

The Thornapple Trilogy 2012

(3 trips in 3 weeks!!!)

TRIP #1: *(Monday June 18th thru Wednesday June 20th)*

Fishing Partners are Steve Meibers from Canton, MI and Jim Fox from St. Charles, IL . Jim and his wife Julie run "U Rent Em" Canoe livery in downtown Hastings, MI. Steve is a West Point graduate, married to my cousin (Sally) and is now retired from The Ford Motor Company after a long & distinguished career.

Conditions: - Monday afternoon 6-18-12

- *Flow at 166 cubic feet per second (cfs) when we started fishing at ~ 2:00 pm*
 - *Note: In retrospect this turns out to be the highest flow level we fished in all summer due to a prolonged drought in the upper Midwest.*
- *Flow was at a steady 130 cfs earlier in the morning; the Hastings area was hit hard by a localized T-storm the morning we arrived - yuk!*
- *Storm dropped over 1" of rain in ~ 25 minutes*
- *Air Temps. - 93 F with high humidity & light wind WSW*
- *The river was muddy in town due to all of the road construction*
 - *The river above town was fairly clear & very fishable.*



Steve "The Hammer" Meibers with a fat 19.5" Smallmouth caught and released during first 15 minutes of fishing. Not bad for your first Smallmouth of 2012.

We spent Monday afternoon & evening fishing an area of the Thornapple I call "The Loop". The starting point is River Road Bridge. Then fish downstream into the tight left turns where the river "loops" back to the old abandoned roadbed.

See the next two pages for a brief summary of the results.



Upper Left: Steve battles a monster Smallmouth in the Loop @ 4:51 pm.
Result?

Upper right: Steve gets a lesson in hook tying @ 4:54 pm after losing the battle. We waved good-bye to a 19" to 20" Smallie.....? Could have been a + 20"....? May have been a lost opportunity to join the "prestigious" T.A.T.C.??

What is the T.A.T.C.? *The ThornApple Twenty Club was founded in the Fall of 2011 by Jim, "The Apprentice" Fox. Membership is earned by catching a Smallmouth Bass of at least 20" in length. At the time of this trip this exclusive club only had 2 members: Jim Fox and Chris Chaney. Some say the TATC was put in place to "torment" those fisherman who can only catch 19" and 19.5" Smallies. These folks are sometimes referred to as "TATC Wannabe's".*



Jim "The Apprentice" Fox with a fat 19.5" Smallmouth caught in The Loop on Monday afternoon at ~ 4:30 pm.



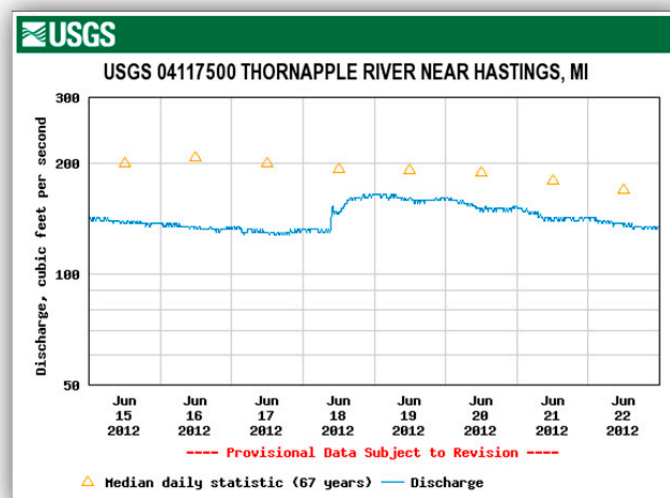
*Jim with a nice 18" Smallie from The Loop.
This one was caught an hour later at ~ 5:30 pm.*

Note: We were in the middle of a great fishing afternoon/evening. Steve & Jim were catching some nice Smallies. The fishing was hot and so was the 95 F air temperature. However, all of this came to an abrupt end when some "unnamed fisherman" screwed up on taking his medications. So instead of catching more huge Smallmouths, Jim & Steve got to put their "river rescue" skills into action and had to carry me & my gear back to the Yukon. *Thanks guys, I owe you one.....*

Tuesday 6-19-12:

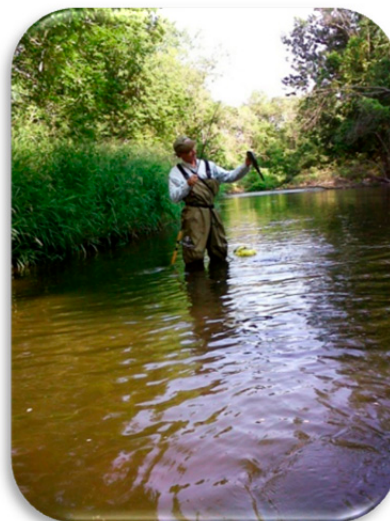
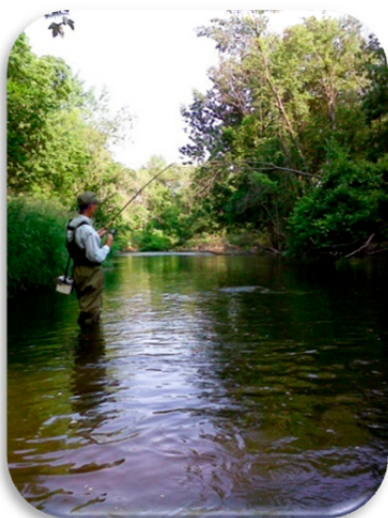
Conditions:

- "Put-in point" at ~ 8:00 am.
- Flow at ~ 160 cps - reference USGS Real-time graph below for the week.
- The river above town was fairly clear considering the area received ~ 1" of rain the previous day & was very fishable.
- Air Temps. - 95 F was the high, with high humidity & light wind WSW





Prepping for launch on Tuesday morning.



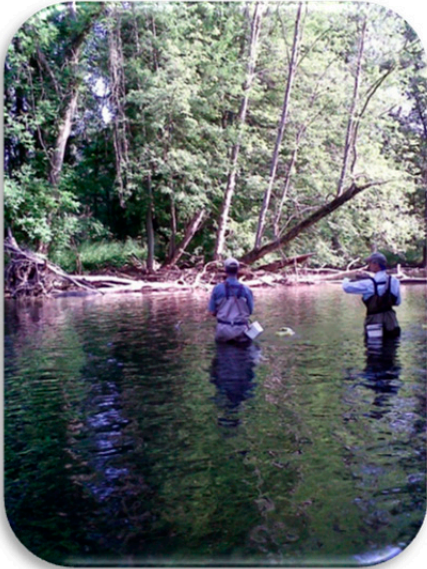
Steve ("The Hammer") starts out the morning just like yesterday; another one of those "pesky" 19.5" Smallies. I hate it when this kind of fish ends up on my hook..... Steve does too, I can tell by the look on his face. This one was caught & released in the hole below the "Put-in" point.

Note: "The Hammer's" hook did not come untied this time!



Expert canoeists are enjoying a leisurely float towards the Boat Hole area.

Note: Really we're racing and trying to beat Jim down to the next hole so we can get the first cast!



Steve & Chris fishing upstream of the "Boat Hole"





Jim & Steve fishing the real "Boat Hole"it's lunchtime!



Steve with a Northern Pike from the "Pole Hole" on Tuesday afternoon.



Steve closing out the 1st trip with a nice "Poastie's Hole" Smallmouth.

Summary: Great trip, lot's of big Smallie's and lot's of Hot weather.....a theme that continues throughout the summer of 2012.....!

Thornapple River Trip #2:

(Thursday June 28th thru Sunday July 1st; that's right just 8 days after my first trip!)

Fishing Partners for this "action packed" trip are Bill Huntzinger from Sylvania, OH and Jim Fox from St. Charles, IL. Bill is an "old" high school friend who fished the Thornapple back in the 1970's and early 1980's. Bill thinks the last time he fished the Thornapple was 1982; just 30 short years ago.....??? Bill could recall a few days when he'd fish all day and not catch a single Smallmouth that could be put on the stringer! He'd come walkin' up out of the river with his "World Famous - Empty Stringer". I even think the size limit was 12" minimum to keep back then. Pretty pathetic I'd say..... I told Bill that I believe he'll find fishing the Thornapple for Smallmouth Bass a little more productive than he remembers.....

Friday June 29th:

Conditions:

- *Flow at a steady 110 cubic feet per second (cps), very low for this time of the year. Evidence of the drought that is hitting much of the Midwest this summer.*
- *Median flow at this time of year is typically in the 160 to 170 cps range.*
- *Air Temps.: daytime highs ~ 95 F with high humidity & light wind WSW.*
- *Weather was hot but so was the "Fishin"!!!!*



Getting ready to launch the canoes on Friday morning June 29, 2012.

The picture above shows Bill trying to remember how to put a pair of waders on. Let's see the right leg goes in the right boot.....oh yeah, now I remember!!



Bill "Doc" Huntzinger - only 30 years since he last fished the Thornapple...?? Let's just hope it's not another 30 years before his next trip!!!!



Bill gets "on the board" quickly just below the canoe "put-in-point".



This 18 incher did a nice "tail-walk" across the hole before finally giving up.....



Huntz showing us he still has that magic touch! A nice Smallie above the "Boat Hole".



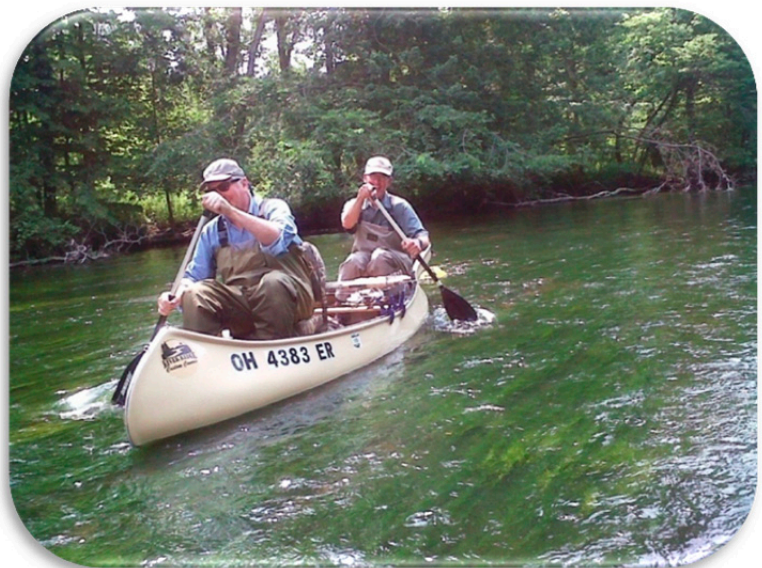
Bill off to a good start at the "Boat Hole". He's just getting warmed up...



Now that's a nice "Boat Hole" Smallie - 18" plus.



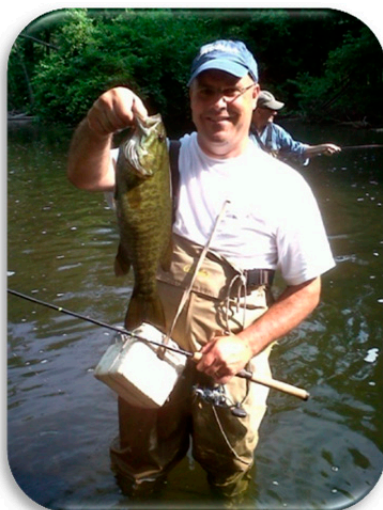
Bill (aka "Doc") with a 32" Northern Pike from the "Pole Hole".
Below, Doc does a little surgery prior to release....such teamwork....!!



So young & energetic here.....just wait....?



A double from the "Cliff Hole", two 15" Smallies



Jim Fox with another big Smallmouth!



We be tired after 10 hours of fishing in 95 F temperatures all day...We're near the "take-out" point here. Bill & I are laughing here because neither one of us can move...



We finished off this trip by fishing "Poastie's hole" on Sunday morning. Below is a typical fat 18" Smallmouth from this hole of water.



Summary:

Bill, Jim and I all had a great trip. We caught and released so many bass that we lost count. Bill actually got tired of catching 14" to 16" Smallmouth out of the "Lane Hole" on Friday morning! The Smallies just flat wore him out! I bet he comes back next year. He just needs to learn how not to let work get in his way.....! Jim & I tried to teach him but I'm not sure we were successful!

Thornapple River Trip #3:

(Friday July 6th thru Sunday July 8th; that's right just 5 days after Trip #2; I had to go home & mow grass and do a little laundry.....? No, actually my Wife did the laundry.)

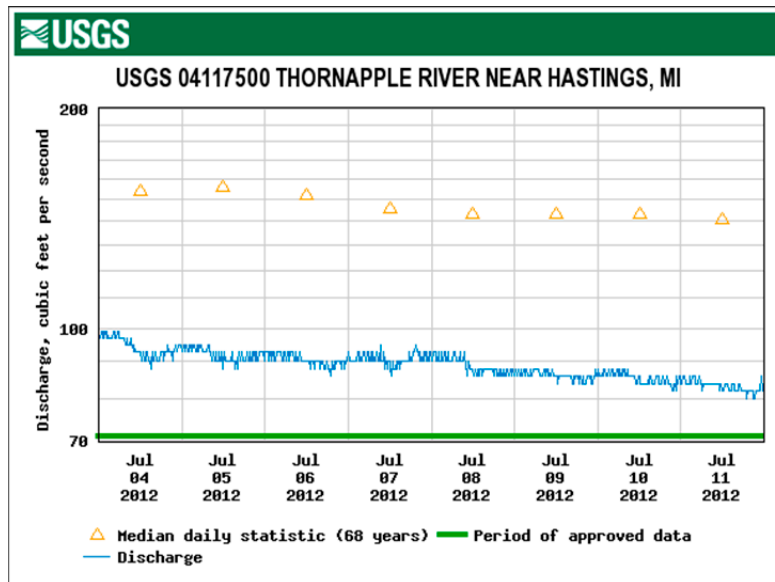
My fishing partners for this rather HOT trip were Tom "The Thumb" Candella from West Chester, OH and Jim "The Apprentice" Fox. Note that Jim happens to appear in almost all my trips these days. He is supposed to be helping out with the canoe livery but he has this "addiction" called Fishing! Luckily he is also blessed with an understanding wife, Julie. "Thanks" to both Heather & Julie for letting Jim & me play together so much in 2012.

Conditions:

Air temps = 100+ F. The thermometer on my Yukon was reading 105 F when we arrived in Hastings!

River flow at ~ 90 to 95 cubic feet per second (cps)

Median flow = 145 cps this time of year. So yes, the drought and heat continue!



Tom and I arrived in Hastings around 12 noon on Friday July 6th. The day was so hot & humid that we did not jump at the chance to go fishing right away.....now you know it was hot! So we grab a sandwich, Subway of course, and then run to Wal-Mart so Tom could purchase his fishing license. I waited in the parking lot with the engine & air conditioning running at full blast. The outside air temperature read 109 F sitting there baking in the sun. That definitely convinced us to go back to the Parkview Motel and just rest in the air conditioning.

It was so hot we did limited fishing on Friday (7/6/12) afternoon. We only took one picture (below) of a nice chunky Smallmouth caught below Center Rd. bridge.



Saturday July 7, 2012:

We (Jim Fox, Tom "The Thumb" and I) launch the canoes right at 8:00 am this day.



Tom gets off to a good start. Nice bass caught & released just below the "Put-in" point.

I told Tom early in the morning, that the fish are biting so well, he should be able to catch at least 40 Smallies by the end of the day! He got rather focused after that and managed to catch and release 53 bass on the day! Yes, we did keep count.....!!!



Tom with a real nice Smallie caught & released out of the Lane Hole ~ 2:00 pm.



Cliff Hole - 20" Smallmouth caught & released on Saturday July 7, 2012.
(Note: This fish, if caught next year, would put some lucky angler into the prestigious T.A.T.C.)



Tom with another nice Smallmouth from the "Cliff Hole"



Tom showing off his angling skills again this time in the "Pole Hole".



The question is will he successfully land this fish.....??



Question answered. Was there ever any doubt?



Just another 18" Smallie caught & released in the "Pole Hole".



In case you were wondering how Tom "earned" the nickname "The Thumb"; no more discussion needed. This shot of Tom's Thumb was taken by our official photographer and assigner of "nicknames", Jim Fox.

Sunday July 8, 2012:

Conditions:

More of the same hot & humid with temperatures in the upper 90's F.
The Midwest draught continues; one big advantage - there are very few mosquitoes or deer flies due to lack of "breeding" water.



We start early on Sunday morning meeting Jim at the "Cliff Hole" at 7:00 am. Above Left: Tom crawling under a "barbed wire" fence just to get to the "Cliff Hole". Above right: All the effort pays off and Tom gets a nice 18" Largemouth around 8:00 am.



Jim & Tom showing off a pair of Smallies caught at the same time from the Cliff Hole. This is what we call "a double" in fishing.

(Note: This photo was taken at 8:40 am and you can already feel the heat starting to rise.)



Tom with two different 18" Smallies this time from the "Riffle Hole" Where's the Riffle Hole you ask? Can't tell you it's a secret. Tom was walking past this hole and I had to get him back upstream in position. Result? These 18" Smallies above were caught & released along with another 12 bass running 13" to 17". (Note: Frankly, Jim & I got tired of watching Tom catching all of these nice bass. We talked about maybe not inviting him back on the next trip.....so maybe we can catch a few bass ourselves.....?)



"Fishing Buddies" -
Tom Candella (left) and Jim Fox (right) fishing the "Pole Hole" Sunday (7/8/12) morning on the Thornapple.



Jim Fox (aka: "The Apprentice") on the left. Chris Chaney (aka: "The Legend") on the right.

Note: As of Sunday July 8, 2012 the two "Master Anglers" pictured above are the only members of the "prestigious" T.A.T.C.

Again T.A.T.C. = ThornApple Twenty Club - to become a member you have to catch at least a 20" Smallmouth. A witness or some type of formal verification is required.

The T.A.T.C. strongly promotes "catch & release" of all Smallmouth bass in order to protect this "world class" fishery!!!



Tom is pictured above finishing a very successful trip by catching & releasing several more nice Smallmouths. This time he is "working his magic" on them out of the "Pole Hole". This last fish, upper right, was caught just after 11:30 am. Now the fun begins. We get to wade back up river and climb the "Cliff Hole" hill. Then we get to enjoy the 5 hour drive back towards Cincinnati.....!!

General Summary of these first 3 trips:

- The weather was extremely hot on all of these trips with daytime high temperatures in mid 90's F up to 100 F.
- The river level was way below average on all three trips. Combine this with the hot weather and it made locating fish a lot easier. Just look for the deeper holes of water and fish any areas that are shaded.
- The fishing was excellent for all 3 trips. We consistently caught a lot of bass and a lot of big bass; any bass over 17" in length I consider big.....?
- 2012 was my 50th year of fishing the Thornapple! That's right, the first year I fished this river was 1962!.
- Based on our 2012 results, I'd say the "Thornapple fishery" is better today than it was 50 years ago. Why? I believe there are two primary reasons: 1) Water quality and 2.) Catch & release.
 - The Barry Conservation District has spent many years cleaning up the Thornapple and protecting the environment along the river's pathway through the county.
 - Catch & release has made a huge impact on allowing fish to grow to maturity. Remember that an 18" to 20" Smallmouth is likely 17 to 18 years old. These are the fish that have the "survival instinct" and are needed to help maintain and grow the Smallmouth population.
- I made a total of 7 "fishing" trips to Hastings in 2012. And the conditions/results were consistent on each trip; low water levels, hot weather and lots of big Smallies!!

A special note of "Thanks" is given to Jim Fox (aka "The Apprentice") and his wonderful wife Julie of "U-rent-Em" canoe livery. There is no way I could have completed all of these trips without your support. Thanks for all that you do! You two are the best!!

*Chris Chaney (aka "The Legend")
2/4/13*