

ARCTIC CHAR JULY 2008- DRY FLY ADVENTURE

Rapid Lake Lodge

DREAM TRIP



No other camps or float planes will disturb you. Let your imagination roam if you do visit these camps and capture the essence of the excitement of fly fishing as wild as it gets.

BY TIM HAGERTY

Dear Reader;

I write this report at the request of Alain Lagacé owner and operator of Rapid Lake Lodge and Barnoin Camp. It is my hope to support his excellent efforts to explore and maintain this world class fly fishing for the Ungava Coast area trophy Arctic Char as well as the wild Lake and Brook Trout with the mighty Ounaniche also inhabiting his camp area.

I receive no compensation for this. I pay my own way on every trip. I am no writer and do not pretend to be.

What we hope to accomplish is to provide you with a reason to consider visiting what may be one of the last great truly remote wild areas left in this world where with each cast you may hook and fight the fish of a lifetime. This is not processed fishing. You are casting many times into the unknown. The excitement would be palpable and distinctive from what most of us

experience during what some consider today's better fly fishing trips.

I let my imagination roam when I am privileged to fish with Alain. No other camps or float planes will disturb you. Let your imagination roam if you do visit these camps and capture the essence of the excitement of fly fishing as wild as it gets. The fishing and the unique remote scenery and surroundings can be that good that it creates the memories and the dreams that keep us fly fishermen going through the everyday routine of life. If I can impart even some of what I have been given by my experiences at Rapid Lake and Barnoin Lodges to you, then my poor writing here will have been rewarded. The more this area under Alain's management is supported, the more chance we have to open more Fly Fishing water in this area and keep the experience world class and pristine. That is why I relate the following for your review.

It was another excellent adventure fishing and flying with Alain Lagacé owner of Rapid Lake Lodges in late July through early August of 2008. This year the target experience was using a Dry Fly, especially with the large holdover and returning Artic Char. Given the

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splendid isolation and remote areas we fished, this was an exploration. Alain certainly knows where the fish are or where they should be and with his flying skills, I knew I was in for another great adventure at both his camps in one of the last truly wild remote places left. I am talking about the Rapid Lake and Barnoin Lodge both located in the Ungava Wilderness.

The area encompasses both an inland fishery and one along the spectacularly sculpted Fjord coastline.

Getting to Alain's camps in the Ungava region was easier than ever before. Without sacrificing any of the special remote quality that compels me to fish and visit this area, the airline and final float plane connections



from Montreal all the way through to Alain picking me up at the Float Plane base in Kuujuaq were seamless. There is a brand new modern airport terminal in Kuujuaq that is light years ahead of most all the other remote airports I have the good fortune to visit in Alaska, Canada, and Kamchatka, the Bahamas etc for my fly fishing pursuits.

For me to suggest that these flights and the simple but spacious and comfortable accommodating Kuujuaq terminal is worth noting may evince a surprise from some who read this. I will suggest that this is better and easier travel from at least the East Coast than the more popular destination angler Alaska areas such as King Salmon, Dillingham, or Lake Iliamna. These also are remote one or two gate airport terminals in those "hot" Alaska destination spots. Again this is true wilderness and do not expect a Starbucks and good restaurant in the facility but I suggest you will be pleasantly surprised.

The Inuits have succeeded here in constructing a facility and reliable (key word here that "reliable") airline connection system that allowed me to leave Montréal at a most reasonable hour and be fishing at



the Rapids Lake camp for several hours that first day. Of note was that my return trip started at 9:30 AM from Alain's very remote Barnoin camp (the northernmost lodge he has and right near the Ungava coast) and by 9:30 PM that evening I was collecting my bags at Boston Logan Airport.

I do a LOT of business travel and I only wish my connections and experiences was that reliable. Now of course weather can be a factor in delays etc. However I recommend now that there is a new airport terminal in Kuujjuaq, unless weather conditions are really terrible all day for flying- one will get in and or/ out of Kuujjuaq and at least be comfortable while waiting. Frankly I have more worries about connecting through Chicago O'Hare airport which I do quite a bit, than I do any delays now getting to and from Kuujjuaq and the Ungava region.

[Brook Trout of a reported 11 Lbs was caught in early September 2006 on a size 16 Parachute Adams.]

The first stop was Alain's Brook Trout and Lake Trout camp- Rapid Lake. Located 70 miles inland from the Ungava coast the Tunulic River runs a ribbon like course to the Ungava Bay. Along this flowage are areas of rapids and riffles that hold plenty of Lake trout (some are monsters especially earlier and later in the season) Brook Trout and closer to the Ungava Bay itself there are hold over Artic Char. Sea Run Char return starting in mid to late August.



It is on this river that a trophy (but well photographed and discussed) Brook Trout of a reported 11 Lbs was caught in early September 2006 on a size 16 Parachute Adams. Now this was within 15 miles of the Ungava coast and the river outlet at another camp only open a few weeks at the end of the season (not Rapid Lake Lodge) but it illustrates the river's potential. The picture of the great Brook Trout was in Fly Fishermen magazine and elicited plenty of discussion. The camp it was caught at is only open for a few weeks at seasons end and is near the coast. It offers no fly outs, it is a fixed location camp limiting where one can cast their fly.



Alain's Rapid Lake Lodge has an entire season to fish this area and offers fly outs as an option so one can properly explore and fish the Tunulic River.

To accent more why I was exploring more with a dry fly this 2008 trip, it is worth recounting that on this same river in 2007, I had the unique privilege of using a size 16 dry to catch Lake Trout porposing (head and tail classic rises) like the Browns, Rainbows and Brookies in the lower 48 that take May or Caddis fly's on top.



It was outrageous to see minimum 3 LB to 7 Lb Lake Trout schooled up in the flats above certain rapids, rising in solemn rhythm; with classic head and tail slow motion rises, to sip size 16 gray/ brown mayflies. They were also fairly selective. Wading carefully I was able to place a number of casts without drag in front of them and the resulting take and battle were worth the price of admission.

Let me ask you: When is the last time you caught Lake Trout on a dry fly? If so have you caught them with regularity? Well the potential exists at Rapid Lake and not just a one shot- pray for the right confluence of moon, starts etc for this to happen. The proof set was that another party that fished here before me in 2008 by at least two weeks experienced the same consistent dry fly experience with Lakers that I am writing about in the exact same major flats area I wrote about in 2007.



They were the only ones this year (2008) that attempted and targeted the Lakers on a dry.



The reference to this Laker Dry Fly fishing is in another travelogue experience on this web site I wrote for Alain from the 2007 trip adventure here to the same Rapid River. Some read it and wanted to experience this. Well they did so at least I can face any skeptics and say this is real. There is more to be discovered in this river using the dry fly.

This dry fly fishing for Lakers happens and it can be consistent. Experience it for yourself. An assumption is made that Lakers cannot be taken with any consistency on a dry. I agree unless you have the conditions where they act like Trout because of a confluence of the right water temperature, a shallow area that translates into the Lakers not having the depth available to go deep and hide so they would not key in on hatches which do take place here in the brief arctic summer. That translates into the Lake Trout will be opportunistic in shallow water as they follow their inner seasonal clock, and that the Mayfly Hatches are "on". The May fly hatches are prolific in this area in July. The Arctic season may be short but it is fertile for all life forms and the Lakers and Brook Trout take advantage of that.

When a Laker cannot "sound" or go deep after being hooked they pull long and hard on your line as the only way they can run is away from you in shallow water. Try hooking a Bonefish in deep water like in Hawaii. You may find a different fight that you get on the flats in the Bahamas or elsewhere. I am NOT comparing the run of a Bonefish to a Lake Trout. I am suggesting that in shallow water these great fish run out and not down and they peel line off the reel. This is just a thought to all of you taking the time to read this. Yes there are

some pictures of this with the dry flies I used in the 2007 report I submitted to Alain from the trip I took last year. It is on this web site.
http://www.rapidlake.com/pdf/fly_fishing_adventure_july2007.pdf

We are not going to recount here in any detail the small dry fly (size 18 and 20) experience I had here closer to Ungava Bay on Tunulic River with the holdover Char. Now these were "smaller" Char than the monsters that haunt Alain's Barnoin area Camp. You can see any number of those giants on this web site. However I myself value a hard fighting Artic Char of 3 to 6 Lbs. Especially when you have an acre (yes I said an acre and I am being conservative) of them sipping size 18 and 20 Black Mayfly imitations. I had to use 5 and 6X tippet.



The pictures and more expansive description of that memorable event are again, contained on this web site in the 2007 trip review I submitted to Alain. This is really available for those who want the adventure.

So bottom line I again relived some of those experiences and had news ones of note. For instance I also caught on this trip 12 to 18 inch Brook Trout starting the first day right at the inlet and outlet to Rapid Lake where the lodge is. This was in sweltering heat. The Ungava region had a record breaking Heat wave I and Alain hope we never see again. Folks this was so bad the water temperatures rose to an unbelievable 64 Fahrenheit in many areas.

Despite this I had decent fishing. That is not a minor item in my recommendation to you. It is another reason I am drawn to continue to visit and fly fish Alain's two camps. Both Rapid Lake and Barnoin Lodges

have world class fishing even in very trying circumstances. Both camps have the key item- "OPTIONS" and Alain does know the options and where the fish are.

I have been caught in extraordinary heat and warm water one other time in an El-Nino year in the late 1990's. In that El Nino year I was fortunate to have fished the Alaska Iliamna region in late July and then the Quebec wilderness tundra area at a well known Brook Trout River (The Chateguay) not that far from where Rapid Lake is located in the second week of August. The water was in both areas very low and an unbelievable 62 to 64 Fahrenheit. I found Fish on some days but it was tough going. Alain s' Rapid Lake lodge fishes a river that flows into very deep lakes along the way to Ungava Bay and that cools the water.

[Both camps have the key item- "OPTIONS" and Alain does know the options and where the fish are.]

Since Alain has 70 miles to fish, one can always find quality fly fishing. In extreme weather conditions like I faced, having easy lodge access to home lake rapids at inlets and outlet aerate the water and that also greatly helps the fishing.

A note I wish to add here is that I will try the earlier and later season fishing at some point in this Rapid Lake Lodge area. That is because I have had a tantalizing glimpse of the larger Lake Trout that are more commonplace especially earlier when the camp opens through mid July and later in the season. I have read of and spoken to a few adventurous fly fishermen



who have caught the much larger Lakers on large Dry's in early to especially mid July. We are not even talking in this report about the "Ouananiche" (land locked Atlantic Salmon trapped eons ago so they could not go back to sea in the Glacier period) that Alain can fly to and access in some nearby waters. I did catch a few in 2007.



These fish are airborne the minute they feel the sting of your fly hook. More on that hopefully in a future report, too much fishing and too little time!!

To finish the fishing report on the Dry Fly Brookies right

at Rapid Lake itself, I fished the inlet rapids mostly where there was an abundance of 10" to 14" Brook Trout available with the occasional 16" fish.



I also caught a couple of 18" Brook trout. All were feisty and very colorful with their vibrant wild Brook Trout Coloration.

What made this even more interesting was that I was using a size # 4 or 6 Bomber fly (Atlantic Salmon Bomber) and most of the trout could not quite mouth it.



That cut back on hooking the smaller Brookies and allowed me to key in on the larger ones. I used a 5 weight Rod and regular 9 foot tapered leader. On a 5 weight rod these fish provided good sport and the occasional larger trout were a true battle. These are wild healthy fish.

I did not fish Rapid Lake long as we only had a couple of days there before moving to Alain's Northernmost Camp – Barnoin. That camp has the monster Artic sea

run and holdover Char. However due to the extreme heat my last days at Rapid Lake (the water temperature by my thermometer at the outlet rapids at times during early afternoon was 66 Fahrenheit which is ridiculous for that far north I am sure you agree) I had to go subsurface to catch some sizable Brookies. I switched to one of my all time Brook trout Favorites in Canada remote areas, a yellow Muddler Minnow.

I experimented with a White Muddler, a Gray and Black Ghost that are two of my all time favorite streamers for Brook and Lake Trout, and a Black Woolly Bugger. None of those could touch the Yellow Muddler. Now I was not getting a fish a cast or anything even like that. Again the water was very warm and the Fish were down on the bottom and lethargic for a long period of the day. Still, using a fast sink tip line I dredged a few beauties. We do not think it likely you will see horrible heat like we experienced. I will go back again and fish the same as I suggest in a normal year (normal water temperatures) one will do far better and that includes size of the Brook Trout right at the Lodge Home waters. On fly outs in the Tunulic River I have caught larger Brook Trout to be sure.



A recommendation here for the Rapid Lake camp is that the Yellow Muddler may play a role for anyone interested in fishing these waters. I have spoken to those who have fished Rapid Lake itself at the inlet and Outlet but also from shore and boat in the main lake. As one would expect the beginning part of the season here (the start of July) through most of that month is when the water is seasonally colder and the Brook Trout cruise all around the lake.

The trout size apparently may increase and that makes sense to my thinking anyway. That would follow a pattern I have witnessed above the 52nd parallel fishing for Large Brook trout in remote Quebec and Labrador. Since the Tunulic River itself is so long that feeds this lake, and it is shallower for the first 20 miles above Rapid Lake as it enters Rapid Lake, one may expect a bit earlier warm up of these waters than some other areas in the 57 to 58th parallel area where Rapid Lake is situated.

Still even at these other places in this remote area of Canada and Labrador the second, third and last week of July have been prime time for major league Brook Trout fly fishing. Lake Trout too as I mentioned earlier will be available up stream from Rapid Lake. Of course the Lakers abound in the River and the fly outs just a few miles from camp rewarded me with a smorgasbord of Brook trout, Lakers of size and substance and some land locked Char. Couple all that with the larger Char available as one fished north on Tunulic River towards

Ungava bay and you can hopefully imagine why some of us find this so appealing. Again, Alain Lagacé has the "options" available at both his camps to satisfy the adventurous Fly Fishermen. . With the potential on fly outs (not far at all) for the Ouananiche and other prime Brook and Lake Trout waters, Rapid Lake Lodge has options available for the adventurous fly fisherman, and to my thinking at a very reasonable rate. The fly outs are not long. This is attributable to the remote quality of the area and the lack of any real neighboring lodge. I call it Splendid Isolation.

I will end this section of this report by suggesting one give serious thought to this time and place (Rapid Lake Lodge) for the pursuit of quality fly fishing. It is the variety and options that are offered by Alain Lagacé that interest me. You will not find many 5 Lb Brook Trout here. There have been a few caught but it is not the Mecca that the Minipi and Eagle River watershed is in Labrador nor does it have consistent 3 LB Brookies as I have been privileged to catch in other areas just a bit south of Rapid Lake Camp.

However, that is balanced by the fact that the Lakers in this watershed grow large, and at times like much of July, they will take a dry as shown in the flats above rapids. Also a consideration is that the options available for fishing, such as Ouananiche in neighboring river rapids and holdover Char further up north in Tunulic River; eclipse any concern on having a one species dependency that can ruin a fishing adventure. It is about having quality Fly Fishing options. That is the major consideration I suggest one entertains when considering both Rapid Lake and Barnoin camp. Options these camps have both in fishing species and where to find your target quarry.

These camps cover an area of 1800 square miles. It costs to fly but the adventure and rewards are worth it. This can be balanced by the many fish available right out the front door of these camps. That is exemplified by the plentiful Brook trout right in Rapid Lake itself and at the Inlet and Outlet areas.



Couple the quality of the fly fishing available at Rapid Lake and river with scenery that is significantly more interesting and rugged than the flat forest one fishes in for the Minipi, Eagle River, Caniapiscau regions where large brook trout frequent, and you have the makings of a memorable adventure. You will not see a parade of float planes fly over you or run into anyone else from other camps. You will wonder what may strike your fly next and you will hope at times your leader is strong enough to hold that fish.

By the way I do not have the space to go into this now but try floating a larger Bomber or Royal Coachman, Grey Wulff dry fly around the edges and in the rapids ,

[These camps cover an area of 1800 square miles.]

even right down the rapids main chute. You may be in for the surprise of a fishing lifetime.

How many camps have you heard of that can offer this? This is why I come back. I think to myself I have only scratched the surface. I have never even visited here in mid July when it is really "on".

BARNOIN AND DRY FLY ARCTIC CHAR



We departed the sweltering Rapid Lake Lodge and flew North East to the Barnoin Camp only 20 miles from the Ungava Bay.



The scenery changed to a treeless rugged sculpted high stone hill area with Fjord's protecting each of the Rivers as they worked inland. In those many rivers and streams the large sea run and holdover Char lay.

I have had the privilege of fishing for Labrador and Ungava Artic Sea run Char before. Still I cannot get enough of them. Maybe it is the quality of the fight and long reel burning runs when one catches them returning from the sea. It more probably is that factor coupled with the utter remoteness and pristine wilderness setting we catch them in.



not see anyone even setting foot in them for years (if ever) on end. Please reflect on this. I love visiting and fishing in Alaska and consider myself fortunate that I get to fish there every year since 1989 and sometimes more than once a season as I get older. Great as Alaska is, those areas where I fish trophy Rainbows in cannot to my thinking match the "splendid isolation" I can feel at the Barnoin camp. Alaska is remote. Ungava Bay may be more remote and this area has no word I know of to use that best describes its "splendid isolation". Maybe I should just say it is a different world.



We went right to one of Alain s' regular sea run Char hot spots for the first day.

You always want to be prepared for the "Big One". This type of Ocean Run Arctic Char fishing is no exception. They "Rock"!

This is true wilderness, about as remote as one can get for Fly Fishing. The adventurous surroundings and the wild experience of casting a fly for true trophy sized species in this remote, picturesque setting, is why some of us savor the moment keeping such a memory close to the heart.

Arctic Char are not plentiful in many locations throughout the world. Alain's Barnoin Camp area holds prime sea run and holdover trophy Artic Char. It is distinctive. These fish have never seen a fly or lure. Alain has sole access to several of these rivers and those he does not have the sole rights to fish, still may



I needed my "Char Fix" after a long absence. The flight in itself was worth my price of admission as we flew at low altitude over the tundra and fjords that characterized the area where the rivers met the Ungava Bay The water even here by the bay was too warm as even this far north was affected by the unusual heat wave, but even with that, the first of the returning sea run Char were right on cue. These Char are not a fish a cast but the action is consistent. The run at this time has yet to build up where the Char swarm and charge up en mass from the Estuary into the river. There is plenty of that available as August

progresses. I had targeted the first large Char and the school size fish of 3 to 6 lbs that accompany them. I was not disappointed.

Alain advises his clients to fish the different pools in each of his rivers where the Char enter at different times of the tide. I had no problems sitting in basically one spot and working one prime Shute and the swirling water around the rocky area. These Char were picky and not just any old fly and retrieve worked, but a smaller size 6 Clouser with white and silver and blue and white did fine by me. Varying the retrieve even with a Clouser was key. Actually for what that is worth to the reader- to me that is the crux of successful Sea Run Arctic Char fishing.



The Char hit the Clouser mostly as it fluttered and fell. An example of the size Char was two I caught, that we photographed and tape measured that were 28 to 29 and a half inches in length and 15 and a half inches to 16 inches in girth. That is about 8 and a half to 9 Lbs using the standard fishermen's formula of Length X Girth squared / 800. That is a basic way to compute size but you get the idea.

They burned my reel and ran into the backing. I set a hard tight drag. I am sure those of you that fish for Striped Bas, Albacore, Bonefish and other salt water fly fishing target species set a tighter drag also. You always want to be prepared for the "Big One". This type of Ocean Run Arctic Char fishing is no exception. They "Rock"! So set the hook and hold on.



To be sure there were a lot of smaller school size Char (meaning 18 to 24 inches and say 3 to 6 lbs) that are an earmark at times of the first returning Char. They were worthy species even on my 8 weight. Actually I love this size Char. They do run line out. If you catch them on a 6 weight you may be very surprised and the quality of the fight and speed of the run. I do not underestimate the power of even the smaller Char and fish the prime estuary waters with anything less than an 8 weight though.

Please review Alain's web site photos of all the monster Char caught. I myself had some at 14 to 16 lbs and yes, the pictures of two of those are on this web site elsewhere. Again I relate this to you because it is the quality of the fishery that is available to all that allow an angler like myself to hook and land these great fish. If you go at prime time to fish here you will catch your share and then some. However, there are other rewards to going earlier in the season before the prime run and now I will describe that.

The real reason I paid Alain to go earlier than his prime time sea run Char fishing is all about the holdover Char. Many writers have described how 50% of the winter Char population leave the lakes (all those Char lakes are near Ungava Bay by the way not deep inland) in the spring and travel out to feed and fatten up in the salt water estuary for a few months. The other 50% stays in fresh water that year. They go out the next year etc etc.

These fish move into the rivers as it gets near time for the sea run Char to return. Some stay close to the inlet of the main lake where they will overwinter but the point is Alain has a whole other ball game for Char that supports early season fly fishing. Combined with the early or beginning of the sea run Char return, one can have a great trip and see different scenery with good potential to catch Lakers that are in many of these same lakes. These Lakers are not small and they tend to stay near the surface because of how cold these lakes usually are even in July/ August.

Some years ago I ran into these same holdover type Char on the Labrador Coast. They were in small river / large stream mingled with a few of the first returning Char. I was in a camp with a group of hunters. When they went fishing they used only hardware or lures. I had to fish with them due to issues with camp boats.

Flying along the Ungava Coast I saw so many icebergs that it felt like I was in a national geographic TV special exploring the arctic.

They were great guys but I was the only fly fisherman. The point is on one memorable day they could not buy a hit with Daredevils and Mepps spinners. Yes I know that sounds nuts. I was not doing any better with streamers in gaudy colors or Atlantic Salmon flies. Then I tried a simple size 12 Royal Coachman. It was how I fished the dry that mattered for consistent success but the Char took it and took it reliably. Not on every cast but every 10 minutes I would get a fish to rise up and sip the dry fly (not slash like caddis fly takes). They ran out line and were terrific fighters. The unique challenge made it even more satisfying to trick these Char into taking the dry.

I tried that same dry fly approach later that week and it worked again. I also tried this at Barnoin this year on the Char and what follow is the results. Alain asked me to detail so I do this for him.

Alain flew me to a river way up on the Ungava Bay coast. I will let him tell his clients the name and the

details of this river. I will not use names but I doubt anyone would figure this out unless they flew there all the time. Anyway it was one of the most beautiful places I have ever had the privilege to wade, explore and fly fish.

We landed on a small lake within sight of the Icebergs floating off the mouth of the small river. Yes Icebergs. Flying along the Ungava Coast I saw so many it felt like I was in a national geographic TV special exploring the arctic.



I think it was the Polar Bears that finally got it through my thick head that this was as wild and remote as I could get. I have seen up close and personal a number of Brown Bears in Alaska. Again, just for credibility sake I will qualify that I have now been fortunate enough to have taken 28 trips since 1989 to fly fish remote Alaska. I have the pictures of the bears in several instances to support what I just wrote. However seeing the size and majesty of the all white behemoths that are called Polar Bears even from a safe distance was stunning. TV does not do either the Brown Kodiak or Grizzly bear nor the larger Polar Bear justice. You should consider going to Barnoin just to see the Icebergs and the Polar Bears. It creates an unreal, otherworldly setting.

This obviously would not do. You all know the feeling when your fly is refused but you thought you had found the key.



So we land and first thing Alain cautions me on is the Mother and two cubs (the cubs looked like Land Rovers and the Mother reminded me of a tank even from the air). Well we never had any issue but Alain had his rifle with him. Then we started to hike over a majestic wild flower and berry strewn tundra along the large stream that entered Ungava Bay.

At the first pool we spied a pod of good size Char. We could not tell if they were returned from the sea or holdover Char. After quickly catching two on a special Char fly I use (no this one I will not give a description on- I did give Alain some for his special customers) I was in heaven. I did not see any sea lice which can be common on sea run Char but these fish were fat and sassy. I decided to switch to a Bomber. Yes an Atlantic Salmon Dry Fly Bomber with grizzly palm hackle.

I think Alain at that point thought I had finally lost my mind. I am serious. However I assessed that a streamer would not be a continued successful key here. This is wild fishing and these Char were in pods. Char are notorious for getting "clamp-jaw" at times. I could see that with the more gentle current and fairly shallow water these Char were in, that a Streamer would just not be the key. I did try and wound up foul hooking the backs of two fish. That was enough of using a streamer. Nymph also was not proven to be the door opener and I did try using a nymph for several

minutes.



I switched to the Bomber as I had used in similar situation years ago with Char. On the second cast a large Char rose in a perfect head and tail rise and engulfed the Bomber. Fish on! Nothing like the feeling of solving a Fly Fishing problem on your own in a wild environment! The 8 to 9 LB Char (we have the pictures) fought extremely well. Now you can imagine I could not stop at that so I kept dedicating my fishing to using a dry.

Interestingly the fishing pattern was for the first couple of eager fish to take the dry on a dead drift but after those initial (large) Char were hooked, I had several looks and clear refusals. The dry was initially the Bomber, and then I switched dry flies and will get to that soon. Some fish even "nosed" the fly on a dead drift but would not take. Alain witnessed this also. Imagine a large Char slowly rising and just literally touching the dry fly with its nose then slowly descending back down. No hurry- just not interested. My knees were shaking watching this. This obviously would not do. You all know the feeling when your fly is refused but you thought you had found the key. You all have had this experience with dry fly fishing at times. However for me, this was "do or die" as these fish were 25 to 30 inches in the first pods we found and that is not your average trout.

So as I had done years before on the Labrador Coast, I tied on a smaller dry. I used a size 14 Grey Wulff and then a Dark Hendrickson. If you wish to know why I chose those two flies exactly, that is another story on lessons learned fishing in remote Northern Canada and is subject for another day. Immediately the success rate on dead drift picked up.



Now please bear in mind I was fishing over a pod of Char. It was shallow enough so I could always see many of them right near the surface. If I spooked them by slapping the water with a streamer or did some sloppy casting they got lockjaw. If I used some subtlety and patiently worked the dry through the school it got quite interesting.

From the success with the first two pods we walked into a beautiful tundra area that opened up more. We could see the Lake ahead and it was ringed with craggy high hills. Again there were no trees or shrubs. This was not however barren tundra. The small river or large stream (take your pick) we followed had very high tundra grass and wild flower cliffs leading down on a steep incline to the stream. We have a picture here for you to see. The Char held up in even larger pods in pools as we looked down from several of the high banked areas. The size really varied in these pods from monsters to the 16 inch school char. We guessed we had several hundred Char spread out in two large wide pools in particular.



I crept down the embankment to the tailout of the pool and started casting the size 14 dry on an 11 foot leader ending in 3 to 4X. Some stealth was needed as I

did not want to spook the entire school and have them get lockjaw. The trick here was getting the fly away from the smaller school size Char and in front of the monsters. Now this was not casting a size 20 Blue Wing Olive on a 15 foot tippet ending in 7X. It was reasonable “use – your- head” approach in a wild setting just so I could have continuous sight fishing targeting the larger Char and watching them “take” on the surface.

This kept up all day. However there is a very important qualification here in regards to how I fished the dry fly. I will tell you that I am not going to detail all I did here to successfully continue hooking the larger Char on a dry. Some things are best left for the reader to discover. I will offer guidance in this way. It is HOW one fishes the dry after the initial willing Char in a pod have taken the initial fly on a dead drift that will make or break continued success. Think subtlety. These are not pacific Salmon. These Char “eat”.



Anyone really interested in more can contact Alain after you book and if you wish, I will talk with you and be more expansive in this area. It is not a military secret, it's just that I am not a writer and there are some things I found out on my own that I do not think would be appreciated if I just blurted them out in print. I am sure most of you know what I mean and I mean this respectfully to all who read this. Suffice to say this type of dry fly fishing was so rewarding that I am booking again just to focus on the Char and Dry Fly.

One other reward of using the dry fly was of course one uses a floating line and the fight of these fish was awesome on my 6 weight. I switched from a 8 weight to the 6 because the size of the Char became more

varied and I plain just could handle them OK on my 5 wt rod up to the 8/ 9 LB mark because of the size of the stream/ small river. I had to be patient and use my drag with the larger (5 Lb or 24" to the several 28 – 30") Char caught. Now bear in mind please a lot of these were healthy fat Char but we could not tell if they had just returned from the sea as we walked further back, or if they had just left the large lake located a bit more upstream and were gathering now in the tributaries.

While all this great dry fly fishing was going on I kept one eye peeled for the Polar Bear and her cubs (or should I say her "tanks" as they were so much larger than I had imagined). It would be hard to miss them on a treeless/ no shrub tundra.



Alain kept finding tracks and lots of Char that they had fished up and eaten. Exactly like one sees in Alaska when the Brown Bears catch the sockeye salmon and eat parts of the fish and leave the rest.

I never read this before on Polar Bears targeting spawning or at this time schooled up Char. I am not clear this is well known that the Polar Bears may now be feasting on these shallow water schooled up pods of Char. There is a unique picture on this web site in another area that Alain took of a number of Black Bears congregated in a shallow riffle area working the Char. I am obviously not a wildlife biologist but it does make sense to me that the Black and Polar Bears would focus in on a large source of protein in the short arctic summer. This is just another example of the wonders one can experience that are unexpected but quite welcome in this Ungava wilderness.

I wish I had the ability to write a better description of the wildflowers that carpeted the tundra we trekked on. Alain has put some pictures here of the sloped streamside pool wall where we found 3 distinctively different colored bands of wildflowers create a mosaic on the sloping steep wall. This land is anything but



barren even if no trees and shrubs. I felt like I was walking on a carpet.

We could see the large Lake getting closer as we trekked and fished upstream. I knew enough to be thankful that I could be fortunate enough to experience this and fish this the way I wanted to fly fish. I kept thinking there were no other humans that would intrude and no other float planes occasionally flying overhead. We did see half buried stones that indicated years ago some Inuits had traveled this area and probably fished this.



How old these mostly buried stone ring remnants were I could not say. Alain thought they were very old. I could go on and on about what other beauty I witnessed this day but I should bring this to a close.

When we reached the now widening stream (actually here it was a small river) outlet from the mountain

rimmed lake, I spotted a smaller school of Char but they were large and fat! At times they “daisy chained” just like tarpon and some other fish do. Here the dry fly was not optimal as I was in a wind tunnel. I mean the wind was whipping. There were small whitecaps even at the river entrance. So I went back to a streamer and the 8 weight rod with sink tip line. My salt water fly fishing experience came in handy here as this was bad wind.

The Char were very spooky also. Even with the cover of the wind. I had to change streamers to get some interest and even then, I really had to work to get them to chase and take. I think at this point of the day it was a good humbling lesson for me. However these great Char certainly did take enough to make it satisfying rather than frustrating.



I have favorite “go-to” Char flies. I do not use the traditional gaudy streamers or Atlantic Salmon flies.

We did not have a lot of time at that point but I did manage to hook 3 large hard fighting Char and landed one. It was another 29” fish.



I was in fishing heaven. Again we use a tape measure instead of guessing on many of these fish and this was one. However I lost a great Char that was on for a long time and nearly pulled me into the River (OK I did exaggerate on that one). Really though the Char was exceptional for the run and wild fight. I did get it so very close but it did defeat me. It took line out when within a few feet of my landing it and then did a surprise jump or surface trash that dislodged the hook. I think this was larger than 30”. Much larger.

If you go when the Char are really in thick, I am sure you could try different techniques with different flies and come up with your own story. Again, this was very early in August and I was targeting the healthy holdover Char initially. Please do not underestimate this fishery. You can get the skinny holdover Char at this time but there are more than enough fat sassy hard charging holdovers along with the “gold standard” sea run Char to rip line off your reel and remind you of why we all pay to have good drags on our expensive fly reels. Please just think about that. Couple that with the dry fly potential, wild and pristine scenery and you can see why I suggest this area and trip can be the stuff dreams are made of.

A final note on the flying. Alain to my critical thinking is a very careful pilot. I will qualify I have been fortunate enough since 1986 to take many remote trips to both remote Labrador/ Quebec/ Ungava area and especially Alaska, so that I have been taught by those who know to put safety in flying first before the fishing. Hard to fish if one is not let’s say “alive”. There were times we saw large Char in shallow rivers I wanted to fish. Alain patiently explained why he or anyone should not land there, despite the fish, because that day or time the wind was from a certain direction and speed that could endanger taking off! Or where the Lake area was had large rocks just below the surface that could rip a hole in the floats. That would put a crimp in anyone’s fishing day. Not easy to call 911 and request help in that area.

I fly and fish with Alain because of his vast experience and his understanding of all the complex variables that can affect the flying and the fishing. The Rapid Lake and Barnoin camps encompass a large area. This is not Alaska where one Lodge has a large area to fish but must contend with other remote camps that fish the

same rivers. One owner like Alain gets sole rights to cover a large geographic area in Canada. That opens the opportunities. Alain has not even explored all he has. The time of the season also affects what species of Fish is available and how and where one can fish for them.

So if you are interested in sampling one of the last remote wild fly fishing experiences available in an increasingly "discovered" fly fishing water world, call Alain info@rapidlake.com and talk about a trip that could be for you what it is for me: the "stuff dreams are made of". I certainly will return and maybe someday we will meet up on these waters.

Sincerely

Tim Hagerty

For further information please contact Alain Lagacé at info@rapidlake.com or give him a call 418-848-2549 / 819-389-5832
