



Winter wonder: Plymouth's Bill Simeon admires a winter steelhead he recently caught on the St. Joseph River.

When there's no ice, try steelhead fishing



OUTDOOR INSIGHTS
BILL PARKER

My ice fishing bucket - complete with dipping rods, tip-ups, ice ladle and tear drops - is still resting comfortably in the corner of the basement. I passed up a chance to get out on the ice earlier this year, when there actually was some safe ice, and now I might as well put my gear away for the season. With poor ice cover at best on all southern Michigan lakes, and more unseasonably warm weather on the way, the prospect of getting another safe cover of ice this winter is pretty unlikely.

But that doesn't mean you have to spend your weekends cooped up inside the house watching reruns of Shirley Temple movies. Consider hooking up with a powerful, feisty steelhead and battling it through a surging river current.

While the rivers of northern Michigan get a ton of attention from winter steelhead anglers, the southern half of the state also provides ample opportunities. Close to home, the Huron and the Clinton rivers serve up decent winter steelhead action. In the southwestern corner of the state the St. Joseph River provides a tremendous winter steelhead fishery.

The Michigan Outdoor Writers Association met recently in Stevensville and I had the opportunity to chase steelhead up and down the St. Joe with veteran charter captain Mike Stowe of Snap-Line Charters.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources annually stocks the St. Joe and its tributaries with steelhead, which produces an outstanding fishery throughout the year. The final 25 miles of the river - from the Berrien Springs Dam to the mouth of the river at Lake Michigan - should certainly be considered when contemplating a trip for winter steelhead. Steelies average between five and eight pounds on the St. Joe, but 10- to 12-pounders are not uncommon.

Joining fellow outdoor writers Bill Simeon of Plymouth, Bob Holzhel of St. Johns and Jim Bedford of Lansing, we headed out from the public boat launch at Shamrock Park in Berrien Springs and into the slow-rolling water just above Farmer's Creek. Our rigs consisted of 4-inch leaders below a 1/2-ounce sinker on 8-pound monofilament. We concentrated our efforts on fishing fresh spawn, but spin-

ners and body baits also produce at this time of year. The trick, according to Stowe, is to keep your bait on bottom and to cover a lot of water. The technique we employed was to anchor above a likely hole and bounce our offerings along the bottom, allowing the current to take the bait back into the hole. "One mistake a lot of people make at this time of year is that they catch one fish right away and they stay on that spot for two or three hours," explained Stowe. "Either the fish are going to bite or they're not. You've got to cover a lot of water to get to the active fish."

If you've never battled with a river steelhead you're missing out on a bout of title fight proportions. Even in the winter, with the cold water slowing their activity, steelhead are fighting machines.

We baited two fish in a half-day on the river, a magnificent 10-pounder - that had Holzhel on the ropes a couple of times before succumbing to the nylon mesh of Stowe's net - and a beautiful, brightly colored 5-pounder. We had a couple others on that we didn't land.

"For the most part the fish seem to hit better on cloudy days, according to Stowe, who also makes custom steelhead rods. "It's best early in the morning and late in the afternoon, but on cloudy days they'll bite all day," he explained. "When the sun comes out the fish seem to get skittish."

Walleye and brown trout are also caught throughout the year on the St. Joe, but the predominant winter catch is steelhead.

"When the spawn starts in the spring the fishing gets tougher because the fish are more concentrated on the gravel and sand flats and there are fewer areas to fish for them," said Stowe. "The weather is warmer by then, and everyone and his brother is out fishing so sometimes it gets pretty crowded."

When the steelhead start spawning the best course of action is to get out early before the crowds arrive.

"The best thing to do in the spring is get there early and stay on your spot all day," said Stowe. "If you get out late you might as well stay home because the good spots will already be taken. It gets pretty crowded sometimes."

It's about a three-hour trip from metro-Detroit to the St. Joe. Simply get on I-94 and head west. If you've got steelhead on your mind the journey passes quickly.

Anglers and hunters are urged to report your success. Send information to: *Outdoors*, 605 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Fax to (248) 641-1314 or call Bill Parker evenings at (248) 901-2573.

ACTIVITIES

SPRING WALK

Bill Graig will lead a spring walk beginning at noon on Saturday March 21, at the William P. Holliday Nature Preserve in Westland. Participants should meet at the parking lot at Newburg Road, north of Warren, Call (313) 622-8647 for information.

ARCHERY

JUNIOR OLYMPICS

The Oakland County Sportsman Club in Clarkston offers a Junior Olympic Archery Development Program beginning at 1 p.m. on Sundays. Call (810) 623-0444 for more information.

JUNIOR ARCHERS

A weekly program for junior archers begins at 9 a.m. Saturdays at Detroit Archers in West Bloomfield. Call (248) 661-9610 or (313) 835-2110 for information.

CLUBS

SOLAR

The School for Outdoor Leadership, Adventure and Recreation, a non-profit organization interested in promoting the appreciation of outdoor activities, meets at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at the Colony Hall in Southfield. Call (248) 988-6658.

MICHIGAN FLY FISHING

The Michigan Fly Fishing Club meets at 7 p.m. the first and third Wednesdays of each month at Livonia Clarenceville Junior High School. Call (810) 478-1494 for more information.

FISHING BUDDIES

Fishing Buddies Fishing Club meets monthly in Rochester Hills. The meetings are open to all anglers. Call (248) 656-0556 for more information.

CLINTON VALLEY BASS ANGLERS

Clinton Valley Bass Anglers is seeking new members (boaters and non-boaters are welcome). The club meets monthly at Gander Mountain in Waterford. Call Mike Daly at (248) 660-8910 for more information.

BASS ASSOCIATION

The Downriver Bass Association, a non-tournament bass

club, meets at 6:30 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Gander Mountain in Taylor. Pro bass angler Marty Wiebelhaus will be the guest speaker at the Feb. 24 meeting. Call (734) 676-2863 for more information.

DINNERS

SAFARI CLUB

The 21st Annual Detroit Chapter Safari Club International Wild Game Dinner and Fund Raiser begins at 6 p.m. Saturday, March 7, at Penna's of Sterling Heights. Tickets are \$60 for individuals and \$500 for a table of 10.

STEELHEADS

Huron Valley Steelheaders will hold its Spring Show on Sunday, March 29, at the Southgate Civic Center. Redford's Bob Mitchell will be a guest speaker and will give a presentation on salmon trolling and Great Lakes fishing beginning at 9:30 p.m.

MEETINGS

NRC

The monthly meeting of the state Natural Resource Commission will be Wednesday and Thursday, March 10-11, at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing.

MICHIGAN BIG GAME HUNTERS

The Michigan Big Game Hunters Association presents Mark Ennett, a conservation officer with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, who will speak on the trace and issues at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 19, at Gander Mountain in Taylor. Call (313) 287-7420 for more information.

SEASON/DATES

FOX

Fox season ends March 1.

RABBIT

Rabbit season runs through March 31 statewide.

PIKE

Pike season ends March 15 on inland lakes statewide. Spearing season ends Feb. 28.

SMELT

Smelt netting season runs March 1-May 31 south of M-72, April 1-May 31 north of M-72.

OUTDOOR CALENDAR

SHOWS

BOAT, SPORT & FISHING

The 15th Annual Boat, Sport and Fishing Show runs through Sunday at the Pontiac Silverdome. Show hours are 8:30 p.m. today, 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday.

OUTDOORAMA

Outdoorama '98 Sport and Travel show will take place Feb. 20-March 1 at the Novi Expo Center. Show hours are 8:30 p.m. Feb. 20, 23, 24, 26 and 27; 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Feb. 21 and 28; 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Feb. 22; noon-9:30 p.m. Feb. 25; and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. March 1. Admission is \$6.50 adult, \$3 for children 12 and under, and children ages five and under will be admitted free. A two-day adult pass is available for \$10 and a two-day children's pass is \$5.

SPORTFISHING EXPO

The 10th Annual Greater Detroit Sportfishing and Travel Expo will be held March 5-8 at the Palace of Auburn Hills. Show hours are 4-9:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday, March 6-6; 10 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Saturday, March 7; and 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday, March 8. Admission is \$7.50 adult and \$3.50 for children age 6-12. Children age five and under will be admitted free. Coupons for \$1 off the price of admission are available at all Dunham's stores.

METROPARKS

METROPARK REQUIREMENTS

Most Metropark programs are free while some require a nominal fee. Advanced registration and a motor vehicle permit are required for all programs. Call the respective parks, toll free: Stony Creek, 1-800-477-7756; Indian Springs, 1-800-477-3192; Kensington, 1-800-477-3178.

1998 PERMITS

The 1998 Huron-Clinton Metroparks annual vehicle entry permits and boat launching permits are on sale at all Metropark offices. Vehicle entry permits are \$15 (\$8 for senior citizens). The annual boat launching permits are \$18 (\$9 for senior citizens). Call 1-800-47-PARKS for more information.

STAR GAZERS

Ages 8-12 will paint winter constellations in t-shirts and observe the night sky during this program, which begins at 7 p.m. Friday at Indian Springs.

SKY SEARCH

Junior girls scouts can earn their Sky Search Badge during this program which will be held Saturday at Indian Springs. Participants should call ahead for times (248-625-7280).

WINDSOR WINDOW WILDLIFE

A craft workshop for ages seven and older in which participants will make attractive window decorations begins at 10 a.m. Saturday at Kensington.

WINTER WILDLIFE SURVIVAL

Using slides and songs, the park naturalist will show families with children age six and older how animals make it through the winter during this program, which begins at 2 p.m. Saturday at Stony Creek.

STORES IN SNOW

Look for signs of animal activity as you walk along the trails during this program, which begins at 2 p.m. Sunday at Kensington.

BETTER BLUEBIRD BOX

A chance for serious birders to make a bluebird box and to learn how to improve your chances of having a successful bluebird nest begins at 4 p.m. Sunday at Indian Springs.

OAKLAND PARKS

COUNTY PARK REQUIREMENTS

Advanced registration is required for all nature programs at Oakland County Parks. Call (810) 625-6473 to register or for more information.

NATURE NAME GAME

Explore some interesting features of various Michigan animals and learn the origins of their names during this program, which begins at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 21, at Independence Oaks.

PLANET PARTY

Join nature center staff and volunteers from the Oakland Astronomy Club to learn about and view (weather permitting) winter constellations during this program, which begins at 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 28, at Independence Oaks.

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NOTICE OF APPLICATION TO ESTABLISH A BRANCH OF A STATE MEMBER BANK

Old Kent Bank, Grand Rapids, Michigan, intends to apply to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago for permission to establish a branch at 2280 Big Beaver Rd., Troy, Michigan. The Federal Reserve Bank considers a number of factors in deciding whether to approve the application including the record of performance of banks we own in helping to meet local credit needs. You are invited to submit comments on this Application, in writing to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, P.O. Box 834, Chicago, IL, 60690. The comment period will not end before March 21, 1998, and may be somewhat longer. The Federal Reserve Board's Policy statement regarding notice of application may be found at 12 C.F.R. Part 252.25. To obtain a copy of the Federal Reserve Board's procedures or if you need more information about how to submit your comments on the application, contact Alicia Williams, Community Affairs Officer at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago (312) 322-5910. The Federal Reserve will consider your comments and any requests for a hearing on the application if they are received by the Reserve Bank on or before the last date of the comment period.

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