

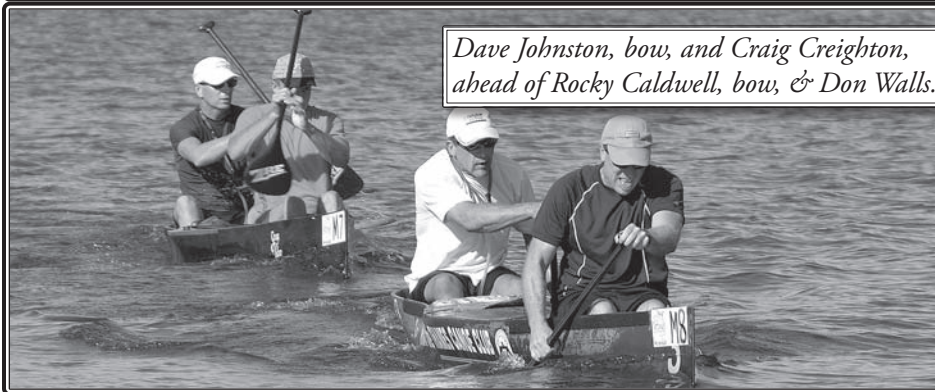
Some very close riding by Kevin LeRoy, bow, & Joe Manns, beside Russ Reker, bow, & Mike Bradford, as they close in on the first buoy.



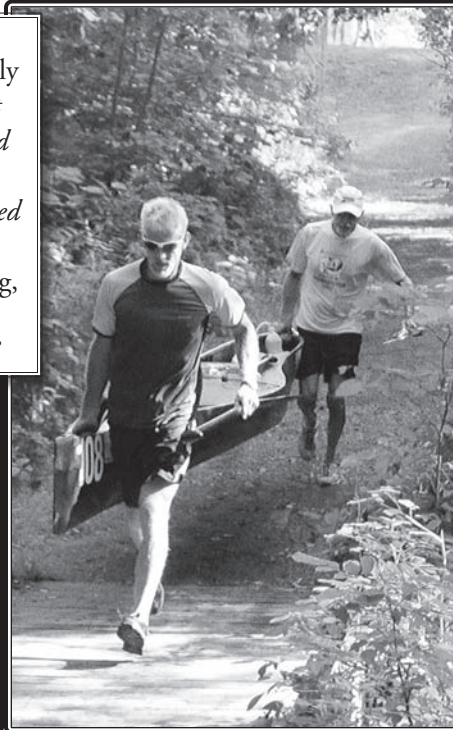
Brad Gross (glancing over at Holly Reynolds), bow, & Todd Van De Ven.



Dave Johnston, bow, and Craig Creighton, ahead of Rocky Caldwell, bow, & Don Walls.



Don Walls: "I was thrilled to get to race with Rocky Caldwell in C2 Men Master [see directly above and below]. I have been racing against Rocky for about four years but have never raced with him. It was real nice to finally get that opportunity at this year's Nationals. We finished about where I figured, looking at the backs of Neil Hanks & Fritz Hansen [shown portaging, right] for most of the race – until the last part, when they had gotten just too far ahead of us!"



## Bittersweet Nationals



..... Matt Meersman

I was looking forward to the 2008 Nationals all year long. They were close to home on familiar water and I was going to be racing with my friend Matt Streib in C2 Men Open. All year long I felt like we had a great shot at winning the *National Championship*. We get to paddle together a lot, we were both having great years, and this was our home turf!

Unfortunately, the timing and circumstances surrounding Nationals prevented us from having the race we had hoped.

The most difficult thing for Matt and me was the death of our dear friend Pat Sawyer on July 21. The emotional cost of losing Pat, coupled with the physical cost of completing the *AuSable River Canoe Marathon*, was too much for my body. I came down with a nasty bronchial infection the week before Nationals.

I considered not racing and suggested that Matt may want to find another partner. He said he wanted to race with me "even if he had to drag my butt down the river".

As expected, we had some really tough competition. The race results may have been the same even if I was 100%, but I definitely felt an unusual burn in my chest as we tried to stay with the fastest teams on the portage.

We put in with the leaders after the portage but I had nothing left to paddle with. We got dropped from their wake and tried unsuccessfully to catch back up. We made some time on the upstream portion, which we knew would be one of our strengths, but it wasn't enough.

We finished in 3rd place and although I was disappointed we weren't up there sprinting for first place at the end of the race, I was glad I got to race with one of my best friends on "our river" against some tough competition on a beautiful day.