

THE MICHIGAN GRAYLING

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Until within a few years that portion of Michigan extending from the forty-fourth parallel to the Straits of Mackinaw, dotted with beautiful lakes and traversed by many a clear winding river was terra incognita to the fly-fisher; and although we were told years ago by explorers and adventurous anglers that trout in great numbers and of large size were taken in the waters of the northern portion of the peninsula, the grayling by its true name was unknown, and does not now form a subject for any of our angling authors. It was supposed that, except in the Arctic regions, it did not exist on our continent. About ten years ago, however, hunters and those who were looking up timber lands began to talk of a white-meated fish with all the game qualities of the trout, which they captured in streams of both water-sheds- east and west- as an addition to their venison and "hard tack ." It was known to them as the "White trout," the "Crawford county trout," and under other local names until a specimen in alcohol was sent to Professor E. D. Cope, of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, who described it in the proceedings of that institution in the year 1865, and gave it the scientific name of Thymallus tricolor, the generic name arising from the fresh thyme-y smell of the fish when first taken from the water, the specific appellation having reference to its beautiful dorsal fin. And yet its discovery as a true grayling escaped the notice of nearly all of our fly-fishers; and to the few who might have meditated an expedition in search of it, its habitat was far off and then almost inaccessible. The following passage, however, from "American Fish Culture" (p.196), by the present writer and published by Porter and Coates, in 1867 soon after Professor Cope described the fish, attracted the notice of Mr. J.V. LeMoyne, of Chicago.

"While on a trout-fishing excursion lately in the northern part of Pennsylvania, I met a very intelligent, though not a scientific person, who informed me that in exploring some timber lands on the AuSable, in Michigan, he came across a new kind of trout which he had never seen before. From his description it was doubtless this new species of Thymallus. He said it readily took a bait of a piece of one of its fellows, a piece of meat being used to capture the first fish; and that it was very beautiful and of a delicious flavor."

The following summer, after consulting persons interested in timber lands, Mr. LeMoyne packed his "kit" and found his way by steamer to Little Traverse Bay, and thence by canoe through a series of lakes to the River Jordan, where he had great sport, not only with grayling, but with trout of good size, taking both from the same pool, and not unfrequently one of each on the same cast. I may here mention that the Jordan is one of the few streams of Michigan in which both are found. Trout are unknown in the Manistee and AuSable.

My friend, Mr. D. H. Fitzhugh, Jr., of Bay City, the year following took them in the Rifle and went by a new railroad then being built to the Hersey and Muskegon, walking twenty miles of the distance. He had been waiting with much interest the extension of the Jackson, Lansing and Saginaw Railroad northward, and in 1873, when it crossed the AuSable, he launched his boat high up on that lovely river. Since then the fame of the rare sporting qualities of this fish has spread among anglers, and they now come from many of our large towns and cities (especially those of the West) to camp on the banks of the Michigan rivers and enjoy the sport.

The European species (*T. vexillifer*) is mentioned by all English authors on angling from the time of Dame Juliana Berners to the present. The opinion is advanced by some of them that it was introduced into England when under the religious sway of the see of Rome, as it is generally found in rivers near the ruins of old monasteries. Sir Humphrey Davy, in his "Salmonia" (1826), wrote of it as inhabiting the Avon, the Ure, the Nye and the Dee; and Hofland (1839) in addition to those mentions the Trent, the Dove, the Derwent, the Wharfe, and a few other rivers. Sir Humphrey Davy also tells us that it is found in some of the streams of the Alpine valleys, and he intimates in some of the rivers of Sweden and Norway. A friend of the writer, who of late years has been in the habit of spending his summers in Bavaria, has had fair sport with grayling in the Isar and Traun, near Munich and Traunstein, as also in the Inn and Salza, and mentions the names of a few quiet England anglers who come annually in September to fish these rivers.

European waters, however, were probably never as prolific of grayling as those of Michigan; for trout, which feed largely on the young of all fish, are there found in the same streams. In Michigan rivers, where grayling most abound there are no trout, and the fry of their own and other species are never found in their stomachs. The various orders of flies which lay their eggs in running water and the larvae of such flies appear to be their only food.

Writers in sporting papers have recently claimed that grayling have also been found in the older states of the Union. If this be the fact, they are now extinct. They are said to exist in some few of the rivers of Wisconsin, which is quite probable, and also in Montana and Dakota. Dr. Richardson, in his "Fauna Boreali-Americana," gives not only a glowing description of the exquisite beauty of Back's grayling (*T. signifer*), but speaks with all the ardor of a true angler of its game qualities. The Esquimaux title, Hewlook powak, denoting wing-like fin, he says, alludes to its magnificent dorsal, which, as in the Michigan grayling, exceeds in size and beauty that of the European species.

Grayling, wherever found, are spring spawners, as also are the smelt and the capelin or spearling. All other genera of the salmon family spawn in autumn. The usual time with grayling, both here and in Europe, is the latter part of April and early in May. They do not push for the very sources of rivers, leaping falls and flapping sidewise over shallows to find some little rivulet as trout do, but deposit their ova in the parts of the stream where they are taken, or if such portions are not of the proper temperature, they will sometimes seek the mouths of smaller and cooler affluents. The time of their spawning is limited to a few days, or a week or so. Of the experts who have gone to the SuSable to express the ova, fertilize it, and bring it East to introduce this fish into the Atlantic states, one found that they were not ready to spawn, and the next season, another, who went a week or so later, found they had spawned. I have taken fry as long as my little finger on the first of September, which were the produce of eggs spawned in April. Those that came from ova of the preceding year were six inches long; at two years old, they are ten or twelve inches long; at three years old, they are thirteen to fifteen inches long, and at four year, sixteen or seventeen inches and weigh from three-quarters of a pound to a pound and a quarter; each succeeding year adding proportionately less to their length and more to their girth. An abundance or deficiency of food, however, has much influence on their growth, while some are naturally more thrifty than others. Sir Humphrey Davy says: "Grayling hatched in June become in the same year, in September or October, nine or ten inches long, and weigh from half a pound to ten ounces, and the next year are from twelve to fifteen inches." On this point, as will be seen from the foregoing, I differ with him. I think he must have written from hearsay.

In Michigan, in a day's fishing, the true hearted angler returns to the water a great many more than he puts in his live-box. He will keep none under a half pound, and where the streams are so abundantly stocked, he will not begrudge their liberty to all under that weight. Our grayling are much more slender than the European species, but, if we credit English authors, do not attain as large a size. Three-fourths of a pound with us is a good average size, and one of a pound and a quarter is considered a large fish. I have heard, however, of their being taken in the Jordan over three pounds. The grayling is a fish of more symmetrical proportions than the trout, although it has not the vermilion spots and bright colors over its body, but its head and mouth are much smaller, and with handsome prominent eyes. It is never found in the strong turbulent water at the head of a rift, but in the deeper portions of the smoothly gliding stream. It avoids a bottom of clay or the mosses so common to the beds of Michigan rivers, but is always found on gravel or sand. Its rise is straight up-sharp and sudden, and when its attention is once drawn to the artificial line, it does not turn back as a trout does, on getting a sight of the angler, but in its eagerness disregards

him entirely, and in running a river with the speed of the current, or even if the boat is poled along down stream, it frequently takes the fly within a few feet of the pole or the boat. Its play is quite as vigorous as that of the trout, and it leaps frequently above the surface of the water before it is sufficiently exhausted to be drawn in. There is this difference, however, between the two. The trout, like a certain denomination of Christians, seems to believe in "final perseverance," and will kick and struggle to the last, even as it is lifted in, while the grayling, after you have sufficiently overcome its obstinate pluck to get its head above water, is taken in with pendent tail, as much as to say, "It's all up;" but as soon as it touches the floor of the boat, its flapping and floundering begin. If it takes a sheer across the current, with its large dorsal fin, it offers greater resistance than the trout. Where they are so numerous, one seldom uses the landing net, for few escape by breaking away, and if they do there are more to take hold at the next cast.

If in fishing with a whip of three flies the angler hooks a fish on either of his droppers, the stretcher fly as it sails around beneath is pretty sure of enticing another, and not unfrequently the disengaged dropper hooks a third fish. Sometimes, as I have sat on the cover of the live-box, I have looked down and seen three of these bright fish, after I had exhausted them, all in a row, their dorsal fins erect and waving in the clear water like so many beautiful leaves of the coleus. Nor is the grayling in taking the fly as chary a fish as the trout. On a perfectly still water you may see the latter rising and taking in the minute natural flies, when the veriest artificial midge will not tempt it; but let even a light breeze spring up and a ripple appear on the surface, and then it cannot distinguish the natural from the artificial, and will take hold. The grayling, on the contrary, is the most eager unsophisticated fish imaginable. When it sees anything bearing the most remote semblance of life, it "goes for it," even if the water is as smooth as a mirror.

The whole of Michigan, south of the Straits of Mackinaw, may certainly be called flat country. The only rising grounds to be found are a few sandy eminences - they can scarcely be called hills - the formation of which we leave the geologist to account for. And yet the rivers abrading against these sand-hills occasionally cause precipitous bluffs (few of which exceed a hundred feet) or such an elevation as is known in a lumberman's parlance as a "roll-way."

There is a gradual but almost imperceptible elevation from Bay City or Grand Rapids to the region where grayling are found. From the former to Grayling where the railroad crosses the AuSable, a distance of nearly a hundred miles, there is a rise of seven hundred feet, which gives the rivers an average current of about two and a half miles an hour. Wherever there is a contraction in the width of the stream, however, especially around a bend, its velocity may be three, four, or even five miles, but on account of the absence of rocks in the bottom, it almost invariably flows smoothly. The strength of the current can only be seen where the ends of half-sunken logs or "sweepers" project above the surface, or when the canoe man turns his prow up stream.

The grayling region, on the Lake Huron water-shed, has a top stratum of coarse white sand. On the streams flowing toward Lake Michigan, the sand is yellow, with more or less admixture of vegetable loam. The rains falling on these sandy plains and percolating through, meet with a lower stratum of impervious clay, and thus form underground courses which crop out at the margin or in the beds of the streams, and keep them at the temperature of spring water.

The eighth longitudinal line west from Washington may be considered the apex of the water-sheds, declining East and West; although the head-waters of streams occasionally interlock. By a short "carry" one can pass from the head-waters of the Manistee to those of the AuSable. I have seen marks on both of these streams that give evidence that surveyors did so forty years ago, and have no doubt that it was a route used by the Indians in crossing from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron.

The country, except on the barrens, furnished a fine growth of white and yellow pine, as well as oak, beach, maple, and other hard woods. White cedars, - the arbor vitae of the East, - invariably fringe the banks of rivers a few miles below their sources, which are generally in ponds or lake. These trees appear to love spring water, and do not appear until the stream has acquired that temperature. Growing on the banks of the streams, the current washes away the loose soil from their roots, which causes them to incline over and at last to fall into the water; and these are called "sweepers." These rivers, from the constant influx of spring water, never freeze, and owing to the slight water-shed and sandy-top soil are not subject to freshets, a spring rise of two feet being considered excessive. Nor are they discolored by high water, a brown tinge only being imparted. Such streams, here and in Europe, are the home of the grayling, for it loves water of a low, even temperature and a smooth, steady current.

The game-laws of Michigan recently enacted forbid the spearing and netting of grayling at all times, and do not admit of their being taken even with hook and line from January until June. These fish acquire condition soon after spawning, but are better in autumn, and in season nearly all winter. So after the first of September the sportsman can unite shooting with fishing. Several summers ago in August while running the AuSable we counted twelve deer and two bears. As they were out of season and my friend Fitzhugh was a stickler for the observance of the game-laws in every instance, we resisted the temptation to shoot them.

The country I have described has, of course, none of that awe-inspiring scenery we find on the shores of Lake Superior, but with its clear, ever-flowing every-winding rivers over white and yellow sands, with graceful cedars projecting at a

sharp angle from the banks, and every bend of the stream opening a new view, it is novel and pleasing to one who has been shut up all winter in a crowded city. In running a grayling stream, the feeling is one of peace and quietude. There are no song-birds in those deep woods. One only hears the far-off falling of some old forest tree or that weird sound caused by the rubbing of the branch of one tree against that of another, as they are swayed to and fro by the wind, and in the distance one can almost fancy that it is a human voice. Otherwise all is as silent as death.

My first raid upon the grayling was in August, 1874, with Mr. Fitzhugh, of Bay City, on the AuSable. We ran this river from Grayling, on the northern branch of the Jackson, Saginaw and Lansing Railroad to Thompson's a distance of a hundred and sixty miles. From Thompson's after loading our two boats on a stout two-horse wagon and occupying another with springs, we drove twenty-five miles to Tawas City, and then after a few hours on a steamer back to Bay City. There is no grayling fishing at the station called Grayling, nor until one gets four or five miles down the stream where the cedars appear. From this as far as we ran it - and there was yet sixty miles of it below Thompson's - it is a beautiful stream, much prettier, I think, more rapid, and less obstructed with sweepers than the Manistee. The distance by land is about seventy miles. On our second day we killed and salted down-heads off and tails off - a hundred and twenty pounds of fish, besides eating all we wanted. In one hanging rift close by the bank, as Len Iswel, my pusher, held on to the cedar boughs, I took at five casts fifteen fish, averaging three-quarters of a pound each. The following day we fished along leisurely until we had our live-boxes, containing each sixty pounds, so full that the fish began to die. Then we passed over splendid pools in which we could see large schools of grayling on the bottom without casting a fly; for we would not destroy them in mere wantonness. In a few days, however, we came across occasional timber camps, when we commenced fishing again, and supplied all hands with fresh fish. One can leave Bay City by railroad in the morning and arrive at Grayling early enough in the afternoon to embark and drop down stream seven or eight miles the same night. He should however, engage boats and pushers beforehand.\*

There are two large branches, flowing almost as much as the main stream, that enter the AuSable. The south-west comes in about forty-five miles below Grayling, and the north branch sixty miles below. On this last stream there is a sluice dam, and when it is let off to float logs during the summer and autumn, the water is discolored somewhat, and the fish do not rise as well. One can get all the fishing he wants by running as far down as the ~~southwest~~ south-west branch, which as already stated, is forty-five miles by water, and is only twelve miles back to Grayling by land. He can engage a wagon at Grayling to come with ice on a stated day and haul back his boats, his luggage, and his fish, thus saving the labor

of pushing back up stream, which would occupy two days of incessant toil.

When I fished the Manistee the latter part of August, 1875, I went from Grayling with Mr. Fitzhugh and another friend, accompanied by our pushers, over "the barrens," a distance of eight miles, to a camp established by I.F. Babbit, to fish with hook and line for the Bay City and Detroit markets. We made a permanent camp four miles below Babbit's and fished five days, giving him three-fourths of our fish, which he came for every day, and which (keeping none under a half pound) amounted to over five hundred pounds.

One of my most pleasant trips, however, was that of the latter part of August, and early in September, 1876, when in company with two young friends, I spent two weeks on the Manistee. We went by the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad to Mancelona, well up toward the Straits of Mackinaw. Here we loaded boats, stores, and camp equipage on a wagon drawn by a pair of stout horses, and journeyed eleven miles east to the head-waters of the main branch. Our trip was dashed with a spice of adventure and a good deal of hard work. We had struck the stream higher up than we expected. It was small, scarcely sufficient to float our boats, and still had the temperature it had acquired in the little lake which was its source. There were no cedars, which only appear when the streams have flown far enough from the ponds to feel the influence of spring water. On the morning of the second day we came to the cedars and cold water; and with them the sweepers, which are cedars, as already described, which have been undermined by the current and have fallen in the water, and always across the stream. We had three days and a half of hard chopping, and hauling our boats over huge cedar logs, some of which had probably lain there for a century- for a cedar log if it remains in the water, never rots. One coming to some of these logs, we had to make a "Carry," placing our luggage on their mossy covered trunks and pulling our empty boats over. We would then load up and go on to cut more sweepers and make more carriers. At last the stream widened and was free of sweepers, and we had magnificent fishing. The grayling were perfectly reckless, and would take one's flies within ten feet of the boats. It was virgin water; no fly had heretofore been cast on it. After a day's sport we came to the sweepers again, and had a day and a half more with them and half-sunken logs and a few carries. At two or three of these carries, the logs were over two feet through. Mosses had grown and spread on them until, as we saw by certain signs, bears used them as a highway. On one we found thrifty cedars growing at regular intervals from the parent trunk that were more than half a century old. Soon the stream increased so much in volume and was so wide that a tree falling across could not obstruct the passage of our boats; and finally we came to open water again. And so we ran the stream down to Walton junction, a hundred and fifty miles by water, while it was scarce fifty on a beeline.

Norwithstanding the difficulties we encountered on this last

trip, those who follow us over the same route will find it quite easy on account of the passage we opened, and in a day will make as much way down stream from the small bridge at its head as we made in four. On looking back I hardly begrudge the hard work it cost us; for the subsequent running of a hundred and fifty miles of beautiful river was much more enjoyable than camping for nearly a week, as we did in the summer of 1875, lower down the river.

The boat used on my first trip is worth description. It was built of white pine; bottom, 1 inch thick; sides 5/8; 16 feet long; 2.10 wide on top, 2.4 at bottom, and with a sheer of three inches on each side. The bottom was nearly level for eight feet in the center, with a sheer of five inches to the bow and seven inches to stern. The live-box was six feet from bow, extending back two feet. The sides were nailed to the bottom. Its weight was eighty pounds, and it carried two men- the angler and the pusher- with 200 pounds of luggage. With two coats of paint it cost about fifteen dollars. The angler sits on the movable cover of the live box, which is water-tight from other portions of the boat, and has holes bored in sides and bottom to admit of the circulation of the water to keep the fish alive, and as he captures his fish he slips them into holes on the right and left sides. An ax was always taken along to clear the river of fallen logs and sweepers.

My customary tackle on these excursions is a twelve-foot rod of about eight and a half ounces; leaders eight feet long, and flies on hooks ranging from No. 7 to No. 10 (O'Shaughnessy). I have found most of the flies used on Pennsylvania streams effective, and one can scarcely go amiss in his selection. One summer, I used for two weeks the same ship, viz.: "Professor" for the stretcher, "Silver Widow" for first, and "White-winged Coachman" for second-dropper. The first is tied with Guinea-fowl feather for wings, an amber or yellowdyed hackle for legs, a yellow floss body wound with gold tinsel, and three sprigs of scarlet ibis for tail. The second has black wings, black hackle, and black body wound with silver tinsel. The thrd has white wings, red hackle, undyed, and body of peacock hurl.

As to stores. Last summer we found that for five men, including pushers, the folbwing were about the right quantities for a two weeks' supply: 50 lbs. flour, 1 bushel potatoes, 25 lbs. of breakfast bacon, 12 lbs. butter, 1/2 peck of onions, with corn meal, tea, coffee, sugar, condensed milk, a jar of pickles, and a few cans of corn and tomatoes. Bread is a diffucult thing to take or keep in good condition. I would advise, therefore, the taking of a portable sheet-iron stove, which with a baker and all other applicances and conveniences, does not weigh over thirty-five pounds. With a box of yeast powder, hot rolls can be had at every meal.

The Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad goes to considerable pains to accomodate anglers. Nearly every station above Reed City is in close vicinity to come lake stocked with bass, muskallonge and



pickerel, or some river teeming with trout or grayling. At such stations boats, wagons, horses and men can be found to accompany parties of anglers. This road has also cabin cars, with stove bunks, etc., which it will switch off at any station.

\* (as referred to an page seven)

I would here say that sportsmen wishing to secure good men for fishing or hunting can do so by addressing L.P. Ramsdell or I.F. Babbit at Grayling, Crawford county, Michigan

By- Thaddeus Norris