



The wilds of Labrador, northeast Canada.....the Minipi River watershed. One of those rare places on earth where things still are as they were hundreds, maybe thousands, of years ago. The large mayflies and caddis still hatch in overwhelming numbers and the giant brook trout still come to the surface to feast on them. The toothy pike still chase all the moving creatures, including the brookies, leaving their teeth marks as their calling card. It can be a beautiful environment although at times harsh, especially brutal during their winters. This is a long trek from the west coast and what draws us back every other year is the chance to stalk and cast dry flies to sighted trout of 5 to 8 pounds in a wilderness that “is the way it was.”



Over the last 15 years, we have made eight trips to this remote area. It seems as if every trip encountered some different conditions and circumstances, each with its own challenges. One of the attractions of revisiting a destination you’ve enjoyed many times in the past is that you begin to develop a sense for the fishery and its challenges. You can evaluate situations and conditions and just maybe draw some meaningful conclusions (of course, guessing as to why fish respond in the way they do is just speculation, but with many years to draw from, at least the speculations are more considered).

Unusual conditions for this year’s trip were caused by record hot temperatures through mid June (this to contrast our 2010 trip when they had the wettest June in history and waters everywhere were the highest ever). The result of those higher than normal June temps was twofold:

1. The brook trout is a cold water oriented species and prefers temps in the mid 50’s. It was high 60’s and even 70 degrees in many of our favorite sections. The warm water in many of our preferred spots appeared to have the brookies somewhere else pursuing cooler temperatures.
2. hatches came off earlier than traditional times. We benefited from this in the later part of our week as the massive green drakes, which don’t normally hatch until late July or early August, were in full bloom.

(photos, l to r: Jim Andras casts across the outlet of Anne Marie, Royce and Bill Hudspeth flank Alisa Andras before boarding the float plane for a fly out, Jeff Reinke departing the dock for a day on the water in the traditional Anne Marie canoe, son Scott and Gary Neal admire a nice 6.5# brookie.)



Lorraine and Jack Cooper have three lodges on the Minipi system and have protected this fishery for over 30 years. We returned to our favorite at Anne Marie and the group who joined us for the week offered a variety of

experience. Joining my son, Scott, and I as Minipi veterans were Jeff Reinke and Ron Miller. Globe hopping angler, Jim Andras, and his gracious fly fishing wife, Alisa, were with us. Also, brothers Bill and Royce Hudspeth - they began fly fishing adventure travel together a few years ago and were great “advanced beginners”. Gary Neal, a long time friend and novice in pursuing trophy sight fishing experiences, rounded out the group.

(photos, l to r: Bill with 7.5# brookie, aerial shot of some of our favorite waters, brown drake, the larger green drakes dot the water joining the browns late in our week)



The Minipi watershed is a series of shallow lakes and large ponds with sections of river connecting them. There are massive weed beds which are alive with bug life which provide the prolific hatches that are as much an attraction as the giant brookies. The lakes have a current moving through them – not traditional lakes. The larger fish, for the most part, are found in the slow moving “lakes” where they can feast on the life cycle of the drakes, caddis, and other mayflies (over 25 species of mayflies have been verified here). The smaller brookies find refuge in the riffles where they can avoid the pike and the jaws of the adult brookies.

(photos, l to r: 5 h.p. outboards power the canoes to different areas – a highlight is stalking large cruising brookies from a guide-paddled canoe, a walk through the black spruce forest across caribou moss is a part of some of the portages, a brookie flank (gold flecks, blue circles with red dots in the middle, white rimmed fins – beautiful fish!), fishing the inlets and outlets of connector rivers is often productive)



(photos, 1st row, l to r: Royce with 8# brookie, young male moose, pike, fish are often rising right through dark)



(photos, above, l to r: the fish are healthy and full bodied – we have weighed fish that were 6# and only 20” long,

Scott and I under the wing, storm clouds building – weather can change quickly, 6# brookie)

This year, there were float plane fly out options available to some areas of the watershed that had river sections that provided a more traditional type “walk ‘n wade” river fishery. Although the average size of the fish was considerably smaller in these rivers than the “non traditional lakes,” good numbers of two to four pound fish provided lots of action. Jeff did take a six pounder in one of the rivers and had other larger fish attack a big streamer pattern.

(photos, 1st row, l to r: Alisa casts in the “Gorge”, Alisa with river brookie, small can still be beautiful, float plane)



(photos, above, l to r: Royce with small pike followed by river fish with Jim and Bill, Royce wading)

The average size fish from our 2010 trip was larger than any previous trip in the past 15 years. Forty-three fish were released over six pounds on that trip. This year, the average size was also incredible (not including the smaller river fish that were taken on five optional fly outs). As the green drake hatch joined with the brown drakes later in our week, the big fish became very active in some sections of Anne Marie. Of the 17 fish taken by Scott and I during our last two days, 15 of them were over six pounds. All but one of those fish were taken on dry flies.



A personal highlight: this trip provided my personal best 8.5# brookie and it happened in the classic Minipi style. On a day when Scott and I did the portage to Minonipi (which includes a 20 minute walk through the forest and

tundra-like caribou moss) and fished an area named “Big Hairy”, above the rapids, the brown drakes began popping in the early afternoon. There was a medium breeze blowing creating waves about eight inches high which made it difficult to spot the brookies sipping the drakes off the surface. A commotion about 100 feet to my right turned out to be a large brookie aggressively taking down brown drakes – the body of the fish was visible in the trough between the waves as she continually did a head to tail roll while taking the drakes off the surface. As I watched her, she turned toward us, continually rising while moving into my range. The cast landed about two feet in front of her and the fly disappeared in a large swirl. As we worked the fish near the boat for the first time, Scott exclaimed, “Dad, that’s the largest brookie I’ve ever seen.” The stakes went up, the tension increased and, fortunately, everything held together, including this angler, and the guide got her into the net. With the boat bouncing in the chop, we weighed it twice – one time at 9 pounds and one at 8.5 and settled on calling it 8.5# (with Scott below). It was our fourth eight-plus brookie in the last 15 years – and third in the last two trips.



The new lodge at Anne Marie (below) was completed three years ago. All the building materials had to be flown in and it has the flavor of the province it resides in. The original Anne Marie Lodge was one of the most traditional in the realm of fly fishing, housing over the years most of fly fishing’s legendary anglers. However, age and the harsh winters had taken their toll on the old lodge, and the new one is a welcomed host in its wilderness surrounding.



Booking a trip: the prime time is a narrow window on the Minipi and there are many anglers who rebook the same weeks each year making space difficult to get during the best dry fly time. Best plan very early, 10 – 12 months out. Most likely, we’ll be returning again in 2014, and if so, we’ll be making our reservations during the next few months to be sure we can get the week we want for our group.

Photo credits: banner photo – Bill Hudspeth; Alisa and Jim Andras; Royce and Bill Hudspeth.

Either phone or drop us an e-mail if you have questions or would like more information about any of our destinations.

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