



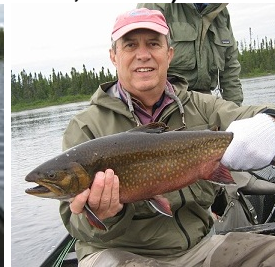
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For the last 15 years, my son, Scott, and I have made an every other year pilgrimage to the home of the finest trophy brook trout fishing on the globe, the Minipi River watershed in Labrador. This summer, we were joined at the new Anne Marie Lodge by the following fly fishing friends who were each making a repeat trip to the Minipi: Jeff Reinke (at left), Josh Luft-Glidden, Berniece and Pat Patterson, John Caddle, John Marlow and Paul Wilms....with a short visit from well traveled, long time Minipi angler Duncan Lewis.

There was some trepidation as we boarded our cross country flights to Goose Bay on July 1. We had learned that Labrador had just finished their wettest and coldest month of June on record. Sure enough, when we arrived we were greeted by the highest water levels we've ever witnessed. Not to worry – we found the hatch cycles, in various parts of the fishery, evolved during our week to give us good dry fly activity daily.

(photos l to r: Josh, Berniece, Pat, John C, John M)



It was interesting how the hatch cycles coincided with our 6½ fishing days.

- In the upriver area that was the most productive for our first four days, rises were triggered by small mayflies and larger brown drakes. This hatch began to wane the last day of our week.
- Another area (which required a portage to reach, a hike of about 20 minutes) finished the week with its famous massive brown drake hatches blanketing the water, beginning in the early afternoon on each of our last three days.
- Anne Marie itself (right in front of the lodge), began strong hatch activity the last few days of our trip and concluded our last evening with an intense brown drake spinner fall which had every giant brookie slurping from the surface right through dark.
- The down river hatches were slim and due to the late spring, probably would have begun in earnest within two weeks after our trip, but as things turned out, this normally productive area was not needed .



This is one of those special fisheries that is not measured in terms of numbers – it's about the overall experience. After spending 15 – 20 minutes stalking a cruising, sipping, brookie and making repeated presentations, watching that big nose stick up and inhale your imitation is the real deal in the realm of fly fishing thrills. It's what has made this particular lodge host, throughout the years, to most of the recognizable names in fly fishing. This is a true wilderness experience where the creatures (finned or not) respond to their environment and feeding instincts in the same manner as they have for centuries....probably eons.

While numbers are not *THE* story, the raw numbers do reflect what makes the opportunity attractive. Our release totals for the week in pounds:

- Under 3# - 9
- 3 to 4# - 12
- 4 to 5# - 13

5 to 6# - 21  
6 to 7# - 32  
7 to 8# - 9  
8 to 9# - 2

All fish over 3# are weighed and recorded in the catch records. We spent all of our time fishing in areas which were patrolled by the trophy sized fish.

Note: well over 2/3 of our fish were taken off the surface, most on #6 Stimulator or #10 or #12 Grey Wulff.

(The new Anne Marie Lodge – below - is a wonderful wilderness retreat in the wilds of Labrador!)



Some of the highlights:

- like our trip two years ago, the average size of the fish was greater than any of our previous trips. 43 of our released fish were over 6#, a dramatic percentage of large fish based on our other trips.
- everyone took their largest brookie ever during the week. This included my first 8+ pounder ever and Scott's second fish over eight pounds, a pig of 8.5#.
- the biggest day in terms of weight was had by Berniece and Pat Patterson who released 9 fish for a total of 47 pounds on our first day.
- some inlets and outlets were very productive with streamers and muddlers. In one such inlet, four consecutive casts produced three fish with a total weight of over 23#.....45 minutes that won't be forgotten.
- probably due to the wet June, black flies were the worst we've seen in all our previous trips – not a highlight!
- Weather treated us good with very little rain all week and some highs in the low 80's.
- long fishing days. The regular schedule called for departing the lodge at 9am with lunch to be eaten on the water. We returned for drinks and dinner around 5:00. We finished the day with a session from 7:30 until 10:30, give or take a little depending on the late evening surface activity.
- girth of the fish was amazing. We measured several fish to attempt to get a ratio of length to weight. The average 22 inch fish weighed 6.5# - a girth of 15.5 inches. One twenty incher actually weighed 6#!

(l to r: brown drake, canoe stalk, healthy brookie, portage – a hike across the caribou moss)



The concluding evening of our week, in a repeat of our last trip in 2008, provided the “best of the Minipi experience.” The water had a mirror finish and the rings from a large brookie rise could be seen from over a hundred yards away. While there was the occasional large caddis or drake on the surface, the trigger for the



feeding fish was a massive brown drake spinner fall. Everyone took between 2 and 5 trophy brookies this evening with some dramatic stalks and presentations involved. Scott and I had released three fish of 5, 6, and 6½ pounds while fishing a shallow “channel” in Anne Marie Lake that was about 70-80 yards wide with a medium current pushing through it. About a mile below us, the Minipi River poured out of Anne Marie on its course to Lake Minipi. This channel was several hundred yards long and was often a gathering spot for big fish. We'd wait until we saw a rise, and then when a second rise broadcast the direction of the cruising fish, we'd try to get in position from our quietly guide-paddled canoe to make a presentation in the fishes feeding path. We'd both cast to double our chances of a take.

As the evening wore on and dark was encroaching, we found a fish cruising and sipping, moving into the current near the shoreline. We quickly positioned ourselves to attempt to get a fly in front of him. With both of our flies on the water in what we thought was his feeding path, we were surprised when he came up and ate a few feet beyond us. He'd been traveling just a little faster than we anticipated. This same result repeated itself for about 300 yards as we chased him down the shoreline. We must have made 15 presentations each, anticipating that one of us would get eaten on each cast, only to be surprised when he came to the surface a few feet from us. We just couldn't get it right!

Eventually, the fish sped up and turned a corner at the end of the channel and we lost sight of him. Our guide kicked in the small outboard and we moved quickly around the corner in an attempt to relocate him. Soon after rounding the corner, we were in the mouth of a small cove and brown drake spinners covered the water....they were thick, ten or more flies per square foot of water. And, in the middle of all those spent drakes, our fish was repeatedly using a classic head to tail rise as he inhaled copious amounts of spinners while rolling his huge back out of the water. He would make 4 or 5 passes on the surface and then disappear for a minute or so before reappearing a few yards away. Scott and I were in hyper drive, fueled by the sight of the big fish so close at hand and eagerly feeding, we repeatedly made casts in his neighborhood. However, the number of naturals on the water apparently was keeping our flies from getting the desired attention. Dark had almost totally settled in and we needed to use the glare of the last light on the horizon to spot our fish. Just as we were beginning to lose faith that we would finally score this fish, he sucked my fly in. The rod tip went up and for a split second, I felt his weight.....and then the line went slack. We thought the hook just pulled through, but as I retrieved my line, it was obvious there was no fly on the end of the leader. Maybe I had not paid enough attention to those light abrasions on my tippet.....but most likely, we were destined to have our trip end this way.....an incredible hour-long stalk and pursuit of a monster brookie who left us with a reason to return as he swam away with my fly in his mouth. Overall, a great trip!

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