

A General Guide to the USCA Nationals Canoe & Kayak Racing

What is USCA?

The *United States Canoe Association* (a 501(c)3 non-profit tax exempt educational, charitable, and athletic organization) is the national governing body for marathon paddling.

As such it runs several active programs related to marathon paddling activities, including an instructor program for basic paddling skills and water safety, an insurance program for race, cruise, and canoe camping organizers, a comprehensive and sensitive adaptive paddling program, a nationwide youth marathon paddling program, and, in cooperation with local sponsors, both the *USCA National Canoe & Kayak Championships* and the *USCA National Stock Aluminum Canoe Marathon Championships*.

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What are USCA National Canoe & Kayak Championships?

USCA National Canoe & Kayak Championships are a series of canoe and kayak races held over a six-day period in early-mid August each year. (There is also a *USCA National Stock Aluminum Canoe Marathon Championships*, the date and sponsor for which is usually announced at the *USCA National Canoe & Kayak Championships*.)

This are *USCA's* major annual event and includes sprint and marathon races and other events such as outrigger, biathlon and orienteering as support allows.

What is a Canoe? What is a Kayak?

It is easier to ask, "What is canoeing?" and "What is kayaking?" You are canoeing when you use a single-bladed paddle to propel your human-powered boat. You are kayaking when you use a double-bladed paddle.

Canoes, therefore, are human-powered boats (typically) propelled with single-bladed paddles. Kayaks are human-powered boats (typically) propelled with double-bladed paddles.

You *can* "canoe" a kayak or "kayak" a canoe . . . but at *USCA Nationals*, and at most other paddling events including the *Olympics* you must use a single bladed paddle in canoe races, and a double-bladed paddle in kayak races!

Because the dimensions of a canoe or a kayak can radically affect its performance (primarily its speed and stability), *USCA* has developed a series of specifications which govern whether a canoe or kayak qualifies to race at *Nationals* and in which class.

The purpose of these specifications is to ensure that boats in competition are as close to equivalent as possible, so that athletes compete fairly with each other, and none has a significant advantage purely as a result of boat design.

What is a Marathon?

In running, a marathon is 26.2 miles. In paddling, a marathon is "a long race." Generally, marathons are defined as races longer than 10 kilometers (about 6 miles), or races that take longer than about an hour.

Most marathon paddling races are longer than this minimum. Some are *very* much longer, like the *Clinton* in New York (about 70 miles), the *AuSable River Marathon* in Michigan and *La classique* in Québec (each 120 miles), the *White River Adventure Scout Races* in Arkansas (120 miles), the *Texas Water Safari*

(260 miles), or the *Yukon River Quest* (460 miles). Most marathon paddling races are in the 5 to 25 mile range.

USCA Nationals marathons are typically in the 12-20 mile range and take between two and three hours to complete. The marathon races here in Bristol fit right in to these guidelines.

Marathon canoe/kayak races generally take place on quietwater – with conditions that do not exceed Class II on the International Scale of River Difficulty. This means easy to moderately challenging rapids may be encountered on some parts of the course.

The marathon races take place on the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Nationals week.

What is a Marathon Racing Canoe?

A marathon racing canoe is any vessel paddled with single-bladed paddles in a long-distance paddling race (see the previous column “What is a marathon?”). Therefore, you may sometimes hear of great races between competitors who use outrigger canoes in Hawaii, California and on the East Coast, or of extreme distance races in Canada where the paddlers are in voyageur canoes or “war” canoes.



Above: **Joe Johnson** of Menominee, MI and **Jim Larsen** of Escanaba, MI paddling a two-person marathon racing canoe (C2). Below: **John Mathieu**, of Bath, ME paddling a solo marathon racing canoe (C1).



Photos © 2005 by Richard McCarrison

However, the type of canoe you will see most frequently at the *USCA Canoe & Kayak Nationals* is a lightweight (20 to 30 pound) canoe that cannot be longer than 18ft 6in.

The *USCA* and most Canadian marathon canoe organizations have specified rules governing several measurements besides the length of the canoe. One of these is the width of the canoe at the waterline (where the boat rests in the water when it isn't holding paddlers).

For the two-person canoe, many Canadian and US races only allow canoes with a 27in width at the 3in waterline (for two-person canoes), often referred to as “pro boats.” The *USCA* allows that kind of vessel and a canoe that measures 32in wide at the 4in waterline, referred to as a “Cruiser,” or “*USCA* Cruiser.”

While there are slight variations in the shape of the hull, in the way the paddlers might customize their canoes and in the materials used to build the boats (which is usually a composite of kevlar, spectra, carbon fiber cloth all held together with epoxy resin), these canoes are so similar to one another that only experts can really tell the difference between them (and they will, if you ask! So be careful what you ask for!).

For the solo canoe, the *USCA* and most other US and Canadian marathon canoe race organizations only allow a canoe that measures 32in wide at the 4in waterline.

These requirements in the measurement of the canoes result in the shapes of most canoes you'll see racing at the *Nationals*, whether that canoe is paddled by one person or two.

You'll also notice that the paddlers generally sit down in the canoe for these races, which is different from how you may have learned to paddle in Scouts. It's also different than the style of paddling learned by international paddlers at the *Olympics*.

The marathon canoes you'll see at *USCA Nationals* are not usually used for canoe expeditions, whitewater paddling, or for paddling across large lakes — although they can be equipped for river trips or lake travel.

Several visionary canoe builders developed the design of these particular vessels over the last twenty-five years, specifically for quietwater marathon canoe racing. One of these builders is **Everett Crozier**, the Race Chair for *Peshtigo River Paddlers*, the race host in Peshtigo, two years ago.

What is a Marathon Kayak?

Broadly speaking, five somewhat different kinds of kayaks are used in marathon paddling competition: sea kayaks, touring kayaks, downriver kayaks, ICF kayaks, and fast racing kayaks that fall outside of these specifications and compete in an unlimited kayak class. Each kayak type was designed for different primary purposes. Each type handles differently and therefore requires different skills and technique to paddle fast.

See “Boat Classes” (page 10) for more detail.



And, what is a Sprint?

A sprint is a short race. Most *USCA* sprints are 500 meters. For the youngest paddlers (who are termed “child” paddlers), the sprints are 250 meters.

Adult sprints (including adult/youth classes) take place on the Tuesday of Nationals week and Youth sprints on the Thursday. This year sprints are being held at Ideal Beach, Heaton Lake.

What is Canoe/Kayak Orienteering?

Canoe/kayak orienteering is the practice of techniques of navigation by map and compass as well as skill in paddling. Paddlers compete to find their way on a pre-set course up and down the river, including crossing islands and running up banks. The course is marked with colored flags known as control markers. The paddlers follow maps given to them at the start of the event to locate the markers as the time clock ticks away. The event typically takes about 2 hours and will cover about 6 miles of river. The event was introduced to *USCA Nationals* in 1992 and takes place on Wednesday.

What is a Biathlon?

The biathlon held during *USCA Nationals* week involves a 3 kilometer run, followed by a 3 kilometer paddle and a short portage (boat-carrying) dash to a finish line a few hundred feet on land.

What is a Class?

The variety of events at *USCA Nationals* can be bewildering to the newcomer. *USCA National Championship* events are split into classes by **boat type** (see below). Within some boat classes there are also **age group** divisions in addition to an “Open” age division (see page 12 for age group definitions and pages 19-21, the Order of Events, to see which boat classes have age group divisions). Also, for every class or age division where there is a race for men, there is also a race for women.

Boat Classes

The descriptions here are guides for the non-technical spectator. Note that these are *USCA* specs. Race specs used in local and regional races may vary, especially in the evolving field of kayak races. Full details may be found at www.uscanoe.com.

C1 – a solo (one-person) canoe which meets *USCA* specs.



C2 – a tandem (two-person) canoe which meets *USCA* specs for either the *USCA Cruiser* or the “pro boat.”

C2 Standard – a tandem canoe very similar to the *USCA-Cruiser*. In “Standard” class, both *USCA Cruisers* and *USCA Standards* may be used, but each must carry enough extra weight to meet a 50lb minimum weight requirement.

Outrigger canoe – a canoe with one or two arms on one side of the canoe, attached to a float. There are one-person, two-person, four-person and six-person outrigger canoes. At *USCA Nationals*, only six-person outrigger canoes (OC6) are used. There are five *National Outrigger Sprint Championship* classes.

One of these classes is the *National Championship for Paddlers with Physical Disabilities*.

K1/K2 – When the designation “K1” is alone without any other words, it means a single person powered kayak of any kind. If the designation is “K2” the kayak will have two paddlers racing in it.

K1 Sea Kayak – a style of kayak designed for ocean paddling, with bulkhead and hatches for storage and flotation. For *USCA* racing purposes a 18ft maximum length is used and a length to width formula sets the minimum width. There is also a 40lb weight minimum.

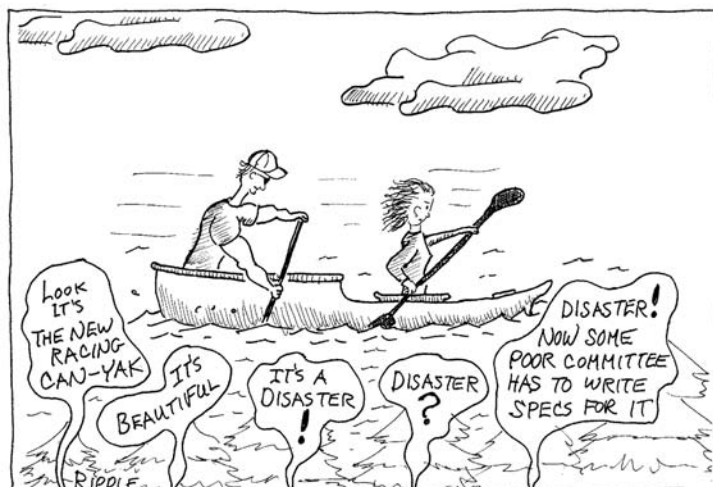
K1 Touring Kayak – a style of kayak designed for flatwater tripping, with a maximum overall length of 20ft and a minimum width of 18in.

K1 Downriver Kayak – a shorter kayak having a 4.5 meter (about 14ft 9in) maximum length without a rudder

K1 ICF Kayak – an international long distance kayak specification (ICF = International Canoe Federation) with a maximum length of 5.2 meters (about 17ft 1in).

K2 ICF Kayak – an international long distance kayak specification with a maximum length of 6.5 meters (about 21ft 4in).

K1 Unlimited Kayak / K2 Unlimited Kayak – a kayak class where there are no limits on length, width or other features.



Age Classes

Age Group Definitions for all USCA Events:

- Fledgling I** – Any paddler 5 to 7 years of age as of prev Jan 1st
Fledgling II – Any paddler 8 to 10 years of age as of prev Jan 1st
Bantam – Any paddler 11 or 12 years of age as of prev Jan 1st
Juvenile – Any paddler 13 or 14 years of age as of prev Jan 1st
Junior – Any paddler who is not yet 18 as of prev Jan 1st
Master – Any paddler age 40 to 49 as of race day
Senior – Any paddler age 50 to 59 as of race day
Veteran 1 – Any paddler age 60 to 64 as of race day
Veteran 2 – Any paddler age 65 to 69 as of race day
Grand Veteran 1 – Any paddler age 70 to 74 of race day
Grand Veteran 2 – Any paddler age 75 or older as of race day
Grandmaster Veteran – Any paddler age 80 or older, race day
Adult / Youth – Adult paddler must be at least age 29 race day – Youth paddler between age 5 and 15 as of prev Jan 1st
Adult / Junior – Adult paddler must be at least age 29 as of race day – Junior paddler must qualify as a Junior and be at least 14 years younger than adult paddler

USCA National Championships History

By 1968, the year that USCA was created, marathon canoe racing had already become popular in about a dozen states – but there was little standardization of boat types or classes from race to race or region to region – and no annual national event.

The founding members of USCA recognized that in order to promote the sport effectively, they needed to provide common rules, classes and boat specifications and, most importantly, an annual national championship event for the sport. Only then could canoers from various regions compete together and do so fairly.

USCA National Canoe & Kayak Championships, now in its 39th year, is a testament to the success of that effort, bringing together paddlers from all over the US, Canada, and, on occasion, from other countries.

The first USCA canoe racing rules in 1968 were one page long. Now they fill 25 pages.

The first Nationals offered three classes: C2 Men, C2 Junior, and C2 Mixed. A total of twenty boats entered the competition.

In 1989, sprint races were added, and by early 1990s hundreds of boats raced at USCA Nationals in about three dozen classes.

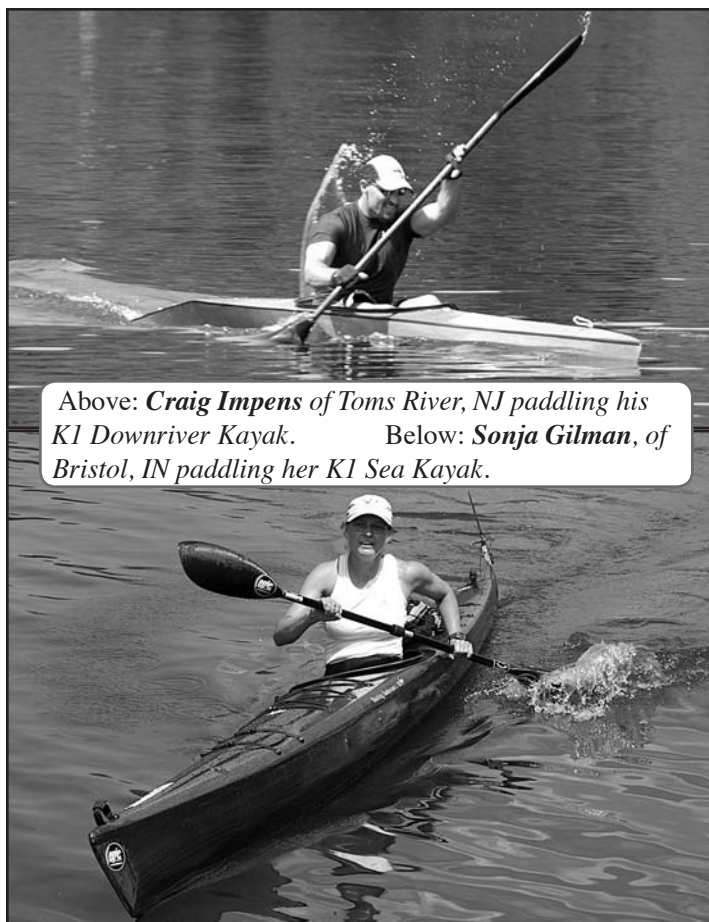
In 1998, the *Stock Aluminum Canoe Nationals* spun off into a separate event. It is the smaller of USCA's two Nationals, and is held at a (variable) different time of year.

Here in Elkhart County in 2008, at USCA's "big" Nationals, there are 38 adult sprint classes (30 canoe and 8 kayak), 13 canoe/kayak orienteering classes, 15 canoe and 2 kayak youth sprint classes, and **66 marathon classes** (44 canoe, 16 kayak, 4 canoe trial, and 2 canoe demo).

Add to that twenty classes in the *Philip H Soule National Biathlon Championships* (not an "official USCA championship event" but a fun event to which everyone, USCA members and non-members alike, are invited), and you have a packed week!

Individual USCA National Championships are sponsored by a local club, regional association, chamber of commerce, or occasionally a group formed for the specific purpose of hosting a Nationals. The 2008 event was sponsored by *The Bristol Nationals Organizing Committee* – a team headed by **Mandy Streib** of Fluid Canoe & Kayak Sales for the purpose of bringing the Nationals to Bristol & Elkhart County.

USCA Nationals have been held in 16 states, from Texas to New Hampshire, from Georgia to Wisconsin – full list over page.



Above: **Craig Impens** of Toms River, NJ paddling his K1 Downriver Kayak. Below: **Sonja Gilman**, of Bristol, IN paddling her K1 Sea Kayak.

USCA National Locations 1968-2008: Future Nationals Dates

USCA Nationals Locations 1968-2008

- 1968 – *South Fork Cumberland River*, Oneida, TN
1969 – *Wabash River*, Wabash, IN
1970 – *Mad River*, Springfield, OH
1971 – *AuSable River*, Oscoda, MI
1972 – *Allegheny River*, Oil City, PA
1973 – *Menominee River*, Marinette, WI
1974 – *Brazos River*, Waco, TX
1975 – *St Joseph River*, Elkhart, IN
1976 – *Little Miami River*, Milford, OH
1977 – *Susquehanna River*, Owego, NY
1978 – *Fox River*, St Charles, IL
1979 – *Wisconsin River*, Muscoda, WI
1980 – *Wabash River*, Wabash, IN
1981 – *Wabash River*, Lafayette, IN
1982 – *Oswego River*, Oswego-Fulton, NY
1983 – *Current River*, Doniphan, MO
1984 – *Flint River*, Columbiaville, MI
1985 – *Wabash River*, Wabash, IN
1986 – *Barren River*, Bowling Green, KY
1987 – *West Branch Susquehanna River*, Jersey Shore, PA
1988 – *Connecticut River*, Hanover, NH
1989 – *Menominee River*, Marinette, WI
1990 – *Susquehanna River*, Owego, NY
1991 – *Menominee River*, Marinette, WI
1992 – *Juniata River*, Lewistown, PA
1993 – *West Branch Susquehanna River*, Jersey Shore, PA
1994 – *Scioto River*, Columbus, OH
1995 – *Onondaga Lake-NY Canal System*, Syracuse, NY
1996 – *Rock River*, Oregon, IL
1997 – *St Joseph River*, Niles, MI
1998 (Aluminum) – *Driftwood Branch Sinnemahoning River*, Emporium, PA
1998 – *West Branch Susquehanna River*, Jersey Shore, PA
1999 (Aluminum) – *Vermilion River*, Pontiac, IL
1999 – *St Joseph River*, Niles, MI
2000 (Aluminum) – *Lumber River*, Lumberton, NC
2000 – *Wabash River*, Lafayette, IN
2001 (Aluminum) – *Mississippi River*, Dubuque, IA
2001 – *Lake Lanier*, Gainesville, GA
2002 (Aluminum) – *Trinity River*, Palestine, TX
2002 – *Connecticut River*, Hanover, NH
2003 (Aluminum) – *Driftwood Branch Sinnemahoning River*, Emporium, PA
2003 – *Allegheny River*, Warren, PA
2004 (Aluminum) – *Western Branch Elizabeth River*, Portsmouth, VA
2004 – *AuSable River*, Oscoda, MI
2005 (Aluminum) – *Wisconsin River*, Muscoda, WI
2005 – *Allegheny River*, Warren, PA
2006 (Aluminum) – *Fox River*, St Charles, IL
2006 – *Peshtigo River*, Peshtigo, WI
2007 (Aluminum) – *Current & Black Rivers*, Pocahontas, AR
2007 – *Allegheny River*, Warren, PA
2008 – *St Joseph River*, Bristol, IN
2008 (Alum) - *Colorado R.* Bastrop, TX

USCA's web site: USCAnoe.com

***Under construction:
USCA Canoe News web site:
USCanoenews.com***

**Mark your calendars for
September 2008!**

USCA Aluminum Nationals
September 27-28, 2008: Bastrop, TX

Mark your calendars for 2009!

USCA Canoe & Kayak Nationals

Aug 11-16, 2009: Warren, PA

USCA Aluminum Nationals

May 16-17, 2009:

Vernon Hills to Wheeling, IL

Mark your calendars for 2010!

USCA Canoe & Kayak Nationals

Aug 10-15, 2010 — location to be determined