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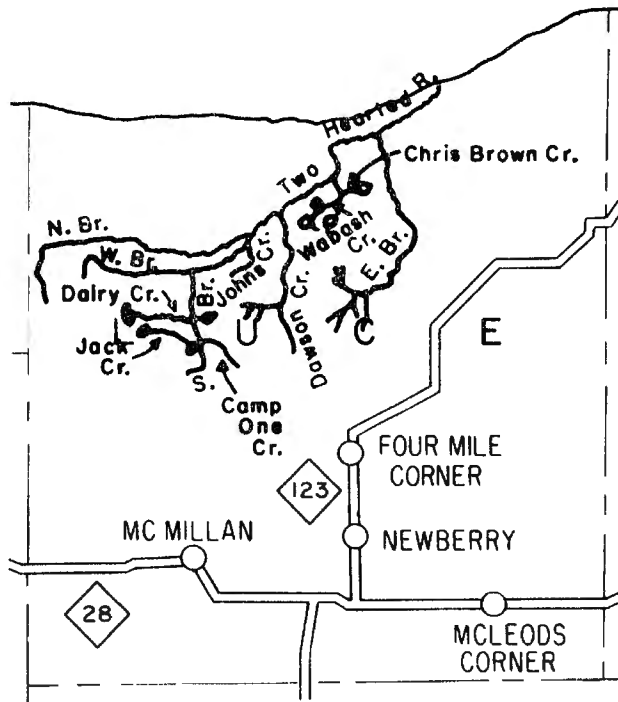
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SERIES: THE TROUT STREAMS OF MICHIGAN

NO. 3 TWO HEARTED RIVER

Leland Anderson, Fisheries Biologist

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The mighty Two Hearted River, where the native red men camped and fished at its mouth, where loggers floated their "sticks" to Gitche Gumee, where Hemingway wished he was and where fishermen today battle the mosquitoes and black flies in quest of hidden "specks" and ram-bunctious rainbows, still flows in all its northwoods splendor.

The river is bridged by a logging road near the Antlers and Hemlock Dam, by County Road 407 at the High Bridge, County Road 410 at the Reed and Green Bridge, and by "Little Mac" footbridge near its mouth. There are several private hunting and fishing camps from its source to the confluence of the East Branch, and state forest campgrounds at the High Bridge, Reed and Green Bridge, and at the mouth. There is also a canoeing campground near the Lone Pine and Highbanks area.

The river system is made up of the main stream and five major tributaries, namely: the South, West, North, and East Branches, and Dawson Creek. There are several secondary creeks, namely: Jacks, Whorls (heading in Whorl and Little Whorl lakes), Camp One, Dairy (heading in Dairy Lake), Beaver Creek (heading in Beaver Lake), Johns, Wabash (heading in McTiver Lake), and Chris Brown (heading in Chris Brown Lake) creeks.

The South Branch of The Two Hearted River

The South Branch of the Two Hearted is the finest brook trout water in the Two Hearted drainage and is one of the finest in the State. The source of the South Branch (Whorls, Camp One, Beaver, Lake, Jack, and Dairy creeks) flows from a rolling escarpment of Au Train sandy loam covered with mixed northern hardwood. The river is clear and spring fed. It flows through open beaver meadows and tag alder fringe to Hemlock Dam and thence through marginal cedar and spruce swamp and northern hardwoods to its confluence with the West Branch. It lends itself nicely to fly fishing.

Besides brook trout, this section contains some suckers and muddlers. There is ample trout reproduction from a number of small spring fed tributaries. Brook trout up to 12 inches are most commonly taken by anglers, but the occasional larger fish is taken from beaver ponds, Whorl, Little Whorl, and Jack lakes. Fingerling brook trout have been stocked at "Antlers" and "Hemlock Dam" to supplement the area of heavy fishing pressure. Some rainbow find their way up as far as Camp One Creek during the spring run.

Prior to 1915, the South Branch was used for log drives. There was a water storage dam at the headwaters (Whorl Club), which was used as a source of water power until about 1955 when a new dam was constructed.

The basin is used now as a private trout pond. The pond is not stocked. There is a workable fish ladder on it. Another water control structure is found at the Hemlock Dam site. It is no longer usable, but the original timbers are still in evidence.

The only access to Whorl Lake is by logging road and foot trail. There is a poor but driveable logging road to Jack Lake.

#### The West Branch of The Two Hearted River

The West Branch of the Two Hearted heads in a terrain of rolling Strong's sandy loam hills covered with northern hardwood and hemlock and meanders north and then eastward through spruce and tag alder valley. Much of this portion of the river has been intermittently flooded with beaver dams. The Spile Dam, about one-half mile upstream from its junction with the South Branch, was once a logging water control structure. A high pine ridge lies between the West Branch and the North Branch. The West Branch has a moderate flow of clear water, a sandy bottom, and much natural debris for cover. The considerable eel grass in its bed would lead one to believe that the West Branch is warmer than the South Branch. This stream produces an abundance of small brook trout. Martindary Lake at its headwaters is spring fed and when flooded by beaver has produced some very nice brookies in the 12-16 inch class. There is an access road to Martindary Lake; other access is by logging road or foot trail from the south and an old established sand road to Spile Dam from the east. It is only passible by 4 wheel drive vehicles.

The West Branch sustains itself by natural reproduction and has not been stocked with trout in the past 25 years. Fishing is mostly of the worm dunking variety.

#### The East Branch of The Two Hearted River

The main tributary to the Two Hearted River is its East Branch which flows out of the Sleeper Lake marshes and drains the Chesbrough Lake Highlands. The marshes are underlain by Tahquamenon and Spalding Peat and Newton Sand; and in these headwaters, the East Branch is laden with organic debris and is overhung with alder. Among the tributaries of the East Branch are Widgeon Creek, a clear water spring creek drawing from wooded sandy ridges which winds through a flat valley of black spruce, balsam, and hemlock, much of which is cut over. This small creek contains small brook trout, and coho salmon fingerlings were found here in the spring of 1968. Adult rainbow were noted here in 1969 and 1970. This stream is not stocked.

An intermittent feeder stream flows in from the bog shored Stuart Lake. The lower portion of this tributary and other small tributaries from the Sleeper Lake bog are spring fed but brown stained.

All these feeders have a population of small brook trout, and lake run rainbow have been noted to move into them in the spring.

There is also a small spring feeder stream flowing out of the spruce and tag alder swamps in Section 18, T48N, R9W on which Dr. R. P. Hicks of Newberry has a small (3 acre) impoundment. This "feeder" is known to contain brook trout. The terrain along the East Branch in this area is rolling and covered with second growth hardwood, balsam, spruce, and pine. The valleys become steeper and narrower as the river winds downstream toward the vicinity of Potter's Camp and the East Branch Club. Below Potter's, the country is gently rolling; but the immediate valley is steep and narrow. The upland, of Rubicon sand, is covered with jack pine, white birch, red maple, and red pine; but the valley is covered with tag alder, spruce, and balsam. The stream is sand bottomed with deep bend holes. There is an outcropping of gravel and hard pan for a mile upstream and half mile downstream of the old Shamrock Bridge which is used extensively as a spawning ground for steelhead, coho, and sea lamprey.

There is a good spring run of steelhead rainbow which attracts a considerable number of fishermen, especially to the vicinity of the Shamrock Rapids and the more open stretches of river below it. This river is not considered canoeable but, for the most part, is wadeable.

From the Shamrock Rapids down to the confluence with the main stream, the banks of the East Branch are steep and sandy; and the sandy bottom deepens at the bends. There are some minor runs of gravelly sand. The East Branch is light brown in color, and its water is soft. Biologically, it is only moderately productive of fish. The water level fluctuates from normal summer low to spring high of 3 to 5 feet above normal.

During the days of the CCC Program, portions of the East Branch were improved with log deflectors and stream bank cover. The raw sand banks from County Road 412 downstream were rip-rapped with brush and planted with jack pine to prevent erosion during high water periods. Another 206 structures were added by the Michigan Department of Conservation's Lake and Stream Improvement Section in 1946.

Fish species found in the East Branch are brook, rainbow trout, coho salmon, sea lamprey, brook lamprey, sculpins, sticklebacks, red-sided shiner, mud minnows, long-nose dace, and creek chubs. The principal game specie found in the feeder streams and main stream is brook trout. Natural reproduction is not considered high, and it is supplemented by annual stocking of fingerling brook trout.

### The Main Two Hearted River

The main stream from the confluence of the South and West Branches meanders through a sandy valley bordered with tag alder, spruce, balsam, white pine, and marginal hardwood. There is a considerable number of pools 4 to 6 feet deep. At Hunter's Dam (an old water control structure), the stream picks up a steeper gradient and flows over a series of sandstone ledges before its junction with the North Branch.

This is principally brook trout water, but a fair number of rainbow work up into this area in the spring. Though tag alder fringed, this area can be fly fished with little difficulty. Johns Creek, a small brook trout feeder, joins the Two Hearted from the south just above the mouth of the North Branch.

Fishing pressure is light to medium, and access is only fair to a short distance west of the Ohio Camp. In dry weather the sandy hills are high unto impassible except by 4 wheel drive. Fish populations are supplemented by annual stocking of fingerling brook and rainbow trout.

The main stream between the mouth of the North Branch and the mouth of Dawson Creek begins in a series of moderately deep pools bordered by steep banks of sandy soil, then builds up momentum over shallow sandstone ledges with intermittent deep pockets. The river is very rapid for a half mile upstream and quarter mile downstream of the High Bridge. The banks are high and steep along these rapids; and the narrow valley is covered by tag alder, jack pine, spruce, balsam, aspen, and red oak.

Fishing is good for brook trout and small rainbow, especially above and below the rapids. The rapids is a vital steelhead spawning area and sea lamprey also use them extensively for reproduction. The fish population is supplemented by stocking of fingerling brook and rainbow trout.

Dawson Creek comes in from the south out of a vast flat black spruce bog interlaced with low ridges of balsam, spruce, jack, red and white pine. The brown stained creek is fringed with tag alder. Its tributary, the Little Dawson, a brown stained, slow moving creek, flows in from the south and southwest; Whiskey Creek, which is clear, joins it from the west; one unnamed brown stained creek comes in from an old beaver pond north of Barry Homestead; and another, a clear water spring creek, joins from the west and north of Luce County 412.

The terrain along the Dawson is rolling and the soil sandy from the Little Dawson on down; and from the mouth of Whiskey Creek to the main stream, the valley narrows and the flow quickens over a gravel and a sandstone bottom.

Small brook trout dominate the headwaters and tributaries of the Dawson. Small rainbow are also found in the lower Dawson and the lower portion of the Whiskey, which would indicate these to be a steelhead spawning area.

Fishing pressure for brook trout is light to moderate, and natural reproduction is adequate to keep the stream well stocked. Beaver ponds in the headwaters occasionally produce some nice catches of brook trout.

Legend has it that thirst quenched lumberjacks exiting from nearby Stagger Inn kept their "corn juice" cool in the small stream south of that place and thus it was labeled Whiskey Creek. (Bottle hunters are hereby warned of the blood sucking sea lamprey that now inhabit the place.)

The main stream of the Big Two Hearted River from the mouth of the Dawson to the mouth of the East Branch flows over a sandy bottom in a predominately northeasterly course, weaving in a narrow valley through rolling terrain of Rubicon sand covered with stands of northern hardwood interspersed with some hemlock, balsam, and spruce. To the south is the forest of second growth hardwood and to the north one of jack pine, red pine, and aspen. The stream banks are fringed with alder, spruce, balsam, and cedar; and stream cover includes deep pools, overhanging trees, undercut banks, and log jams. This portion of the river can be fished from the bank, waded, or is easily canoeable. A canoe trail has been cut through the logs and around the immovable jams. (At present this "trail" needs improvement.)

Brook trout, rainbow, and menominees await the angler. There is road access to only six places along this 8 or 9 miles of stream. Spring and summer fishing pressure is light to medium, heaviest during the spring rainbow run in the vicinity of the High, and Reed and Green bridges.

Feeder streams along this stretch contribute little to the production of trout. The Wabash, which is intermittent above its confluence with Chris Brown Creek, heads in the McTivers Lake and threads through a series of old beaver meadows and small cedar swamps. Chris Brown Creek heads in dark watered Chris Brown Lake and contains some small brook trout.

There is also a small spring fed creek "feeder" that comes in from the north and west of the Lone Pine Landing.

The water levels in this portion of the Two Hearted have a tendency to raise from 5 to 10 feet during severe spring floods.

This portion of river is stocked annually with rainbow trout, some of which grow to the legal size of 10 inches and others head to Lake Superior to return a year or two later as full fledged tackle busters.



The main stream from the mouth of the East Branch to Lake Superior ranges from 40 to 60 feet wide and varies from 1-7 feet in depth. It flows with a moderate current in a narrow valley through slightly rolling jack pine country. The bottom lands are covered with tag alder, cherry, jack pine, and white birch. There are 25 short rapids on the Two Hearted between the mouth of the East Branch and Lake Superior. There are also a number of areas where gravel covers the bottom, generally near these rapids. Otherwise the bottom is sandy with long deep holes. There is a considerable amount of debris in the channel but the entire stretch of river is canoeable and most of it can be boated up and downstream with an outboard, especially during the spring.

Many of the immediate banks are steep and show exposed sand. Some attempt was made to stabilize the sand during the CCC Program with fair success.

There are 4 or 5 fishing and hunting camps along the river from the Reed and Green Bridge to the East Branch; but below this point, the land is state owned and free of development until the river reaches the "Little Mac" footbridge and a large State Forest Campground about a half mile above the mouth. There is also a private camp known as Gene's, catering to fishermen, on the first land shelf above the state campground; and on the third and final shelf is Rainbow Lodge, a store, restaurant, and motel complex, lying adjacent to a small airplane strip.

County Road 423 leads to these points from the inland. There are several "fire lanes" that branch off County Roads 412, 414, and 423 that lead back to various points on the river.

Prior to World War II days, there was an active U.S. Coast Guard Life Boat Station located at a point between the north bank of the river and Lake Superior shoreline, the remains of which are still evidenced by log cribs, cement sidewalks, and a few wind beaten Lombardy poplars that once graced the sand dunes.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has maintained an active Electric Lamprey Checking Weir since 1955 at this point. This weir operates from early April until early July of each year. The Two Hearted River sustains the heaviest sea lamprey run in the east end of Lake Superior.

The river flows wide and straight from "Little Mac" to the mouth over a bottom of shifting sand and patches of gravel until finally rush into Gitche Gumee over a short rapid of agate and other beach stone. The mouth changes its position after each "big blow" from the north.

The principal species of fish found in the lower Two Hearted are "steelhead", rainbow, menominee, whitefish, coho, brook and brown trout, white and long nosed suckers, smelt, muddlers, sticklebacks, and long nosed dace.

This portion of river sustains a very good run of "steelhead" each spring and fall which attracts thousands of ardent anglers, many of which spend days and weeks at the large, well kept State Forest Campground, now in the stages of further development. Coho salmon have found this stream to their liking; and though none have been stocked here, an ample number of stragglers from points up the lake mount their spawning run in this stream each fall. Menominee whitefish enter the lower river in large numbers in the fall and find their way up as far as Hunter's Dam above the mouth of the North Branch. This tasty and much sought after fish also spends many days off the mouth of the river, evidently feeding on the abundance of food that flows out on the spring flood and after the fall rains. Steelhead fishermen supplement their larder with their tasty and gamey little members of the whitefish family.

When the fish are "off their feed", the stony beaches at the mouth of the river provide some of the best "rock picking" areas in northern Michigan. Agates, chalcedony, jasper quartz, coral of gem quality, and "lucky stones" are found here.

At one time up to the early 1940's, brook trout were found in good numbers in the entire Two Hearted System and coaster brookies (lake run) came in on the spring and fall runs. At present, the brook trout population has petered out in the lower river, and their niche has been taken over by the other species.

Though the river sustains a very good run of "steelhead", natural reproduction is supplemented by annual stocking. These young steelhead work out into the lake, wax fat, and return in a year or two to sacrifice themselves to the whims and whiles of the Sons of Walton.