another part of the guidebook. This might take two hours.
2. **The top half of Foote Pound** - Put in at Cooke Dam and paddle down about 45 minutes until you see the power line cross the pond. Look for cuts through the weeds and try not to end up paddling in dead end bays. Total trip will take about an hour and a half.

3. **Alcona Pond** - Put in at campground on south side of pond and paddle until you see the dam. Check and determine your compass bearings. You may even be able to do this without launching the canoe. Allow an hour for this if you paddle.
4. **Ray's to McMaster Bridge** - This is a three hour paddle covering the narrower part of the river and enabling you to check out the hazards and find the cuts, most of which occur in the first half of the race.
5. **Below Five Channels Dam** - not as confusing as below Cooke Dam, but you can still find some cuts that will save you some seconds. This might only take an hour.
6. **And if you have time** - Go on down from McMasters to Mio and paddle out above Cooke, Foote, and Loud Dam so you can see where the dams are in relation to the main body of the pond. You can also check out the portages while you're at these places.
7. **Stretches you don't need to paddle** - From Mio Dam to the entrance to Alcona pond. (The water is fast but not difficult and contains only a couple minor cuts.) From Alcona Dam to the entrance of Loud pond (More swift water with no real cuts.) From Loud Dam to Five Channels Dam (The shortest and easiest stretch of water.) From Foot Dam to finish. (Swift at first then it gets progressively slower).

Sample split times to achieve a sixteen to seventeen hour marathon

	For 16:00 - 16:30	For 17:00
Burton's	50-51	53-55
Stephan's	1:30	1:35
Wakeley	2:00-2:10	2:15
Townline	2:17-2:27	2:35
McMaster	3:00	3:20
Parmalee	4:15	4:35
Luzerne	4:30	4:43
Mio	5:55-6:15	6:25
McKinley	7:55	8:35
4001	8:55-9-20	9:35
Alcona	9:35-10:05	10:15
Loud	11:30-12:00	12:15
Five Channels	12:00-12:00	12:45
Cooke	13:10-13:45	14:00
Foote	14:35	15:25
Oscoda		

EQUIPPING YOUR CANOE

Equipment Needed in the canoe:

- 3 paddles
- 2 lifejackets
- 3 flares
- 2 pr. goggles

- light
- Spare light
- 2 compasses
- watch
- emergency bag -
 - contact lens case
 - toilet paper
 - duct tape
 - spare flashlight

As far as putting in food and drink holders, spray covers, and spare paddle carriers this will not differ from the setups that are used in any long canoe race.

Most of the professional division canoes use spray covers, be they temporary plastic covers or more permanent waterproof ones made of synthetic materials. Amateur canoes are not permitted to use spray covers.

Provisions should be made to have holders capable of carrying two quarts of liquid for each paddler since there will a couple times when your bank runners won't reach you for nearly two hours.

Each paddler should have a small basket or container mounted off the floor for holding food, since mixture of urine and water will be sloshing around your feet for much of the race.

Each boat needs a number eight inches mounted on each side of the bow. This number can be your club number; all Michigan canoes use their Michigan Canoe Race association number. Leave about a two foot gap behind your number and at the rear of the canoe because your registration for the race guarantees the sponsor the right to attach stickers in these places.

OUTFITTING YOUR CANOE

Your primary concern will be your light. While some veteran marathon paddlers run virtually the entire night without light, most rely on it for much of the race. What you'll need is a light, that will be able to run about eight hours without dimming and is able to illuminate the shoreline thirty yards ahead.

Two types of lamps are commonly used. The first being to mount a miner's type lamp on the bow and hook a six volt battery to it. Some then wire a switch to it so they can click the light on and off without leaning up to reach the lamp. Others mount a heavy duty flashlight on the bow. We used a Maglite that used four D-cells and used the adjustable beam at the wide setting.

All the lights are mounted so the lens is slightly (about an inch) back from the front edge of the bow. Mounting it too far back will cause the light to reflect off the canoe's bow plate.

The light should be tilted slightly up at the rear, since you want the beam to catch the water that lies just off the bow as well as the low edge of the shoreline. Flashlights are mounted in a pair of u-shaped hooks, like those that are used to hang garden tools.

EQUIPMENT UNIQUE TO THE MARATHON

Whereas two paddles and a spare, a couple lifejackets, and two bottles of sport drink was really all you need to race your typical one to three hour race, things get a bit more complicated for the AuSable Marathon.

An equipped canoe will have the following items:

- **Two lifejackets** - Contest rules say they must be readily accessible so instead of taping them, you'll need to secure them near your seat with an elastic cord.
- **Three paddles** - (with perhaps another couple stored with your bank runners) - Many paddlers prefer ones about inch shorter than they normally would use and one with blade width closer to eight inches rather than the popular models having blade width that is close to nine inches. Paddles having a slight bit of flex are also preferred. Paddles with narrower blades, shorter overall length, and flex create less strain on the paddlers' muscles and quicker stroke rate can be maintained with less effort.
- **Three flares** - Race rules require you carry these. Most of us purchased these from race organizers for twenty dollars. The brand we used was the Skyblazer Eagle signal distress flare model 20R. The package of three is not much bigger than pack of cigarettes.
- **The lightholder** - Many variations were in use but u-shaped hooks or clamps that you would use to hang garden tools up with were frequently mounted on the bow. In addition I added a c-clamp with a string to my light and tied the string to the canoe. I thought I might inadvertently knock the light out of the holder as I switched sides with the paddle or that a crash might flip it out. I never hit the light with the paddle and we had no serious crashes so the emergency string didn't have to make a save.
- **The light** - We purchased two Maglites at a cost of about \$25 dollars each. Each one held four D-cell batteries. One was on the canoe and the other was with our bank runner crew. A cheaper flashlight was tied into the canoe (using slip knots for quick release when we dropped flashlights at Alcona Dam). We bought sixteen D-cell batteries to fill our Maglites and the spare. On race day I put fresh D-cells into the Maglite that was on the canoe. The light was use continuously for eight hours and showed no signs of dimming.
- **Seat padding** - Try two layers of ensolit pads. Some are experimenting with cutting holes for your butt cheeks in the second layer. Your butt will get sore. Before the pain gets too intense, move. I would shift back and forth, put a

leg under me and push up lifting a cheek, and essentially try to deal with cramping and sciatic nerve pain before it became excruciating.

- **Goggles** - Undoubtedly you will rush through three hours of bug hatches on the river from nine until midnight. We tried wearing goggles borrowed from our schools woodshop. They worked in practice but were fogging in the race. Occasionally someone has tried wearing clear lens on sunglasses. I just ate the bugs & wore a layer of the little creatures on my neck arms and chest.
- **Spray cover** - Since you may encounter wind and waves on the impoundments, spray covers can be helpful. They may be made from a variety of materials.
- **Paddle holders** - Our spare paddle was secured beneath the deck. On portages we would shove the paddles we were using on broom clamps and slip the blades under an elastic cord that was stretched across the spray cover.
- **Drink holders and food trays** - These come in all sizes and designs. Be sure you have provisions to carry two quarts of liquid for each paddler and have a tray for the food bag to sit in. If you drop your food to the floor of the canoe you will have no desire to fish it out of the bilge slop.
- **Compass** - We carried two. If there is fog on Alcona or Loud Pond you may never get to the dam without a compass. Actually you could, but following the shore would take a long time.
- **Watch** - I taped my wristwatch up in the bow. During the night the hourly beeps helped and during the day I was able to monitor our progress and estimate when we would reach bridges and dams.
- **Emergency bag** - This was taped into the canoe and it carried a contact lens case, toilet paper, and duct tape.

USING TOPOGRAPHICAL MAPS TO CHART YOUR COURSE

Probably one of the best purchases I made was four topographical maps of the major impoundments of the AuSable River. We used these while we were practicing on the river, for at home study and had maps taped to the bow and front of the spraycover so Brent and I could navigate through Cooke and Foote Ponds.

Unfortunately we didn't have one for the main part of Foote Pond and that is where we made our only major error of the race. Following our instincts instead of the map cost us about five minutes in retracing across Foote Pond.

Maps may be purchased for about \$3.50 each from:

Forest Service
Supervisor's Headquarters
Huron National Forest
421 South Mitchell St.
Cadillac, Michigan 49601

The maps are scaled at 2 1/2 inches to the mile, so every bump in the river shows.

The maps we purchased were:

- Alcona Dam Quadrangle (shows Alcona Pond and large Stretches of the river above and bellow pond.)
- Hale Quadrangle (continues from Alcona pond Quadrangle and shows AuSable widening and half of Loud Pond).
- The Tawas City NW Quadrangle (continues from Hale Quadrangle and shows second half of Loud Pond, Five Channels Pond, and half of Cooke Pond)
- The Tawas City NE Quadrangle (continues from Tawas City NW Quadrangle and shows second half of Cooke Pond and first half of Foote Pond.)

The map we should also have purchased was:

- The East Tawas NW Quadrangle which shows the second half of Foote Pond.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A MARATHON PADDLER

To paddle and portage for fourteen to nineteen hours requires great physical reserves as the body burns thousands of calories and nutrients. Paddling strength and great technique alone will not get you through this race. I am convinced that the majority of those who drop out of this race do so from dehydration and insufficient or improper feeding.

Actually your race feeding starts about four or five days prior to the race, when you follow a diet that includes plenty of carbohydrates; spaghetti, bread, potatoes, pancakes, or rice are all excellent sources of carbohydrates. In addition to a diet of this type, each day I drank a quart of Exceed High Carbohydrate Source and had two cans of Exceed's Sports Nutrition Supplement.

On race day after a big pancake breakfast mid-morning, I only snacked a little during the day.

During the race our crew fed us nine times. Each time we each were given two quarts of Exceed Fluid Replacement & Energy Drink that had been diluted 50-50 with water and a Ziplock bag containing several items. Two-thirds of the time we received 1/2 bananas and 1/2 cut up Power Bars. Occasionally we were given cooked pasta shells, grapes, Fig Newtons, animal crackers, and dinner rolls. On three occasions the banana halves had Advil tablets stuck in the ends. Each of us also drunk two cans of the Exceed Nutrition Supplement.

As the race wore on we were less eager to eat and drink but forced ourselves to try and eat all that was given to us. It was amazing how much of the Exceed drink seemed to pass right through our body, yet we were definitely not overhydrated. After the race I had tremendous thirst and the dark yellow urine was an indicator that I had been dehydrated despite drinking over four gallons of fluid during the race.

Paddlers frequently use Mountain Dew, Coke, and iced tea as race drinks. In shorter races these may be okay however in this competition a sport drink designed for endurance events may be of more benefit. In addition caffeine, which may enhance performance in short races, may cause you problems here. The caffeine may cause diarrhea and the stimulant which brings you up in the short run may cause you to crash later in this race.

AuSABLE FEED NEEDS

This is a copy of the food list that I left with our bankrunners. Having bankrun myself for two marathons I knew how befuddled one could get as the night wore on, so I tried to make a very specific easy-to-read menu for them. Exceed always meant two quarts for each of us of Exceed diluted 50-50 with water. We drank virtually all of the Exceed, ate all of the Power Bars, and most of the food. Believing that the fruit taste and in the drink could cause our stomachs to upset we ate bananas, pasta, cookies and rolls to neutralize the drink. We, however, experienced no stomach problems. Take 1 Advil shortly before race (8:00)

EACH OF US GET THE FOLLOWING ITEMS AS INDICATED:

If we get sick of Exceed, you will have water & Mountain Dew to give. Be sure to cut Mtn Dew 1/2 with water.

- Breakfast Point - Exceed. 1/2 banana and 1/2 Power Bar cut into bitesize pieces. (If miss us here go to Burton's Landing.)
- Towline road - Exceed. Advil in 1/2 banana. 1/2 Power Bar cut into bitesize pieces. Dry T-shirt. (Poly pro if it's cold - under 50 degrees)
- Mio Dam - Exceed. 1/2 Power Bar. Animal Crackers. Advil in 1/2 banana.
- McKinley Road - (5:00am) - Exceed. 1/2 Power Bar. Dinner roll in pieces.
- Alcona Dam - (6:45am) - Exceed. Grapes. Several pasta shells. 1/2 Power Bar. Advil in 1/2 banana. SUNGLASSES & Dry shirt. (Flashlights & safety glasses will be dropped as canoe leaves water.) Bring knife to cut flashlight loose!
- Loud Dam - (8:40am) - If you come here we'll take water.
- Five Channels Dam - (9:10am) - Exceed. 1/2 Power Bar. Grapes.
- Cooke Dam - (10-20am) - Exceed. 1/2 Power Bar. Fig Newton Quartered roll.
- Foote Dam - (11:45am) - Exceed. 1/2 Power Bar. 1/2 banana. Animal Crackers. Dry Shirt.
- Oscoda - Beer and chips for everyone.

A BANK RUNNER'S GUIDE TO THE MARATHON

On race night watch the start in Grayling; it is amazing sight. When the cannon blows and thirty canoes and paddlers come running toward the river, you'll feel a tremendous adrenalin rush.

As soon as the canoes are in the water you'll need to sprint to your car. Hopefully you will have checked out an escape route that will get you onto M-72. On this night the safest place to be is in the river as hundreds of enthusiastic spectators will be trying to get their cars onto M-72 the same time as you.

If you plan to feed at Breakfast Point, reached by paddlers 15-20 minutes after the start, you will have no time to waste. Feeding further down at Burton's or Keystone Landing, which are reached by canoes in 40-55 minutes' is much easier since you will have more than enough time to drive down and get positioned in the river to meet your canoe.

The advantage of meeting your canoe in the first half-hour is that the run and sprint paddling brings on a quick thirst and if they are looking for you to give them light, they should receive it before darkness falls, which occurs between 9:30 and 9:40.

A typical bank running team consists of two cars and three to five people. Two cars are need so if one vehicle fails, you've got a second one. No team can complete this race without a bank running team. Generally teams are fed nine or ten times. Five or six of these feedings are done at dams, the rest are done from the river. The river feedings are done at night.

At a river feeding the team carries all the food, drink, clothing, and equipment to the river. Clothing and equipment is carried in a kit bag which is usually left on the bank, but can be reached quickly should the paddler need something unexpected like gloves, flashlight batteries, or moleskin for blisters.

Two or three wade into water, being careful to position themselves where the water is not deeper than a few inches above the knee and where the footing is good. Canoes have been flipped when a bank runner lost their footing or got caught in current and grabbed the canoe. Position yourself and let the canoe come to you.

Each team needs a way of being identified by the canoe as it approaches. Glow sticks, flashlights with colored lens, reflective vests, whistles, and noise makers have all been used to help canoes find their bank running team.

As the canoe reaches the bank runners, the paddlers throw out their drink bottles and tubes toward the runners. (One team used a landing net to catch the bottles which seemed to simplify the job.) When the canoe is beside the runners, new bottles are placed in the slots, and a Ziplock bag of food is handed to the paddler. If clothing is given, have it in a Ziplock bag. Feeding at a dam is done below the dam as the canoe is preparing to go downstream. Here two of the team wait with food and supplies that will be needed for the next leg of the trip. At the top of the dam, one or two wait for the canoe to arrive. After hitting the bank or climbing onto platform, the paddlers will dump their canoe and one runner will pick up the gear and trash.

No one, except the paddlers can carry the canoe, its lifejackets, or paddles. If an item is dropped the paddler must retrieve it. Bank runner cannot hand or kick toward a paddler

dropped lifejacket or paddle. The paddlers can be disqualified or receive a time penalty for this.

Often one bank runner will run next to the canoe, perhaps shining a light to guide them down the Mio Dam portage trail. This runner will have an opportunity to talk with the paddlers as they run. Here's where information on your standing, and the condition of you and your opponents can be discussed.

Portages at Mio, Five Channels, Cooke, and Foote Dam involve climbing onto platform and then onto face of the dam. To save the canoe, the bank running crew may drape a blanket or quilt on the edge of the dam so the canoe won't be scratched as the paddlers haul it from the water.

Bank runners usually are up all the night, catching little more than an occasional cat nap. In addition they will have wet feet and legs. Ample dry (and warm) clothes will help. Some nights the temperature will drop into fifties. Paddlers and bank runners will appreciate warm coffee or soup.

An advantage of having team of five or six is that you can work in shifts, so some can sleep. To keep going all night they should eat nutritious snacks and avoid caffeine until late in the night. Caffeine will give you a lift, yet after six or eight hours, caffeine won't do the job any more and you'll crash. Avoid caffeine until the wee hours of morning.

Obviously when paddlers and bank runners are involved in an event that will last 14-19 hours. Physical, mental, and emotional resources will be depleted. Irritability and anger are a natural product. Bank runners and paddlers alike should be aware of this and work together to function in as friendly and civil manner as possible throughout the race.

Items needed by bank runners:

- 1. One or two flashlights
- 2. Reflective vest, whistle, glowstick or some device to make your presence known to paddlers.

Items to be kept in car:

- 1. Spare paddles
- 2. Blanket to cover dam wall to protect canoe.

Items to be kept in equipment kit:

- 1. Spare flashlight
- 2. Knife
- 3. Duct Tape
- 4. Vaseline
- 5. Moleskin

- 6. Spare Batteries
- 7. Spare T-shirts (2 each)
- 8. Long-sleeve T-shirts
- 9. Spare Hat
- 10. Sunglasses
- 11. Windbreaker pants
- 12. light cotton gloves
- 13. Two maps each of Foote and Cooke Pond sealed in Ziplock bags

For Feeding the Paddlers:

- 1. 20 qts Exceed or similar sport drink
- 2. 20 qts water for diluting Exceed or sport drink
- 3. Drink containers. We used 12 setups by carving out caps from Exceed bottles and inserting drink tubes. We used the Exceed bottle as our drinking container. Each feeding took eight bottles as we discarded four empties and received four filled bottles. We had four waiting in reserve since occasionally a tube may be lost or destroyed.
- 4. At least thirty heavy duty Ziploc freezer bags for carrying food, and maps.
- 5. 8 - 10 Power Bars
- 6. The half dozen bananas
- 7. Four to six Advil or Nuprin pills for each paddler to be inserted into banana halves
- 8. Other foods that are enjoyed by the paddler and friendly to their digestive system.

For Bank runners to keep them going through the night:

- 1. Dry clothes
- 2. Raincoat
- 3. Nutritious snacks
- 4. Drinks with caffeine (for after 4 a.m.)
- 5. Hot drinks (and small camp stove)
- 6. Patience and stamina

BANK RUNNER'S TRAVEL GUIDE

This section tells how to get to the most commonly used bank running sites. You may want to scout your own , especially if you want to avoid congestion. Mileages are close but not exact. If all in your running team are unfamiliar with marathon route, you might want to drive through the bank running spots prior to the race. The route one way is 80-90 miles.

Breakfast point - 1 mile from I-75 overpass east on M-72 turn left at series of small signs on trees reading "Dud-Ange-Foster", "Whites", and "Murphy's".

- Racer's time - 9:15-9:20 (15-20 minutes)
- Water conditions - deep and mucky at landing, best is at cottage at the next lot on the right. Shallow & sandy there.
- Note: Traffic on M-72 is heavy. It may be difficult to get across from the north side of M-72 to eastbound lane. This is the only spot where you will have to worry about not getting to spot in time feed your canoe.

Burton's Landing - Turn left 2.6 miles from I-75. 1.6 miles down M-72 from "Dud-Ange" sign. Burton's is at a Nat'l Forest Canoe Access and marked on M-72 with good sign. Has ample parking.

- Racer's time - 9:40 (40-65 minutes)
- Water conditions - good firm bottom, knee-height deep.

Keystone Landing - Past Burton off M-72, Another well-marked access provided by Nat'l Forest.

Stephan's Bridge - This as well as Wakeley, McMaster, and Parmalee Bridges, are crowded with screaming spectators. Good wade-in feeding at canoe accesses adjacent to the bridges, however the crowd frenzy may make it confusing for you to communicate with racer. All bridges plainly show on highway maps and are easily found. Parking and maneuvering may be difficult because of the crowds. Police will help you get in and out if you show them your bank feeder sign.

Squirrel Bend/Townline Rd. - Turn left off M-72 (6.4 miles from Burton's Landing turnoff of M-72) onto Wakely Bridge Road also marked as Chase Bridge Road. There is a Marathon gas sign & party store on the corner. Drive 1.8 mi. to series of homemade signs with prominent ones reading "Limber Lost" & "Squirrel Bend". Turn right (& bear right at first fork) and go 1.4 mi. to end of the road at river. There is a single cottage on your left.

- Racer's Time - 11:00-11:30 p.m. (2-2 1/2 hrs)
- Water Conditions - At end of the road, bottom is sandy with steady drop-off to 3'. A few yards upstream to your left is slippery clay - avoid it! Paddlers must watch a log across the river from you and just past you on your side of the river.

McMaster Bridge - Turn left at blinker 6.4 miles down from Wakely Bridge Road. Good feeding area at access but crowded.

- Racers Time - 11:40-12:30

Luzerne Park - Turn left at Blinker in village of Luzerne by "Big Creek Market" and drive 2.9 to Deeter Rd. Follow Deeter Road to Luzerne Park. (If miss Deeter road you will come to Parmalee Bridge which has several places to feed.)

- Racer's Time - 12:55 am - 2 am

- Water Conditions - Below large gravel-covered area facing river is deep water - don't wade here! Next to this area is a pavilion & to right of that is a staircase. At base of stairs, wade out, moving downstream as you move toward midstream. Water is shallow but bottom is mostly loose gravel. Midstream feed is necessary because water is shallow on your half of the river.

Mio Dam - Turn right in downtown Mio and continue to parking lot (it's a grassy field) just past Gott's Canoe Livery on south side of river (left side of the road). On foot follow two track to field and then a trail, which crosses a small wood bridge and shortly thereafter trail will lead you to base of dam.

- Racer's Time - 2:15 am - 3:30 am (Racer's taking longer than 7 hrs to reach Mio Dam will be disqualified.)
- Portage notes - As with all dam portages, keep at least two people where canoe will reenter river to resupply the paddlers, have at least one and preferably two people meet paddlers at top of the dam - one to guide paddlers and one to pick up what falls out of canoe when they dump it. All dam portages have a treacherous reentry to water - usually a steep drop down an eroded slick clay bank. Paddlers and bank runners take care! In addition there is lots of poison ivy along the portage trail by the river.
- Mio is the only portage that will be done at night and so paddlers will need a runner going with them to show them their footing. This portage is about 100 yards long.

At Mio, Cooke, & Foote dams paddlers will be lifting their canoe over a wall from a platform. Canoes may be dragged over these cement surfaces, so blanket, quilt, or old sleeping bag should be draped over the wall to protect the canoe as it is pulled over the wall.

Comins Flats - Cross river going north, in less than a mile go right on McKinley Rd for 5 miles to Comins Flats Canoe Access. Paddlers reach here 45 minutes to an hour after Mio Dam.

- Water Conditions - Good fast current, loose rock bottom. An acceptable but not great feed spot. Must go on to McKinley Bridge

McKinley Bridge - 5.7 mi past Comins Flats on McKinley Road (or 10.7 mi. from M-72/M-33) turn right in village of McKinley at Evans Rd., (just past abandoned hotel/bar at corner) where "Riverside Tavern" is located.

- Racer's Time - 4:00 am - 5:45 am
- Water Conditions - Sandy, light gravel bottom off landing below bridge makes easy feeding. Fifteen yards downriver in center of river there is a drop-off.

4001 Bridge - go back across river to McKinley Rd and drive 8.2 mi. to 4001 Rd and follow it to 4001 bridge.

- Racer's Time - 4:50 am - 6:45 am
- Water Conditions - sandy gravel bottom off canoe access landing.

Alcona Dam - All feed stations are at dams for reminder of race and a spectator's map will make easy to find these spots.

- Racer's Time - 5:30 am - 7:45 am
- Portage Notes - Canoe lands on beach and is portaged 100 yds to river. On foggy mornings, car horns have been known to blow to help paddler's find landing. Paddlers will be leaving their flashlights here and picking up sunglasses. Lots of Poison Ivy!

Loud Dam -

- Racer's Time - 7:20 am - 9:45 am
- Portage Notes - Portage is 200 yards long from beach to river. Since next portage is only about 25-30 minutes away, bank running teams may not choose to come to this one.

Five Channels Dam -

Racer's Time - 7:45 am - 10:15 am

Portage Notes - Portage goes from platform at dam, down a steep hill, & on a road to gravel beach about 200 yards from dam.

Cooke Dam -

- Racer's Time - 8:45 am - 11:30 am
- Portage Notes - Portage goes from a platform at dam, down a steep path or steps to river - a distance of perhaps 50 yards.

Footo Dam -

- Racer's Time - 9:55 am - 1:10 pm
- Portage Notes - Portage is almost exactly the same as Cooke Dam, a platform, a steep hill, 50 yards long. The bank runner's job is done when their team heads downriver below dam.

Oscoda -

- Racer's Time - 11:20 am (14:20) is record - To be an official finisher paddlers must reach finish by 4 pm (19:00).

THE SPRINTS

On Friday afternoon at four, about 25 hours before the marathon, all entrants assemble at Penrod's Resort in Grayling. Here at six minute intervals, canoes sprint downstream turn a buoy and then sprint back upstream. Although you start your sprint alone, you will encounter canoe coming down as you come back upstream. The stream, being perhaps only twenty feet wide and with a depth of six inches to two feet, barely accommodates one canoe here so encounters at blind corners are especially exciting. Times in 1990 ranged from a 5:33 produced by Brett Stockton and Serge Corbin to a 9:48. Average professional time was about 6:20. Amateur's average was about 7:30.

Your sprint time determines your starting position. Virtually everyone sprints since failure to do so will put you about 150 yards behind the leaders when canoes are shouldered for the sprint to the river.

The Running Start And Paddling Sprint For Position

The race starts about 300 to 500 yards back from Ray's Canoe Livery on a street. Here the canoes are arranged in rows of four with twenty yards between rows. At the countdown, the paddlers stand by their canoe until the starting gun sounds. Then they grab the canoe hoist it to their shoulders and race for the river.

As you approach the river you may wish to pull the canoe off your shoulder and carry it at your side. A side carry may give you better control of it as you launch. Arriving at the river at a boardwalk in front of Ray's, most continue to run, not dropping their canoe into water until they come to the end of the boardwalk. However if there are canoes in the water ahead of you, you'll probably launch before the end of the boardwalk

Launching involves jumping into water while holding the canoe and carefully yet quickly getting seated, while grabbing your paddle off of the spray skirt. Usually one or two canoes try to do it this maneuver too fast and wind up swamping canoe or flipping it.

As soon you pass the end of the boardwalk, there is a gravel bar in the center of the river. Try to go left. If that's not possible go right. In any event, stay out of center of river.

For the first ten minutes the river is filled with canoes and the wakes rebound off the shore and canoes creating tricky waters for paddling. The favorites are busy trying to escape the pack, while the rest are maneuvering for position and trying not veer into a bank or swamp. As you approach the I-75 bridges, go center or left, there is shallow water on the right.

If you're not familiar with river try to follow some veteran paddlers so you will hit the early cuts.

The Sprint Through Grayling

For the first ten minutes the river is filled with canoes and the wakes rebound off the shore and canoes creating tricky waters for paddling. The leaders are busy trying to escape the field, while the others are also maneuvering for position and trying not to swamp or veer into the bank.

If you're not familiar with the river, try to follow some veteran paddlers so you will hit early cuts.

Finding The Legendary Cuts

Fifteen minutes into race you'll encounter Spider Cut - an opening that comes just after you pass a bank supported by canvas and sandbags. Don't take it! It's longer than the main river.

Right past Spider are four cuts - take the first two on the right, then left on one, then right.

Down a straightway an around a bend past Breakfast Point (about 20-25 minutes from start. Several teams use this as a bank feeding spot), is the first of four cuts. Take all on the right. You will be through all four in five to ten minutes. If you miss one cut you will see where Mud Creek enters. Mud Creek is a wide slow flow marked by a yellow stump. It's on the left. Avoid it. Go right.

Below Wakeley Bridge - About twenty minutes below Wakeley Bridge, you may see canoe campground on the right. There will likely be aluminum canoes pulled up on the shore to help you identify it. Several bends beyond that the South Branch joins the Main Branch. It enters from the right as the river forms T with the South Branch on the right and Main Branch flowing to the left. Canoes have been known to shoot up the South Branch by mistake.

Below McMaster Bridge - Ten to fifteen minutes below McMaster are several islands. Go left around them.

Forty to fifty minutes below McMaster Bridge is a false cut. It appears as though a small but substantial stream goes right to cut off a bend. Actually it goes 150 yards and dead ends in a logjam.

Below Parmalee Bridge - Forty to fifty five minutes below Parmalee Bridge (or 30-45 minutes below Luzerne Park) you will come to Mio "Cuts". Taking these will enable you to cut off three river bends and find the opening through a wall of stumps and logs into Mio Pond.

Two hundred yards upstream from first cut on your right is two sandy campsite canoe landings with three birches growing on the grassy bank between the landings. Fifty yards down is huge dead pine tree having many branches cut off. It hangs out over the river. The shore then drops down from woodland to marsh and a large log jam

appears. Here you'll see a false cut followed ten yards later in the middle of the log jam by a small opening with fast current running through it. Turn right into this, duck a low branch and bear right down a narrow passage. When the cut reaches a T veer slightly left and go through narrow but obvious opening in the weeds.

Reentering the river go 100 yards downstream and go past a log jam that appears to have an opening but doesn't (a nearly submerged log makes this impassable). There is, however, a cut just past a grassy mound at end of logjam. Turn left (a beaver lodge is at opening) and continue down cut to river.

Reentering the river, follow it downstream to the left for one hundred yards and you'll see an opening on the right. Don't enter it but follow the weed bank past a log ending with a big stump. Slow down and look for a narrow three foot gap in weeds and enter. (Just a few yards past this opening downriver is a log that is submerged and mashed weeds where canoes have tried to enter the cut.) Once in cut bear right and follow current to where cut opens into a shallow flat.

As you enter Mio Pond you'll see a ring of logs and stumps a hundred yards ahead of you. Ahead of you to the left is an opening for you to enter Mio Pond through. It is shallow here and you may leave canoe to get through this part.

Below Mio Dam - There are several cuts between here and McKinley Bridge. None will gain you more than thirty seconds advantage. It is nice if you can run them but nowhere as critical as the cuts upstream from Mio Dam.

Below Five Channels Dam - As you enter Cooke Pond there are several minor cuts through reeds and weeds that will save time.

Below Cooke Dam - Here for the first half hour paddling are some major cuts. If you haven't been here before, this section can really be confusing. Occasionally paddlers get so confused that they paddle upstream again.

The River By Night

About forty-five minutes after the nine o'clock start, night will be upon you. For most the lights come on. Others rely on night vision and their paddling instincts to guide them. A couple of practice sessions will establish the extent to which you need a light. In any event the dawn is about eight hours away.

The bowman's primary job is to detect hazards lying immediately ahead of the canoe, while the stern paddler watches the treeline and bank to determine the course of the canoe. If he can't be sure where the river is going, he'll ask the bowman to help him search for the course of the river.

You're navigating as much by instinct as by knowledge. For the bowman, looking into the water rushing toward him under the light of the lamp, is tedious work. The big rocks

and stumps that stick out of the water are easy to miss. Those which lie just under the surface are not usually seen until it is too late. The canoe moving through the night reminds me of when I was a teenager and we would drive along wooded two-track roads after dark.

Our car did well as our headlights picked up turns and large obstacles. However of a short stump or rut appeared in the road, we were doomed to hit it. Police officers call it "driving too fast for conditions" and that description aptly fits night racing on the AuSable. Yet to be competitive everyone paddles hard at night as well as the day. Beating the seven hour cutoff to Mio requires that you keep pushing. So with the hard fast night paddling will come occasional bashings on the canoe.

The first three hours of the night run will put you through masses of insect hatches - a boon to the trout anglers, but an unpleasant experience for the paddler, especially a bow man sitting just behind the light. Some wear goggles, most just pull their hat down and eat the bugs. The day after the race we found tiny insect bodies squashed on the lens of our light.

After midnight the insect leave and the mist comes, wispy clouds of it dance along the surface of the water. The light reflects off these making it even harder to see. Those who run without light have it easier. The rest of us scrutinize the puffs of mist trying to determine where the safe paddling water is.

From the start until beyond McMaster Bridge you will be cheered on by hundred of spectators. They'll be waiting at cottages, public accesses, and especially at bridges. Wakeley, Stephan, and McMaster Bridges will be jammed. You'll have to shout to get your "huts" heard. The sheer energy and madness of the crowds will exhilarate you. Remember through that you will still racing long after they're asleep, so maintain a reasonable paddling cadence.

Obviously food given to you at night not be seen. Most of the time you won't know what you're eating until it hits your mouth. This is not the time for gourmet treats that require you to eat by means of eye-hand coordination.

Expect pain to come from below. Sitting that long is hard work. As discomfort is felt, move about on your seat. I would move forward to sit on the lip of the seat, tuck a leg, push down on one to lift one cheek, and stretch forward to push against the foam in the bow. By working on the pain when it is first noticed I managed to keep the discomfort to minimum.

Mio Pond is not complicated, yet it is not easy crossing a body of water in the dark. About ten minutes past Camp 10 Bridge you will have to choose between following the straightest line to the dam which brings you into shallow water that is filled with stumps or going for clearer deeper water out further.

At the dam there will be many held flashlights to guide you in. The platform is a little high but everyone makes it. The water below the platform is waist to chest deep. Most run the path rather than the steps down to the river. Watch for the last ten yards to the water, it is slippery clay and gravel.

The section between the Mio Dam and McKinley Bridge will take you about two hours to cover. Most will be doing this between 2:30 and 5:30 in the morning. It may feel like two of the longest hours of your life as the crowds are gone and so is the charm of night paddling.

Dawn will come to you sometime between McKinley Bridge and Alcona Dam.

Racing By Daylight

The joy at finally seeing the gray light of dawn may be tempered by seeing nothing but fog on Alcona Pond. If this is the case, move close to the right shore of the river while you can still see it. Just past the overhead power line you will see a tent and trailer park with docks and boats tied up along the shore.

Follow the shoreline along three bays, which are nothing more than slight indentations on the shore. When the park ends, there's kind of a swimming area there. From that last point, set your compass for 160 degrees and strike off into grayness. Less than a half mile later look for a trailer park on the left. Just off this park there are three tiny islands that are little more than clumps of brush. The park and islands will tell you that you have crossed the pond successfully.

Continue on your 160 course less than half mile and you will come to the shoreline. Follow it for about a mile until you reach your portage, gravel beach on the right side of Alcona Dam. As you approach, move your legs around so you'll be able to run rather than lurch through your portage run.

At Alcona you'll dump your flashlights and pick up sunglasses. The run is about 100 yards long and like all portages ends with a steep treacherous bank. Walk, don't run, down this bank.

The paddle to Loud Dam takes roughly two hours and seems endless. The river moves with good current and offers no tricks or major cuts to find. It's just a long stretch with no cottages. You'll be lucky to see anyone during this part of the trip.

As the river widens and slows you'll have some islands and cuts to figure out but they're not serious problems. The best route essentially moves along the left until you reach an area of flooded woods. Here you'll pick your way through, swing around point on the left side of the pond and head for a beach to the right of the dam. Here's another 200 yard run which ends with steep clay bank and the river.

The paddle to Five Channels Dam is easy. The water is deep and the dam is easy to find, less than thirty minutes below Loud Dam. Here along with Cooke Dam and Foote Dams, look for a carving of a yellow canoe which is atop a pole. This sign tells you to portage. Below the sign is platform which is about fifteen feet long.

Incidentally, the water below the platforms at the dams is three to four feet deep. At the platform the bowman should jump out, pull the stern man up to where he can get out, and then the two will haul the canoe out and begin to carry. This is the longest run, maybe 250 yards long. It starts with a steep downhill and then continues down a road, past a concession building to the river where the canoes are then relaunched.

The challenge of Cooke Pond is avoiding dead end bays. By watching carefully, you should be able to follow the main pound down to the dam. It will take you about an hour to reach the dam. The portage on your left side of the dam. It's a platform again followed by a steep run downhill to the water. Some paddlers let the quicker runner drag the boat down the hill while other follows carrying the paddles. The steepness of the hill favors this and you lessen your chance of falling if just one handles the canoe.

Foote Pond, I believe, is the trickiest section of the race. The first half hour below Cooke Dam, the river widens, spreads, and offers numerous opportunities for short cuts and the possibility of getting genuinely confused on which way is downstream. If I could only practice one stretch before the race, I would run the top half of this pond from Cooke Dam to the power line. Once into the main pond, navigation gets easier. The dam will be in a small bay which is part way up the east shore of the pond.

Wind and waves can be problem here and on Cooke Pond. The race committee has boats on the ponds to help paddlers who capsize or are swamped in the waves. Most years, however, the winds are calm when the racers come through. It usually takes paddlers 70 to 90 minutes to get to through Foote Pond.

The last portage is an easy 50-yarder on the left side of the dam which is almost identical to the Cooke portage.

The final run to Oscoda starts out in good current with a passage under the left side of a bridge several minutes below Foote Dam. Avoid the right side which has obstructions. It will take only 80 to 90 minutes to get to the finish but the water is sluggish, you're tired, and the day may be getting hot. It's been a long race and you're eager to get it over.

Your first hint the end is imminent will be when you pass under a railroad bridge about fifteen minutes from the end. When you go under the highway bridge, you are just 6-8 minutes from the finish. When you pass under the final bridge continue paddling until you are thirty yards beyond the bridge. A floating buoy is the official end of the race.

AuSable Marathon Entry Information

Brent McCumber - age 25 from Cadillac, Michigan Began Canoe racing in 1986, won C-1 Midwest Marathon Championships in LaFayette, Indiana in 1987, took 3rd in C-1 MCRA Championship in Mio in 1988. A shoulder injury sidelined him most of 1989.

Dave Foley - age 43 from Cadillac, Michigan. Began MCRA racing 1985 - Placed 3rd in C-1 Midwest Championships in 1986, 4th in 1987. Finished 9th in USCA National C-1 Masters in 1988 in New Hampshire, and 10th in USCA Nationals over-under C-2 class in 1989 in Marinette, Wisconsin.

Foley, who is the state TAC recordholder in the 50 mile run, has crossed country skied marathons, run 20 of them, and snowshoe raced long races. This, however, will be his and McCumbers first time for the AuSable Marathon.

July 28-29, 1990
The 43rd AuSable Marathon

"Brent McCumber and Dave Foley from Cadillac. Both doing the marathon for the first time and both are runners who requested that their boat numbers be 26.2 which is the distance of a running marathon." That was a close representation of how we were presented to the several hundred seated across from Ray's Canoe Livery in Grayling during the introduction of paddlers an hour before the race's start.

After that introduction, we were often referred to as the "runners". And that would be the only area where we would be able to hold our own with more competitive teams in this field of twenty-eight canoes, who had come from all over North America to race in the longest continuous canoe race in the world and the only one run at night.

Our Friday sprint time of 6:54 from Penrod's to the hatchery creek and back placed us 18th of 20 pros but ahead of all eight amateurs.

So it was that we were lined up in the fifth of seven rows, about 75 yards back from the leaders. The starting gun fired followed by the canoe boom. We hoisted our canoe to our shoulders and sprinted forward. We quickly moved ahead of our row and caught three boats from the fourth tier in the quarter mile dash to the water, enabling us to enter the river in about 14th place.

Holding the canoe we leaped into the calf deep water, whereupon Brent slipped went down but recovered quickly. Our getaway was good but less than a minute later we hit a railroad tie. I jumped out, maneuvered the canoe around the obstacle, but two boats had slipped by us. Everyone, including us, were running on pure adrenalin as we paddled frantically for ten minutes.

As we approached Reisers where we had spent the afternoon, their dock erupted with cheers and photo flashes. Just ahead were Connie and Tom Cannon, Lynn Witte and Joe Johnson, and Al Jr. and Al Sr. Widing. Staying close to this group we missed no

cuts and made good time, however forty-five minutes into race (9:45) the night came and we were alone, destined not to see another canoe for 8 1/2 hours.

Our journey was not a quiet one as at nearly every corner of the river people jammed decks and docks at cottages to cheer us. Often a spotlight would pick up our canoe number and we'd hear yells for the "Runners" or they'd call us by name. Some lighted their property with candles or gas lamps, a few had spotlights on log and rock hazards that lay in our path.

Stephan Bridge loomed with spectator heads stacked along its rail at least four high. Screams, cheers, shouts, and lights lustily greeted our approach. Yet within a couple of minutes it was quiet as we steered through center of the recently burned over lands (May, 1990) where by day we'd seen cottages reduced to cement slabs by roaring fires of the recent spring. The moon, a quarter full, loomed over our right shoulders. Once passed the burn, the party resumed as revelers occupied nearly every bankside home.

The river here twists and often has only a narrow channel. Brent set the course calling out a "hut" every few seconds telling me to switch sides. We were paddling strongly but not as hard as if were daylight, knowing that a solid smash into a snag could dump us or worse yet, puncture the canoe. Somewhere past Wakeley we ripped over top of a rockwall, scarring the canoe bottom and scaring us. We knew that the veteran paddlers who knew the river well pull away from us during the night.

It was flyfisher's paradise as hatches of insects floated in clouds over waters, filling my face, neck, and occasionally my mouth. Examining our flashlight after the race I found squashed bugs on the lens.

We reached McMasters Bridge about midnight. Here was mania at its wildest. Mobs of spectators shrieked at us. A large blood red "Budweiser" banner hung from the bridge. On the other side my brother, Steve, and the rest of our bankrunning team yelled their support.

Our bankrunner team consisting of Steve, Cyndy, Ben, Renee Cousino, and Dan Gussert, met us eleven times during the race. Not only was the nourishment they gave us welcome but so was their presence. As we would approach a feed stop, our light would pick reflective vests. We'd slow, throw out empty our bottles, then they'd be at our side giving each of us two quarts of Exceed and a Ziplock bag of food. Then we'd sprint away back into night.

During the race we each drank over four gallons of Exceed through tubes and probably peed 90% of that back into boat. Yet it was necessary since dehydration is probably the major reason that paddlers quit the race. Knowing that our bodies were using nutrients and electrolytes as well as water, we used Exceed to replenish that which our exertions were depleting. For food we ate pasta noodles, Fig Newtons, dinner rolls, and lots of bananas (some with Advil tablets jammed in them). Power Bars, however, were the

most important food. Eat a chunk or two of this coarse sticky candy, which tasted like a bad tasting Tootsie Roll, and almost immediately you felt like you had more energy. Periodically I would feel lightheaded, and after eating some Power Bar I'd feel better.

After McMaster the spectators were fewer, but often those we glimpsed or heard were drunk or at least happily on their way to that state. One group offered us an acappella choir singing of a nonsense verse to us.

My overriding memory of that night was hours of peering over the bow into the spot of water immediately in front of the canoe that was illuminated by our flashlight. Meanwhile Brent watched ahead for obstacles, and called the huts to direct the canoe on the safest line of travel through the night.

Occasionally a trout would jump, a couple beaver splashed a warning as we went by, but mostly it was quiet except for Brent's "huts".

About two we approached the Mio Pond cuts, three shortcuts that when taken would eliminate three major bends in the river. Having memorized photos, we hit all three openings although none were wider than ten feet and one was only big enough for a canoe width at its opening. Most of the night we ran about three quarter speed as our lack of familiarity with the river and the fear of crashing into obstacles tempered our desire to paddle hard.

Once in Mio Pond we paddled hard as this was a rout we'd both done several times. Looking up I saw the northern lights making colored slashes across the horizon. Seeing the dancing flashlights on the dam we raced toward them - eager to see our crew and have our feet touch the land.

Hitting the platform I stumbled out, then Brent followed. We emptied the canoe on the breakwall with its six hours accumulation of feed bags and slop for Dan to pick it up. Then run downhill as Ben gave me information on the race. Once bank in the river Renee, Steve, and Cyndy dropped in fresh drink bottles and food bags and we were off.

The next two hours were interminable as we paddled to McKinley Bridge. A misty fog danced just above the water, reflecting our light beam making it difficult to see. Halfway there Steve surprised us by being out in midstream at Cumins Flats. It was a needed lift.

We reached McKinley and were surrounded by our crew for a few frantic moments then we headed back into blackness. We anticipated dawn sooner than it came, but as the sky went from black to gray our spirits lifted and we picked up the pace, fearful of seeing log on Alcona Pond. Fog hung over the pond but we could just make out the far shore and we sped across it. As we neared the end of it we caught a glimpse of the father and son team of Widings. Adrenalin surged and we began a run toward them. At the

shore of Alcona, I shouted a cheery "Good Morning" to the Assembled bank runners and spectators, most of whom had a zombielike appearance.

Hitting the land Brent and I raced for the river. Later Ben remarked that except for the lead pack, we were the fastest portagers. Having finally seen another canoe, we were intent upon catching them. In the next two hours we cut Widings lead on us by two minutes and were close enough to follow them on their run through Loud Pond.

We eagerly anticipated the portages for not only was it a chance to stretch our legs and lift our butts from canoe seat but also an opportunity to use our running talents. Loud and Five Channels Dam each offered about 300 yards of running and we reveled in it. At the base of Five Channels, at the last instance before we paddled off, Cyndy gave me quick kiss - a special moment.

The upper end of the Cooke Dam is a myriad of channels and grass islands, although Cyndy and I had done it once, we poured it to stay close to the Widings so they could lead us through the correct paths. Midway through the pond we began to catch the team of Brooks and Sheldon. Suddenly they pulled off into the reeds and Tom Brooks climbed from the canoe, a victim of dehydration. After a break, though he was able to continue and team finished.

Less fortunate was Scott McKenzie who collapsed and was taken from shore of Cooke Pond by ambulance. He later recovered. By race's end seven of the canoes had quit the marathon. However, we felt great and reached the end of the pond just 34 seconds behind Widings.

Foot Pond brought us problems as a misread map led us off on an unneeded detour and stiff headwind complicated by boat wakes made paddling difficult. By the time we reached Foot Dam we were 5 1/2 minutes behind Widings. As I got out of the canoe it swung under the platform on the dam with Brent in it. He nearly fell out before we could get him out. Once out, he ran the canoe downhill, while I followed carrying the paddles.

It felt good to be on the last stretch yet it also seemed hard as the river switched bank numerous times and often run only inches deep.

Finally we saw the finish and sprinted under the bridge in 14th place in 16:06:51.

I remember throwing my arms up and yelling "We made it." We'd also made \$550, but the money was incidental to the experiences we'd shared on our 120 mile race from Grayling to Oscoda.