



William B. Mershon

Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Conservation, preservation, and restoration of Michigan's cold-water resources.

Fishing letters

Winter Contemplations

by Art Neumann

Dear Fellow Angler:

I'm a few days late with this letter, but what a hectic few days it has been! We've been without light, power, heat and phone for ten days! It was the worst freezing rain storm in the history of our weather bureau! At one time 90% of the disaster area had no electricity! You never saw so many limbless trees, broken utility poles and damaged homes! It completely halted operations here at The Shop and our family was forced to take refuge in a local motel for the duration! But we're back now and while it has put us a couple of weeks behind on deliveries, we should be caught up in a few days. So please be patient. Your order will be along shortly.

It started out like a normal winter. The first snow fell in early December and by the second week in February, two months later, we hadn't had a single day when the thermometer got above freezing, it never stopped snowing and we had more accumulated snow on the ground than in many, many a year. It reminded one of an old fashioned winter from the good old days! Then on February 9th a chinook set in and, save for an odd day or two, winter hasn't returned since. I'm glad. It's easy on the trout and it'll start the steelhead a bit earlier. It'll be over on the PM end of this month. The snow is all but gone so it should be a super year. See you there!

I love steelheading with flies but I'm afraid my first love is still hatch fishing for resident trout, especially in May and June. For that matter, there's some super fly fishing to be had in early April on the Flies Only section of the Main Stream of the Au Sable now that we have Catch & Release there from Jan. 1st to April 24th. Tactics are much the same as on opening. You fish weighted nymphs like the Early Stone, Iron Dun, Hendrickson, Teboe's and the Scuds right on the bottom. Pitch your streamers, like the Royal Coachman bucktail, the Roxy Specials, the Spruces and the Ghosts tight against the bank and make them run downstream instead of just across. If you run into a hatch in April it will either be the Early Stone or the Iron Dun. Priestts Skittering Stone, the Little Black Stone and the Early Stone will work best then. But if it's the Iron Dun hatch, try Jackson's Baetis, the Iron Dun or Robert's Black Drake. You may not do as well as you will come May 1st when the Hendricksons, Little Black Caddis, Borchers Drake and Grannom hatches show but getting your boots wet again after the long winter's hibernation will more than make up for it.

Now I'd like to close this letter with excerpts from a column Whitey Sawyer, Outdoor Editor for the *Muskegon Chronicle*, once wrote entitled, "The Outsider."

Sometimes it takes a lot of faith to plow through the dregs of winter's snows, stand shivering in icy streams under cold and gloomy skies and pelt the trout with weighted nymphs and heavy streamers. The wind whips errant casts into trees and expensive flies are lost. Sullen, heavy currents roll the weighted flies under logs, into snags, and around stumps, breaking them off. Sturdy words of Anglo-Saxon derivation are applied. Soon even the most faithful return to camp to apply poultices made of essences of sour mash, juniper, peat smoke and the like. But there are those openings when nature smiles on the faithful. Spring bursts upon the land, stone flies hatch and the trout rise freely. These are the golden days that live in memory. Just the thought of Opening Weekend brings back a flood of memories, of rising trout, of old friends, of laughter and fellowship, of the river sliding by, the pointed tops of pine and fir against the sky and the joy of spring in the air. When it comes right down to it, there isn't much else that counts.

Yours for greater angling sport,

Art Neumann