

**Derby City Fly Fishers  
Michigan Anglers Basecamp Scouting Report**

**November 7-11 2024**

Derby City Fly Fishers, as well as Northern Kentucky Fly Fishers, and Buckeye United Fly Fishers were invited to send a couple of representatives from their respective club to visit Camp Rotary, in Clare Michigan, to determine if it would be an adequate base camp for fishing trips near or local to Central Michigan similar to what has been done with other Boy Scout of America camps such as our trip to Cody Wyoming.

Brian Kaluzny In myself were asked to represent Derby City Fly Fishers for this event. The Michigan Anglers Base Camp is being developed by a commercial venture associated with the Michigan Boy Scouts to utilize the camp facilities during the majority of the year that the Boy Scouts do not occupy this camp. This effort is to help determine the worthiness and acceptance of the fly-fishing community as well as other organizations and agencies to take advantage of these facilities during the non-occupied parts of their year.

As far as the facility goes, in my opinion, this Boy Scouts of America camp is top notch. The facilities are clean and well maintained, and there is road access or hiking trails clearly marked throughout the entire camp. Plus, there is full access to Beebe Lake (55 acres) on the property.

We stayed in the Pike Lodge which was located at the northwest corner of the camp. The Lodge had double bunks to sleep 24, but the trip organizers are limiting the lodge to 10 to 12 occupants. The Lodge had four bathrooms available, and a kitchen area with a refrigerator, sink, and a stove. The building was clean, with ample parking.

We were directed to the Kepadshowink Lodge for registration. We were greeted by Marilyn Costigan, the Senior Development Director of Mitten Outdoor Adventures & Events. We signed a couple of forms, and was presented with a "swag" bag, and given directions to the Pike Lodge.

After dropping our stuff off and checking out the other parts of the camp, Dinner was scheduled for 6:30 that evening. We were very impressed with the dining hall which was a short walk by path, or three quarters of a mile away if you drive. The facility overall would hold 250 to 300 people and the kitchen has the equipment and the staff to serve three meals a day plus snacks.

The staff went out of their way make us feel welcome and to accommodate any dietary needs we requested. The buffet style setup had a cold and a hot food section, and there was enough presented to the 10 of us to feed 20 people. The food was excellent quality the entire time we were there.

We opted not to do lunch at the camp, so the staff set up a cafeteria line for us to make a to-go lunch consisting of cold cuts, vegetables, fruits, chips, desserts, and we could make requests for anything else we may need.

After dinner our group got together and decided that we could cover more ground if we split up. So, we split into four individual groups, Brian and I had decided that the Rifle River would be our starting point.

We would come back at the end of every day and give a report to the group. We had a conference call with a local fishing expert and compared notes with the other teams.

Each day we would pick a different part of the state to explore as in the river descriptions are in this report.

## Attendees:

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### General Notes and Thoughts:

Pay close attention to your GPS as most roads are not marked well with upcoming signs in a 55 mile an hour zone. Also be aware that there is a lot of wild life around the roads. Keep your eyes open.

Central Michigan has a higher percentage of dirt / sand roads. They are on the maps, so have faith.

The city of Clare, where the base camp is located, currently has no real marked fishing streams in the entire county. But a lot of lakes. That said, this area was not covered by the original map.

You have to make a choice to either have a full breakfast and get on the road after 7:30 am, versus being on your own for breakfast for early fishing because of the drive to the nearest rivers.

However, there is a lot of lake fishing very close to the camp with canoe and kayak access as well as many with boat launches, we did not check in on the Michigan laws for out-of-state boating (if a permit was required) but we did see that some lakes did not allow trolling motors.

Michigan rivers have different laws for access and tackle on different rivers, at different times of the year.

It would be wise to take note of local hospitals in each area visited.

I found that you need several tools for scouting that need to be used at the same time to take advantage of the travel time.

Michigan DNR app on my phone using the maps.

The Anglers Basecamp map on their website.

And the DNR website map. (Different from the phone App.)

## Day One

# Rifle River

### Rifle River Recreation Area (Overall Rating \*\*)

Ease of Access	*****
Parking	*****
Water Access	*****
Facilities	*****
River Bottom	***
Fishing Experience	*

The Rifle River Recreation Area (fee to enter) was the northern most point of the river that we explored. It is a large recreational area with George Lake being the center of the activities. We did not research the fish-ability of the lake, but concentrated on the river access that ran from the lake. While the access was great, and facilities everywhere, we both felt that since this is basically a State Park, that the river access points would be very crowded and potentially over fished In May. One final thought, is that while this facility has parking everywhere, there was no parking near the river access site, and there were signs posted that you could not park on the road. We did not see any parking within a couple hundred yards of the main access point. (Please Note.... NO MOTORS, INCLUDING TROLLING MOTORS are allowed at the lake.





### Rifle River Sage Lake Road Access (Overall Rating \*\*)

Ease of Access	*****
Parking	*****
Water Access	****
Facilities	*
River Bottom	***
Fishing Experience	*

The Sage Road Access Point was easy to find, and easy to access parking, with room for a dozen cars or more. Water access was easy at the canoe takeout. But other than the takeout, there were steep banks around the access site that would make wading hard. All of the river that we could see was a maximum of 20' or less across.

The river has a rock bottom with algae covered grass and medium to large rocks. There were a lot of trees and debris in the water that would make fishing difficult near the access point. There is a gated road that you can walk along the river to access the water further upstream. But the narrowness of the river, the steep banks, the overhanging trees and brush, makes this location very hard to fish.

On the south side of the overpass, it is private land, and posted as no trespassing. The location was one hour in 13 minutes from Basecamp At 64.2 miles.





### Rifle River at Twin Lake Access (Overall Rating \*\*)

Ease of Access	*****
Parking	***
Water Access	****
Facilities	*
River Bottom	***
Fishing Experience	*

The Twin Lake Road Access point is not on the map but we came across it looking for the Peters Road Access Point. The access road turns into a sand road from the main road. There are makeshift camps along both sides of the road which I discovered was very common in Central Michigan.

The road ended in a loop at the water access with parking for eight to 10 vehicles in the grass. There were no facilities. But there was a canoe takeout. Similar to the Sage Road access point, there was a lot of debris in the water but the river was wider measuring about 15-30 feet from our view. As in the previous review, this access point has a lot of posted properties nearby. You have to pay attention to where you are or if you're in the water, and where you get out. The river bottom in the condition of the river was the same as Sage Rd.



**Rifle River at Peters Road Access (Overall Rating \*\*\*\*)**

Ease of Access	*****
Parking	*****
Water Access	*****
Facilities	*
River Bottom	*****
Fishing Experience	****

The Peters Road Access Point was by far the best fishing area that we found in our exploration of the Rifle River. There is drive-down water access on the west side of the bridge, as well as gravel parking on both sides of the road. The north side of the bridge Has the easiest access to the water. But on the south side of the bridge the river opens up and from our view from the road looks to be 40 or 50 feet wide.

The water was very wadeable, with a rock bottom and clear water. It looked like most of the property on the east side of the bridge is posted as no trespassing. A unique feature of this point compared to the others that we have seen on this river was a lack of debris, and a patch of reeds that I had not seen at any of the other points. Brian and I both concurred that this was the best access point of the Rifle River that we discovered so far.





## Day Two

# Rifle River

### Rifle River at Cole Base Camp BSA (Overall Rating \*\*)

Ease of Access	*****
Parking	*****
Water Access	*****
Facilities	****
River Bottom	*
Fishing Experience	**

Our initial impression of this access point was that we came across the best site yet on the Rifle River. This location is located at the Cole Canoe Base Boy Scout camp. The camp was very similar to Camp Rotary and very clean. The roads were well marked to the access point. There is plenty of parking, and facilities near the water access. There is even a cable bridge that you can cross to get to the other side.

The bottom quality of this section of the river however was not very good. While the water was very wadeable and looked to max out at about three feet deep, it was a mud and silt bottom. We saw no structure whatsoever that would attract fish. And so far, it was the slowest moving section of the river that we saw.

If there is a positive to this location, it would be a very easy launch point to put in a canoe or a kayak in and travel the river in either direction to look for opportunities to fish.



**Au Sable River, South Branch at Smith Bridge (Overall Rating \*\*\*\*\*)**

Ease of Access	*****
Parking	*****
Water Access	*****
Facilities	*****
River Bottom	*****
Fishing Experience	*****

This location is by far the best location that we have experienced on this trip. There is easy access with nice facilities, with great water access to a beautiful Michigan River. It had a pure rock bottom and was flowing at a medium speed on this particular day. The access point has two clear areas that you can cast into the water with no trees behind you. That's the good news. The bad news is that we were told from another fisherman that we ran into, is that on a weekend in the summer, there may be up to 200 people fishing from that access point.

But fishing on this particular day, there was no one else in sight. The water was very clear with riffles in the middle of it. Brian scouted about a half mile downriver and did not discover any significant holes worth mentioning. We caught a total of four brown trout (my first of these species) in a very short time.

Wading is very easy at the access site; further downriver the banks are steeper and higher. You need to exercise caution getting in or out of the river as I can tell you from my own experience, that being completely submerged in 42-degree water was not the best part of my trip.





## Day Three

# Little Manistee River

### Little Manistee River Spencer Bridge Access Point (Overall Rating \*\*)

Ease of Access	***
Parking	***
Water Access	*****
Facilities	****
River Bottom	**
Fishing Experience	*

The Spencer Bridge access point was one of the more interesting points to find. The roads are very narrow as well as nothing but sand. You have to go past the dead-end sign and while there is no fishing posted at the bridge, there is an access point that you can pull off and park. The parking would only facilitate a few cars close to the water.

To me the Spencer Bridge Seemed more like a culvert. The river was only about 12 feet wide at this point, and about three feet deep. While the movement was good, it was hard to see the bottom as the water was dark. Interestingly enough, the water had stair step access from the parking lot. And there were bathrooms at this facility.



**Little Manistee River Indian Bridge on Irons Road (Overall Rating \*\*)**

Ease of Access	***
Parking	***
Water Access	*****
Facilities	****
River Bottom	**
Fishing Experience	*

While this access point had paved roads for access, it was not well marked with only a small brown sign 3.2 miles from the access site. While parking was adequate, and the water was accessible by three different sets of stairs, the water overall was not impressive. The river was narrow and it looked like it would be hard to wade.

Public access ends at the last set of stairs and beyond that is posted private property. While the water is accessible, we personally would not pick this site to fish.





### Little Manistee River Johnson Road Bridge (Overall Rating \*)

Ease of Access	*
Parking	*
Water Access	*
Facilities	*
River Bottom	*
Fishing Experience	*

While this location was recommended by a guide at a fly shop, there is no parking and no water access visible from the road. It was the worst of the locations that we scouted, With the only thing of interest was the construction of a nudist to camp across the street from the bridge.





# Tippy Dam (Overall Rating \*\*\*\*)

Ease of Access	*****
Parking	*****
Water Access	***
Facilities	*****
River Bottom	*****
Fishing Experience	*****

While we did not venture the 100 plus steps to the tailwaters of the dam, this area by far had the best parking and facilities of any of the sites that we had visited. They have park-maintained bathrooms and concrete steps to the water. Like most tailwaters of any major dam the area has a great reputation for fishing with several access points further downstream from the dam.

And like any location being fed from a dam, caution must be observed for sluice opening or any power generation schedule associated with that dam. It would be wise to research both of these before any visit.

## Final Thoughts

Overall, it would be wonderful if this base camp were one hour further north from its current location. On the plus side there is water everywhere in an opportunity to fish around every corner. On the minus side, if an angler is looking to fish only moving water, then there is a minimum one hour to one and ½ hour travel time to any marked water access location.

That said lakes are everywhere and most with kayak or canoe access. The lakes are stocked with large mouth, small mouth bass, pike, perch, and bluegill. Some of the sites mentioned require a Recreational Passport or a Golden Passport National Park / National Forrest Pass for parking.

You will need to get a Michigan fishing license, which in my opinion is very reasonable for out-of-state residents compared to other states that I have been to recently.

If you take your own boat, canoe, or kayak, you may be required to clean your boat and each lake before you can access the water. They are dealing with a lot of invasive species and are working very hard to prevent any further contamination.

In my opinion Michigan has a very odd set of rules for each one of their rivers. There is a rating system published in the rules and regulations that rate a river or stream 1 through 4, and these ratings can change during the year. It's a fisherman's responsibility to know these rules, when the dates are in effect, and where the geographic locations change on each individual river. There are also limitations on some tackle that can be used on an individual river. Adherence to these rules is a must.

If a visitor is considering using a guide service, you need to be aware that there are limitations on guide boats and personal watercraft on some of these rivers in certain time periods. You cannot assume that

you can launch and run a watercraft on any particular river at any particular time. You always need to check.

And speaking of using a guide, their schedules are filling up now for the spring and summer fishing season. It is highly recommended that if that is what you are wanting to do then you must book early.

We have been told that in May, that there are many hatches occurring later in the day. So, it may not be an issue not getting to the water first thing as the better fishing would be presumed to be in the late afternoon evening.

Any participants in this event must be aware that this camp will not be run by experienced fly fishers. If you need help with fishing issues or advice you will not get it at this camp. These folks are to help with our accommodations and meals, and operating as a base camp. That is why we are recommending this trip for experienced fishermen only.

The base camp has a decent Wireless Internet access available around the main buildings. And we were told in one of our follow-up meetings that there may be a separate wing available for women if they have enough participation and choose to want that option.

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Addendum: 11/21/2024

The folks at Red Cedars Fly Fishers (a local club) have identified additional waters that are within one hour of the base camp. These will be updated on the MABC interactive map.

Tittabawassee River  
Tobacco River  
Chippewa River  
Tamarack River  
Cedar River  
Clam River  
Middle Branch River