



ERIC SHARP
OUTDOORS

Streaming downstream underrated

MCKINLEY — It's often tough for college kids to find good summer jobs. People don't want to hire them for high-paying positions because they'll be gone in two or three months, and basic service jobs don't pay much.

That's the problem Mike Johnson faced between his sophomore and junior years at Hillsdale College. He reviewed his options and thought about what he liked to do most in the world. The answer was obvious — fly-fish for trout.

Fortunately, so does his dad, Jeff, and the end result was that I spent a day this week fishing with one of the youngest trout guides in Michigan. Mike is 21.

The Johnsons had called to ask if I would like to try some streamer fishing on a float on the bigger waters of the Au Sable downstream from Mio. I usually fish below Mio in late August and September, when the white fly hatch is on, but I rarely fish as far down as McKinley because there's a lot of deep water, and the wading is easier closer to Mio.

These slightly warmer waters, where you will hook an occasional smallmouth, host tremendous hatches of Ephoron leukon flies, with so many duns on the river's surface at dusk that it's impossible to pick out your imitation.

Ephorons hatch, mate and die all in an evening. Males molt to a spinner, but the females don't, so a dun pattern works through the hatch. The best fishing usually is early on, when flies are sparse enough that you can cast an imitation to a rising fish with a reasonable chance it will be seen.

I hadn't fished below McKinley for at least five years, and I wasn't too optimistic when we launched in brilliant sunshine, warm temperatures and water that was high and stained from heavy rains a couple of days before.

It turned out surprisingly well. The Johnsons fished with streamers — mostly a juvenile brown trout pattern with a gold, Mylar-tube body and brown deer hair wing — and caught 16 trout in six hours of fishing. Most were 10- to 12-inch rainbows. I stuck stubbornly to dry flies and caught five, mostly the same size but one 13- to 14-incher.

The streamers drew at least 20 follows from fish that wouldn't take, including one 20-inch brown, and I missed several strikes at the dry fly.

This is a neat stretch of river that gets overlooked by wading anglers, who concentrate on the more famous and shallower waters 20 miles upstream. But after what I saw with Mike Johnson, I'll be back below Mio with a kayak before August is half over, and I'll even break down and throw some streamers.

Johnson may be reached at 800-522-7829, 810-423-2010, or www.724-ruby.com/MJRG_index.htm.

Contact **ERIC SHARP** at 313-222-2511 or esharp@freepress.com.