

Kayaking and Camping from Grayling to Oscoda May, 2001 – By Arturs Graube

My name is Arturs Graube. I am 18 years old and am in Michigan as an exchange student from Latvia. I came here in the end of August and I am going to go back on the 17th of June 2001. Here in Grayling, I attended Grayling High School (GHS) for my senior year. While I was at GHS I played soccer, basketball and ran track. I would say that my year here went past pretty fast.

In Latvia, I had paddled about three times, and when I did paddle it wasn't more than 20 km (12.4 miles) a day in a rubber raft, not in a canoe or kayak. People who paddle in Latvia usually use the river Gauja. It is the longest river in Latvia 492 km (307 miles). It's rather wide and the stream isn't too strong, so you can't cover very great distances.

Here in Michigan, Wayne (one of my host parents) and I decided to go down the Au Sable River. The Au Sable River starts just north of Grayling and ends at Lake Huron in Oscoda. Every year there is a Canoe Marathon, which goes from Grayling to Oscoda. The paddlers start the race at 9 PM, paddle through night, and get to Oscoda at about 11 AM, the next day. Usually for the winner it takes about 14-14.5 hours. The fastest time ever was 13:58. The plan was to go from Grayling to Oscoda in 2 .5 days. We didn't make it in our planned time. It took us from Friday 5:07 PM to Sunday 2:45 PM. We used kayaks; I had a Folbot folding kayak and Wayne had an Old Town Castine kayak. The worst thing about the trip was the seat of my kayak. I would advise you to get a good seat for your kayak because you'll have to sit there about ten hours a day. And I can say that a bad seat can get frustrating very quickly. Let's say in the first four hours.

When you go on a boat trip, always remember to pack light and pack many separate bags. It will guarantee you that all your clothes will not get wet (maybe). You should definitely bring some extra pairs of socks and maybe even a pair of wool socks, extra underwear, always bring something warm to wear because you never know what the weather will be like. Take a couple of sweatshirts, long pants, maybe some shorts. And here comes the last but not the least a poncho. You should never go on a boat trip without one. You should also remember to bring some maps of the river with you, because you should always know where you are and where to get help if needed. We used three different kinds of maps. We used canoe livery, Geologic Survey and National Forest Service maps. The canoe livery map gave us the approximate paddling time but it was not well detailed so if you would use only that map you could go the wrong way and lose a lot of time in the dam ponds. To escape that we used the National Forest Service and Geological Survey maps. The National Forest Service maps had all the campsites in them and you could use it to navigate in the dam ponds. The Geological Survey map had relief and was very accurate, but didn't have any campsites. To get the United States Geological Survey maps call the MUCC at 1-800-777-6720. You would need maps that cover the Au Sable river from Grayling to Mio: Grayling, Wakeley Lake, Luzerne North West, Red Oak and Mio maps. To get the National Forest Service maps that cover the river from Mio to Oscoda, you can

write Huron National Forest, 401 Court Street, Mio, MI 48647 or call 989-826-3252. There you can ask for a map from Mio to Alcona that lists landings and campsites, and also ask for individual maps of Alcona Pond Primitive Camping, Loud Pond Primitive Camping, Five Channels Pond Primitive Campsites, Cooke Pond Primitive Campsites, Foote Pond Primitive Campsites, and Lower Au Sable Primitive Campsites which will take you almost in Oscoda.

Remember to bring some food because all that paddling makes you hungry. In the mornings, a good idea would be to eat some oatmeal, get some tea or coffee. For the first day it's easiest to pack some Deli sandwiches. Also take some food with you in the boat for dinner because you probably won't stop during the day. You can take some sandwiches and some fruit, maybe some pudding and granola bars. Definitely pack some water with you because there are very few places on the river where you can get fresh water. You can always use the old drink from the river technique but that might make your trip unpleasant. Imagine what kind of boat trip would that be in which you stop every half an hour to go to the bathroom.

When you go from Grayling to Oscoda you can see a lot of wildlife along the banks of river. We saw animals like geese, different kind of ducks, deer, a loon, and cranes. Also the nature is very nice there with lots of beautiful sites.

I will tell you a bit about our trip now. As I mentioned before we departed Friday at 5:07 PM. The weather was pretty nice, but cloudy. This was the day where I experienced the seat problem for the first time. Our first day's planned destination was McMasters Bridge, and as you can probably guess we didn't make it. We came just short of it. We might have made it but a storm caught us so we had to stop at the White Pine campgrounds (9:20pm). On the way there we thought that we might get a cabin in this one place but when they said that it would be \$90 we said no thank you. So we camped at the White Pine and paid \$1 each. We managed to get our tent up just before the rain started (lucky break for us). We ate our Deli sandwiches and drank our 20-oz pops.

Friday, May 25

Time of departure	Location	Paddling time (hrs.min)
5:07	Grayling	0.00
6:37	Burton's landing	1.30
7:42	Stephan Bridge	2.35
8:37	Wakeley Bridge	3.30
9:20	White Pine camp	4.13

Day 2. Wake up call was at about 7:20 am. It wasn't raining but everything was wet. We ate our oatmeal and made us some tea and started to pack. Wayne got our boats set while I was responsible for the tent. By 9:00 am we were on the river again. If we got lucky we might get to the Alcona dam. At noon, we stopped at Parmalee's water well to get some fresh water supplies. At 3:45 PM we hit the Mio dam. There were some tricky places there but thanks to our maps we went everywhere just right. In Mio, we noticed that my boat had lost one knob so Wayne went to

Mio while I portaged our stuff down. Wayne returned with McDonalds meals and some stuff to fix the boat. That whole break took us about 1.5 hours so it's sure now that we wouldn't make it to Alcona. At 8:50 PM we stopped at the Bear Island National Forest Campground. Wayne was unpacking the boats while I was putting up the tent. We had stew for the supper and had some pop.

Saturday, May 26

Time of departure	Location	Paddling time (hrs.min)
9.00	White Pine CG	4:13
9.50	Rainbow Bend CG	5:03
10.05	McMasters Bridge	5:18
12.00 arrive		7:13
	Parmalee Bridge	
12.30 depart		30 min break
2.30	Camp 10 Bridge	9:43
		10:58
3.45 arrive		
	Mio	30 min portage
5.00 depart		45 min break
8.05	McKinley Bridge	15.18
8.50	Bear Island	16.03

Day 3. Wake up call was at 7 am, but it was raining outside so we went to bed again. Woke up again a bit after 9 am. We ate our oatmeal and we were ready to leave at 11:00 am. We passed some canoe paddlers but I got grounded on the rocks so they passed us again. Day 3 was the day where we saw the most paddlers. Just as we departed the rain started again and didn't stop until 2-3 PM. This was the day when we run out of our water supplies. This day we had to cross three dams. Dam crossing was kind of fun because you could get out of boat, and sometimes I felt I would do anything to get out of my boat. The bad thing about the dam ponds is that it would be easy to go the wrong way in some places. In Loud Dam pond at one time there were a lot of islands and it would take us much longer to get through them if we wouldn't have had a map. Around 8:30 we reached Sidtown. Wayne went to find a shop to buy some water. He came back at 9 PM with water and sodas. There were some camping sites but we couldn't camp there because we didn't make a reservation. It's kind of strange that if you somewhere beyond Alcona on National Forest Service land you must make a reservation for a campsite. The bad thing is that you can't always predict how far you will go during the day. We went a bit down the river and camped there. We tried to build a fire but with no luck (the wood was wet).

Sunday, May 27

Time of departure	Location	Paddling time (hrs.min)
11:00	Bear Island	16.03
12:00	4001 Bridge	17.03
1:15arrive 1:45depart	Alcona	18.18
		30 min portage
		22.28
5:25arrive 5:55depart	Loud Dam	
		30 min portage
		23:43
6:50arrive 7:10depart	Five Channels	
		20 min portage
8:30arrive		25:23
	Sid town	
9:00depart		30 min break
9:15	Cook Pond site	26:18

Day 4. This is the last day of the trip so that gives me some motivation to paddle harder. We woke up just after 7 am. We are all set and ready to leave at 8:45 am. For the first time there is some sun and what's even better we get a back wind. And it is a strong back wind too. As we cross the last of the dams (Foote Dam), the river gets narrower and much more beautiful. We see a lot of fish there because the water is very clear, and it is real nice knowing that you only have to paddle for a few more miles. Monday 2:45 PM mission accomplished! It took us 32 hours and 18 minutes to go from Grayling to Oscoda. (Including 2:35 in portages and 1:45 in breaks)

Monday, May 28

Time of departure	Location	Paddling time (hrs.min)
8:45	Cook Dam site	26:18
9:15 arrive		26:48
	Cook Dam	
9:40depart		25 min portage
		29:33
12:00arrive 12:20depart	Foote Dam	
		20 min portage
2:45	Oscoda	32:18

The last and most important part is that you have to have a way to get home without having to paddle upstream. We hired a local lady who was willing to come to Oscoda with our car to take us back to Grayling. If you would need to find such a person a possible source for information is my paddling partner Wayne who can be reached at koppa@compuserve.com

Total paddling time with portages and breaks: 32 hours 18 min

Good luck and safe paddling

Arturs Graube

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SUMMARY OF RIVER TRAVEL TIMES

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