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SERIES: THE TROUT STREAMS OF MICHIGAN

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River Lore

The mighty Tahquamenon, you name it! It has it! To my knowledge, no other stream in the water wonderland of Michigan can boast the versatility of this great and historic river. Famed in legend of the Chippewa and steeped in the lore of the hob-nailed boot, this aqueous serpent twists its way from the springs of northern Alger and Luce Counties at its source, over the twin cataracts of the Upper and Lower Falls and on into the mist studded waves of Hiawatha's Gitchee Gumee at its mouth. Its nursling tributaries drain hardwood studded hills to the northwest, the pine plains to the south and the tannic bogs in its valley.

This mighty river has something in common for all who have an interest in the north country.

Its esthetic value centers around the picturesque cataracts, the Upper and Lower Falls. The forest types along its banks are ever changing - from virgin stands of beech and maple to white birch, balsam, white and black spruce, elm, ash, willow, hemlock, norway, white and jackpine.

The naturalist can find here, on or near by, a myriad of flowers, hundreds of song and marsh birds, ducks, geese, eagles and osprey; and many members of the animal kingdom such as beaver, muskrat, mink, otter, rabbits, deer, bear, coyotes, fox, and an occasional moose.

The hunter has used this waterway for centuries as a source of travel and game. Duck and coot hunting is considered very good on adjacent Mud Lake near McMillan, the Natalie Marshes inundated by the Dollarville Flooding, and in the many bayous and inlets along its entire course. In the adjoining forest run the agile whitetail and lumbering black bear.

To the canoeist, there is water to test the expert and satisfy the neophyte. This stream may be floated from Long Lake above the Eagle's Nest near its source to Whitefish Bay at its mouth. However, it is advised that for better canoeing one should start at McMillan Bridge, for one may become hopelessly tangled up in the "spreads". There are many other points of access and the principal portages are around the two great falls.

The fisherman can test his skill along its entire course for this river probably contains the greatest variety of fish found in any stream in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. There are panfish, bass and trout in the Tahquamenon Lakes; brook trout from the High Fill to Long Lake where some perch and suckers come into the catch also, and pike from Camp Seven, a tributary lake. Then on down from the Eagle's Nest past the High Bridge and the "spreads" (above and below Hatch's), it is mostly brook trout fishing - a prettier stretch of stream few have fished. From the mouth of the Syphon (below the spreads) to Mud Lake

it is brook trout fishing in the spring; panfish, pike, walleye, suckers and minnows in the warmer months. From Mud Lake to the Upper Falls there is a chance to hook northern pike, muskies, large and smallmouth bass, walleyes, and panfish. Some trout (brook, brown and rainbow) along with a few pike and walleye are caught between the Falls, and recent stocking of brown and rainbow trout have greatly increased the lure to this romantic area. The species of fish most prevalent from the Lower Falls to the mouth are northern pike, walleye, smallmouth bass, perch and rock bass. However, some muskies, brown, brook and rainbow trout are taken and an occasional salmon.

Many of the tributary streams that rise above the Falls also furnish fishermen with imposing targets. The upper portion of the East Branch is well known for brook trout, while the Lower stretches abound with pike and walleye. The Hendrie is noted for good pike fishing, but does give up some brook and brown trout at its headwaters near Fibron Quarry and Rexton. The Sage River is a brown trout stream. The Teaspoon Creek, the first creek in Michigan to be set aside for "kid's fishing" has a variety of species - trout in its headwaters and warm water fishes in the lower marshy areas. The Auger and Murphy are brackish water streams and add little to the fishery. The Silver with its artificial and many beaver ponds, the East, Red, Syphon, and Kings Creeks are mostly feeders of brook trout.

Mosquitoes, black flies and no-see-ums abound along the entire system.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow used this setting as a love scene for that legendary Indian hero, Hiawatha, and that eugenic maiden, Minnie-Haha. Barstool legend has it that Hiawatha tragically met death in a plunge over the Upper Falls while swooning over Minnie who had jilted him by falling in love with a mysterious intruder from the rocky reaches of Tahquamenon Island.

In latter years such stalwart loggers and lumbermen as Danaher, Culhane, Dollar, McSweeney, Hunters, Hulbert, McLeod, Morett, Underwood, Clauson, Cummings, McPhee, and Malendi used the river in one way or another to assist in the promotion of their fortunes or illfortunes.

Landmarks along the river that claim association to these luminaries are: the "highfill" on Co. Road 422 and the "high bridge" about a mile below the Eagle's Nest are logging railroad crossings associated with Danaher (1895-1903); E. C. Underwood's fur farm (muskrats) near Natalie Siding on the DSS&A; the "ghost town" of Dollarville, once a thriving lumbering metropolis named for Robert Dollar (later an associate in the Dollar Steamship Company) who ran the American Lumber Company Sawmill on this location about 1882; this was taken over later by Danaher and Malendi who finished up in 1903. Remnants of the railroad trestles, booms and building foundations are still evident. A short distance below is the "ole swimmin hole" used for skinny dipping by local youths. Spider Bay (a series of arm-like bayous) is a short distance below into which flows a spring creek from Angel Lake (named for the "angels" that inhabited the "honey house" located thereon). At M-123 crossing, a mile and a half north of Newberry, is Chamberlain's Mill (a modern-day small dimension sawmill); while on the opposite side of the bridge, where Newberry's Sewage Disposal Plant is now located, was the Underwood Shingle Mill and Potash Plant run by a Mr. Clauson. The pilings from the Newberry Lumber and Charcoal Co. railroad trestle are still evident at this location.

In 1903 Cummings and McPhee had a logging camp and banking ground at the present site of McPhee's Landing, five miles down river from Newberry. It is likely that timber from this point was floated downstream. Deadman's Farm, about 5 miles below McPhee's, is an isolated high spot in the Tahquamenon swamp where a trapper-farmer, remnant of the post logging era, was supposedly murdered when his furs were stolen. Hunter's Landing (the end of a logging road that joined with the Charcoal Grade) is about 1 1/2 miles down from the farm. (This landing was used about 1910). Another of Hunter's landmarks is the former location of a sawmill about 4 miles down from the landing, now the upstream terminus of R. J. Beach's "Betty B" river trips and the Toonerville Trolley from Soo Junction (Junction of former DSS&A and Soo Line Railroads). Slater's landing at the mouth of the East Branch Tahquamenon is the terminus of the "Tom Sawyer" River Boat Trips. McNearney's farm, about 3 miles below the mouth of the East Branch, was the Headquarters Camp of Dawson Timber Company (1872-1879) where squared timbers were hewn and then rafted down river. McNearney took over after Dawson left. Con Culhane's (one of the more "picturesque" loggers of the era), logging railroad grade crossed the river about 3 1/2 miles below McNearney's (about 1897). Parts of the trestle and approaching grade are still in evidence. The "Big Island", a modern-day rendezvous for Dutch and Detroit Lions Thanksgiving festivities, is another mile or so downstream. The Tahquamenon's "deephole" is in the big bend where the river again meets up with M-123. It is about a mile from the deephole (60 feet deep?) to the brink of the Big Falls (a 48 foot drop). During the logging days, Morett had a floating bridge at the top of the falls to prevent losses of stray barges and errant boatmen from taking "Hiawatha's plunge." One passage over the Lower Falls was diked by Culhane to facilitate better log passage over the other fall. Culhane Railroad Grade ended at the "Whitehouse" landing about 5 1/2 miles below the Lower Falls. A channel was dredged by Alanso Cheeseborough to cut off the big bend above the mouth of the river, evidently as a pass-by of a log storage area. There were thriving sawmills at Emerson, about a mile south of the river mouth in 1885 and at Shelldrake 8 miles north of the river mouth in 1895. Very little remains at Emerson except for dock pilings. There are still old houses and dock pilings at Shelldrake. It is doubtful that Shelldrake had any connection with the Tahquamenon River operations.

Logs were also driven on the East Branch of the Tahquamenon as early as 1890. Cornelius Bennett had a lumber and shingle mill on the river just north of Seewhy with a spur railroad to the DSS&A, (prior to World War I). George Bridges is supposed to have had the longest corduroy logging road in Michigan which crossed the East Branch about a mile northeast of the town of Hulbert. Dick Hulbert, for whom the town and lake of Hulbert were named, had a log rollway on the East Branch near the mouth of Big Beaver Creek in 1890. The State Fish Division maintained a brook trout rearing station on the river a half mile east of Eckerman from about 1930 to 1958.

The Hendrie River which flows into the Tahquamenon a mile or so upstream from the East Branch was also used in the logging era by the D. N. McLeod Lumber Company (1905-1915). Carl McSweeney, an artist with the long armed dredge, is responsible for the network of canals and ditches that were used to straighten out the serpentine configurations of the Hendrie and

and Sage Rivers to provide better drainage and more judicious use of water flow. He was commissioned to this work by D. N. McLeod. McLeod also had visions of land promotion after the logging era. The black soil (mud flats) in the Tahquamenon flood plain were noted for their ability to produce bumper crops of celery, cabbage and lettuce.

Soils

The principal soil types in this watershed vary from sand-sandy loams to muck, clay, marl, and silt. The predominant soil in the Tahquamenon Lake area is Hiawatha sandy loam; from there to the "Eagle's Nest", AuTrain sandy loam; from there to Hatch's is rubicon sand; the mainstream bottom lands to Newberry are Tahquamenon peat and tributaries carbondale muck. From Newberry to McPhee's Landing is Griffin sandy-clay loam; from there to the Hendrie River mouth, Tahquamenon peat; from Hendrie to the Falls area is a mixture of rubicon sand, Griffin sand, fine silt, muck and clay; in the Upper Falls area is fine sandy loam; Ewen silty loam below the falls, and from there to the mouth is a mixture of rubicon sand-gravelly phase to Brimley sand.

The river's "sand load" assisted by strong northerly winds off Lake Superior had deposited a delta type bar about 3 1/2 miles long southeastward into Tahquamenon Bay.

The valley of the East Branch Tahquamenon is Kirsten muck up to Eckerman; from there to Strongs is loamy sand and rubicon sand. Rifle peat is found in swampy areas. Above Strongs is heavy sand loam on highlands.

The pattern for the Hendrie River watershed is the same as the East Branch.

The Sage Valley is Tahquamenon peat up to M-28 and Houghton muck above M-28. The swampy areas are carbondale muck, Kalkaska sandy loam, and rubicon sand is found in the highlands.

The Auger River Valley consists of Tahquamenon peat at the mouth, coming down stream through Griffin sandy loam on the ridges and carbondale muck, Dawson peat, and Kirsten muck in the flat bottoms; Strongs sandy loam in headwater highlands.

The Murphy Valley, a short way to the east, consists of carbondale muck at the mouth; coming through Bohemian fine sandy loam with Tahquamenon and Spaulding peat in the lower flats and AuTrain sandy loam in the headwaters.

The Tahquamenon flood plain extends from King's Creek west of McMillan to the mouth of the Murphy above McNearney Farm; (30 miles in length and 5 in width as the crow flies).

The bottom lands (muck flats) around Newberry have grown some of Michigan's prize celery, lettuce and cabbage, but distance to urban markets was too far to make it a profitable operation. They may come back into production one of these days when the industrial complexes and super highways over-utilize the rich farmland in the southern part of the state.

Stream Character, Gradient And Vegetation

The Tahquamenon River watershed rises at an elevation of 1,000 feet descending to an elevation of 605 feet at its mouth in Whitefish Bay of Lake Superior. (The Upper Falls being 48 feet high and the Lower Falls 20 feet.) Water discharge amounted to a minimum of 157 C.F.S. (1955) to a maximum of 6990 C.F.S. (1960). Water levels in 1960 extended to two feet above the Soo Line (DSSA) Railroad tracks in the Sage River area. It drains an area of 790 square miles. The average snowfall in the valley amounts to 100 to 119 inches with an average annual precipitation rate of 30 inches. Days are generally frost free from June 20th to September 1st. The water in the mainstream and major tributaries vary from light to dark brown in color. They have a pH of 6.5 to 8.5.

Many spring fed tributaries feed the mainstream well above the Upper Falls. The major tributaries ranging from the headwaters to the mouth are Kings, Syphon, East, Silver, Teaspoon, Thirty Nine, Sixteen, Auger, the Sage, Gimlet, Hendrie, East Branch, Murphy, Linton, Bowers, and Cheney Creeks.

The Hendrie River and its upper tributaries, namely Naugle Creek, rise at 840 and 810 feet respectively in the sand plains of Chippewa and limestone hills of Mackinac Counties. The East Branch Tahquamenon rises at 902 feet from the sand plains southeast of Strongs, in T45N, R5W, Chippewa County.

In profile the mainstream drainage emerges from a series of steep rolling sand hills which are vegetated with northern hardwood (hard maple, beech and yellow birch), hemlock and white pine, and scattered "islands" of spruce, balsam and cherry. The Tahquamenon Lakes form a sort of aqueous basin out of which flows the stream thread. There is a short gravelly rapid between Tahquamenon Lakes 2 and 3. After flowing under the "high-fill" of County Road 422 the stream falls in a series of gravelly riffles and pools to Long Lake, emerging from Long Lake in a wide sandy basin to about 200 yards beyond the "Eagle's Nest" on County Road 421. From here the river drops in a series of gravelly riffles and pools through a steep sandy valley vegetated with lofty white pine, white birch and poplar. Past such historical landmarks as Danaher's Highbridge, and several fishing and hunting camps (Seelbinder, Thompsons, Skinner's and Ross's) to a half mile beyond Ross's Camp where the stream flattens out into a small swampy "spreads" fringed with tag alder and cedar. The river pinches back together at Hatch's Camp on County Road 442 (East Creek Trucktrail). From Hatch's downstream, for a short distance, the stream winds through a flat marshy area and then "spreads" again over a flat swamp of conifers and tag alder. Though the stream is hard to follow in this area there is a main course that follows the low sandy hills along County Road 442 for a half mile and then dips generally southward until its confluence with King's Creek. The bottom in the spreads area is of sand and silt and littered with windfalls of cedar and spruce. From King's Creek downstream, the river is considered canoeable to the confluence with Syphon Creek, where the stream picks up more depth and width allowing for use of out-board motorcraft from here to its mouth. From Syphon Creek to the mouth

of the Hendrie, the river is slow and meandering thru bog and low marginal swamp, vegetated with tag alder, willow, laurel on the fringes to swamp conifers (tamarack, black spruce, balsam), elm, soft maple, white birch and poplar. There are relatively few high spots along this stretch of river and these are occupied by road crossings, camps and cabin sites. The McMillan (steel) bridge spans the river at County Road 415. At Natalie, Michigan Waterways and Forestry Divisions have established a public access point and a State Forest Campground. The popular landing was once the site of Underwood's Muskrat Farm.

At Dollarville, where the river skirts the Soo Line Railroad tracks (formerly the DSSA Railroad), the State and Federal authorities in cooperation with local interests have constructed a dam to hold back 1200 acres of surface water which ranges in depth to 12 feet. (Deepest water being in the immediate old river bed.) The river is well vegetated with a variety of aquatic weeds, fringed and islanded with willow, alder, marsh grass and northern lowland conifers.

From Dollarville to State Highway M-123 (about 3 miles downstream) the river winds serpenticuously through several grass and brushy bayous. The banks vary in height to 15 feet and are vegetated with grass, willow, "buck brush," elm, white birch, soft maple, and tag alder.

From M-123 to McPhee's Landing (about 6 miles downstream) the river winds through low sand hills vegetated with poplar, white birch, soft maple, jack pine, and thornapple. Marshy bayous have developed along its course over the years. The river is relatively shallow, sand and silt bottomed, and littered with debris.

The first mile below McPhee's, the river flows through marginal swamp vegetated with elm, soft maple, ash, and alder; from thence downstream to the mouth of the Hendrie River the Tahquamenon flows through low marsh land vegetated with alder, "buck brush," cattails and sedges. Low sandy hills emerge from the swamp at Deadman's Farm, Hunter's Landing, "Betty B" landing and Baker's. The stream is approximately 50 to 100 feet wide and 1 to 10 feet deep. Aquatic weed growth is moderately heavy. Bottom soils are sand and silt.

From the Hendrie down to the Upper Falls, the river channel straightens out considerably; the bends being large and loopy, flowing through marginal swamp vegetated with soft maple, elm and conifers and then through low rolling sand plains vegetated with poplar, white birch, marginal hardwoods and alder. Stream banks are steep and relatively high. The lower ground is covered with alder, cedar, spruce and balsam.

Where the river meets again with M-123 it bends eastward through what is thought to be the deepest spot on the river (60 feet according to early field notes) and there picks up velocity as it widens and approaches the Upper Falls. Excursion boats and pleasure craft can proceed to a point about a quarter mile above the falls. The river bottom in this area flows over a sandstone escarpment and drops 48 feet into a rocky fringed

whirlpool below that is probably 30-40 feet deep. The water then flows over a short sandstone rapid about 400 yards below. From here to about one mile above the Lower Falls, the river is about 100 to 150 feet wide and enclosed by precipitous banks 80 to 100 feet high that are vegetated with northern hardwoods, hemlock and white pine. At a point about a mile above the Lower Falls the river bottom is elevated to another sandstone ledge over which it flows until it drops over the Lower Falls. This drop is about 20 feet over a 2 step cataract west of the island and a one step fall east of the island. A series of shallow rocky rapids below these falls ends in a quiet pool about 12 feet deep in which the river bends south-eastward for a quarter mile and ripples over another short rapids and then heads in a southerly direction over a sand and silty bottom.

From this point to the Whitehouse Landing the banks are still quite precipitous and covered with northern hardwood and islands of white and norway pine, aspen and white birch. Eastward of the Whitehouse Landing the terrain falls into a lowland category covered with spruce and balsam and then rises again into low rolling hills covered with hardwood and white birch. Then it tapers off into a flat sand plain along the river vegetated with jack and norway pine, aspen and white birch. Terrain falls away to black spruce swamp and buck brush to the south, but remains high to the north - the landscape tapers off toward Lake Superior and is covered with a mixture of jack and norway pine, aspen and white birch. There is some alder on the river bottom. The river below the falls is free of debris except along the immediate shore. The width of the river varies from 100 to 150 feet wide and 3 to 20 feet deep. The deepest area being in a big bend just above the mouth and west of M-123, under which the river passes about 100 yards upstream from the mouth. The bottom is of sand, clay and silt from the Lower Falls to Lake Superior. There is a large grassy island about 100 yards west of the M-123 bridge formed by a dredged by-pass which was dug by Alanso Cheeseborough in the late 1800's.

Most of the main tributaries are relatively sluggish, rising in sand and gravelly hills, but for the most part flowing through large swamps within the flood plain, except in the highlands where virgin forests skirted the stream. Most stream banks are vegetated with grass or alder. Soil erosion is not a major problem anywhere on the watershed.

Land Ownership

Starting in the headwaters the lands are in Cleveland Cliff Iron Company ownership south to the vicinity of County Road 421 below the Eagle's Nest. For the next 2 1/2 miles it is in State ownership except for two forties; then in a number of private holdings down as far as Hatch's Camp on County Road 442. From there to Newberry in State owned land except for 2 sections in the immediate vicinity of Newberry. From Newberry to Deadman's Farm is mostly State land, except for an odd lot and a section at McPhee's Landing. From the mouth of the Sage River to the boundary of the Tahquamenon Falls State Park the river corridor is divided up between Atlas Plywood Company and several small ownerships. Most of the land in the river corridor from the "deep hole" at M-123 to Lake Superior is in State ownership (Tahquamenon Falls State Park) except for a few isolated parcels just below the Lower Falls and midway between the Falls and the mouth.

The majority of the main tributaries in Luce County are in State ownership, especially in the marsh and submarginal swamps. The upper end of the Syphon, Kings, Teaspoon, mid-section of East and Red Creeks are in small private parcels; the Gimlet Watershed is mostly in Kimberly Clark ownership and the Murphy in several smaller ownerships. The lower Hendrie and McLeod Ditch are in State and Mead ownership and the upper portions in State and Federal ownership. The lower portion of the East Branch is in several private parcels and the headwaters in State and William Bonifas lands. Thus most river front lands now in State, Federal and Timber Company ownerships can be classed as public recreation lands.

Fish Management

The Tahquamenon Lakes are managed for species present - mostly warm water and an occasional brook trout; and adjacent Frank Lake for brown trout and perch. The river from the high fill is a first class trout feeder stream. Long Lake is stocked annually with 1-2000 brook trout and Bennett Spring, its outlet, and Grass Lake slough are stocked annually with yearling brook trout. Camp 7 Lake, whose outlet joins with Grass Lake slough produces pike and panfish. From Long Lake to the McMillan Bridge is a first class trout stream and need not be stocked. (The stretch between the Eagle's Nest to Hatch's, esthetically, is probably one of the most "inviting" stretches of trout stream in the eastern Upper Peninsula.) In the lower reaches (from King's Creek to McMillan Bridge) warm water species are the principal inhabitants in the late summer. Kings, Syphon, East and Red Creeks are first class trout feeder streams in this area, but not presently stocked, and provide some good "beaver pond" fishing.

The mainstream from McMillan Bridge to Whitefish Bay is designated as a warm water stream. However, brook trout are found down as far as Newberry in the spring, but these fish work up into the spring feeders by June. Mud Lake, which lies in close proximity with the river about 3 miles east of McMillan Bridge, contains northern pike, northern muskies, largemouth bass and perch. The backwaters of Dollarville Dam (1200 acres) approach the Mud Lake outlet and contain the above mentioned species plus walleye, rock bass and bullheads. Silver and Teaspoon Creeks are the principal feeders in this area. Silver contains 3 artificial and a number of small beaver ponds which produce an abundance of small brook trout. The artificial ponds (Silver, Brocky and Bucky) are stocked annually with brook trout and get a good play. Kak's Lake at the head of Carlson Creek, a tributary of the Teaspoon, is managed for warm water species and has been stocked recently with "tiger" muskies. Twin Lakes at the headwaters of the Teaspoon is a two-story lake and planted regularly with yearling splake. It also produces some brook, brown trout, northern pike, perch, sunfishes, and largemouth bass.

The mainstream from Newberry to the Upper Falls contains northern pike, northern muskies, walleye, largemouth bass, yellow perch, rock bass, bullheads, and suckers. The principal tributaries in this stretch are 39 Creek, a primary trout feeder; the Auger, a warm brown water stream with some brook trout in the headwaters; the East and West Branch of the Sage - the river below the Soo Line tracks is warm water containing pike, perch

and bullheads whereas the portion between the railroad and M-28 is a trout stream stocked with brown trout with some large brook trout present. The headwaters contain mostly brook trout. Third Creek Pond has been stocked with both brook and brown trout. Gimlet Creek is a warm water stream with several small beaver ponds containing mostly suckers and minnows. The Hendrie River is principally a brown warm water stream from its mouth upstream to the Trout Lake branch of the Soo Line Railroad, and from here its headwater streams contain some brook and brown trout. Fibron Pond at the head of Anguilm Creek, a branch of the East Branch of the Hendrie, is stocked annually with sublegal brown trout. The Murphy is a brown warm water stream containing northern pike, yellow perch and bullheads. There may be some brook trout in the extreme headwaters. The East Branch of the Tahquamenon from the mouth up to the River Road contains northern pike, walleye, yellow perch, rock bass, bullheads and suckers. From River Road upstream to its headwaters it is a trout stream and is stocked annually with brook trout near Eckerman and Strongs where fishing pressure is heavy. All tributaries in this area are top quality trout feeder streams. Linton Creek is a small stream with numerous beaver ponds. Brook trout are numerous but small. There are several other small insignificant trout feeder streams between the mouth of the East Branch and the Upper Falls.

The mainstream between the two Falls contains a mixture of warm and cold water species, namely brown, brook and rainbow trout, northern pike, walleye, rock bass, and suckers. Trout are stocked just below the Upper Falls. Fish food is plentiful and water well aerated. The "romantic" setting draws many anglers, particularly fly fishermen and many good catches are made. Feeder streams here are either seepage springs or intermittent drainage off the escarpment.

The mainstream from the Lower Falls to its mouth in Whitefish Bay is noted principally for its northern pike, walleye, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, muskies, and suckers, however, some brown and brook trout and a few anadromous rainbows come up to the Falls. Before 1950 the river's excellent fall perch fishery and late summer walleye fishery produced a phenomenal crop of fish. This fishery is presently a mere skeleton of its former self. Good perch fishing has been developing in Emerson Bay in recent years and it is hopeful that this will spread up river.