

## Steelhead Trip 2008

For the past couple of years I have ventured north in an attempt to catch fall run Steelhead. My first year resulted in one hook-up and I landed it. I caught it on the first day and first thing in the morning. After that I didn't get another hook-up for three days. My second year also resulted in one landed but several hook-ups. The amount of timber in the stream that I fish is amazing compared to our Ozark streams. Keeping those silver bullets out of the timber is a tremendous challenge. One day last year I met a fisherman coming down the stream. It was the same time I had the only fish on that I landed and he helped me land it. He took the photo and released it. We introduced ourselves and of course exchanged information. Barry was using a spinning rod and fishing with spawn bags. I had never fished with spawn before so I was curious how it was done. I asked him if I could observe and he obliged to show me how he fished for these marvelous sport fish. We parted ways and he went down stream to look for another spot. The next day I ran into Barry again and watched him make about a half dozen casts through a hole that I had just fished and he was on to a nice Steelhead. He landed it and released it after a short battle. I told him about a big one at the tail of the pool that I lost yesterday. He made two or three casts and had it on for about 10 seconds before it broke off. After that I asked if I could watch him fish for awhile... we fished together the rest of the day.

Throughout the year I stayed in contact with Barry and we planned a week together for my fall trip in 08. The first day we decided to float the stream in his drift boat. It was his home waters so he knew the stream like the back of his hand. It was a little chilly that first day with temps in the lower 30s, snow and freezing rain and very windy.... what a great day it was to be for Steelhead. We started off catching some trout and one "skipper". A skipper is a two and half year old steelhead that returns to the stream of its birth and weighs 2-4 pounds. We anchored across from a huge tree in the stream

and on my second cast I had my first Steelhead on. She was a strong fresh fish, with good girth. There was plenty of open water to fight her, except for the tree where she was holding. After a few minutes she was ready to be netted. We guessed her to be about 6.5-7 pounds. Not long after that Barry had his first Steelhead of the day. Another excellent fresh hen with plenty of fight. I made a couple of attempts to net her, but missed both times. She finally tired enough and Barry dropped her down stream into the net. His fish was at least 8 pounds. He has caught a ton of these wonderful fish so I took his word on their weight.



© My first steelhead

of the trip



©Barry with a  
“skipper”, a young Steelhead



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We hooked up with a couple more skippers and a few trout, but the middle of the day was pretty slow. About an hour or so before we reached our takeout spot, we came across several salmon on redds so we pulled over and studied the current flow. After 20 or 30 casts by each of us we decided that the Steelhead must be further down stream so we drifted about 15 yards and dropped the anchor. I made a cast a little upstream of a pocket and got an immediate take when the drift got to the pocket. This was the largest fish I had on the entire trip and I couldn't stop him. He came up and rolled on the surface, but then turned down stream and headed for the timber. I tried to turn up but couldn't and he broke off. I got one of those empty feelings in my gut... I had waited all day for a fish like that and now he was gone. I told Barry were I had the hook up and on his next cast to that same pocket, he was into a very strong fish that took a lot of line off the spool. He managed to turn it just before the log jam and worked it back to the boat for me to net it. It was a magnificent fresh female chromer, 8.5 maybe 9 pounds. (above photo). I retied my rig made a couple of casts to that same pocket and I was into another one. Not as strong as the last one, but still plenty of fight. Barry netted it and took the photo above. He

guessed it at about 7 pounds. It was the only male we landed all day.

The next day turned very cold and we had to dip our rods in the stream to get the ice out. The radio station I tuned in said it was 26, but I knew that it was going to be a few degrees colder on the stream... it was. The fishing was still good the second day. We caught a few trout to start with then Barry had a nice one on that got off. I caught a skipper, he caught a skipper and we made our way down stream. We walked a lot and caught a few more trout and skippers but no Steelhead. We spooked up a Steelhead as we passed by a little run and decided to come back for it later. Moving down stream a little ways we fished a nice long run and Barry had a nice one on, but it broke off. I caught a skipper and he caught a skipper in the same run. We decided to go back up and try to catch the one we spooked. I missed it twice, and that was that. I guess I was just a little too slow on the set. We found a spot where a couple of guys were fishing for salmon. They thought they were casting to Steelhead, but it was the little Jack salmon they saw darting in and out of the redds trying to mate with the females. I made one cast in a run below the salmon and was into a nice fish. It took some line and headed down stream. It turned and came back up along the near bank and under a small log. The line had looped around the fish and he was lassoed. Barry tailed him and I had my first Steelhead of the day. It was a nice 7 pound male that had been in the river a little while and was starting to color up. We didn't get a photo of this one, but that's OK, there were to be more. We moved on down stream and Barry came up with a heavy fish at what we ended up calling the persistence hole, because that seemed to be what you needed to pick one up there. I was just around the corner beating the water when I heard him yell fish on. He battled it for a while before the hook came out and went flying into the tree over his head. We switched places and soon he turned another one in the run just below me, but lost it too. He moved on a little down stream and hooked up again but this was in a very fast

and deep run and eventually broke it off. He needed to leave so we parted and he headed home. I fished about another hour and managed to pick up a skipper on my way back to the truck.

Barry was going to meet me a little later in the morning on the third day, so I headed for the same spot I caught the male the day before. This time I decided to cross the stream and try it from the other side since I was by myself and needed a good place to land one, if I was lucky enough to hook up. I had a nice fish on with my first cast, but it made a strong run and broke off. The night before I had switched to 6lb tippet and forgot to adjust my drag accordingly. A dumb mistake cost me a fish, or so I thought. I retied and made another cast into the same run... fish on. Two steelhead with two casts.. this was going to be a great day. This guy made a good run down stream and across then turned and came back toward some logs. I kept his head up and managed to tail him. Then I saw my rig with about 6 inches of tippet hanging from his mouth. This has never happened to me before as far as I know, but I hooked the same fish with two consecutive casts. As I was lifting the fish up to lay on the bank for a quick measurement and photo I was losing my grip, so I switched hands... big mistake! He bolted under a log and I was hung up. I tried pulling on the line, then realized that it was snagged in the log. BUT the Steelhead was still holding under the log. I slowly reached down and tailed him with my glove hand and lifted him out of the water and on to the bank. As I pulled my tape measure out of my vest I noticed that his lower jaw was split and that he had a Lamprey mark on his side. I quickly measured him at 26 inches, 14 girth, took a photo and after taking the tippet and hook out of his upper jaw released him. I made another cast, nothing and then on my fourth cast I was hooked up again, but this time it was a skipper about 3 pounds. Barry showed up, I told him about what had just happened. He made several casts into the same run and picked up nothing. We moved down a little and he was into a nice Steelhead pretty quick, but it broke him off. We went down to the persistence hole and Barry hooked up with a nice

heavy fish. We were both using 6 pound tippet, so there was no horsing these guys. Taking his time he worked the fish down stream and managed to corral it against the bank. This was a thick female around 8 pounds. We took the photo and released her. After that the fishing slowed down a lot. We were hooking up early and late in the day with the middle of the day pretty slow. As we walked the stream looking for fish holding in familiar locations, Barry found a nice one mid stream below a birch. He spotted for me as I made my casts so I could get it right where the fish was holding. Barry saw the take and I was hooked up with a nice Steelhead. Keeping it out of the log infested hole was going to be a challenge, but this guy stayed down stream from the timber and Barry tailed it for me. We took the photo below and released it. I was going to be on my own the rest of the day, Barry had a prior commitment for that afternoon. I managed to get a couple more hook ups that evening, but lost both of them including the Steelhead I missed twice the day before.



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Thursday morning was still a little chilly, but it was going to get warm pretty fast. We went down to the persistence hole and Barry picked up a skipper at the taylor. I beat the water without a look for about 30 minutes. I moved down a little and cast pretty close to where I knew a big log was sunk in the stream. I had a hard take and I was into a very heavy fish. It rolled then made a little run up stream and turned back toward the log, my line went limp....It was a very large Steelhead and the only one that I was to have on for the entire day. We walked a lot and caught a few trout and then Barry found a couple of Steelhead holding next to the bank immediately above a huge log jam. He made one drift and the largest one moved out to take his offering. Hook Up, but it only lasted about 10 seconds when the brute headed for the log jam. Barry applied the pressure to turn it, but it broke off. Late afternoon, the day before, a high front moved in and the fishing went south pretty quick. It was a



beautiful fall day, but not a cloud in the sky... I hate to fish on Blue Bird days. Give me the rain, or snow any day for catching fish.

I fished alone on Friday, another Blue Bird day. I caught a trout early that morning, then nothing. I decided that if I was going to catch a fish I would have to hunt for one by slowly moving along the stream and looking for them in the familiar holding spots I had learned from experience and from fishing with Barry. I managed to find a nice one in the exact same spot Barry had hooked one the day before at the enormous log jam. I decided that if I was going to catch this one I would have to switch to an 8 pound tippet and crank my drag down and hope for the best. If it got any kind of a head start it would be tangled up in the logs pretty fast. I made several drifts but this fish wasn't going to move. I would have to put it on his nose to get a take. I finally got the drift I wanted and it moved about 4 inches over and I saw the take. I pulled back hard and managed to keep it from the log jam. I was really surprised that I was able to stop it. I had a hard time finding a place to land this one, because the water was pretty deep and there was only one place I could reach it with my glove. Finally after about 5 minutes I was able to move her into position for me to get a grip on her tail. I took a quick photo and got her back in the stream... she was pretty stressed out, so I held her there for a good 4 or 5 minutes until she swam away on her own power. I was pretty close to getting skunked again, but fortunately my hunting paid off.



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## **This was a Great Trip!**

I have been hooked with Steelhead fishing from the first time I ever caught one. Most of the time they are tremendous jumpers and extremely strong, but this year the water was much colder and they didn't fight as hard and none of the big Steelhead we caught jumped... The little skippers did, but none of the big ones. I am told that the reason is because of the water temperatures. Winter Steelhead behave the same way.. they are still strong, but not like they are when the water is warmer.