

Steelhead Trip 2007

I like to make a Steelhead trip to Michigan as often as possible. Fly fishing for steelhead isn't for the fair weather fisherman, the occasional fisherman or the fisherman that likes to catch a lot of fish, or the fisherman that loses interest if they are not "hitting". If you can get a couple of hook ups a day you are doing well. There are days that I have fished sun up to sun down and not had a single fish on. Steelhead fly fishing is only for those fisherman that are totally committed, in one way or the other. My wife thinks I should be committed for making the trip just so that I can have the opportunity to hook a couple of fish and maybe get real lucky and actually net one. But if you ever get the "bite" you will be hooked on Steelheading for a long time. They are an amazing fish on any tackle, but on a fly rod they can't be beat. They come out of the water immediately on a hook up. Flipping and twisting then a long run and another leap and another leap, then a dive to the bottom head swinging back and forth trying to shake the hook, then another leap and another long run and maybe a few more leaps. Hooking a Steelhead and landing a Steelhead are two completely different things, I love it.

This trip was a good one, in that I had a couple of days of 4 fish hook ups. The first fish I had on was an early run male, that had started to color up a little. When they first come in from the lake they are totally silver and after awhile they start to colored up like a rainbow. This guy took my estaz peach egg on about the 5th or 6th drift through the hole. There were several Chinooks bedding above the hole, so I had a pretty good idea that a Steelhead was holding below them eating caviar. As they almost always do, this guy came out of the water immediately and I knew I had a good one. Now it was a matter of trying to keep him out of the rocks and the lumber. The current was swift and the hole was deep, with a tree in the water just below. He dove to the bottom and I could feel him shaking his head trying to get rid of the annoyance. Then he came

up again twisting and flipping, what seemed to be four feet above the surface. He headed for the tree, but I managed to turn him and he swung back down to the bottom, after about 5 minutes of his head shaking and short runs of give and take my Galvan Rush drag did the job and he was netted. Fortunately for me another fisherman was near and helped me net him. I want to thank Barry Hicks for his help with this fish and for allowing me to fish with him for the rest of the day and the next day. I learned a lot, made a friend and a fishing companion for future trips.



© This guy was 30 inches long. I was told that it is a nice Steelhead for this river. In the background you can see the trees in the stream. Unfortunately there is a lot of lumber in the water, making it very difficult to land a fish if you are fortunate to get one on. They like to head for the timber and usually they don't have to go very far to find it.

I hooked 3 other fish the first day, but didn't land any of the them. Two broke off in some timber and the last one threw the hook. The second day of the trip was a repeat of the first day. 4 hook ups, but this time no fish were netted. Three of them tossed the hook and one found a log jam for protection. The stream was pretty clear and we had to get down to 6lb tippet to get any hits, making it even more difficult to handle these 8-10 pound silver bundles of muscle. The third day was very cold, with temps in the 20s, windy and not a cloud in the sky. It was what we call a "blue bird day". Great for sightseeing, but terrible for fishing, especially Steelhead. The rod guides were icing up, and the line was freezing on the reel. Steelhead fishing is better when the conditions are stable and nasty outside. Rain, snow and wind make for a good Steelhead day. I knew where several fish were, but none of them were on the bite. I could see them holding in the log jams, and some of them in runs, but they were not feeding, they were just hanging out. I did find one hen that was working below a bunch of salmon, but I spooked her with my first cast. I decided to take a break, it was about lunch time anyway, get some warm soup and tea at the truck and return a little later. When I got back to the spot a couple of guides were there, fishing on a day off, but they also spooked her.

It can be frustrating when the weather doesn't cooperate. I know what my clients feel like when they come down here to fish for smallmouth or trout and it is a "blue bird day" and the fishing is sloooooow. You can make great casts with just the right fly, to the perfect spot and the fish don't do a thing. You would think that they would eat all the time, but they don't. Just like you and me, there are times that we are not hungry and not interested in eating, especially after consuming our fill. Just like after a huge Thanksgiving dinner. Well I guess fish can be the same way, but maybe for different reasons. I have not discovered the secret of getting fish to bite when they don't want to. If you find out let me know, I promise I won't share it with anyone else.