

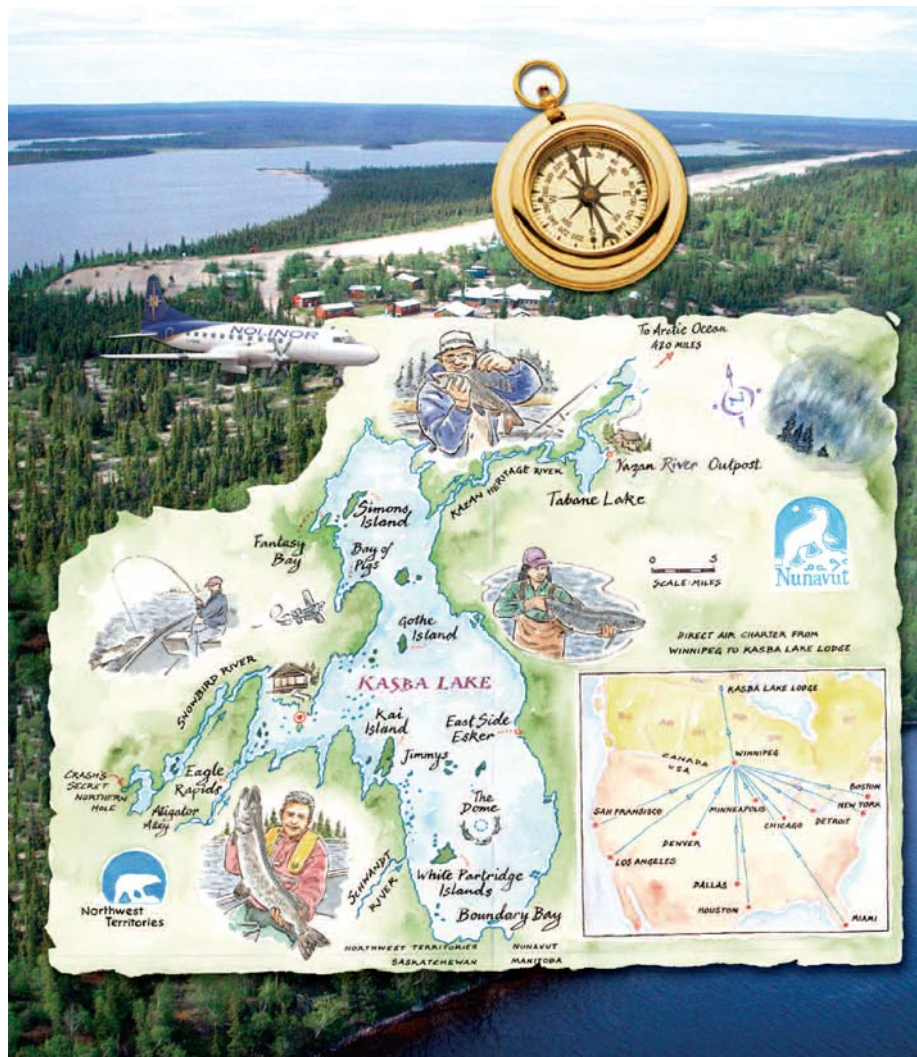


Northern Pike, Grayling and Lake Trout on the Fly: Triple Fun in the Land of the Midnight Sun

By Jim Hine

Overview, Logistics

2 hours north of Winnipeg, Manitoba at the intersection of the Northwest Territories and the First Nation's land of Nunavut, 150 miles from the nearest road, is Kasba Lake, home to triple trophy fly fishing for Northern Pike, Lake Trout and Arctic Grayling.



Doug, Rob, and Mike Hill, the founders and owners of the Kasba Lake lodge, (the only lodge on the lake), have managed it as a catch and release fishery for over 20 years. Although the majority of the fisherman have traditionally been of the hardware type, fly fisherman are becoming a much larger percentage of the guests, at Kasba and also at many of the other quality fisheries in Northern Canada. And with good reason, as the fly has proven to be an extremely effective, often superior, and certainly more exhilarating method for pursuing all three species.

We flew in to Winnipeg the evening before the 9 day trip then caught the lodge's charter turboprop early the next morning for the two hour flight to Kasba, landing on the only large airstrip for hundreds of miles.



By noon we were on the water with our Scotty, our guide, a physical ed teacher in Toronto in the off season. Most of the fishing is done from very stable 18 foot aluminum boats with 20 hp outboards and good casting deck. We did some shore stalking and wading for Grayling and rising Lake Trout.

Northern Pike:



Initially our primary focus was sight casting for large pike with poppers and streamers- we booked our late June/early July trip to coincide with the best opportunities for big pike in shallow water- they come in to the bays to warm themselves after a long winter under the ice. By mid to late season, there is still plenty of action for the smaller (24-30") fish in the bays, but you need to go deeper with sink lines for the big boys.

We used 7 and 9 weight rods, with floating line for the poppers and sink tip for the streamers. Pike are not particularly choosy about flies; the larger and more garish the better. The popper we found most effective was one we called "the Jamaican":



Weed less is best as the big fish are often sitting right in the cabbage in less than 3 feet of water. Steel leaders are essential- these fish have razor sharp teeth. To save their digits the Canadian guides have perfected a technique for hook removal that includes jaw spreaders and long nosed pliers.

The surface strikes are something to behold, these are top of the food chain predators; they literally explode in your face in pursuit of anything that moves.



Over the course of the 4 days we spend pursuing Northern's, we boated at least 100 fish, 40% of which were over 30". A trophy is considered 38" or larger- we landed 8 of those, the largest at 41". We spent most of our time hunting pike in the bays on the main lake, but for change of pace we did one fly out to Bradford Lake, where we also did extremely well, despite the nasty weather that day.

Lake Trout:

The biggest surprise of the trip was the quality of the fly fishing for lake trout. Although we had been told it was a great lake trout fly fishery, we still harbored image of downriggers with hardware for salmon sized Lakers. Which is still how most of the really big ones (over 20 lbs) are caught, but we were astounded by the nearly constant action for 3-10 lb lake trout on streamers and dries. All day long we could get into scrappy fish, both sight and blind casting streamers over reefs and points.





Lake trout will hit a variety of streamers, including my personal favorite (just because of the name) the Purple Egg Sucking Leech.



But Clousers and almost any other good baitfish imitations will draw strikes.



In the evenings and during calm moments of the day there are great opportunities for dry fly action for rising fish. Caddis and mayflies all are effective. I am told not many people have caught Lake Trout on dry flies- this is the place to do it.



Taff Price, a Kasba veteran, reports that later in the season there is also another amazing surface opportunity for Lakers: “The most exciting time for casting to Lakers is during the Cisco minnow rise. This rise is indicated by the hyper activity of the Arctic Terns. A white coloured streamer on a floating line fished into the turmoil of thrashing water, diving terns and slashing rises from the trout, will bring you fish after fish anything from three to 14lbs.” We used 5-6 wt for dry flies, and 7 and 9 wt for the streamers.

Artic Grayling

The fishery up here where fly fishing clearly outstrips hardware is the Artic Grayling action on the Kazaan River. (rare mottled 3 lb Grayling)





Andrew with 2.5lb Grayling

The outflow river for Kasba, the Kazaan can be reached via the lodge's DeHaviland Beaver in about 15 minutes, or via boat in a bit over an hour- though the ride can get dicey, we were told, if the wind kicks up and the whitecaps roll on the lake.

The Beaver can also be a bit treacherous if weather blows in (we did have to abort one fly out in midair when thunderheads impeded us) or when the pilot lets the 18 year old kid take the stick:



We had great action in the riffles and rapids nymphing with prince and hares ear bead heads. In the rapids closest to the lake we lost at least half a dozen grayling when 20+ pound Lakers grabbed them. The Lake Trout have learned to hang out in those rapids for an easy meal. We almost scored the rare "double trophy on a single line" (3 lb. grayling, 20 pound Laker) when the latter inhaled the former which had inhaled our nymph. We valiantly fought the combo for 30 minutes on the 6 wt with 4x, and had them partially in

the undersized net, but then lost them, to the chagrin of Scotty who would have most certainly gotten a lot of free rounds that night from the other guides if we had bagged those trophies. (Might have to try some Grayling nymphing with a 9wt and 20lb test next time).

The most fun with the Grayling was on the dry. Though we were early in the season (surface action apparently picks up as the season progresses, the water warms, and the hatches increase), on our second day on the river we got into some flats with dozens of rising fish. The action was non-stop with both elk hair caddis and parachute adams. One of the other fly fishing guests at the lodge had spent a week downstream on the river (where warmer water brought on prolific hatches); he reported the dry fly fishing simply as “Biblical”.

Over the two days we spent on the river we landed 40+ grayling over 2 lbs, 15 over three pounds, and one 5 pound whitefish. We used 4-6 wt rods, with floating line. Kasba has an outpost cabin further down the Kasaan which would be great base for pursuing Grayling in earnest- there are also pike and Lakers in the smaller lakes along the river, so would have multiple options to augment Grayling.

Miscellaneous:

The weather in Northwest Territories can be very volatile. In one day we had a 38 degree, blustery morning give way to a 75 degree flat calm sunny afternoon (the first and third Laker pictures above are both from that day). But the dramatic weather can lead to some amazing sunsets and cloud formations.





Late night sunset- 20 hours of sunlight in late June, early July.

The bugs can also be biblical, especially early in the season. Although much lighter on the main lake, in the smaller bays and on the shore at the fly outs they could be fierce. We used head nets for the worst of them.

These trips can also be great for the “mixed marriage”- a fly fisher and a gear fisher. The fly caster can be working from the front deck, while the spinning gear can be used from the middle. We scored many doubles in this fashion. We also did double fly casting from front and back, though that can get a little tricky. When you really get lazy, trolling flies on sinking line and trolling spoon on gear almost always hook up with Lakers, and the occasional pike.

The guides are very dedicated; although not every one is well versed in fly fishing techniques, they all know how to get you into fish. And they are great cooks- we had some amazing shore lunches of fresh pike and lake trout (the only fish killed at Kasba are for shore lunch). There are a few enhancements I would make to increase the “fly friendliness” including addition of quiet electric trolling motors for stealthy pursuit of rising Lakers, fly rod holders on the boats at the outposts (I broke two rods due to my own clumsiness and lack of safe rod holders), and more emphasis on the evening dry fly Laker fishing. But you definitely don’t have to double haul 75 feet to do extremely well here on the fly.

As to accommodations, for being in the middle of no-where, the lodge and cabin accommodations are outstanding. The two of us had our own 2 bedroom cabin with daily maid and morning coffee service. The main lodge has a great bar and eating area, and the food is top notch. The clientele range from blue collar to blue blood:



Because it has the only runway in town (or for at least 200 miles) and best dock, Kasba is a bustling hub for other outfitters and commercial groups in the summer.



Lodge's Beaver and a visiting Otter



Top of the line Turbo Otter- work crew transport

Package and Pricing:

Standard Kasba trips are either 5 days or 9 days, with 4 and 8 days of fishing (the plane flies every four days). 2008 prices for were \$3395 and \$4595 per person respectively. Includes transportation from Winnipeg, meals, accommodations, guide, and boat. Tips and fly outs are extra- fly outs averaged \$250-300 per person- there are about 5 or 6 standard fly outs. But they are definitely optional (though recommended for Kasaan grayling to maximize fishing time and minimize spinal damage from long bumpy boat ride).

The 2008 price will be honored for all 2009 reservations deposited by 10/15/08.

Some special offerings:

- fly fishing seminar week – 6/28
- kids 16 and under are 35% off
- couples week (ladies discounted) – 7/30
- outpost camp on the Kasaan River
- wilderness canoe trips available

Since the flight to Kasba is at 6:30 am, you must fly in to Winnipeg the night before. Would recommend you not take the last flight in, as if you miss the charter due to delayed or cancelled flight, it is four days to the next one (or a very large private plane charter bill, if even possible). We came dangerously close to having this happen when our plane was delayed in Chicago until almost midnight.

