

Fishing the McKenzie River Watershed

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**McKenzie River Fly Fishing Lodge
Labrador**

**A primer on the location, fish, and flies
compiled from my guiding notes and observations
and discussions among the guiding staff**

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Introduction

This is a personal project of mine, intended to better inform people of what we here at McKenzie River Lodge have to offer in terms of fishing territory and local experience. I'm very interested in recording as much as possible each season with regards to the fish movements, insect hatches, and effective fly patterns. I am a fly tying guide with a science background, and I have combined my observations with those of former guests and current guides to produce this information.

In what follows, I'll describe the McKenzie River watershed, some of what we've learned about fish movement, and what fly patterns have been effective. Taking the time to go through this would mean you'd be well informed of what we have to offer you, show up well equipped for our fish, and better informed of how we operate McKenzie River Lodge. I also provide descriptions of our own patterns and variations on existing patterns. These flies are available for sale at McKenzie River Lodge if you are not a fly tier yourself. When I am in camp, I'll also have a good selection of materials and am able to provide you with customized fly tying service on site.

Contents :

Lodge Description and Operation.....	3
The Watershed.....	5
Advice from the Guides.....	8
The Fishing.....	10
Ouananiche.....	12
Brook Trout.....	14
Lake Trout.....	16
Northern Pike.....	16
Lake Whitefish.....	17
The Forage.....	18
Stoneflies.....	18
Mayflies.....	18
Caddis.....	20
Baitfish.....	20
Recommended Flies.....	21
Specific Essential Flies.....	23
Fly Tying in Preparation.....	26

The Lodge

The camp facilities were established by former owner Wayne Watkins in 2000, as part of “Expeditions North Inc” offering mainly hunting packages for caribou and bear at several sites in central Labrador. At that time the McKenzie River camp served primarily as a spring bear hunting camp and fall caribou hunting camp when the George River herd migration brought larger numbers of animals into the Andre Lake area. Fishing was often limited to around twenty clients per year. Since 2003, fewer caribou migrate into the area....into the western quarter of Labrador for that matter. The last few caribou seasons have the bulk of the migratory George River animals much farther east than usual. The emphasis of Expeditions North caribou hunting was diverted to the Schefferville area over its last few seasons of activity. Wayne retired when, in 2007, the business was purchased by Paul and Chris Ostiguy. Since that time, the camp has served as a fishing destination primarily for fly fishers seeking the thrills of landlocked salmon and brook trout fishing. Northern pike, lake trout, and lake whitefish are also abundant in the McKenzie river watershed.

What sets McKenzie River Lodge apart from other interior lodges is our unique fishery. We offer a **five species** river based fishery that primarily involves wading and walking rivers at your own pace. Anyone looking at any sections of our rivers will agree that its just fantastic water.

We offer some of the best (if not the best) fishing in the world for landlocked salmon up to fourteen pounds so far. The brook trout fishing is memorable, with a reasonable expectation of brook trout between two to seven pounds. The fact that there are three other species options is a bonus. Each river in our system is different in terms of size, bottom conditions, and water movement. Lake fishing adds another option. Yet, the one thing all of our waters have in common is that all five fish species can be found mixed together in the lakes and rivers. Every hook up might be a different kind of fish than what you were expecting. Sound interesting ?

McKenzie River Lodge itself overlooks the bottom third of Andre Lake. Sunsets across the lake and the rising lake fish on still evenings will be memorable. We are a totally remote, accessible only by float plane outfit. Once the plane departs, we are on our own in a comfortable small camp setting. Two guests cabins can sleep up to four persons each. Each has a wood stove and private bath with shower, toilet, sink and hot / cold running water. There are four single bunks with linens supplied. Camp staff occupy a third similar cabin, and the rear portion of the main lodge (the front of which contains the kitchen, dining, and common area). All camp buildings are powered by our diesel generator.

The staff will do whatever we reasonably can to make sure you have a great time and are well taken care of. Including Paul, the camp has a staff of five. Lorraine is responsible for the great meals, daily camp care, and is the link between camp and the outside world. Her husband Danny guides, along with my “retired” father Fred, and myself (Burt). Provincial legislation requires one guide per two anglers.

Our typical day starts with the generator on at 6 AM and guides have breakfast shortly after six. Guests have breakfast next while guides get lunches and gear ready. Packed lunches of sandwiches, snacks, and coffee / tea / drinks are made available by Lorraine. Cooked shore lunches of fresh pike, lake trout, or whitefish can be prepared by your guide if a request is made ahead of time. We do not retain brook trout or salmon for shore lunches. Fresh boneless pike fillets are plentiful and delicious.

Guides may rotate between anglers during a week, and we let the weather conditions dictate which parts of our fishing territory are accessible on any given day. We try not to have any one stretch of water repeatedly pressured without giving it a break. Consulting with you, we'll discuss what areas can be reached with the forecast we've got, and we'll want to be aware of any special conditions or goals people have. We then arrange guides and guests for the day trip. Groups head out by 8 AM.

We're here to provide you with an enjoyable wilderness experience each day and hope you get to realize fishing as good as we know it can be. We're continually expanding our collection of photos on the main camp walls, and new gear will allow us to offer a growing range of fishing destinations in our area. We are making the transition from aluminum 14 and 16 foot boats and two stroke outboards to James Bay boats and four stroke engines. For 2010, we have added two 18 foot boats equipped with 18 hp four strokes. Two new 20 foot boats should be available for 2011. These craft are extremely stable and offer a more comfortable ride in choppy conditions.

We're back for supper by 5:30 PM. Staff have supper shortly after six. Supper is served to the guests next, so you can have the main camp table and common area as long as you like while the guides take care of things around camp. The couple of evening hours following supper are reserved for camp maintenance, gear preparation, drying clothes, and relaxation. We'd normally have the generator running until 10 PM most evenings.

Our flights generally arrive mid afternoon on change over day (Sunday), and we don't venture out on that day for several reasons. The flight schedule may be subject to change, depending on weather and requirements of other outfitters. Cabins must be cleaned and made ready for the next guests. Staff see to camp chores, and the flight brings in more supplies to be moved and stored. That "down time" allows us as guides to tend to camps and gear, recharging before starting fresh with a new crew of anglers for another week, as each group rightfully expects us to put forth our best efforts. It is very understandable that newly arrived guests will be eager to fish as soon as they unpack, but please don't put us in the position of denying that request. Our packages advertise six days of fishing (which excludes the evening of arrival and morning of departure of a seven day trip).

The Water

Located to the north northwest of the Smallwood Reservoir, our waters serve as one migratory route for fish moving between the Smallwood Reservoir and up past McKenzie River Lodge to spawn in our rivers. Fish also move out of lakes in our territory to fill in the rivers. We offer access to three rivers - the McKenzie, Quartzite, and Comeback (each unique in terms of size, water speed, and bottom make up) and four lakes - Andre, Quartzite, Montgomery, and Comeback.

The water system drains from our northwest from Marion River, entering Comeback Lake, Comeback River, into Montgomery Lake, and on to Andre Lake. Quartzite River drains into Andre lake halfway down its western shore. The watershed exits Andre Lake past McKenzie River Lodge into the McKenzie River, which begins several hundred yards behind the camp.

Each river section has its own variety of water and bottom conditions, so there's a wide range of water suited to dry fly fishing, casting wet flies or streamers, some trolling short still water sections, and nymphing. A walking trail system utilizes older caribou paths meandering alongside the rivers whenever possible, as a alternative to wading some shoreline sections. We often have a boat or two positioned at the slower sections for those wishing to reduce the walking time, or prefer to troll or reach middle portions of the still water sections. For most sections of our rivers, there is ample casting room whether you prefer to fish along the rocky shorelines, or wade the rivers width in some sections.

The rivers range between 30 to 200 feet wide. Riffles range from one to three feet deep, holes varying from four to seven feet in depth. Holes can be 5 to 60 feet across. Virtually every client will attest to the quality of this river in terms of how clear and varied the water flow is. This water system faces little fishing pressure, and there's enough excellent fishable water to offer a surprise at any moment. Spring season finds the lake surface waters hovering between 44 - 55 ° F, and throughout July and August will vary between 52 - 66 ° F over the last couple of seasons. The river water fluctuates in temperature daily, ranging between 54 - 64 ° F for the season. Weather conditions can quickly impact water temperature and fish behavior. Our brook trout are most active at temperatures between 55 - 60 ° F. If river temperatures reach 60 ° F or more, brook trout are sluggish. A variety of patterns must be tried to turn on what can be stubborn warm fish. More of them move from being scattered throughout river pockets and can be found in the deeper holes and faster chutes. The brook trout fishing then comes as more of a challenge until rains or overcast days quickly change the temperature. Ouananiche seem to be able to remain fishable at slightly higher water temperatures, but they too will tend to lie in the deepest holes, or move out of the river overnight and into Andre Lake, so flies and presentation change accordingly.

Parts of the McKenzie poses the most challenging wading of our three rivers. The Comeback River would present the easiest wading, and Quartzite ranks between the two. The sections of McKenzie River available to anglers will depend on their mobility and their preference of methodically working water with a multitude of fly types, or covering more area in a searching pattern with fewer fly patterns. Either way, wading the McKenzie means you have to pay attention to where you tread. Most sections of the McKenzie are better handled with studded boots, and wading staff is a definite must. Rounded stones litter the shorelines and shallower waters, and algal growth during July and August is just enough to make sure you pay attention. In some short sections, sharper edged stones at varying angles demands your close observation. The spring ice movements mean that rocks can be rolled around differently each season, and some can be surprisingly unstable regardless of their size.

The **upper portion** of the McKenzie is relatively easy to wade, increasing in difficulty as you move downstream. Fishing can begin about 300 yards behind the lodge. Clients from 10 to 84 years old have fished the top section. Some clients are better served having a short boat taxi to the head of the river, while others walk a ten to fifteen minute trip. This section is about 400 yards long by 100 yards wide, and can be crossed at only a couple of places.

It is extremely easy to spend an entire day picking apart this very productive section from either side. The cooler the water temperature, the greater the variety of fish lurking in its holes and riffles. Five species are present to one degree or other at any one time in the McKenzie River, often occupying niches in the same holes. Landlocked salmon (ouananiche), brook trout, lake trout, northern pike, and lake whitefish can be caught on a wide range of flies and presentations. It is possible in some stretches of water to visually locate a variety of fish, and each hook set could yield something different. You could stand in one spot and catch four or five species at times. Each day can bring a new number of migratory fish upriver, which seem to hole up in this top portion before moving northwards through Andre Lake. Other fish seem to spend two to seven weeks occupying holes around the top section, as evidenced by our tagging of ouananiche and brook trout during the 2009 season. Some fish will spawn in the top section at season's end. Lake species often move into the top portion during early season, or for overnight feeding forays.

The **middle section** of the McKenzie begins at the lower end of a still water separating it from the top portion. A ten to fifteen minute walking trail or short canoe run takes you around the still water, to "Mouse Hole" and the river downstream (Salmon Hole, Ruby's Run, and the Canoe Launch). The water narrows through a large boulder strewn neck and shallower riffle with pockets of water up to four or six feet in depth. This tumbles over a low rock ledge into a large pool, followed by a long large shallower flow averaging three feet of water, gin clear over rocky bottom. Wading here is more uneven, and demands your attention. This section offers predominantly brook trout and ouananiche fishing that builds in numbers as the season wanes. Vegetation grows to the waters edge, but casting is easily managed with short wading ventures out in most spots. A long stretch of shallow white riffle and pocket water loaded with deeper holes takes you to a freighter canoe positioned below. Some clients might venture onwards to the lower section with a five minute canoe run down river. From that point, fish water that sees less than ten to twenty anglers per season. That trip involves more work getting the boat back up through upwards of five rapids sections until more boats are positioned below. Several more craft should be available in 2011 to be placed along the McKenzie sections and greatly reduce the work required to go below and back.

The boulder strewn **lower river** portion alternates between riffles ending into deeper river wide pools, and short calm water stretches for another mile or two. Much of the slightly faster portions are covered by wading, and there are numerous pockets of deeper water. In places, there are deep troughs and black water holes that could harbor anything from day to day. Fish here are generally on the way up river towards McKenzie River Lodge, so it is not necessary to venture this far down river to hook trout or salmon, since they are coming up to us each day. Clients capable of the walking, wading, and pulling have access to predominantly ouananiche and brook trout earlier than some of them arrive in the top portion. Larger ouananiche and colorful male brook trout can be found here converging from a vast water system throughout the second half of the season. Occasionally lake trout can be found in some of the holes, and lake whitefish in the calm sections between riffles.

The lower section is fished most often at the seasons end, the last two or three weeks, depending on the ouananiche movement timing. The later you fish it the better. The last week of the season provides the best salmon fishing, particularly on overcast cool days. You could hook up with five to twenty five salmon some days.

The lower section begins with “The Funnel”, a staging area for fish having just completed the move up through the lower section. Followed by the “Cable Pool”, “Warren’s Hole”, the “Elbow Pool”, the “Boulders”, “Third Rapids”, and other gems waiting to be named. Maybe you could show us something to remember you by? We had one 81 year old client make it down to the Third Rapids and back this year, walking it and riding it down and back. A remarkable effort to see as much of the river as he could. The oldest ever to pull it off. We’ll name a bench, trail, or hole for him soon.

Andre Lake itself is the headwaters of the McKenzie, being eleven miles long and narrow, heading north for forty percent of its length, then turning northwest. McKenzie River Lodge sits at the southern base, and the lake beds drop away to a shelf of four to thirty feet around the perimeter. All shorelines are bordered by rocky ledges and shallow coves, with vegetation beds only in isolated spots. Depth ranges from four to fifteen feet. A 70 foot hole is located in the center. The lake center is generally six to fifteen feet, with scattered holes and shoals throughout. Deeper water is found along the western edge, with holes off Lone Tree Point up to 80 feet. Cruising ouananiche, lake trout, or pike near vegetation can be caught trolling between six to fifteen feet. Lake trout congregate to spawn in front of the northernmost narrows in front of Montgomery Lake at the end of the season. There’s plenty of good fishing for casting or trolling for northern pike along the shorelines, especially during the first third of the season. Pike congregate at the Island Narrows during early July to feed on the migrating sucker run moving up in behind Andre’s main central island. Lake trout can be caught trolling in deeper coves and along steep ledges, and whitefish schools following the shorelines sipping insects during warm still weather. Whitefish schools move back and forth along sections of shoreline. When a boat is slowly positioned in close proximity and things are quiet, small dries and / or dropper nymphs are cast ahead of rising fish.

Halfway up the west shore, Quartzite River enters. Generally fifty to eighty feet wide and a wide variety of water conditions. Trout and ouananiche move through all season long to reach Quartzite Lake and the narrows between it and Snelgrove Lake in behind. These lakes are shallow and fishing localized to only a few spots, but a narrows between them is a spawning area where fish gather during August. Extremely low fishing pressure and the potential for big colorful brookies and serious salmon. A number of ten pound plus ouananiche were observed at the very front of Quartzite river last season, and ouananiche over five pounds were landed in the small waters of the upper half of Quartzite river. Brookies and salmon over five pounds have been caught at the lake narrows years ago, but this area hasn’t been fished with any regularity. That will change with upcoming seasons.

Montgomery Lake is up to 65 feet in depth at center, but generally bowl shaped with lots of shallower shoreline and coves. It is a small lake, and fishing is limited to a few steeper drop offs in isolated spots and in front of the Comeback River for a mixed bag of fish. The shallow riffle narrows between Montgomery and Andre Lake is a staging area for fish headed up current. This can produce a mix of larger lake predators following suckers, smelt, and brookies up towards Comeback River.

We fish the 3/4 mile long Comeback River, having deeper holes in front, then smaller pocket water with small deep holes as one walks upriver. There is the potential for fish to fill up in holes for brief periods as they work their way between Montgomery Lake and the short Marion River upstream and across Comeback Lake. The anglers hitting these build ups always have a great time. Being a relatively short trip, fish don’t stick around long. A shallower river, the Comeback has the potential to change temperature fast, and fishing fluctuates. All five fish species can be caught somewhere in the river at one point in time or another.

With another small boat positioned at the top of Comeback River, there may be the option of traveling across Comeback Lake to the inflow of Marion River. This is another staging area for moving fish, and several deep holes in this narrows could produce any of the five species.

Advice from the Guides

To help us make your trip the most it can be, there are a few things the guiding staff wants to pass along to you.

1. Please **let the guides know if there are any conditions that we should be aware of - specifically anything that might impact your mobility**, in advance of trip planning.
2. **Make use of your guide's familiarity with the fish and water.** We are there to speed up the learning curve for you. No point in learning lessons by day five or six that we could have worked you through on day one. Your choice. We can suggest the easiest ways to wade areas that minimizes spooking fish, point out depths and proven holes, or help with fly choices. This works only up to the level you are willing to accept. Some clients have their day made chatting with a guide over tea and fresh battered fish while you sit in the sun. Others silently fish all day. Some learn avoidable lessons by losing fish consistently. Sometimes guide and guest wade together and banter back and forth for most of the day, stalking the fish as a team. Others prefer to be left alone to discover things for themselves and would rather have us waiting somewhere on the sidelines for when we're really needed. Let us know what you would and would not expect from us so that we can help make your trip everything you want it to be. We can move and fish at your pace. We want you to be successful at landing some of our gems. We enjoy fishing and we like to be busy.
3. All guides will also caution clients to **fish the reachable water before doing any wading.** Too many start walking around just targeting deeper holes, or haven't spend a little while conversing with the guide. "Fish it before you touch it" is a golden rule here. Big fish can be found in water just deep enough to cover their backs. Don't forget that we are stalking river fish...they have to move from hole to hole through shallower areas eventually. We know which holes are most likely to hold fish. Just because you've passed some of your favorites through them without luck doesn't mean much until you've covered them with recommended flies and presentations we've described. Be prepared to try a variety of flies on a hole before you move around too much. Not heeding that advice will most certainly cost you opportunities.
4. **Keep your eyes open at all times.** Polarized glasses will greatly help you with this and are absolutely essential. Not only will they assist you in moving around, but also point out fish others will miss. Trophy fish might saunter up to your toes, and enjoy the current break you provide while you make thirty foot casts. Six to eight pound trout did this to a half dozen or so clients during 2009. Also watch the footing while wading. Studded boots are recommended, and a wading staff highly recommended. Cameras should be toted in waterproof containers.
5. **Be prepared for weather changes.** Depending on the nature of your day trip, you may require adequate layered clothing for boat jaunts and/or short stints of walking through a variety of weather. Rain gear and some extra insulation is essential. Be able to strip off layers without overly exposing yourself to black flies and mosquitoes. I'd recommend long

sleeve high wick undergarments and relatively thin long shirts and pants. A breathable windproof / waterproof shell at all times and fleece for boat jaunts. Don't forget the high DEET insect repellent (30 %). A day pack should be large enough to deal with your own fishing gear, drink, and clothing. Always carry rain gear ! Clients in the latter part of the season should have some medium weight insulative layers. Last season it snowed August 25th and 26th and any wading boots left out by the camp door were frozen solid. Unusual, also uncomfortable, depending on how well you dress.

6. **We expect your cooperation in helping to maintain a quality fishery.** Single barbless hooks only. We play, handle, and release* all fish (particularly salmon and brook trout) with their well being a priority. We use a knotless mesh dip net when necessary, and weigh the fish in the net when necessary. Minimize handling as often as possible and avoid holding fish vertically or contacting gills. Photo backdrops and camera settings are set up before any fish comes out of the water. We will take as much time as required to ensure all fish make a full recovery. We might also tag, weigh, and measure the length of brook trout and ouananiche for the Province's Wildlife Department studies, and you are welcome to assist the guides if you wish.

**Exceptions are made for pike, lake trout, or whitefish if you wish to have a shore lunch prepared.*

7. From me personally, as a tier, bring an assortment of surface and subsurface flies. Don't limit yourself in terms of patterns. You obviously can't bring everything, but the more versatile you are with your gear and fly selection, the better your chances. I'll supply anyone in camp who wants to have flies made up on site. I sell a variety of dries, streamers, and nymphs. The guides often carry a selection of proven local favorites I've tied. I'll offer some to anyone showing an interest in trying them (if there's a need to) after you've tried your ideas. I joke with the clients though that the price grows with any fish you catch on them.

The Fishing

Some clients arrive with the perception that Labrador fishing means fish are easily enticed by a wide variety of fly patterns - both at the surface and below. At times, that is the case. When an angler finds him/herself fishing water that now holds dozens of brookies or ouananiche under the right conditions, the experience will not be forgotten. There are times when the fish will repeatedly rise in numbers to dry flies, or slash streamers on a quick grab and turn strike, and an angler can seem to do no wrong with anything that moves on or in water.

One shouldn't forget that those memorable hours are interspersed with warmer water conditions, weather fronts, and the fishing can change on short notice. Sometimes brook trout between three to six pounds will use your legs as a current break, and will hardly move aside if your rod were to be poked into the water. Sometimes no fly seems to pique their curiosity, and sometimes they move aside again and again to let any fly pass them by. I would expect people to arrive knowing they have a chance at very nice fish on fantastic looking rivers. I would also expect the fishing to be down right easy at times, damn difficult at other times. Pressure changes, precipitation, water temperature, gusting winds, and the timing of the fish movements are things no one has control over. As we saw in 2009, a late spring break up and ice out meant everything was delayed by about three weeks. As someone who tries to observe and note as much as possible each season, that's interesting. I had a chance to see water and fish conditions I wouldn't normally be around for. In 2010, the water was much slower to warm up. Brook trout are later arriving in numbers. As it turns out, the salmon were ten days slower in arriving....in spite of everything else seeming early.

On most days, probing the variety of water with an array of fly patterns can connect you with ouananiche between two to fourteen pounds, brook trout between two to eight pounds, pike from 5 to 10 pounds, lake trout from 3 to 15 pounds, or whitefish from 2 to 6 pounds. A rare client might use spinning gear with single barbless hooks if fishing in the main water body of Andre Lake or Montgomery Lake. This is usually on the part of people wishing to target pike and lake trout while trolling or casting from our boats, or those with limited mobility. It's also a great fishing opportunity for younger anglers, someone relatively new to fishing, or someone wanting to try a new species on the lure or fly.

All members of the camp staff have repeatedly proven that world class fish can be regularly found throughout our water system. That's one thing we can count on - there will be good fish present. Their feeding behaviour however, can be as voracious as it can be fickle. We've seen times when a pair of anglers land over thirty three to six pound brookies in one afternoon. We've seen a hole or tail out come alive after the last few visits have produced average fishing. Sometimes guests beat our favourite spots to no avail, or miss the sparse opportunities that occur on the slowest of days. Standing in thigh to waist deep water, large brookies may rest near your legs and even ignore you. Fish long enough and you'll experience them all. The greater your ability to adapt with a variety of patterns and presentations, the more consistent you'll be.

This range of feeding has been videotaped on several occasions during the past couple of seasons. During one filming, trout took emerging mayflies in a relatively small foam spattered eddy....with fins and tails sometimes three at a time on video. Brook trout to just under five pounds were caught using small mayflies and stimulators in between photos. Another video crew shot footage of feeding brookies (3 to 5 pounds) in the top section, and that can be viewed on Youtube. What became very apparent to me was the fact that the fish were busy feeding without ever contacting the surface, and were totally ignoring surface offerings and streamer patterns - even the

dace minnows gathered around them. Many anglers would never suspect that fish like that would be found feeding heavily in shallow water while you cast and cast without result. That video segment also included a shot of a couple of streamers passing right by these fish, and although they did move out of position to quickly look the flies over, they were totally rejected. This reinforces a number of long held notions. There are trophy fish in the water at almost any time, and if there are no visible signs, that doesn't mean a thing. If they are being opportunistic, then you'll quickly find out with the first few proven patterns you throw. If nothing happens, the fly patterns have to be changed up to find something more specific to identify what they are keyed in on. Again, the variety within your fly box and your ability to present them makes the difference. One client on the McKenzie River caught eight or nine nice brookies in one afternoon after being rejected during the morning hours. A size 12 black chironomid looking thing on a dropper turned everything around. Every fish was hooked on the tiny dropper. Most anglers focus exclusively on the dry flies, only a few use dropper nymphs or pupal patterns. There are a lot of ideas out there. A wider arsenal of fly types will increase your odds. A word to the wise. The well prepared angler will include a sampling of attractors, streamers, at least a few smaller pupa / nymphs / emergers, along with the dries. The core essentials would consist of a selection of bombers, mice, muddlers, stimulators, and mayflies.

Generalizing from my notes and discussions with the other guides, there are some very general trends I'd mention at this point about fishing the system.

Fish are moving through the rivers, meaning *you genuinely have to be ready for a strike while covering a lot of good looking water*. Sometimes you only get one rise, or that nice one is caught moving in water so shallow you only lucked into him with a couple of quick checking drifts. *They may well be where we'd expect them, but also anywhere between deeper holes under favourable water conditions*. To do any river section justice, a more thorough search with a variety of streamers and dries would be used to emphasize good holes and runs, but quickly cover shallower sections too. A good angler would *cover water methodically while changing patterns routinely, moving periodically, casting line quietly to minimize water disturbance*. Always watching, sometimes caught dreaming. There will be fish in the river sections. Introducing you is our job, and we like to be busy.

You will most likely have to deal with sudden fronts and varied weather on any given trip. The fishing activity is very much affected by changes in barometric pressure. A great hole that produced a bunch of fish yesterday can seem completely dead the next if fronts move through fast, or sunny conditions prevail. After stabilizing, the same pool comes alive again.

More often than not, our fish will take a fly on the first few passes. If a proven pattern has had a reasonable try in good water, and you've come up short, don't beat the water with the same fly. Change it up until we find what it takes. The fish will be there. Stick with what works only as long as it works. If they want it, you'll know in short order.

Matching specific hatches is concentrated mostly between the last week of June and into the first three weeks of July. After that, streamers and attractors account for most of the fish landed. As the season progresses, flies go from large to small to large. Early season, I prefer bright streamers over anything else, but smelt, brook trout, leech, and rabbit strip muddlers are reliable patterns. Smaller dry fly patterns (sizes 10 - 12) will peak in performance during July : mayfly, caddis, and size 8 stones. The latter days of July probably offers the best combination of dry fly / streamer overlap. After that, the large streamers out fish everything else for the second time.

Streamer fishing is the most consistent means of pulling up brookies and salmon throughout the season. Fish with floating or sink tip line, 12- 10 lb test range leader / tippet material. Six to eight weight rods, I prefer eight. These fish are surprisingly strong, and the brook trout can be heavy.

Landlocked salmon (Ouananiche)

Most Ouananiche spend the winter in the deeper lake waters, and will move into river water during late May / early June and begin feeding in earnest on sucker / pike spawn, smaller fish, mice, and insects. Once they have moved into the rivers, they will be caught all season long in the deeper holes and tailouts. Lake trolling can also produce ouananiche between five and twelve pounds on occasion, generally during the latter half of the season. They feed all season long, and can be caught on a wide range of fly patterns. Anglers should not forget that our fish species are mixed together. Ouananiche may be struck when you least expect it, not only when you are deliberately trying to get one. As an example, in August 2008 I was trolling in Andre Lake with two gentlemen in their seventies. We were making passes in front of a weed bed in 12 - 15 feet of water and had released seven or eight northerns in the previous half hour. On the next hit, the client exclaimed "He's in the air!", and when my head snapped around, there was the salmon about three feet out of the water and shaking as it landed on its side with a big splash. A hair under nine pounds. Wasn't expecting that.

The McKenzie water system is a spawning tributary leading eventually into the Smallwood Reservoir, where the current world record of 22 pounds 11 ounces was caught by an angler from Labrador City. Anglers can encounter two slightly different colored versions of the ouananiche in our system. Males are a golden brown, with a heavily spotted black and red pattern resembling a brown trout. Females are a flashy chrome, often having teal green or metallic blue highlights running laterally.

All are fast strikers, and are usually airborne before someone can yell "fish on!" It is not uncommon to get four to eight leaps in the first two minutes as large head shaking fish try to break you off. Many clients have commented that these acrobats are airborne far more often than an ocean run Atlantic salmon. It's a lot of fun to experience. In fact, to play and land a ouananiche without a jump is very rare. Clients landed ouananiche up to eleven pounds this past season. Anglers with prior salmon experience and those able to handle leaping fish will have a much better success rate generally. Many clients lose ouananiche in the air by the second jump. Most are the result of taught line when the fish is actually in the air. I read somewhere that a shaking airborne fish places four times its weight onto the test strength of leader and tippet. Wind knots, line tension, and aggressive hook sets combine with a leaping fish to end your attempt if you aren't lucky or skilled. Keep an eye on the condition of your line. Experienced salmon anglers will agree that one has to develop a feel for how much tension is required on an airborne fish. Enough to avoid excess slack, but ease off enough to protect your leader and tippet against the shock of aerial head shaking. A slight lowering of the rod tip, or a small bow on your part towards the fish each time it leaps. Some clients repeatedly bow forward and mutter "bonjour Monsieur / Madame" with big smiles. What a time. Many clients tense right up on the first jump, and raise the rod. Goodbye. Others stand in shock until the first splash, then lift to see if it's still connected to you. Goodbye.

Since 2001, our largest landed ouananiche have weighed in between twelve and fourteen pounds. 2009 was one of our best seasons for ouananiche. Nature's schedule seemed to be about three weeks late, and higher than average numbers of spring salmon remained in the McKenzie. We were able to enjoy the concentrated ouananiche numbers longer than usual. We also landed salmon each week all season long. We saw ten pound plus salmon in all three of our rivers. In 2010, salmon were landed most every week, as incidental catches while targeting brook trout. Nice surprises. The main fall run was about ten days later than expected.

Most often, rivers will see juvenile males and larger females move in during early June,

ranging between two and seven pounds, sometimes slightly more. Some will spend upwards of six or seven weeks in the larger holes of the McKenzie, others moving through and into the Andre Lake system, headed north as they feed on baitfish, suckers, whitefish, and brookies. Sometimes glassing across Andre Lake on a calm evening, one can see silver fish leaping as they feed along the far shoreline. The deepest water of Andre Lake runs up the western shoreline, and we believe that fish moving from McKenzie towards our other rivers can be targeted more often in that part of the lake.

Females follow, smaller at first, but reaching up to six to nine pounds over the last couple of seasons. These fish may more often move through the McKenzie and into the more northern rivers over a period of two to three weeks or so, feeding all the way along. Some remain in the same section of river for a majority of the season, like the young males, and are opportunistic feeders. Insects, baitfish, small brookies, and mice make up the river diet. Scattered juvenile male and larger females can be landed in the three rivers through the remainder of the season.

In the latter third of the season, the larger males make their way up the McKenzie, with bottom rubbed kypes and thick bellies. Darker in color, they are the largest run, weighing up to the mid teens. As these larger ouananiche move upwards from the lower sections of the McKenzie anytime after August 20th, you'll notice greater numbers of brook trout moving ahead of them and occupying the upper portions of the river. This is a sure sign of what's to follow. The brookies give way to the speedy and aggressive salmon. These fall fish are highly aggressive, and usually take a fly on the first few passes. They are strong fish that will put you and your equipment to the test. Highly acrobatic, you might get four or five jumps in as little as fifteen seconds. They are savage.

Dry flies, wets, streamer, even popped topwater mice have been successful in connecting anglers to missiles. The river diet is a combination of insects, fish, leeches, and mice, and the lake feeding consists of larger fish and insects, so there's a lot of potential ideas to throw at them.

On the McKenzie, we find that there seems to be little middle ground with their behavior. They either slam the first fly you throw at them within three or five passes, or its likely not going to happen at all with a particular pattern. Having said that, there is a slight chance that changing it up and throwing a pile of patterns out there will entice the odd strike. That's why its called "fishing" and not "catching". More often than not, the brighter streamers elicit the strikes....yellows, blues, and especially orange highlights add to the effective patterns.

Guides will encourage you to present flies across or slightly up current of likely lies. Generally, dry flies are allowed a drag free drift (or a slowly skating presentation as an option for bombers) and streamers an even "sliding drift" as the line mend pulls the fly down current and straightens out down river from you. Streamers are often presented across current this way, and / or stripped back in irregular foot long strips quickly. Streamers need to have a significant amount of motion to capture their attention.

No matter what you decide to throw, weather plays an important role in their behavior. Movement upriver will correspond to heavy rainfall, and fluctuating river levels. Sunny or partially sunny days will decrease the likelihood of strikes. Dull overcast, drizzle days usually make them more prone to striking our flies in numbers. A great example would have been ending off 2010, we were hooking a half dozen to twenty five salmon per day between a pair of anglers. Eight on another brighter day, 16 on a cloudy day, and two chilly drizzle filled days with eighteen to twenty plus salmon.

Brook Trout

As with the ouananiche, ice out is followed by movement of juveniles from the lakes into the rivers, particularly when water temperatures range closer to 60 degrees and spring lake trout occupying river niches move out with warming temperatures. They will generally wait until the larger lake trout have moved out of the cold spring holes, and take over until such time as they are pushed out of the rivers by the incoming ouananiche. The brook trout that remain, or travel at the same time, can be big. Smaller mixes of males and females up to 4 ½ pounds move to occupy holes and runs before being followed by brookies up to five or six pounds. The earlier fish are smaller on average, but are numerous. When water temperatures warm slightly, one could expect brook trout over a wide size range.

The upper section of the McKenzie fills with brook trout, much more so than the lower river portions at the season's start. Quartzite will receive trout perhaps overwintering in Andre Lake or Quartzite lake itself, so by the first week in July, brook trout up to five or seven pounds may be present. Anglers may encounter over a hundred smaller trout per day, or perhaps up to fifteen or twenty females from two to four and a half pounds per day. Fishing myself on the rare occasion without clients, I have caught and released thirteen brook trout on the same fly in the same hole, all over 2 ½ pounds to 4 ½ pounds in about 25 minutes. My largest brook trout to date would be a 6 1/4 pound female rising to a mouse at this early time of year. Other anglers sometimes encounter holes stacked with brook trout between ½ pound to 2 ½ pounds, and released over 75 fish per angler a day. Dependent on water temperature, these are voracious feeders. Being at the right hole when numbers of brook trout gather temporarily is an exciting experience. When the bite is "on", they generally will take almost any fly. At other times they key in on nothing but size 12 dark colored mayfly duns.

Although one might encounter a few of the larger more mature trout moving through rivers in the spring, its July that provides the best brook trout action. Trout congregate in the river holes and take advantage of the baitfish and hatch activity warming water provides. Spawning activity is far enough away as to not impede their fly taking. Dry flies, streamers, wets, nymphs...all will produce brook trout action during this time.

Colorful males with hunched backs and black kypes appear from the lakes and into all three rivers in full spawning colors during early August. Large males and females move into all three rivers, up to eight pounds. It is these fish we seek out in earnest. As spawning approaches and brookies pair up during the latter half of August, it is increasingly difficult to get them to readily take a fly. The brookies you're most likely to have take a fly are those not as close to spawning activity. When groups of males are found, the fishing gets better. When males mix with the females, it's down right difficult.

Many clients in August see brook trout between four and seven pounds, but are surprised at how stubborn some of them can be, expecting these Labrador fish to throw themselves at any offering you choose. When you do connect with one, it is amazing how much strength they can muster, as they turn sideways and use the river current and their thick girth against you. I prefer seven and eight weight rods and 10 to 12 pound test leader material. They are in no way leader shy, and a five to eight foot leader is plenty. These are not mountain stream brook trout, so come prepared for a fight. They feel like a trembling football headed down current. Our largest landed brook trout over the past handful of seasons was a male 27 inches long, with a girth of just over 17 inches, weighing in at 9 1/4 pounds. In July of 2010, a brook trout was landed that was believed to

be a new camp record of ten pounds. In June and July, an angler can realistically expect brook trout between two and six pounds. . In August, an angler has a realistic chance at a brook trout up to eight or nine pounds. They are all beautiful river gems, and we release all large brook trout. Your photos and memories are your trophies.

The largest brookies landed in 2009 were a couple of fish between six and seven pounds. We would consider any brook trout over three pounds a nice fish, trophy fish over five pounds. The bottom ledges of the upper McKenzie will at times shelter males and females between seven to nine pounds. Some of them spawn in the upper McKenzie and Quartzite rivers and may spend some time lurking in the deepest holes, reluctant to give themselves up. They may or may not spawn in the shorter Comeback river. We do know that large brook trout also spawn up into the lake systems behind Quartzite River and Comeback River. Upcoming seasons will see boats positioned at the tops of these rivers to allow guests the option of travelling farther into both lake systems in search of the trout and salmon congregation spots. These lakes have not been fished by clients with any regularity for the last four or five years.

When the rivers drop below 60 degrees or so, they turn on, and will be most tempted by large offerings, size two and four streamers, large bugs and bombers, in addition to smaller flies I'll mention shortly. As with other trout, the larger ones tend to feed mainly subsurface. In my mind, the ultimate Labrador brook trout angling experience would consist of a trophy brook trout slamming a large deer hair mouse on top, throwing water in a violent explosion, or a dolphin like side charge that makes the mouse disappear in one quick slice. Sometimes brook trout actually leap out of the water, looking down at a mouse as they fall in an arch to land on it and disappear below the surface as the rod leans forward. They won't always come up however. My approach (if water temperatures are suited to it), and what I'd recommend to clients willing to listen, is to have someone begin with a dry fly search using attractors if no hatch is apparent, and there are no signs of surface activity. If large fish are in the mood to rise, they will most often take the fly on the first few passes. Large opportunistic feeders have succumbed to mice, bugs, bombers, large wulffs, Turk's tarantula, stoneflies and stimulators to name a few of the more common choices. If hatches are visible, sure one would try matching, but don't neglect to try the attractor patterns or even a streamer. A short feeding / growing season means that when they are turned on to feeding, many fly patterns will likely work. My other client should be trying the large streamers, size two or four. We use big flies here more often than anything else.

With the cooler spring water temperatures (40 - 48 degrees), fish are sluggish and will become numerous throughout most sections and holes of the rivers over the first two weeks of our season. As the season progresses, they are spread out over the entire system, and within rivers are found in faster water more often than not. As previously mentioned, when water temperatures hit 60 ° F, brook trout shut down and are a challenge. Presentation becomes increasingly important, and the use of something like a mouse or large nymph may just be too much to resist.

Lake Trout

The early season cold temperatures, combined with sucker and smelt spawning, mean these predators will be found in shallower water along the shorelines for the first three or four weeks. Lake trout also move from the lower end of Andre Lake and into the top of McKenzie River. The upper portion of the McKenzie may yield 10 to 20 pound surprises for someone hoping to rise a brookie. Most lake trout range between three and ten pounds. I'd realistically expect fish up to twenty pounds during the early cold season. Anglers on the top holes would have no idea what fish might have moved in overnight. River lake trout will rise to dries, slam mice, or hit streamers with a strength that makes you think you've hit "the trophy".

As for lake fishing, the early season lake trout will be relatively abundant along the shorelines and points like anywhere else. We troll large streamers on sink tip or full sink lines in usually six to twenty feet of water. Trolling streamers have generally been large weighted double bunny, smelt, or bucktail streamers with contrasting colors. Blue / white, red / yellow, red / white combinations are generally good. During calm conditions, dry flies and / or dropper flies might be cast to rising fish from the boat. Caddis and mayfly patterns will bring cruising lakers to the top. It's likely that pike will be hit in much of the same water. Flies and leader materials have to be durable.

Spinning gear could also be used (again, single barbless hooks only) for lake trout while trolling in Andre or Montgomery Lake. If anyone wants to prepare for that, medium action rods, open faced reels, with a hundred yards of fourteen to twenty pound line would suffice. Ball bearing swivels and 12" leaders. Spoons are the most effective. Three to five inch red / white, five of diamonds, silver, Blue fox Pixees, and Mepps rainbow or silver / blue cyklops are my favorites. The five of diamonds is just nasty. During the second week of 2010, I spent six full days lake fishing with two clients having limited mobility. We hooked approximately 150 lake trout up to 18 pounds. We also caught a number of northerns up to eight pounds and several ouananiche up to four pounds - without getting out of a boat to fish.

The lake trout get deeper throughout the summer, but are taken in lesser numbers off the deepest points and at river mouths on occasion all season long. The next gathering of lake trout will be at the narrows between Andre and Montgomery during the latter part of August.

Northern Pike

Early season pike can be found in the shallower coves around Andre, the Island Narrows, and some will venture into the first sections of rivers after baitfish or spawn. Water temperatures have to warm significantly before any substantial numbers of northerns are to be found in the shallows. These areas warm significantly faster than most other parts of the Andre system, often three to five degrees warmer. Trolling or casting just about anything that has movement to it in front of pike suspended off the bottom will induce violent strikes. Pike gather in certain places for their own spring spawn and also to ambush passing fish. They often lie close to bottom, very still. Even when clients can see them and cast lures or flies anywhere close, the speed of the attack has often made someone jump right off the bottom of the boat. They throw water violently, chase each other when hooked, and can follow right up to your rod tip before hitting. Some even leap out of the water. Andre lake is the only place we've ever seen pike jump while hooked. We landed pike last season up to twenty pounds and just under four feet in length. Most range between five and ten pounds. Their flaky white flesh is very mild tasting when cleaned fresh, and there's a lot of it to be had in Andre Lake. Boneless fillet pieces deep fried in a beer batter have always gone over very well on the beach at Lonetree Point.

Pike are often found stacked together in a small spot. This competitive environment is particularly interesting. Pike will be seen having larger bite marks on their bodies, or fin / tail pieces bitten off. Your fly might not have much of a chance. Into that pit I toss the helpless popping surface mouse. What a sin. This is a fantastic opportunity for someone to try a new species, get a kid hooked up with something big, or satisfy the need for huge surface takes. Anything large making a surface commotion is going to get nailed. Bring tough leader material !

Sometimes pike are spotted while wading the shorelines of river sections as well, or they might just be the second or third take in a pool you just released a brookie. These hard takes can be the beginning of some funny stories when someone is expecting another brookie. Never forget that all species can be mixed together in our fishery.

Vegetation grows to the surface by late July in some isolated shallow spots of Andre, and those provide the hottest action. In other places, isolated weed beds exist on the bottoms of coves. Either way, a surface commotion or a streamer with lots of motion will not take long to hook you up. Mice and frogs on top during calm conditions would have to be the most exciting, coupled with polarized glasses. Bright colors and tantalizing movement underwater will work just fine.

Spinning gear for Andre pike would be of the same setup described for lake trout. Heavy 12 to 18 inch ball bearing leaders and 3 - 5 inch wobbling spoons are deadly.

Whitefish

Lake whitefish range between two and seven pounds, and are more of an opportunistic fishery. With very small mouths and delicate surrounding tissues, they are a challenge to land with light drag and tiny flies. When hooked, whitefish “shiver” and make short runs, sometimes leaping out of the water. They generally do not have a long winded stamina, but they often tear out the small hooks unless you have a light touch.

The most active surface feeding is during calm evening hours, or mirror like mornings, but insect emergence can change all that quickly. Whitefish schools could be encountered at any time of day on the calm lake, or in still water sections of the rivers. Schools often number into the dozens. You might be able to encounter a feeding school on the calm lake surface, move in slowly, and cast small flies (mayflies and caddis) from the boat ahead of cruising fish. Sometimes whitefish can be hit on medium sized or large streamers while trolling for another species.

Schools often hang around for periods of time, moving back and forth along a relatively short section of shoreline while feeding. Of course, we have to have ideal flat conditions on the lake to take advantage of this. Small caddis, chironomids, mayflies, pupae, and nymphs fished at or near the surface are most effective. Still presentations, with just a very faint occasional twitch, are best.

The Forage

I am not an entomologist, so I will only identify a few insect species I'm sure of. The rest are generic descriptions with the intent of helping potential clients prepare for fishing under our conditions. Our observations show that water temperatures have to exceed 50 degrees before any significant insect activity occurs. *When* this happens will of course vary from season to season, depending on water temperature (so any specific weeks mentioned are approximations). As temperatures hover in the early fifties, stonefly activity gives way to the earliest mayfly species. Caddis activity occurs when temperatures reach the high fifties. We've also noted that the insect activity progresses in a north to south pattern among our three rivers. Hatches on the northernmost Comeback river will be followed within days on the Quartzite river, then predictably last on our largest....the McKenzie.

Stoneflies :

The first major insect emergences, starting with the large Pteronarcys, then medium sized stones, and lastly the small stones. Tiny (size 12 - 14) black stones emerge as the spring thaw occurs, not a significant part of our early season angling. The giant Pteronarcys stoneflies emerge at the end of June or early July, when water temperatures are just passing the 50 degree mark. Early season anglers (first 2 or 3 weeks) can expect to encounter these insects, finding dropped wings along walking trails, and adults around the rivers. During the first week of the 2010 season, I've landed lake trout for clients that regurgitated intact Pteronarcys adults by the handful. Fly patterns should be size 4 or 6. Dark stimulators, foam bodied flies, Tarantulas, and nymph patterns.

There's another hatch of dark stoneflies (size 8) when water temperatures are 50 to 52 degrees. These you'll see off and on throughout July and into early August in waning numbers. We were watching ovipositing stoneflies at Quartzite river last July 10th, and 2 - 4.5 pound brook trout were sipping down clusters of eggs at the surface. Smaller (size 12) black stoneflies emerge almost simultaneously. Except for a very small (14) yellow stonefly species halfway through August, that will be the end of the stonefly activity. Anglers visiting up to mid July should include stonefly adult imitations. Nymphs (sizes 4 to 10) can be used all season long. Not all of our stonefly nymphs are dark like the big Pteronarcys stones...olive / cream undersides (hint of yellow)and darker golden olive top surfaces on the size 8 nymphs.

I've collected Pteronarcys nymphs almost as big across as a standard mason jar lid. It never ceases to amaze both the guiding staff and the clients how many large insects crawl out of a river.

Mayflies :

The mayfly action also occurs in earnest from the last week of June up until the third week or so of July. There are many species of mayflies in the watershed, I cannot identify them all to date. Home on the Ashuanipi river system, I've collected mayfly nymphs and in conjunction with www.troutnut.com, I've tried to identify what I have. Others are recognizable from my camp notes and photo matching.

The first of the mayfly species observed will be the size 12 black quills. Ouananiche, lake trout, brook trout, and whitefish will feed eagerly on these. Water temperature will be about 51 degrees. I have my own version that's been well proven, but anything size 12 and black at the right

time will do. As the water warms slightly (52 - 53 degrees), the dark Hendricksons will be emerging with the black quills, size 10. On July 1st, 2010, one large tail out in our territory came alive with whitefish, lake trout, and ouananiche rising to take these insects. It's hard to say if the ouananiche were more interested in these little mayflies, or eating the whitefish. Tails slapped the water as energetic fish at the surface thrust their way back downwards. Clients watched at least one salmon rise with a sizeable whitefish in its mouth. At one point there were more than ten ouananiche at the surface at a time. Over the course of that week, many lake trout and whitefish were hooked and released there, and probably a dozen ouananiche between 2.5 and 8 pounds. Being there at the right moment means your fly will hook you up with a?

As water reaches 56 - 58 degrees, tiny (size 16 - 18) black mayflies with clear wings emerge (Trico's ?). Another rust colored species (size 16) also emerges. Size 10 March Browns follow. Brown drakes, hexagenia mayflies (size 8) and eastern green drakes (size 8) will be emerging when the water hits 60 - 62 degrees. Our brook trout were gorging themselves on these hatches during July 8-12 last season, but the timing of course is determined by water temperature, not the calendar. Hex nymphs (size 6-8) and extended foam body brown duns are effective, size 8-10 (for both ouananiche and trout). Very small (12 - 16) black mayflies emerge halfway through August, and a similarly sized pale chartreuse bodied dun with gray wings (blue winged olives ?).

Recommended mayfly patterns would include nymphs and duns for the flies described above. The most often used of course, are the duns. Black Quills, Black Wulffs, White Wulffs, Royal Wulffs, Dark Hendricksons, March Browns, Brown Drakes, Green Drakes, Minonipi Wulffs, Hexagenia, Olive Wulff, Quill Gordon, or Gray Wulff. Of course, you wouldn't be expected to arrive with them all. What you need depends on what portion of the season you're visiting for.

- # 10-12 black quills
- #8-10 black wulff
- # 12 all white
- # 8-10 white wulff
- # 12 cream with light brown hackle
- # 8-10 grizzly wulff
- # 8-10 gray wulff
- # 8-10 minonipi wulff (Dave Brandt's)
- # 12 blue winged olives
- # 10-12 quill gordons, cahills, humpies, march browns
- # 10 - 12 light cahills

During warmer water conditions, Hexagenia limbata (Hex) and Ephemera guttulata (green drakes) will make an appearance, and this is particularly interesting. These are big, size 6 - 8 mayflies, and a combination of dun, emerger, and nymph patterns are handy. I find that, due to the extremely low fishing pressure, these trout, once feeding, will take most anything. Mayfly patterns don't have to be so species specific or detailed to be effective. General size and color, and you're probably in business. Stragglers will emerge through the third week of July, but after that the mayfly activity also drops off. I tend to carry an assortment of wulffs, extended foam body duns, and a variety of simple wingless hackled mayflies in the color schemes listed above.

Very few people try emerger patterns, or even spend time with mayfly nymphs of any type for that matter. There are a lot of patterns out there that our brook trout have never seen.

Caddis :

Caddis species really begin to emerge in earnest when water temperatures range between 56 and 60 degrees. At least seven species emerge within a short span of time....

- A size 12 to 14 black caddis
- A size 12 tan winged, black bodied caddis
- A size 12 tan winged gray bodied caddis
- A size 10 tan winged rusty bodied caddis
- A size 10 brown winged, brown bodied caddis
- A gray / transparent winged light olive bodied caddis, size 12
- A yellow bodied, pale winged size 14

Green rockworm larva are numerous, as are the cased caddis larvae in varying sizes from 12 to 8. Caddis pupa in sizes 12 or 10, predominantly brown or olive green might be offered. As for dries, I often try a goddard, elk hair caddis, stimulator.....anything in a size 8 to 12 will work. Patterns should vary according to the colors listed above. The caddis activity really drops off after the third or fourth week of July. Scattered caddis activity may be observed after that, but nothing like the first half of July. Very few people spend time here with pupa droppers, but there's no reason why they wouldn't be very effective. Green, tan / brown pupae and olive / brown pupa combinations in sizes 8 to 12 would cover most species encountered. Beadheads would be recommended for a lot of the river water. The caddis patterns (dry or droppers) work very well for the whitefish one might encounter either on the lake or in the rivers also.

Bait fish :

Northern dace, river sculpins, sticklebacks, juvenile whitefish, and rainbow smelt are numerous throughout the water system. Juvenile fish of all species are eaten. This means streamer fishing is common practice and very effective most times. Use strong long shanked heavy wire hooks. My tying preference is the TMC 9395 hook. Long slender smelt patterns tied on light hooks work, but just don't seem to hold up to the abuse. No tandem or double hooked patterns please. If you show up with large tandem streamers, you'll be asked to clip off the front hook. Single barbless hooks only.

Large (size 2 and 4) rabbit strip streamers, bucktails or rabbit strips muddlers are deadly producers. The internet is full of ideas and patterns from the Maine area and from Quebec. A fly assortment should include a variety of dull / dark mottled olive browns / blacks alongside colourful orange, blue, or yellow. Sizes two to six. Unweighted for the riffles, cone heads or otherwise weighted for the holes and faster water. I wouldn't bother with anything smaller than a size 6 on most occasions. Having said that however, there have been a couple of situations during the start of 2010 when a tiny size 10 orange muddler hooked clients into brookies up to seven pounds....lost in river currents.

I prefer to wade and pick river water apart searching for fish willing to rise to relatively large dry flies. More often than not, a brookie will rise to a pattern within the first half dozen casts if they're ever going to do it. If fish reject what we're throwing, change it up. Vary the action, then vary the fly. All plans change if rising fish or weather / insect activity dictates. I have no problem going through 10 to 15 patterns an hour if its necessary. As a matter of personal preference, I begin using the mouse or bomber. I'll fish a short section with those patterns, and if there's no luck within a handful of nice passes, I'll switch to several types of muddlers or rabbit winged streamers.

A quick note on muddlers. Marabou, or sparse hair winged variations work almost as well as bulkier rabbit strip versions. I prefer either over the original quill winged muddler. They're more durable, the rabbit even more so. I also prefer rabbit over marabou for the greater retained bulk and strength. If one is going to collect muddlers, the hair winged versions are most successful unweighted in natural light deer tones with a red tail that isn't overdone. The rabbit versions are great tied in black, olive, white, yellow, and orange. Size 4 heavy hooks. A combination of unweighted and cone heads are recommended. Casting these big wet flies with sink tip or floating lines can be awkward for some. I use bright orange most often for early season trout and salmon, white for early season ouananiche. Olive and black versions seem to be the most consistent all season long.

The Essential Flies

A box of my favourite fly picks would have to include patterns that can appeal to either the brook trout or landlocked salmon mixed together in the river. From one day to the next, our favourite holes might give us either one. I don't think there's a prettier fish than the big brookie, but if you were to ask me what's the most fun on the rod...it's the big ouananiche. The big brookies can be heart stopping, thrashing on top with the big tail slaps and head pulls- especially in strong spring current. That's fun, no doubt about it. The Ouananiche however are simply electric, strong with a sustained fight. They run, "shiver" right up through the rod, and are so acrobatic. I won't turn either one down, so my fly boxes are first stacked with the "dual purpose flies". The other three species are incidental catches.

These patterns I would consider essential to anyone who is hoping to target nice brookies, but always willing to oblige the salmon. You'll notice there are no nymphs or droppers listed, although they are very effective at times. My fishing is usually big flies for big fish. That's just my style. Other ideas and styles work, but we can't carry everything can we (especially if we tie our own). Most clients bring boxes and boxes of patterns, and almost invariably end up using only a small fraction of those flies. I'd fish with that collection anywhere I go on the McKenzie or Ashuanipi systems.

Streamers

Le Ballerine - size 2
Daren Dicks Special - sizes 2 or 4
Cat's Ass muddler - sizes 2 or 4
Rabbit muddlers - sizes 2 or 4
Olive Sculpin - sizes 2 and 4
Black Leeches - sizes 2 and 4
Brook trout strip leech - size 2

Dries

mice - size 4
salmon bombers - sizes 4 and 6
Black quills - size 12
Wulffs - sizes 8 to 10
Goddard Caddis - sizes 10 and 12
Stimulators - sizes 8 and 10
Turks Tarantulas - size 6

D.W. Special - size 2
Thunder Creek Minnows - size 6
Widowmakers - size 4

Green / Brown drakes - sizes 8 and 12
Low wing deer / CDC caddis - sizes 8 to 10
Extended foam bodied mayflies - size 10

Targeting Ouananiche Specifically...

Opportunistic river feeding means that at times, small dry flies of many types will work, while at other times size two streamers can “clean out” a hole. Expect ouananiche to rise to caddis, mayflies, bombers, bugs, mice, and muddlers of many types - same as the trout. Inclement weather and cooler water might decide that hair wing or bucktail streamers are needed.

I suspect many patterns and colors are worth trying, but no one angler could carry them all. Orange, blues, yellow, and white are common themes among the most successful patterns over the last few seasons. Most of my streamers are tied on size 2 or 4 straight eye 4xl 3xh hooks. 6xl for many smelt patterns. All patterns should be reinforced against the abuse of the fish. I clear coat tinsel bodies and uni-stretch tags, or use reinforcing fine wire to add durability. I also prefer to have painted eyes added, a neat round job done with sections of wooden dowel shaved in a pencil sharpener. Eyes as large as the built up fly head will allow. Clear coat for durability. Tandem versions would better suit lake trolling (we remove the first hook altogether), with / without rattling metal beads in the middle. I've had good success on the Ashuanipi River with a tandem silver beaded Magog smelt.

The best producer of 2008 was the yellow rabbit strip “Gabbro” muddler with a pearl mylar tube body/tail and red band. The D.W. Special, olive sculpin, Cat's Ass, and Blue smelt landed the most salmon in 2009. In 2010 its been my new “Ballerine” and the Daren Dicks Special during the spring. The D.W. Special and the Ballerine proved to be the best all around pick for streamers in 2010.

The majority of river water is shallow, so floating lines with 6 to 9 foot leaders will be adequate, but also bring sinking tip leader material or intermediate sink tip line. Split shot may be used on the leader under spring conditions, or to assist in getting lighter lines into deeper holes without changing things up. Seven or eight weight gear. A smooth, powerful drag system is indispensable. I use a Billy Pate Salmon reel and 8 weight 9' rod.

Well Proven Ouananiche streamer picks :

D.W. Special - size 2
Blue Smelt - sizes 2 to 4
Yellow or white rabbit strip muddlers - size 4
Magog Smelt - sizes 2 to 6
Gray Ghost - sizes 2 and 4
Daren Dicks Special - size 4
Le Ballerine - size 2
Capelin - size 1/0 or 2 salmon hook
Olive Sculpins - size 2 or 4
Black strip Leeches - size 2 or 4
Brook trout strip leech - size 2
Thunder Creek Minnows - size 4 or 6
Cat's Ass Muddler - size 2 or 4
Gabbro Muddler - size 4

Clients have also landed ouananiche using egg cluster imitations, Polar Shrimp, Black Ghosts, Turk's Tarantulas, Blue Charms, Clouser minnows, fox squirrel nymphs, stonefly nymphs, and the new favorite addition proven in 2010 - the Capelin salmon pattern.

Presented dead drift along the current edges and deep eddies, or short drifts with a tightening of the line and lifting the rod to gently "skitter" and arc the fly across the bottom third of its presentation. Waking the fly across an arc as your line straightens downstream from you brings the greatest number of strikes. Always strip back the wulffs, bugs, bombers, mice, and other attractors, often ouananiche will follow the fly in close to you.

Fast action retrieves, with a rapid random length strip action will attract the most attention using streamers. Don't be afraid of ripping the fly off the water in the case of muddlers in particular. When the fish makes up its mind, the speed of your fly isn't going to scare it. They prefer a speedy action. As soon as the fly slows or stops, the ouananiche is a flash from gone. Slower, deeper presentations with heavy coneheads in the deeper holes. Smaller strips.

On occasion, trolling streamers with sinking tip, or full sinking lines, on Andre Lake itself can produce ouananiche between two and twelve pounds as they move along the shoreline rock ledges and up the western side of the lake. Water depths usually run eight to twenty feet off shoreline ledges, sometimes as deep as forty feet. Most trolling is done from 6 to 12 feet down. There are a few short opportunities on the McKenzie to troll streamers as well. Sink tip lines and bright spring attractors like the Daren Dicks or Ballerine are very effective.

Either way, ouananiche are very different from the Atlantics in the sense that they will slam any pattern they want upon first seeing it. You do not have to make pass after pass hoping for the "perfect presentation". If they want it, it is usually taken quickly with speed and aggression. Be prepared for fast strikes and multiple leaps. Many stand frozen watching that first jump, only to react by being too forceful on the rod, not reacting fast enough, clenching rod and line together, and pushing the leader or tippet past the breaking point. Two thirds of ouananiche are lost on the first jump.

Tying In Preparation

During the early high cold water fishing, be prepared for some brook trout action with flies covering a wide range of sizes, from 2 to 12. An assortment of nymphs, streamers, and some dry flies will cover the bases for brook trout, depending on your preference. Ouananiche fishing is usually streamer fishing, although you might get them to take dries. Lakers might take nymphs, streamers, or mice. All three species might occupy river holes, especially true when fishing the McKenzie.

If you're doing any lake fishing out of interest or just to have a break from walking and wading, huge streamers on full sink lines would be ideal for trolling shorelines. Deceivers, large smelt or whitefish imitations, or Clouser minnows. Surface poppers for pike are fun if we're fishing for a shore lunch.

Mid season is prime brookie fishing in terms of numbers and the potential of actually getting larger ones to take anything. Ouananiche will be encountered occasionally, as they will occupy

certain holes throughout the season. The insect hatches are on, and you have a large number of possible fly patterns to choose from. A wide variety of small mayfly duns, big wulffs, bombers, attractors, nymphs, pupae, and big streamers. Good luck narrowing that down. Lake trout fishing dies off, and pike are numerous in the lake and a few spots on the rivers.

Late season fishing will offer the wildest ouananiche action you've ever seen. Brookies are extremely hot colored but harder to entice. Big streamers on heavy hooks. Avoid excessively long shanked hooks (as they tend to bend up and / or act as levers to work hooks out of crazy fish). They look good but don't result in more landed fish. Use heavy wire hooks and do yourself a favour.

Flies generally have to be durable and bigger than you might expect. Take care to use tight thread wraps, head cement, and reinforcing wire often. I also feel that the addition of eyes in some form add to the effectiveness of streamers. Lots of movement generally in terms of body materials. With a few exceptions, my favorites are bulky, thick ties (true too on some of your dry fly patterns to be used in the faster riffles). One of the first things I often do is talk flies with clients and browse boxes. Show me something new. Try your ideas and patterns, mine will be there if you need them after.

Make sure to pinch down all barbs so we don't have to be after you on the river.

Recommended Flies

During the 2009 season, I spent more time tying smelt streamer patterns, bombers, mayfly duns, rabbit strip muddlers, attractor streamers, and mice than anything else. I'm always up for new patterns or tying techniques that might apply to my two favourites : the ouananiche and the big brook trout. I'd like to pass along a couple of local developments, and variations of other fly patterns that have been successful for us so far. I'm not sure if they qualify as unique, original creations (some might), but they are patterns we prefer here. When I'm in camp, I tie and sell all of these flies if they're needed. I always bring in a pile of materials. Some of these patterns will be featured in an episode of *The New Fly Fisher* show starting sometime in January 2011.

I'll offer a list of essential patterns that will prepare you for both trout and salmon. I make these available in camp, and we're always interested in new fly ideas. What I describe here is a variety of fish related information, fly patterns and notes on the presentations that we've found effective. Do not limit yourself to just these patterns. They are effective, but we're always adding new ideas. I for one will ask you if you have any proven fly patterns to share. If I see them proven on our water, this document grows. I want to stress again how low the fishing pressure is here, and one never knows what works from one week to the next. Each group of clients adds something to my fly tying. We've proven that at times, when the favourites aren't producing, showing the fish something completely new can turn things around.

Here I'll provide you with patterns and their variations that have already proven their worth on this watershed. I'll begin with the most reliable dries : bombers, mice, wulff, extended bodied drakes, and add a few other proven patterns.

If I had to Pick Just One ?

I'm absolutely convinced that if I were to stick with only one pattern for an entire trip...and I HAVE done this...a two week trip consisting of camp preparation work and free time fishing without clients... that one critical pattern is going to be a deer hair mouse. Salmon are sometimes hooked with mice as well, I've landed smaller ouananiche of two or three pounds with a mouse, and had clients that have landed salmon between six and nine pounds using mice while trying for brook trout. I have also landed lake trout in the rivers deeper holes using a mouse, and the fact that pike slash at them goes without saying. It's the one fly for four species. I spent two weeks fishing only one fly pattern during late June / early July 2008, and had a blast doing it. At one point I had a streak of 25 brook trout over two pounds on one particular mouse during an afternoon at Comeback River before busting a retied leader. Over twenty brook trout (two pounds plus) one day on the upper McKenzie, including my biggest ever.

I was fishing the top hole of the McKenzie after having dropped off a Newfoundland geologic team directly across the lake for the day. I drifted a mouse a second time down a right hand tail out current when a big brookie porpoised from right to left and seemed to take the mouse on the way down. I lifted the rod (I think) while I took in the wide flank and rusty tail...its width was amazing. I remember thinking....female....nothing connected....big swirl disappearing in the current...hands shaking....heart racing.....damn. Try as I might, there was no other sign of her. I slowly waded away to fish the other side of the river for a while. Really though, my mind was still across the river. After twenty or thirty minutes, back I went with the mouse. Within the first several passes, the brookie came up almost vertical underneath and gulped the mouse and flipped away with a nice splash and tail whipped the water. Five to seven minutes later, I brought the fish to hand and marked the length on my rod. Twenty three inches. The fish rested across the breadth of my hand at the surface as I tried to scheme a way of getting the camera out of my backpack while standing out alone in the river. In the end, I had already lost one camera seasons earlier, and the trout slipped away and left me with a huge grin.

In an article written for the 2003 SPAWNER magazine, the late Len Rich, a guide and author of a number of books on brook trout fishing in Labrador, also wrote in praise of the mice patterns. It would rank as his number one fly pattern for Labrador's brook trout over a twenty five year career...

“Big brook trout of three pounds or more just cannot resist the sight of a mouse skittering on the surface overhead. I reasoned that a meal with this much protein wrapped up in one package sure beat the option of sucking down a few thousand midges or a hundred mayfly nymphs. Brook trout are opportunistic, and large ones like anything that resembles a rodent.”

I love seeing fish hit the mouse on top. That just never gets old. The large, half muddler head and larger body behind the eyes means it's a great popper when retrieved straight back upstream in short popping strips or a shaky twitching motion. Dead drifts, gently skittering arcs that produce a trembling “V” wake, pulling it back well underwater, even trolling for pike behind a boat have all produced fish on mice this season. Just as much fun have been the three or four times over the last couple of seasons a client has fired everything at the trout holed up in front of him, to no avail. Then the odd reluctant trout forgets him or herself for an instant as that “cheeseburger with legs” goes drifting overhead. The expressions I may get make each mouse tied a solid investment. I've seen what can happen.

This past season I had a client fishing a deep bowl shaped hole wrapping around a rock outcrop, and after several patterns were tried, he caught and released a four pound brookie with the mouse. Several drifts later, a chrome ouananiche around seven or eight pounds slashed that mouse, and before the rod was up and words were out, that was it. There it was....gone. The shock of the unexpected salmon rise was gravy on top of the colorful male trout just released.

Several seasons ago, a ten year old boy stood on a rock ledge not far from that same hole. He was asking about what pattern to try if there were large brookies underneath the tailout, and as I pulled out a fly box to show him, I inadvertently dropped a large mouse onto the water, and it was quickly carried away and over the deep tailout. I nudged the young boy on the shoulder and said “ Watch this”...pointing out the muskrat wrapped mouse floating high on the surface for its first and only drift. As it neared several boulders forty or more feet down current, a large head and flank burst through the water and that mouse was history. The blaze orange flank left no doubt as to what it was. That young pair of hands couldn't move fast enough to get the next mouse out there.

What I use most often I call the McKenzie Mouse. I've been tying and using it since my first experiences here six or seven seasons ago. As mentioned, it's a great searching pattern that brings large opportunists to the top for a lot of fun. Apply floatant all over the deer body, and fish it in a manner opposite of what the water is doing. In faster water, trim the edges with a fast plain riding drift. In moderate currents, its more of a relaxed slight twitching drift, finishing with a skating / skittering arc much like a bomber. Retrieve with short quick line strips that make it pop. In slower water, I use a more aggressive short strip drift with the occasional pause and pop. I find the darker, scruffier mice that are more of an oval shape far out fish the perfectly trimmed little light coloured ball shaped mice I see all over the internet. Eyes, whiskers, and ears are nice but optional. If it looks like a mouse from underneath, then it's a mouse. This works all season long on brookies, salmon, pike, and lake trout.

The “McKenzie Mouse”..

- Hook : Mustad 3277 wide gap popper hook, size 4
Tail : Brown rabbit zonker strip, hair extending almost 2"...so you'll need to cut out about a 3/4 to 1 inch strip of hide. I find the use of rabbit provides a lot of rear end movement, and helps lower the back half of the mouse a little when wet. Too long allows for short strikes or hook bend fouling.
Body : Brown deer hair spun and clipped, shaved flat belly
Ears : teardrop shaped brown craft foam, tied at 45°
Head : brown deer hair spun and clipped to a “half muddler” head
- Note :* *Smaller (size 6) grey mice have also produced very well in 2010. Trimmed very differently, they could be some of the round arsed stubby patterns seen often on the Internet, but also an elongated, slim version with black leather strip tail, whiskers, eyes and ears. The point being that it seems that the brown mouse works wonders at times, but the grey mouse can do fine as an alternative at other times. For 2011, I'd carry some slightly larger brown mice, and smaller gray mice.*

Having already done the “one fly thing”, I'm now back to trying a variety of flies, so the list continues to grow each season. I'm starting here by describing my favourites.

Salmon Bombers :

Usually white calf tail and wing (single or split) up front, and an elongated cigar shaped deer hair spun / clipped body and 5 - 8 turns of hackle rib for a bomber. Bugs lack the fore wing and have a short football shaped body. The orange bomber is probably the number one salmon pattern in NL, certainly proved time and time over throughout Atlantic Canada. I usually tie bombers on a straight eye # 4 or usually a # 6 streamer hook, and bugs on # 6 or # 8 streamer or even a # 8 or # 10 dry fly

I have easy access to caribou hair here in Labrador (partial home range of the George River Herd - the largest in the world), hollow and very buoyant, it packs tighter than deer. Fine, straight hair seems to produce the neatest trimmed bodies for me in the end. Your choice...caribou or deer, both work. I use whatever's on hand at the moment. I also prefer calf body hair over the usual tail hair. Its straighter and clumps denser than the tail hair...which brightens the white at both ends and improves visibility in faster water. Stacking versus unstacked hair ? Also your choice. The tail and front wing should be equal length, and the front should be propped up with a dam of tying thread. This helps the pattern remain at the surface when being stripped back to you, and creates a greater disturbance on the surface. For that reason I prefer the bomber style fly patterns over the similar bug patterns (which have the tail, but lack the front wing). I also prefer to tie my bombers with a couple of extra turns of hackle rib. Two together up front behind the wing, then four to six more along the body. The last rib being a double wrap.

When fishing bombers, apply floatant liberally all over the fly and let dry. I like to apply floatant ahead of time and let it dry, then apply again after you've tied it on. I expect this fly to be dragged under a lot. Fish as you would a mouse. For targeting salmon however, a completely dead drift in moderate to slow current can be even more effective. I let the fish show me what they want, and I'll vary the retrieve until I know. Start slow and work the fly faster within a few casts over the same water.

Sure, it's labelled a salmon fly pattern, but don't tell the brook trout. They haven't found out yet, because these are just deadly on brook trout in a variety of colour schemes. Here are my most often tied choices...

<i>Tail</i>	<i>Body</i>	<i>Forewing</i>
white calf	natural deer with blaze orange hackle rib	white calf
white calf	back 1/3 blaze orange deer, front 2/3 natural deer with grizzly rib over front 2/3	white calf
white calf	natural deer with grizzly hackle	white calf
white calf	back 1/3 fl. Chartreuse deer, front 2/3 natural deer with fl. orange hackle rib over front 2/3	white calf
white calf	natural deer with brown hackle	white calf

Other colour schemes might include royal blue body with white hackle or brown hackle, brown body with orange hackle, natural deer with yellow tail / wing and brown hackle, orange body with white hackle, or all white with badger hackle.

Paul Leblanc of Quebec ties another variation of the brown bomber using silver fox tail fibers for the tail and wing, and wrapped with brown hackle, the “Hazel Fly”, responsible for several nice ouananche in 2010.

Wulffs :

Many Labrador outfitters can attest to the effectiveness of this fly series. As a tier, I know that far more realistic and specific dun patterns exist. Nymphs, emergers, spinners, and cripples are obviously also effective at some point in a hatch. Yet this fly series remains the most thrown and most productive mayfly pattern in Labrador since Lee introduced it here in the early seventies. Not many anglers use anything other than duns however. They work just fine, but don't let that limit you. In terms of duns, you'll need black quills first, then Dark Hendricksons, March Browns, Green Drakes, Hex, Grey Wulffs, white Wulffs, and Royal Wulffs. Any dun can be tied Wulff style.

There's about a four week window during the early season when mayfly patterns are absolutely essential. Many will work if the color and size are close enough. These fish haven't been exposed to a large portion of the fly patterns that exist, so when insects emerge, anything relatively close has a good chance. I'm always carrying Wulffs (sizes 8 and 10), generic mayfly duns (size 12) in assorted colors, and extended foam bodied drakes (sizes 8 and 10).

Hook choice is up to you. The traditional salmon, 3xl dry, or standard dry in sizes 8, 10, and 12 depending on the species. I'm not going to provide the dressing for well established wulffs. I'm listing our own preferences and my own variations here. Royal Wulffs, Grizzly Wulffs, and White Wulffs would be useful.

Black Quill (size 12) : my own variation tied in the Wulff style

Thread :	6/0 black
Tail :	6-10 moose hairs, slightly longer than body length
Wing :	grey calf tail, split
Body dubbing :	black superfine dub, thin with only a slight thickening forward
Hackle(s) :	badger

Minonipi Wulff (Dave Brandt) size 10

Thread :	6/0 brown
Tail :	woodchuck guard hairs
Wing :	tan calf tail
Body dubbing :	brown / olive / gray superfine blend
Hackle(s) :	gray dun (or add a grizzly variant)

Olive Wulff size 10

Thread : 6/0 olive
Tail : 6 - 10 moose hairs
Wing : gray calf tail
Body dubbing : medium olive fine and dry, with a pinch of brown antron dub blended in
Hackle(s) : grizzly dyed olive and grizzly

Yellow Wulff size 10

Thread : 6/0 yellow
Tail : natural deer hair
Wing : gray calf tail
Body dubbing : pale yellow superfine
Hackle(s) : grizzly dyed yellow / olive and gray dun

Green Drake size 8, 10

Thread : 6/0 olive
Tail : black calf tail or moose
Wing : speckled chartreuse deer from a bucktail base
Body dubbing : medium olive dry dub with yellow uni-stretch nylon rib
Hackle(s) : grizzly dyed olive

Gray Wulff size 8 and 10

Thread : 6/0 gray
Tail : dark elk hair or deer or brown bucktail
Wing : dark elk hair or deer or brown bucktail
Body dubbing : grey superfine dubbing
Hackle(s) : dun

Extended foam body brown drakes (size 10) :

Thread : 6/0 yellow
Tail : 3 moose hairs
Body : cream craft foam on top of which is placed or glued brown craft foam. I place the tail fibers in between two separate foam strips and hold it all with one hand, along with a thread tag, then wind thread to form four segments, gradually getting thicker and larger towards the front. Two more larger segments connect the body to the hook shank. Trim excess foam. Color a stripe along the top with a brown marker.
Wing : gray deer with a touch of olive in front
Hackle(s) : ginger and gray, grizzly and olive grizzly, badger, or others to match different species

As the season progresses, you'll use black quills first, quickly followed by larger Dark Hendricksons, then March Browns. Hexagenia and Green drakes end things off near the end of July, maybe even early August. After that, any mayflies are tiny. If you fancy those, check back to my hatch descriptions mentioned previously. By the time they emerge, I'm having fun with big streamers.

Turk's Tarantula :

Hook : size 6 3xl streamer
Tail: 10-12 pheasant tippet fibers
Body : fluorescent fire orange antron dub ribbed with fine gold wire
Wing : 10-12 strand of pearl krystal flash to tail length
White calf tail
Head / Collar: Light natural deer with white rubber legs

Variations : Some of the largest salmon (10 - 14 lbs) toying with anglers during 2009 rose repeatedly for two other versions of this fly...

Hook : size 8 or 10 dry fly hook
Body : extended foam body made with a bilayer of white craft foam ribbed with orange 6/0 to create a segmented effect (4 segments extending, and another 2 on the hook shank)
Wing : 10-12 strand of pearl krystal flash to tail length
White calf tail
Head / Collar: white deer with white rubber legs

I'm also tying olive versions for the upcoming season. Be sure to bring some all black with orange body to imitate the giant stones of late June if you're early season fishing.

Muddler Minnow Variations

Making the transition between dry and wet are several variations on the muddler. Hair winged muddler variations are absolutely the one line of flies I'd always want to be carrying. Specifically the Cat's Ass and D.W. Special variations designed here at McKenzie River Lodge. Rabbit strip muddler designs are also extremely effective in a variety of colours. Orange, olive, black, yellow, and white. Sizes 2 or 4, some weighted with cone heads, others unweighted.

I'll offer here a line of very well proven variations. I call anything with the classic head and collar a muddler, although not all will agree with me. I'll mention both the unweighted and the deeper reaching "muddlers" here while we're on the topic. The original turkey tail muddler with either silver or gold bodies are always worth having, sizes 2 to 8. I tie most muddlers using size 4, sometimes size 2 TMC 9395.

Grizzly variation : the "Spuddler"

Hook : size 4 or 6
Tail : grizzly hackle fibers
Body : flat silver tinsel body ribbed with fine silver wire
Wing : underwing of gray squirrel hair, topped with two grizzly hackles
Natural deer collar and head.

Squirrel tail muddler :

Hook : streamer size 4 to 6
Tail: red hackle fibers
Body : flat silver tinsel ribbed with silver wire
Wing : stacked clump of grey squirrel tail
Finish with a natural deer collar and head

Another camp guide, Danny, and I sometimes sit down at the vise. He'll describe something he wants tied, and I go to it. Over the course of a couple beers we get things worked out. Starting with an already proven squirrel tail muddler effective for brookies, we added a hint of yellow and rainbow accent that wasn't pronounced. (Hoping the yellow and subtle blue could work on the ouananiche the way the squirrel tail muddler worked for brookies) We tied up a couple for Danny to take with clients down river. After a slow day for a pair of anglers on the McKenzie's top section, with warming water and lazy trout, Danny walked back with two clients from below, and (as we talked over a cold beer at the camp) exclaimed "My son, that fly is the cat's ass on that river today !" There it was. After his guests had thrown many fly patterns over proven holes without incident, Danny offered the new muddlers. Both brook trout and ouananiche took the fly and helped put big grins on the anglers faces. It hasn't been in use by us for long, but no guide's going to go anywhere without one. A fly that more often than not, would end up producing for us during the seasons when other patterns didn't. The wing has to be tied sparse, thicker versions haven't been as effective. Cast it across currents, and strip it back as though you were about to lose your last one to a pike. Irregular length strips, but keep up the speed. This is Danny's design and my tie.

The "Cat's Ass" muddler :

Designed by guides Danny Winsor and Burt Gillis

Hook : streamer sizes 2, 4, and 6
Tail : small clump of red hackle fibers or marabou tips, extending 1/4" past hook bend...too much red isn't as effective, don't over do it
Body : silver diamond braid with silver wire rib
Wing : sparse yellow bucktail to tail tip, followed by 4 strands of rainbow krystal flash, topped with a sparse clump of grey squirrel tail
Head : light natural deer collar and muddler head, gold conehead optional

Anyway, back to my story, Danny's not done. While I was out of camp in 2009 to attend a wedding, Danny combined with Paul, camp owner, to develop another deadly streamer for the late season salmon and brook trout. They were both quite pleased to tell me what had transpired while I was away, and of the salmon they hit with this new D.W. Special. Its Danny's design and Paul's tie.

The "D.W. Special" :

Designed by guides Danny Winsor (D.W.) and Paul Ostiguy

Hook : Mustad size 2 straight eye streamer, gold cone head
Body : holographic silver tinsel, silver wire ribbing
Underbelly: orange bucktail

Belly : white bucktail
Underwing : four strands of gold holographic flashabou
Wing : brown bucktail, over which is black bucktail
Collar / Head: natural deer, spun and clipped

This one can't be tied thick enough. This was one of the best flies for 2009 and 2010. The number one fly for late season ouananiche. Well done boys.

Rabbit strip muddlers :

I prefer 1/4" magnum zonker rabbit strips over marabou since it retains more bulk underwater, the colour doesn't bleed out, and has the better blend of colour tones. Its much more durable than the marabou muddlers. I also believe the twitching motion of rabbit in current is more pronounced than marabou. I always trim both ends of my cut zonker strip into points. It produces a better tapered tail profile and an easier tie on point that slips under a conehead when one is used.

Here are a few of my favourite rabbit strip patterns...in no particular order. Tied on size 2 or 4 TMC 9395 hooks. Weighted and unweighted.

1. Fluorescent orange rabbit strip over pearl mylar tube body with red tail band. Light natural deer collar and head, gold cone head optional.
2. Fluorescent yellow - known locally as the "**Gabbro muddler**" tied like the orange muddler described above.
3. Olive variant rabbit strip with pearl krystal flash underneath, and olive collar / head, slight red throat. Olive dubbed body (rabbit, Quick descent blend) Black or gold cone head optional.
4. Black cone head, black quick descent dubbed body with black or red wire rib, 4 strands pearl krystal flash underwing, topped with black rabbit. Black muddler collar and head. (brook trout and ouananiche)
6. Gold cone head, short chartreuse marabou tail, olive quick descent dubbed body with brown or copper wire rib, red throat, olive variant rabbit wing, olive collar and head (brook trout and ouananiche)
7. Silver cone head, red hackle fibre tail, rainbow diamond braid body, optional silver wire rib, 4 strands rainbow crystal flash underwing, white rabbit strip, light grey / tan collar and head (spring ouananiche)
8. Pearl mylar tube body over white underbody, ribbed with red fine wire. Black rabbit strip wing topped with 4 - 5 strands of pearl krystal flash. Natural deer muddler collar and head.

The Widomaker :

I've had very good success with a muddler variation I first came across featured in another article by Len Rich in the SPAWNER magazine. (This is a "muddlerized" variation of the woollen headed "widomaker" pattern from camps in eastern Labrador)

Hook : size 4, black conehead optional
Tail : red hackle fibers, sparse
Body : copper diamond braid wraps
Wing : black magnum zonker strip, copper krystal flash underneath optional
Throat : red hackle fibers to collar length
Head / Collar : black deer hair

Streamers :

Again, I must remind you that the most effective patterns vary from day to day, but we have our fairly consistent favourites. I am only presenting patterns for lesser known patterns, locals, and local variations. Proven patterns like the Gray Ghost, Supervisor, Magog Smelt, Governor Aiken, Egg Sucking Leeches, and Thunder Creek minnows are solid choices with tying instructions widely available online.

Do not feel limited to these patterns. Smelts, sculpins, dace, brook trout, whitefish, and sucker minnows provide the tier with all kinds of possible patterns to try. Sizes 2 and 4 mainly, sometimes a 6. The Internet constantly supplies information on new products, tying techniques, and streamer ideas. I'm always browsing for new ideas. You should have a selection of our favourites, a selection of yours, and some unknowns.

Another well proven ouananiche streamer pattern for us locally is a pattern developed by Daren Dicks here in Labrador City. Daren used to sell this when he operated a store a number of years ago, but the pattern is not widely known. It's a locally developed pattern for ouananiche. Lake trout and brook trout are also taken with the same fly.

The "Daren Dicks Special"... **Designed by Daren Dicks**

Hook : size 2 or 4 streamer
Tail: orange marabou
Body : silver crystal chenille
Wing : yellow marabou flanked by two red hackle feathers, flanked on the outside by grizzly hackles
Throat : orange hackle fibers
Gloss black head

I tie my Daren Dicks Specials using fluorescent fire orange rabbit fur tail and throat. The tail is 1/2" or longer, and the throat extends halfway along the body length. The head is slightly longer than normal and built up significantly to accommodate large yellow eyes with black pupils.

Le Ballerine :
Designed by guide Burt Gillis

Hook : TMC 9395 size 2
Thread : 6/0 white
Tail : 6 - 8 strands of gold krystal flash, trimmed to 3/4"
Body : medium gold crystal chenille, reinforced with fine gold wire, counter wrapped
Underwing : 4 strands of holographic gold flashabou, to slightly longer than tail tip
Wing : fluorescent orange 1/4" rabbit strip trimmed to a taper and extending just past the tail material
Belly : unstacked white bucktail extending just past hook bend
Head : thickly built up, multiple coats of fluorescent orange nail polish (Rimmel 347 Tequila Sunrise) and large yellow eyes with black pupil. Protect with clearcoat

Brook Trout Strip Leech : (Brett Kent)

Hook : TMC 9395 size 2 with nickel plated yellow / black real eyes dumbbell 1/4 from hook eye below the shank
Thread : 6/0 white
Tail : thick clump of fl. Orange rabbit hair, 3/4", over two splayed pieces of white rubber leg material, trimmed to tail length
Body : White chenille (medium) ribbed with copper wire through a rabbit strip wing zonker style
Wing : olive variant 1/4" rabbit strip trimmed to a taper and extending just past the tail material
Throat: thick clump of fl. Orange rabbit again, then two splayed white rubber legs underneath, trimmed to throat length
Head : olive variant rabbit in a dubbing loop, forming a collar around the head (muddler style). Trim the head to a bullet muddler shape, and trim the "collar" underneath to fully expose the orange and white throat.

The Blue and White :

Tie this pattern thick. Stacked or unstacked.

Hook : size 4 or 6 salmon
Body : silver flat tinsel, ribbed with silver holographic flashabou and fine silver wire rib for a slightly speckled pearl look
Belly : white bucktail
Wing : 10 - 12 silver krystal flash strands, sky blue bucktail, topped with white bucktail
Gloss black head

Blue Smelt :

Hook : size 4 streamer
Body : red lacquered uni-stretch tag, covered with a clearcoat nail polish, and pearl mylar small tubing over a white uni-stretch underbody
Belly : sky blue bucktail, white bucktail on bottom
Wing : sky blue bucktail, 4 - 5 strands of small blue holographic flashabou, topped with royal blue bucktail, then 4 - 5 peacock herl fibers
Throat : red hackle fibers
Cheek : silver pheasant with jungle cock eye
Head : Gloss black with chartreuse eye / black pupil, clear coat lacquer

Capelin :

Hook : size 1/0 spey or salmon, white 6/0 thread
Body : a white uni-stretch underbody, thin, pearl flat braid overwrap
Belly : white bucktail
Wing : sparse orange bucktail, sparser cherise bucktail, flanked at the 10 and 2 positions by 2 strands pearlescent flashabou per side, topped with 2 silver pheasant crest feathers
Cheek : silver pheasant with jungle cock eye
Head : Gloss black

Rainbow Smelt :

Hook : size 4 streamer, 6/0 white for body, black for head
Body : flat silver mylar underbody, over wrapped with pearl mylar
Wing : white bucktail, sky blue bucktail, cherise bucktail, pearl krystal flash, olive bucktail, topped with 4 - 5 peacock herl
Throat : red hackle fibers, short
Cheek : mallard
Head : Gloss black with yellow eye / black pupil, clear coat lacquer

Nymphing Anyone ?

As mentioned earlier, relatively few anglers spend any time presenting nymphs here. I've already pointed out that there is a wide variety of aquatic insect types. It follows then that nymph patterns ought to be able to connect us with fish, perhaps help more on the occasional sluggish fish.

I am limited in suggesting what someone ought to bring, because so few nymph patterns have been actually tried with us. You'll need larger nymph patterns presented with sink tip or even full sink lines during the earliest part of the season. As the season progresses, and water levels drop, most of the described insect activity would be covered with a size 10 or 12 nymph.

I have provided to you a description of the local insect life, and many patterns are found all over the Internet for matching. If I had to pick just a small selection of proven nymph and pupae, I'd be caught carrying....

- green bodied (size 10 or 12) caddis pupae / rockworms, with a tan / brown thorax
- gold ribbed hares ear nymphs, sizes 10 or 12, with orange or gold bead heads
- dark stonefly nymphs, sizes 4 and 6
- hex nymphs, size 6
- fox squirrel nymphs, sizes 8 or 10
- casual dress nymphs, sizes 8 or 10
- species matching hendricksons, march brown, size 12

