

Fishing the Thornapple River

Hastings, Michigan

Friday July 30th, 2010:

I arrived in Hastings on Friday afternoon July 30th, 2010. After checking in at the local motel, I contacted the folks (Julie & Jim Fox) at [U Rent Em Canoe](#) and arranged for a canoe to float the Thornapple on Saturday.

After getting the canoe arrangements set, I headed out to the Thornapple for a little fishing. First stop along the way was to seine for "Hellgramites"; the larvae stage of the Dobson fly. Hellgramites are ugly and mean but Smallmouth Bass love them. Reference photos below:



And yes "Hellgramites" live in the river typically buried in the sand under rocks located in riffles. I managed to catch about 2 dozen "hellgramites" in a short time so now it's time to go fish.

I initially fished a stretch of river downstream of Hastings along Irving Road. I managed to catch 6 or 7 short (10" to 12") Smallmouth but the fish don't appear to be real active. Three weeks earlier I had fished this same stretch of river with a friend of mine and we caught and released several nice (15" to 16") Smallmouth while fishing in the rain.



Saturday July 31st, 2010:

River Conditions:

Flow at 160 cubic feet per second and clear.

Air Temp:

High of 75F, mostly cloudy, showers in the forecast

I meet Jim & Julie at the U Rent Em Canoe livery in downtown Hastings. I started renting canoes from Julie's Dad, Mike Hawthorne, over 40 years ago. Mike, and now Julie and Jim, have always done an outstanding job at meeting my needs and "odd ball" requests to reach certain sections of the Thornapple!! Wonderful people and they really understand what "customer service" is all about.

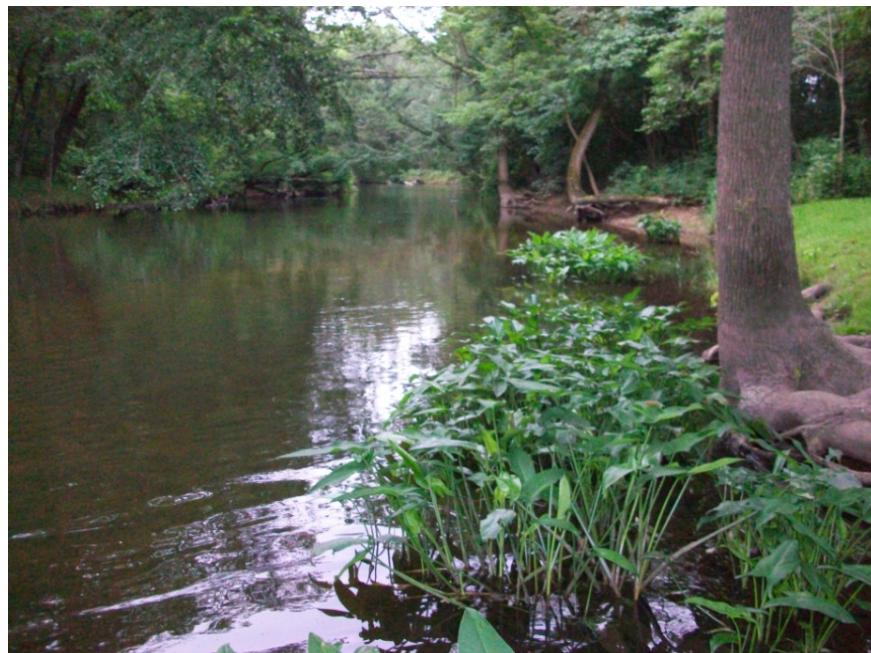
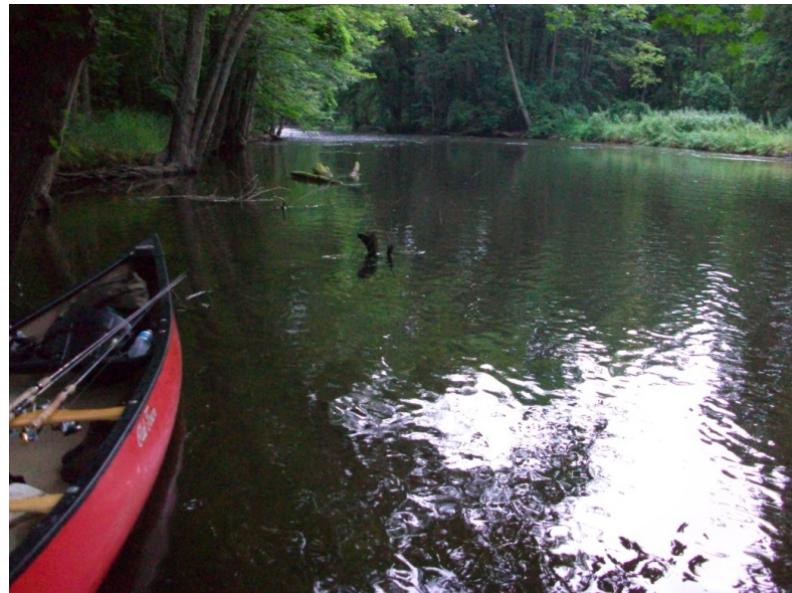
Jim drops me off with the canoe and all my gear by 8 am. So, I'm fishing by 8:05 am. I manage to catch and release at least 10 Smallies near the "put-in" point. Four of the ten bass were "keepers" over 14".

The largest Smallie caught and released was ~ 18": reference photo below: and yes I had a blast trying to land this fish.



Note: This big fish was caught on one of those live "hellgrammies" seined from the river on Friday afternoon.

Views of the Thornapple near the "put-in" point.



I'm still catching Bass here near the "put-in" point but decide to move on downstream to the next series of holes before it gets too late. I have a lot of water yet to cover.



I continue catching nice Smallmouth in all of these holes of water.

In the hole pictured below, I caught and released 5 Smallies ranging in size from 15" to 16".





I stopped for lunch around 12 noon; 4 hours of great fishing under my belt.

Half time Score: I have kept a rough count of the fish I've caught and released so far. 33 Smallmouth in total - all sizes included. Twelve of the 33 were over 14" and would qualify as "keepers".

I continue fishing the hole shown above after lunch and the Smallies are still biting. However, I need to move on down the river in order to reach town and the "take-out" point before dark.

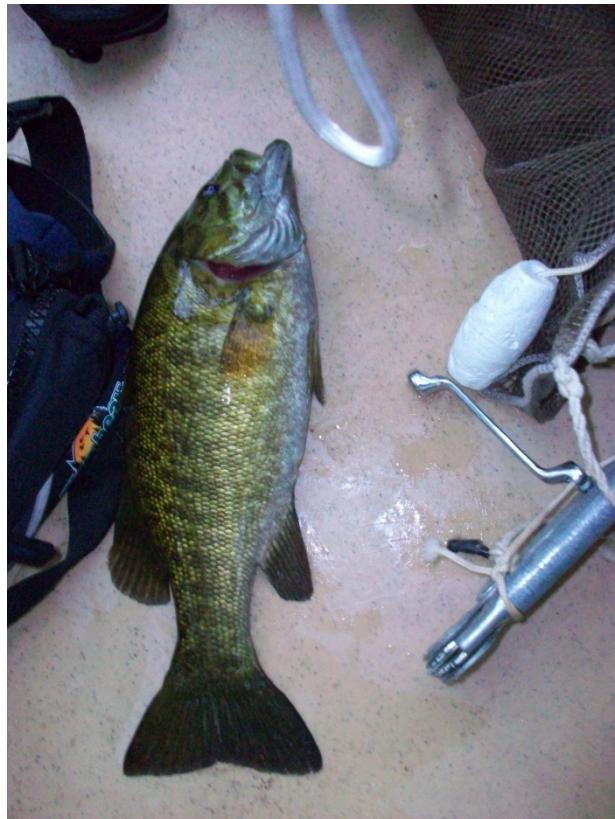
(I told Jim Fox of "U Rent Em" I'd be there by 6:00 pm..... I hope he doesn't think I was serious about that??)

By the way the weather was perfect for fishing; gray clouds, temps in the mid 70's and only a few light showers.

The next hole, which is pictured below, was alive with fish!! I caught fish; mainly Smallies, on my first 10 casts into this hole.



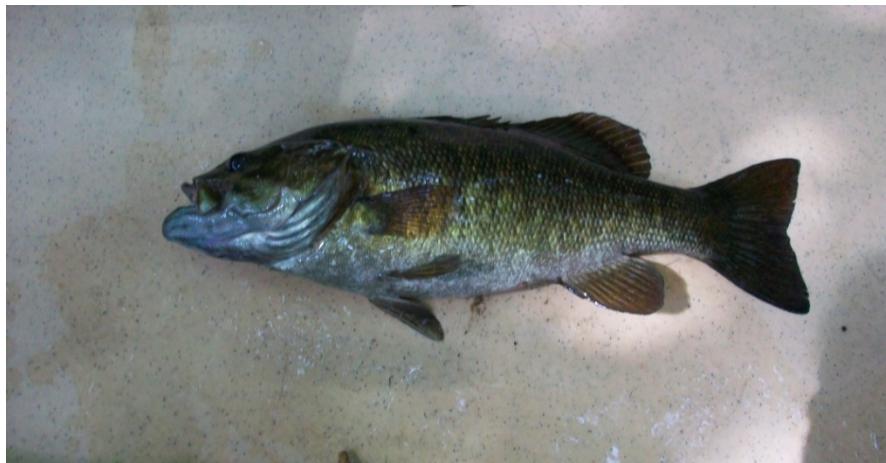
Several Smallmouth caught in this hole were 15" to 16" long, similar to the one pictured below. The largest Smallie from this hole was 17" and was a handful to land in this swift moving water.



Once again I am forced to leave a hole of water where the fish are very active but I'm still a long way from town. So I continue my float down river.



The hole pictured above is deceptive. It is located in a very wide part of the river but out of the main river channel. I catch and release another dozen Bass here with the largest going 17" or so; see photo below.



Over the years, many 19" to 20" Smallmouth have been caught and released in this very hole of water.

It's now 4:30 in the afternoon and I have one more great hole of water to fish so I continue my float down river. I once again experience the same sort of action as I have had all thru the day. The Bass continue to aggressively feed and provide almost non-stop action. Finally, as 5:45 pm approaches I stop fishing and begin my non-stop paddling to the U Rent Em canoe Livery in downtown Hastings.

Saturday (7/31/10) Summary:

- "Put-in" @ 8:00 am with "Take-out" @ 7:00 pm
 - Only 1 hour late - not too bad.....
- Total Smallmouth caught and released ~ 65 to 70!
- 25 to 30 Smallies were greater than the 14" size limit!
- Caught 1 - 18" Smallie, 2 - 17" Smallies, 1- 17" Largemouth and a "whole bunch" of 15" to 16" Smallies!
- Not a bad day at the "Office".



Mike Hawthorne (seated in truck) is the man who started "U Rent Em" back in the 1960's. Mike's daughter Julie (on the left) along with her husband Jim have kept "the dream" alive. Based on the number of canoes, kayaks and tubes I see on the river, I'd say business is thriving! That's me on the right, Jim's behind the camera.

Sunday August 1st, 2010:

River Conditions:

Flow at 155 cubic feet per second and clear.

Air Temp:

High of 84F, mostly clear and sunny

I start the morning by fishing the McKeown Rd. bridge area.

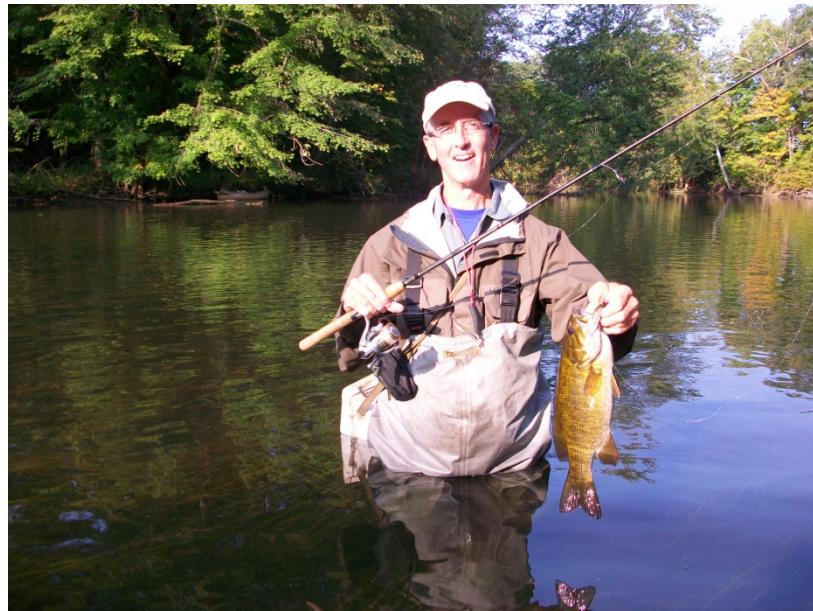


I wade upstream to a hole of water that has produced good numbers of Smallmouth in the past.



However, this morning I catch maybe 8 or 9 small (10" to 12") bass and then the fish stop biting as the sun hits this hole early.

The picture below is from September '09 and shows a nice 17.5" Smallie caught and released in this same hole.



I finish the day fishing the Thornapple around the River Rd. bridge area. Again this is an area that has produced big bass in past years.



As I wade this stretch of water, the Smallies feed aggressively on almost any bait or soft plastic.

Over the next 2 hours I catch and release 9 or 10 Smallmouth ranging in size from 15" to 17". Reference photo below for an example:



Now it's time to pack up and head home, after another great morning of fishing.

TRIP SUMMARY:

(Friday July 30th to Sunday August 1st, 2010)

River conditions were near perfect; water clear and flow @ 155 cps.
Daytime temps in upper 70's to mid 80's degrees F
Winds were mainly west and south west
Caught and released approximately 115 to 120 Smallmouth during the weekend.
Estimate at least one third of these Smallies (~ 40 Bass) were 14" or longer.

Needless to say I'll be back and soon!