

Thornapple River Trip (October 7 - 9, 2011)

This fishing trip was taken in memory of my Dad who had died on September 29, 2011 just 10 days short of his 91st birthday. Dad had fished the Thornapple for 55 years over a six decade period of time: 1953 to 2008. That's a lot of Fishin'!!

Tom Candella of West Chester, Ohio joined me on this trip. Jim Fox of "U Rent Em" canoe met us in Hastings and also fished with us on Saturday & Sunday morning. Jim's wife Julie held her 50th 29th Birthday bash that Saturday night as well! Yes, we all survived and were able to fish on Sunday morning.

Friday October 7, 2011:

Tom & I left West Chester ~ 6:15 am and arrived in Hastings around 12 noon. After a quick check-in at the Parkview Motel, we unpacked the Yukon and geared up for an afternoon & evening of fishing. Our first stop was at Airport Rd. to pick "hellgrammites". This is the highlight of the trip for any "newcomer"!! The first time a person gets to see a live hellgrammite becomes the memory (good or bad?) of a lifetime. Tom & I managed to pick up ~ 30 of the little critters, so now it's time to go fishing. Conditions are perfect for Fall fishing:

River flow @ 180 cubic feet per second (CPS)

Gage Height @ 3.3 feet

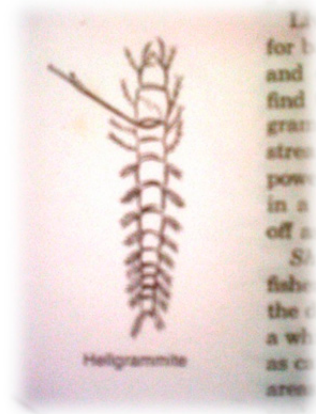
Air temp. @ 68 F with winds WSW



*Getting ready to pick Hellgrammites on Friday afternoon October 7, 2011.
And yes they are ugly but the Smallmouth Bass love them.*



Live hellgrammites are also excellent natural bait for bass. Because they are tough, they can be cast over and over again without coming off the hook. You find them in swift, rocky riffles. As with crayfish, hellgrammites can be caught by using a net setup downstream. However, be careful when you pick one up. The powerful jaws they use for holding onto rocks and in a swift current can inflict a nasty bite; clip the off as well as the claspers on their tails.



This description of the Hellgrammite is direct from the Boy Scout manual courtesy of Mr. Jim "Holy Cow" Fox. Jim is the Founder & President of T.A.T.C. - "ThornApple Twenty Club".

Our first stop of the afternoon is downstream of the old Monument along Irving Rd. Conditions are perfect & the water is crystal clear. However, the fishing is slow which is not too unusual for this hole. This hole of water is known as Poastie's hole. It was named for the first fisherman who found the hole in 1953, his last name was Poast. Tom & I catch & release a few small bass and one nice 17" Smallie.



Poastie's Hole on Friday afternoon October 7, 2011.



More Poastie's Hole action this time with a 17" Smallmouth

Tom and I decide to leave "Poastie's hole" and head back upstream to downtown Hastings. We park at "U Rent Em" canoe's lot on Apple St. Four weeks earlier I had fished upstream

of the livery and caught four (4) nice Smallmouths in 15 minutes while waiting on Jim Fox. So I thought it would be fun to fish this area again; *"thinking wouldn't it be great if Tom would catch a 20" Smallie right in Jim's backyard"!!* We didn't catch any 20 inch bass but we did manage to catch & release several Smallies in the 14" to 16" range.



Tom also managed to catch a couple Northern Pike in this hole of water; his first ever Northern. The second pike was decent size going ~ 30" in length. Unfortunately we couldn't dig out a camera fast enough before he made a big splash and got away. Next year Tom's bringing a net!!

Our final stop of the afternoon is at Center Rd. bridge. As usual we waded to the upstream side of the bridge and fish a series of holes in this section of the river. We catch & release several more Smallies in the 12" to 15" range. *They are such great fighting fish in the cool, clear autumn water!*

The funniest thing happened while fishing upstream of the bridge. Tom and I were standing in the river fishing when we hear this rustling noise in the trees directly over our heads. *We look up to see a big squirrel falling "spread eagle" from a tree branch 30 feet up in the air!*



The squirrel does a belly smacker in the river just downstream from Tom. It sounds like a rifle shot when the squirrel hits the water!! This squirrel was in a major panic as it hit the water! Its legs were going a 100 mph trying to get out of the water and back onto a tree branch! I think the squirrel was just a little bit concerned about becoming dinner for a big bass or pike. Tom & I each scored the squirrel's dive with a 10.0 and awarded it the Gold medal!

Saturday October 8, 2011:

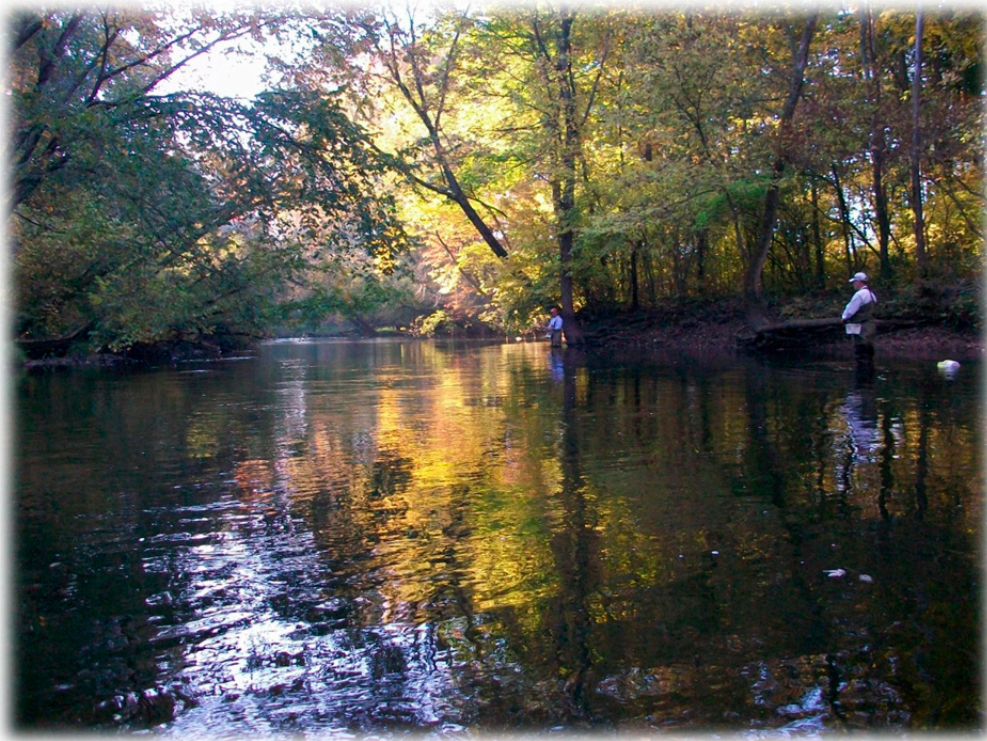
River flow @ 175 cps & Gage Height @ 3.2 ft.

Air temps in the low 70's F with winds WSW



Canoe launch and fishing in the DeWitt's backyard on Saturday morning October 8th. That's Jim "Chicago" Fox on the left and Tom "The Thumb" Candella on the right in the photo below. We've been dragging & launching canoes in Vern & Shari DeWitt's backyard for over 40 years..... Sure hope they don't get tired of us?????





Tom & Jim fishing in DeWitt's backyard. This shot is taken looking directly upstream. The trees were in full color on this weekend.



Tom fishing just upstream from the Boat Hole - resulting in a solid & aggressive 16" Smallie. Tom thought he had hooked a log at first..... then the log started to move!



Jim & Tom fishing the "Boat Hole" - not much action on this day. The water was crystal clear and the sun was directly overhead.



Tom & Chris fishing the Cliff Hole. We got shut out in the Cliff Hole which seldom happens. There were a lot of leaves and almost every cast ended up on top of a leaf and it was difficult getting a minnow below the surface. Pretty good "excuse" I think?

Next up was the "Pole Hole". We managed to catch & release a few Smallies from this hole with the biggest going ~18".



18" Smallmouth from the Pole Hole - caught & released at the lower end of the hole. I was letting Tom & Jim fish at the top end of the hole where we ~~used to~~ catch all the big ones??

After leaving the "Pole Hole" we headed towards the Center Rd. bridge. Jim had caught a bunch of nice bass during the previous weekend. Reference the photo below for a sampling.



This nice bass was caught & released on the upstream side of the Center Rd. bridge.

Jim had to go and get ready for Julie's big 50th 29th Birthday Bash out at Middle Lake. So he went on ahead to the Bliss Training Center take-out point. This allowed us an extra hour to fish. Jim is such a great husband.....?

Tom and I dropped below Center Rd. bridge and slipped below the island that is located downstream of the bridge. I managed to pull out the 18.5" Smallmouth pictured below at the big hole where the river bends.



18.5" Smallmouth caught & released below the Center Rd. bridge.

A pretty nice way to end a day of fishing on the Thornapple!!

Sunday October 9, 2011:

River flow @ 172 cps & Gage Height @ 3.1 ft.

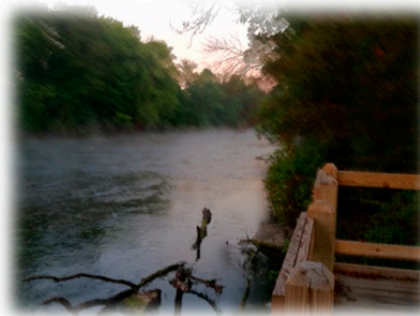
Air temps in the low 70's F with winds from the SW

This would have been Dad's 91st Birthday. I couldn't think of a better way to celebrate and remember him than by fishing the Thornapple, his favorite river.

Jim, Tom and I met at McKeown Rd. park at 8:00 am. I was most impressed that Jim even showed up since I think he partied all night.



These 4 photos were taken at McKeown Rd. Barry County and the City of Hastings have done a great job in improving access to the river in many areas.



A photo (lower right) of my favorite USGS Gage House #04117500 on the Thornapple at McKeown Rd. I access the data from this gage on a daily basis during the fishing season. It's an invaluable asset in helping me determine whether to make the 300 mile trip to Hastings. My "Go/No Go" decision point is a flow of 250 cubic feet per second of flow.

The Loop!

Sunday morning Tom, Jim and I fish a section of the river I call "The Loop". We start at the River Rd. bridge upstream of downtown Hastings. If you look at a map or satellite shot of the Thornapple in this area, the river makes a long continuous "left hand" turn. Eventually the river comes all the way around to where an old section of River Rd. used to be located right next to the Thornapple. This becomes the "take-out point" and it's an easy walk back to the River Rd. bridge and the car.



Looking downstream towards "The Loop" .



Looking upstream w/ River Rd. bridge just around the bend on the right.

The fishing in "The Loop" was very slow this Sunday morning. Even though the weather was great the water was cooling off. You could tell Fall was on the way.

We still managed to catch 4 or 5 nice Smallies in this stretch.

Hint: *the tighter the turn gets in the Loop, the better the fishing becomes.*

The photos below were taken in June of 2011. That's an 18" Smallmouth I'm playing with and I finally manage to land



I caught this fish on one of those ugly hellgrammites - they're like magic!



Now we start the countdown until June 2012 comes around..... My first trip to the Thornapple is usually the Monday following Father's Day weekend in June. Fishing in the middle of the week avoids all those noisy canoes.....!