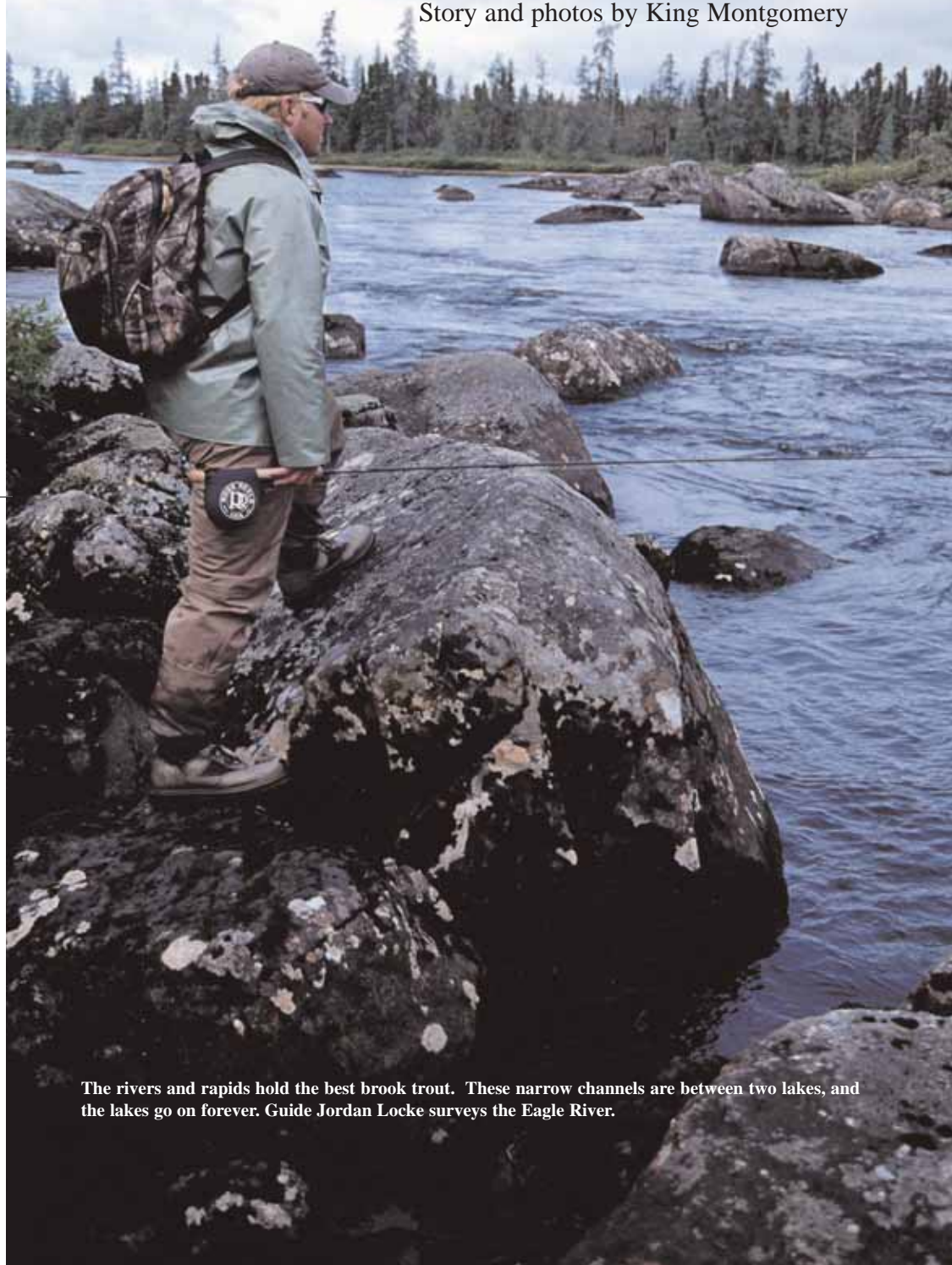


Jewels in the Stream Labrador's Giant Brook Trout

Story and photos by King Montgomery



The rivers and rapids hold the best brook trout. These narrow channels are between two lakes, and the lakes go on forever. Guide Jordan Locke surveys the Eagle River.

The Wood River area is as much water as land, and caribou moss grows in profusion on the dry ground. It will sustain the migrating caribou as they move south for the winter. The waters teem with giant brook trout, Northern pike, lake trout and whitefish.

Mention Labrador to someone and they might make some reference to a large dog, but few know where the place is. Labrador, about the size of New England but with only 17,000 people, is part of northeastern Canada's Newfoundland-Labrador Province. The southwestern quadrant of Labrador is a whole lot of water interspersed with some land. The water teems with the native, wild brook trout of your dreams; the fingers of land host the fall and spring migrations of the huge George River caribou herd—an exotic combination of creature and creation.

An hour or so flight from Wabush/Labrador City in a 1950s vintage DeHaviland Beaver float plane takes you over endless long lakes connected by narrow chutes of water called “rapids.” The rapids concentrate fish that move between lakes in search of food or mates for the fall spawn. Here anglers catch brookies to nine pounds on dry flies, weighted nymphs or streamers. Bass poppers and mouse patterns are large fish getters. Add lake trout and Northern pike and you can have your hands full. The many rapids are reached by plane and/or boat from the only lodge around for many miles.

The Three Rivers Lodge, where I stayed, is a very comfortable and well-run facility with all the amenities, great guides, and excellent home-cooked meals. It sits on a peninsula that juts into a large, tree-lined lake. The lodge is open spring to fall to fly anglers and caribou hunters (in season). Cast and blast packages are also available.

The Big Land

The yellow-white caribou moss 1,200 feet below the float plane carpeted the ground under the alder, spruce and tamarack that define the subarctic forest. Interspersed with a trail network carved by generations of caribou, the moss, actually lichen, will feed the herd on its annual fall southerly migration from the rich calving and feeding grounds near Ungava Bay on the North Atlantic and back again in spring. With all that water the animals would swim part of their migration as well as hoof it. When I arrived this past August, the vanguard of the herd was still to the north, so it was the waters that drew my attention as the Beaver's engine droned on.

Three cool, clear rivers—the Eagle, Victoria, and Rick's Run—form the headwaters of the Woods River system that flows over 70 miles to empty into the huge Smallwood Reservoir to the southeast. These don't look like rivers to me, but rather they appear as channelized sections between long, thin lakes that softly flow toward the reservoir and beyond. Here in these "rapids" the brook trout, who prefer running water, concentrate to feed, grow, and mate in the fall. The rapids are numbered from north to south, which provides a good way to keep track of where you are.

The Fish and the Gear

The # 8 Royal Wulff alighted softly on the surface. Tethered to the 2X tippet, it bobbed merrily along. A dark shape quietly porpoised over the gaudy fly and took it down, and once stung by the hook, the brook trout went berserk. The trout's reaction to a #6 Mouserat—a fly I often use for Virginia smallmouth and largemouth bass—was much the same. And my largest brookie, a handsome male of just over seven pounds in spawning array, took a #6 Bomber in tan with orange hackle. Don't dead-drift these flies all the time. Skate and dart them along with the line hand and the rod tip, but keep a taut line or





Brook trout to nine pounds rise to dry flies and take underwater offerings as well. These August-caught male brookies are displaying their fall spawning finery. They are true jewels in the stream.

Northern pike inhabit the slow water areas of the rapids and rivers and provide superb fly rod sport.



the fish will catch you short. If the fish aren't coming up to the fly, use a weighted nymph under a strike indicator or cast a streamer across and downstream.

Leave your 5- and 6-weight fly rods at home when you come to Labrador. A 9-foot rod for a 7-weight is okay, but an 8-weight is better, particularly if the wind kicks up, and it often does. A brookie over four pounds will test your skill, and smaller rods aren't fair to these great fish: Sure, you can land them on lighter gear, but they become stressed and could die because of

it. When you consider the appropriate tackle for these fish, think bass—the rods, lines, leaders and tippets work equally well with either type of fishing.

Jason Jacobs, a fine young angler from the Philadelphia area, worked the large white bass popper along the edge of the eddy. The rapid *blurrp blurrp* of the noisy fly was interrupted by the minor explosion of a substantial brook trout in search of serious groceries. Guide Jordan Locke slipped the rubberized catch-and-release net under the beauty, and I waded over to

snap some photographs. It was an arrangement Jason and I grew comfortable with over the next several days. When I wasn't taking photos I was catching some fine fish, but nothing in the quantity that Jason managed. He's a serious fisherman who believes that big flies catch big fish, and his bass poppers and saltwater streamers proved the point.

Great Northern pike inhabit the same waters as the brookies but prefer the quieter runs and eddies to the main current. They establish ambush points behind rocks and other obstructions where they wait for a meal to come by. They viciously attack flies, particularly streamers and large nymphs, that come their way. We hooked pike while fishing for brook trout and managed to land some, but others cut the line with their nasty teeth. If you target the pike, use a wire bite tippet. Lake trout and whitefish are also here, and Arctic char are within range of the lodge's resident float plane.

I mostly used a weight-forward floating line but did drag some nymphs and worked some streamers with the slow sink heads of Scientific Anglers Multi-Tip on one Ross Evolution 3.5 reel, and the Airflo Quad-Tip on the other reel. Both lines performed admirably, but floaters usually are all you'll need. I tested and liked knotted tapered leaders and tippet material in fluorocarbon and standard monofilament by Frog Hair from Gamma Technologies in Pittsburgh.

Three fly rods accompanied me to Labrador: a Sage 6-weight, a G. Loomis 7-weight and a Temple Fork Outfitters 8-weight. All worked well, but as I said earlier, the 7- and 8-weights are best. Flies for the brookies include large Royal and White Wulffs in #6–10; Bombers and Mouserats in #6; various weighted nymphs in #6–12 (the Beadhead Prince Nymph worked best for me); and streamers such as Clouser Deep Minnows, Mickey Finns and Woolly Buggers in #4–8. The lodge guides—Locke, Cliff



Three River Lodge sits on a peninsula jutting into Wood Lake. It is a true diamond in the rough, a comfortable lodge run by extremely nice people.

Marco Valcourt, the self proclaimed French pilot, lumberjack and lover, shows off his culinary skills with a superb shore lunch.

Randell and Ned Whittle—were high on the efficacy of what they call a Mickey Finn Clouser, which is tied in the red and yellow of the venerable salmon fly. (These fine guides, all from Newfoundland, know their business, are very personable, and helped me get around a lot since my mobility is limited from an old war wound and recent bouts with poor health. Their kindness went far beyond their job descriptions for which I was very thankful.)

The Lodge

A lodge is not just a structure plopped onto a piece of terrain. A good one must be the synergy of time, location and, most important, the people associated with it. Three Rivers Lodge is a very homey, comfortable place comprised of nice cabins with woodstoves, flush toilets, and showers with hot water. The dining hall is large, well-appointed and, best of all,



houses the large open kitchen where Frances Barry, who manages the lodge with her husband Kevin, and the charming Darlene Cusick put together fabulous

home-cooked meals and make box lunches to take fishing. When not cooking, they clean and make up the cabins while guests are off with the guides and Marco

Valcourt, the affable Beaver pilot. Marco's ball cap is embroidered in the back (so you can see it from the seats behind the pilot) with "Pilot, Lumberjack, French Lover." The only part I know about is "pilot," and he is one of the best I've ever flown with. He's also a fine cook, and the masterful shore lunch of two small trout, fried potatoes with onions, and pork and beans he prepared for Randell and me was the best I've sampled anywhere.

If you want to fish this remote part of Labrador, the Three Rivers Lodge is the only option. But if other camps were available, I doubt they could be any better. The lodge's part of Labrador is green and lush, and the surrounding waters make it even more vibrant. It is still wild, untamed, and home to caribou, wolves, otters, a variety of birds including eagles, and, of course, the gorgeous brook trout. And they truly are jewels of the stream.

For more information on Three Rivers Lodge, see their informative website at www.trophylabrador.com or call owner Robin Reeve in Massachusetts at 781-246-2527. Robin and the Three Rivers Lodge staff can tailor fishing and hunting packages to meet your needs.

The Labrador West Tourism Development Corporation has maps and information at (709) 944-7631, email: tourism@crrstv.net. The Newfoundland-Labrador Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation is at 1-800-563-6353.



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