



Minipi River, Labrador



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We are in the ninth year of publishing our monthly newsletter with updates on the great fly fishing venues, trip reports and insights for our traveling fly fishers. We’ve been to most locations and pride ourselves on our ability to research new destinations. Whatever unbiased information on timing and locations we can provide comes at the same cost to you as booking direct – i.e., NO EXTRA COST.

WILDS OF LABRADOR – THE WAY IT WAS IS THE WAY IT IS



The black spruce trees still cover the shorelines and hills.....the caribou moss envelopes the ground with a foam-like, spongy surface. The mayflies hatch in incredible numbers that blanket the water. Outsized brook trout look up, not down, for their next meal and brookies of 5 to 8+ pounds are seen porpoising as they cruise and inhale the mayflies. The small brookies hide in the riffles, safe from the predatory pike and their larger brethren. It has been the same for centuries, probably eons, in the Minipi River watershed in Labrador, far northeastern Canada. It still is the way it was.....that can't be said of many places on earth anymore. (Jeff Reinke with 8 pound male brookie at left)

The “au natural” aspect was an important reason why we were drawn back to this wilderness destination for our 9th time. But, just as important to us, was the chance to stalk and sight cast to giant brookies as they feed on the surface.

Labrador seems to collect all the world’s weather – in all forms, good and bad. The week before we arrived saw a stretch of days with temps from the mid 80’s to 90 degrees. As we left San Francisco for Goose Bay, Labrador, people living on the Atlantic seaboard were bracing for tropical storm Arthur. Arthur continued moving north up the east coast and arrived with us in Labrador. The accompanying low pressure system had a large impact on the first half of our fishing week. Even though some large fish (to 8.5 pounds) were taken our first three days, our numbers were way off due to the impact of the weather system.

Photos below, l to r: Son Scott and 7.75# male. Fishing a pool in a short section of riffles connecting two larger bodies of water. Andrew and Jim Hine – a father/son team with our group returning for their second trip. Guide with Arctic Char.....landlocked Arctic Char join pike as additional species in the watershed.



Our fourth day, after Arthur had dissipated, the fishing exploded headlined by some of our anglers doing a fly out to the Little Minipi River. How do you define a “brook trout explosion” on the Minipi? Must use numbers to do it.....our group took 37 weighed fish over 3 pounds for the day, almost all of them over 5#, including several at 7+ pounds and two over 8.....and virtually all of them taken on dry flies! Steve Simco and Jeff Reinke, fishing partners for the week, led the way with an incredible total of over 90 pounds of brookies released for the day.

Photos below, l to r: Steve was the only first timer at the lodge during our week and he led the group in numbers of fish over 3# (i.e., “book fish” – each fish is weighed and recorded). Andrew took his first 5# trout on the trip. Scott with an 8.5# hen. Lots of water – large areas of shallow lakes with a mild current connected by short rivers; stalking large cruising brookies from a quiet, guide paddled canoe is high level excitement.



Photos below, l to r: The mayfly and caddis hatches are an important part of the Minipi story, especially the large drakes, both brown and green. Left, a brown drake emerges from his nymph shuck – shucks cover the water during heavy hatches. Brown drakes litter the surface – this hatch usually begins in the early afternoon. A few days after hatching, massive spinner falls provide fodder for another feeding frenzy. Healthy 7# brookie.



Photos below, l to r: Given that it is a remote, wilderness lodge, Anne Marie Lodge is special. Jeff with another beautiful male. The float plane is used for transportation in this roadless wilderness. Fish on in the mouth of the Little Minipi River – we saw a lot of gray skies during our week.



Early booking: Like many of the world’s top destinations, getting space during the prime hatch time on the Minipi River requires booking very early, usually over a year ahead due to the large repeat following this fishery has.

WHY IS PERMIT FISHING SO DIFFICULT?

There are salt water fly rodders who have been trying for years to take their first permit.....and are still looking. Taking your first permit is one of fly roddings most memorable experiences. Below left is a photo of a smiling Tom Filippini with his first permit taken on a June Rising Tide trip in Belize accompanied by a group of friends celebrating a 40th birthday.



Why are permit such a difficult challenge? Having pursued permit all over the world for many years, I have experienced almost all the ways you can be frustrated and fail in this endeavor. I have heard it said that a penguin in Antarctica farted and it spooked a permit that an angler was stalking in Belize. That may be a little extreme.....here's my short list version of why they are so difficult.

- Panic set in as one of the two tailing permit we were stalking saw the shadow of the other, bolted for the deep, scaring the hell out of his partner who follows him.
- The winds are “down,” the water slick and the fish spook from the fly line in the air; plus, they seem to sense the skiff from 100 feet away.
- Winds are “up” making accurate casts a challenge, plus the slap of the chop on the hull of the skiff spooks the fish.
- I know the permit is using that big eye to measure the length of the crab legs on my fly, finding them half a millimeter shorter than he prefers.
- The set up is perfect, four tailing fish at 60 feet.....now headed for the depths spooked by the shadow of a circling frigate bird 500 feet above us.
- The cast was perfect, but while it was in the air, the erratically swimming (normal!) permit switched directions and the fly landed 10 feet behind him.
- The cast was perfect, but while in the air, the fish slowed to eat and the fly landed far in front of him and the line spooked him.
- “Buck fever” induced by watching that BIG black tail waving above the surface.....can't cast a lick!
- Crosswinds are heavy – fish just 50 feet away and feeding. Know I can make this cast. What is this crab fly doing stuck in my arse?
- The cast is perfect and lands a few feet in front of the slowly cruising permit who charges forward. The hook strikes home.....where did that yellow tail snapper come from?
- If we'd have seen that fish 2 seconds earlier, we would have had a good chance.

I'm sure that many of our readers, who have a lot of experience with permit, can add to this list. Why would someone go through the frustration of permit fishing? Very small chance of success and often very difficult casting situations with a quarry that is notorious for ignoring the casted fly? Of course, the challenge is an attraction for anglers who have already satisfied their desire for “numbers” and are looking for the ultimate fly rod objective. Plus, usually you are fishing in a spectacular marine environment. And, if you've ever seen that big black tail waving above the surface, signaling an aggressively feeding permit, you don't have to ask. Permit fishing – the most exciting way to fail with a fly rod in your hand!

A SUMMERTIME ASCENSION BAY REPORT

Over the years, our family has taken mid summer trips to Ascension Bay, both Casa Blanca and Playa Blanca. We found hot weather and often afternoon rain squalls, but we also found uncrowded waters and usually great fishing. Many times, we almost had the lodge to ourselves.....sort of a private family experience.

Three members of the Tymstra family (Jeanne, Pete, and son Matthew) were contemplating a trip to Casa Blanca the last week of June. The reports of unseasonal heavy rains earlier in the summer almost turned them away, but they decided to go forward.....and things turned out well. This report from mom, Jeanne: “We're back home after a great trip. The weather was very hot, but no rain and very little wind and mostly sunny. We were well taken care of by the staff and our guides.....Pete caught bonefish and a couple of tarpon, but the permit still eluded him. Matthew caught several tarpon, his 2nd permit, a snook, and bonefish. Both guys had a great time fishing.....two days, a guide took me birding and to look at the orchids along the rivers.....We had the lodge almost to ourselves.....I even fished for two days and caught three bonefish. It was a very good trip.”



Above, Matthew's super grand slam for the week: baby tarpon, bonefish, permit, and snook.

A “GRAND SLAM” OF GRAND KIDS

We're fortunate that three of our grandchildren live in the Napa Valley, within miles of their grandparents. All three of these grandkids have had their first fishing experience and caught their first fish at some farm ponds in the area. Jack, at left with his first fish – a black bass, has followed his two older sisters in using those same farm ponds for their first fish. Jack is 7. His fish provided a few extra thrills by diving into some heavy grass and causing some tense moments while it was worked free and made the net.....and the photo.



JULY MEMORY PHOTO



Michael Collins (at left holding his trophy Golden Dorado) was on his second trip to the Tsimane Lodges on the eastern edge of the Andes in Bolivia, an area that drains into the Amazon. The beautiful Golden Dorado in the photo was taken on a tributary of the Secure River. Michael's report: "It was a classic black and purple dorado streamer.....We were walking along an elevated river bank above the tributary and there wasn't much room to cast into the deep pool below. The guide suggested a back cast and said to make the first one count as these were primarily resident fish this far up the tributary. Fortunately I was able to make a good cast and this nice fish came out of the depths to grab my fly and the fight was on!"

Photo Credits: Minipi River – Steve Simco, Jeff Reinke, Jim and Andrew Hine, Scott Muelrath; 1st permit – Tom Filippini; Casa Blanca – the Tymstra family.

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,
Don Muelrath
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