



Light Lines

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Steelheading the Lower Niagara River By Aaron Shirly

Boat Control—The Critical link to boating more fish!

One cold January morning, as I backed my aluminum boat down the icy launch ramp to the lower Niagara River, I couldn't help but notice a strong wind blowing up-river. I immediately thought to myself "this is going to be a cold day of steelheading!" My good friend Joe and I established a game plan together as I started up my Honda, letting it warm up in the frigid winter waters. We came to the conclusion that targeting two drifts near the New York shoreline would be a good idea to keep out of the wind. It wasn't long after we started drifting that we realized avoiding the 40km/h winds would not be a possibility, so we decided to garb-up and brave the elements!



I recall lowering my Minn Kota Maxxum into the river and pointing my bow straight into the gale-force wind. I had to turn up the foot-pedal setting to maximum in order to properly present our baits in the most natural fashion, coinciding with the bottom current. The wind was so strong, that it was actually blowing us up-river slightly without any boat control. As we pretty much seemed to troll by all the other boats sitting still on the drifts, we boated steelhead after steelhead while others watched in almost disbelief. While other frustrated anglers who were drifting near us, one by one, slowly decided to leave that morning, Joe and I continued to consistently boat fish all day. We ended up with over thirty hook-ups during the course of that day, mostly fishing without any other boats around us.

So, what were we doing to have such success while others were struggling for a hit? It's quite simple actually – effective boat control. Steelhead ultimately prefer to have their food naturally drifting along with the bottom current in streams and rivers. If your

baits are not drifting along the bottom naturally, the fish will more than likely ignore your offerings. Float-anglers and fly-fisherman have known this for years, and capitalize on landing more fish with this knowledge in the smaller streams and rivers. If you think about it... why would a steelhead hit your bait that is unnaturally defying the current and/or drifting in an unnatural manner? This is especially true when drifting egg sacks, artificial eggs or flies. To my experience, this precision in obtaining boat control is not as required when using live shiners or baits with a lot of action, such as Kwikfish or jigs.



Effective Methods for Boat Control

To achieve matching a typical three-way rig drifting naturally with the bottom current, you must control your boat to adjust for the top currents and wind, while using the least amount of weight as possible. I most commonly use 1/2-ounce and 3/4-ounce weights on my rigs to steelhead the lower

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Credit River Anglers Association
Light Lines

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from all members and non-
members alike.

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News and Announcements

Highlights within CRAA!



CRAA Membership Corner:

CRAA welcomes a new membership coordinator to our ranks in Wayne Vierhout. Wayne was very active at the fishway and has jumped in with both feet to the CRAA membership portfolio. Many of you have likely heard from Wayne to collect missing e-mail addresses and update addresses and other information. Wayne will be sending out membership renewal reminders for those owing membership fees in the near future.

More members taking a leadership role

CRAA is pleased to announce a strong addition to our managing ranks recently. Take a look at the Executive team and you will see new names and new projects that have been created. CRAA is growing quickly and expanding our work so it is vital that we have more members step on board to manage projects and help coordinate our work. If you interested e-mail John at president@craa.on.ca.

CRAA Members receive a 10% discount at the retailers listed below on selected items!

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President's Update

John Kendell



In the early fall I truly love taking a walk at sites CRAA has planted in the past. Having done rehabilitation for so many years we have a long and growing list of extraordinary successes.

Up at Ted Hancock's farm in Glen Williams the north side of the river we planted in 1999 is loaded with poplars exceeding 50 feet, and pines and maples passing the 15-20 foot mark. Even the massive area around Steeles Avenue is coming along. With successive plantings from 2000-2005 the site has several new forests and thousands of trees growing and starting to shade the river. Streetsville Park is another favorite close to home for me. Where the grass was once cut like a fairway in 2000 now there is a forest, with enough cover deer have started to move in.

Truly amazing what a group of organized anglers can do in their spare time! Well Done CRAA!

Niagara Steelheading. By Aaron Shirley

Niagara River from my boat, employing the heavier weights for the faster drifts. I have found the best indication of what the bottom current is doing is not as complicated as you may be thinking...basically, I watch what my fishing line is doing. If I see my line going under the boat, off to the side, or drifting away from the boat, I know I have to start controlling the boat with the trolling motor. For example: when I see my line wandering in any specific direction, I use the foot-pedal on my bow-mount trolling motor to turn the 'arrow' at the top of the trolling motor in the direction my line is wandering and push the 'momentary switch' at the desired speed setting to maintain bottom contact. When I have bottom contact and the line is more vertical again, I will take my foot off the momentary switch and drift free. When my line starts to wander again, I repeat the process (sometimes consistently in windy conditions or heavy current). I also try to keep my line as vertical as possible in the water, being careful not to let out too much line (having a lot of line out will cause you to snag the bottom more often, and you will also lose sensitivity for those subtle takes). You do not necessarily have to use a bow-mount trolling motor for effective boat control; however, I believe it is the best tool. I have used a tiller outboard and electric motor to achieve boat control, but they are limited in my opinion. Effective boat control will take some time to master (especially in the heavier currents), but learning to have precise control of your drifting methods will be well worth the effort undertaken!

Equipment, Rigs & Baits

I prefer to use quality 8 ½-foot, medium power rods with a fast action for steelheading the Niagara River. I believe

the fast action of the rods help with 'feeling bottom' and detecting subtle takes from wary steelhead. Furthermore, the length of the rods still allow for the flexibility needed



for fighting feisty steelies. I also like to use high quality spinning reels with excellent drag systems, such as Daiwa's Regal, spooled with Maxima 10-pound test for a main line. I then tie my main line to a small black three-way swivel, choosing to employ three-way rigs to bounce naturally along the bottom. I then knot on a 4- to 7-foot leader of 4- to 6-pound Maxima Ultragreen, with a small sedge, specialist or egg hook tied on the business end of the leader, with the longer, lighter leaders and smaller hooks applied during clear water conditions. An 8-pound, 8- to 12-inch dropper line with a ½-ounce or ¾-ounce weight rounds out the rig. I personally use my own home made weight system for the Niagara River, though the standard pencil lead weights or slinkies are a good option. I use roe bags for bait in various colours and sizes quite extensively, but also utilize skein chunks, corkies, yarn, Exude single eggs, streamers, Kwikfish (with 8-pound Ultragreen leaders), emerald shiners, Exude night-crawlers, finesse and trout worms with good success!

So, next time you're planning an action-packed trip to the lower Niagara River for steelhead, make sure to charge up those deep-cycle batteries, choose appropriate attire and take along a large thermos with a hot beverage... hey, it's hard to improve on a day full of steelies, but having all the right equipment never hurts!

Fish On!



Fish ladder and transfer highlights from 2007 by John Kendell

With another great year nearing a close and as many of you know first hand, CRAA has been busy making sure our fishing and environment is better in the future. Here are just a few highlights. There are so many it is becoming difficult to keep them all in memory. In the February newsletter we will recount all the going's on by CRAA.

After the fishing shows and winter fishing action it was down to work as Spring started in late March. Rick Symanski, Dave Leschied and Justin Elia managed the fishway project under my guidance.

This year however was different than past years. For the first time, thanks to pushing from both Louis and I at the Fisheries Management Meetings CRAA was permitted to live transfer **ALL wild steelhead** past Norval to Black and Silver Creeks. This meant more time so we could collect more fish to transfer. In the end, roughly 800 wild steelhead were moved by trailer and not one died from the process.

To recount one night of pandemonium, Rick and Justin opened the ladder and called me saying it was loaded. The guys immediately started loading the first CRAA tank on the rented pick up truck with only five volunteers in total. Of course the night we had 400 fish was the night we only had 9 volunteers in total. Louis and I had been meeting at Queen's Park with MNR staff over issues such as VHS and lowering limits when we got the call they need help. We fought our way home

through rush hour traffic and hitched the CRAA trailer to my truck and went down. Dave and another volunteer had already left with 60 fish and the guys had another 100 tagged and ready when we pulled in at 5:30. We loaded another 90 (the max our two tanks on the trailer can hold—that is roughly 900 pounds of wild steelhead) and headed for the hills—Halton Hills. We passed Dave on his way for another load as we neared Georgetown.

Louis and I arrived at our first drop zone and proceeded to net and dump our fish. Now 90 fish is no easy task, but within 30 minutes we were headed to Streetsville. The guys at the ladder called and said they were still netting 5 at a time from the ladder and by now it was 8:30 PM. We arrived back at 9 PM and started to load. Finally the lift had slowed down and we cleaned out the last of them at 9:30 and hit the road with another load of 90 fish. In the mean time Dave had already left with another 70



crammed in his tank for his second trip too. Andrew, one of our volunteers who had been processing and tagging could not squeeze his hand together from holding so many fish and everyone was wet, cold and excited. 10 PM rolls around and while the Rick and Justin close up the ladder in the dark Louis and I are dropping another 90 fish at a bridge in the dark in Georgetown. Over 300 fish moved that night, and over 400 lifted in total!!!!!!

Membership and Renewal Information

Are you concerned about the future health of the beautiful Credit River and Bronte Creek watersheds including all their tributaries? Do you enjoy fishing, hiking and other activities in the valleys? Do you want a cleaner river, better fishing and a cleaner environment for the future? Then you should join CRAA NOW. CRAA's address is on page 2.

New Member Fees: **1 year \$25.00** **3 years \$55.00** (Please enclose cheque payable to CRAA)
Membership Renewal : **1 year \$20.00** **3 years \$50.00**

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