

Upper Illinois River Report – 09/16/2017 – by Phil Curtis

I had the opportunity to fish the Upper Illinois River with Kelly Brown. Kelly grew up on this river and is chocked full of stories about this river. I'm sure he will share some of them if you ask him. Anyway, Kelly invited me to fish with him and a few of his friends. In truth, Kelly had staged a mini Fly Fishing tournament as a birthday present for one of the friends. A great time was had by all.

On with the report. I left Owasso like a herd of turtles. One mishap after another had me leaving Owasso about the time I was supposed to meet up with Kelly. We were to meet at the Chewy Bridge on the Upper Illinois River and then drive upstream as far as we could before walking our favorite floating transportation upstream another half mile. I finally made it to the river, around 11:00am, where I found out that my electric pump had malfunctioned which meant that I had to inflate my pontoons by hand. An hour later, I was walking my pontoon up river to meet with Kelly and company.

They were already in the process of catching fish, so I got busy scouting out a place to toss a fly. I started out with a, heavily weighted, articulated black marabou leech. The Smallmouth were hanging out in the expected places. By that, I mean that they were holding behind structure like large rocks, logs and root balls, cruising the bottom of deep runs and waiting in riffle tail outs.

I'm not going to lie. If you were solely interested in catching numbers of fish, the most productive way to do this is to use a spin cast rod and a heavily weighted slider style weighted hook with some kind of soft plastic crawfish imitation. But, I've been there, done that and was looking for more of a challenge which equates to a fun time for me.

I picked up my first fish on the Black articulated leech and then proceeded to lose it on the bank across the river. (I got a little too aggressive with my cast.) So, I switched to an Olive colored articulated leech and picked up the next fish. After a lot more casts, I decided that I needed something heavier that would get down to the bottom. My problem was that I had brought my 5 weight instead of the 7 weight. I would much rather use the 7 weight to cast heavy flies. Anyway, I switched to a Chartreuse and White Clouser Minnow and used it to catch another 5 or 6 fish. The Clouser was, definitely, the right fly for the day.

If you decide to chase Smallmouth with your fly rod, I recommend a 6 or 7 weight rod using heavy flies or using a sink tip with lighter flies. Your choice. Also, when setting the hook, use a strip set before lifting your rod tip. Tight Lines and good fishing!!



