

Fishing the McKenzie River Watershed

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Guide

McKenzie River Fly Fishing Lodge

(A primer on the fish and flies compiled from client notes, guides notes, and discussions among the guiding staff)

The camp facilities were established by former owner Wayne Watkins in 2000, as “Expeditions North Inc”. At that time the 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 activity was often limited to 15 to 20 clients per season.

In 2007, the operation was sold to Paul and Chris Ostiguy. Since that time, the camp has served as a fishing destination for anglers 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. These new owners are quite keen on learning 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 which I hope will be of benefit to those interested in fishing Labrador waters for our world class fish. In what follows, I will describe the McKenzie River watershed and the river conditions, what we’ve learned about fish movement and general sizes, and what fly patterns have been effective.

The Water

Located to the north northwest of the Smallwood Reservoir, our waters serve as migratory routes for fish moving between the Smallwood Reservoir, through the Murray Lake system, and up past McKenzie River Lodge to spawn in our rivers. We offer access to 30 miles of water system, which includes three rivers - the McKenzie, Quartzite, and Comeback (each unique in terms of size, water speed, and bottom make up) and three lakes - Andre, 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.

Fishing the McKenzie River

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 river ranges between 60 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 48 - 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 in the 50 - 55 ° F. If river temperatures reach 59 ° 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.

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. 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 200 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 most walk a ten to fifteen minute trip. This section is about 400 yards long by 150 yards wide, and can be crossed at several 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. 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, for overnight feeding forays, or when the river water significantly cools during the latter half of summer.

The **middle section** of the McKenzie begins at the lower end of a still water separating it from the top portion. A walking trail takes you around the still water, and the river downstream (Ruby's Run) has the water narrowing 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, then a long large shallower riffle averaging two feet of water. 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 manageable in most spots. A long stretch of shallow white riffle takes you to a boat positioned to carry some clients onward down river to fish water that sees less than ten to twenty anglers per season.

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 small pockets of deeper water. 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 and wading have access to predominantly ouananiche and brook trout earlier than they 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 and drop offs.

The Fish

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 weather, hatch, or temperature 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 however, that those memorable couple of hours are interspersed with warmer water conditions, 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 near impossible 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.

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. What I describe here is a variety of fish related information, fly patterns and notes on the presentations that we've found effective.

Landlocked salmon (Ouananiche)...

Since 2001, our largest landed ouananiche have weighed in between twelve and fourteen pounds. 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. Some are a golden brown, with a heavily spotted pattern resembling a brown trout. Others 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 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. During the 2009 season, several ouananiche were observed on the upper McKenzie pools estimated in the mid-teens as they broke water, nowhere near any anglers reach at the time. Clients landed ouananiche up to eleven pounds this past season.

Most often, rivers will see moving juvenile males right after spring ice out, ranging between two and five pounds, sometimes slightly more. Some larger of the male fish may move through quickly, smaller fish remaining in river longer. 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.

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.

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, 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 no 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. 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 orange highlights add to the effective patterns. What I list here is a sampling of some fly patterns we’ve landed ouananiche on between four and twelve pounds over the past few seasons.

Streamers : generally size fours, but 2 to 6 in 2x1 to 4x1 with some sparkle and lighter color, attractor patterns, smelt patterns, and variations of muddler minnows, unweighted and coneheads. Fished with floating or sink tip lines, most water will be two to five feet in depth, sometimes to eight feet. Remember, blues, yellows, or orange, coupled with a small touch of red, seem to be more productive.

Black ghost	Gray Ghost
Magog smelt	Chapman’s smelt
Daren Dicks Special	DW Special
Blue smelt	the “Cat’s Ass” muddler
Olive Sculpin	Baby Brook Trout
White and Blue	Thunder Creek Minnows
Clousers	Gabbro Muddler
Orange muddler	White Muddler

Fast action retrieves, with a rapid random length strip action will attract the most attention. 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.

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.

Dry Flies : caddis, mayfly, stonefly, and attractor patterns, an assortment of sizes.

Extended foam bodied green drakes (Hexagenia limbata), 8 and 10
Extended foam bodied brown drake (Ephemera guttulata ?) 8 and 10
Wulffs in 8 to 10 - white, black, minonipi, royal, grizzly
Orange bugs size 6 and 8
Orange bombers sizes 4 and 6
Brown bombers, 4 and 6
Caddis patterns (Elk Hair, Goddard, Brown/tan stimulators) sizes 8 to 12
McKenzie Mouse, size 4 bass popper hook
Turk’s Tarantula - original dressing, plus white and orange versions

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.

Those patterns account for most of the flies anglers have tossed out there lately. Other clients have been successful with...

- stonefly nymphs drifted deep, both golden and black in sizes 4 to 8.
- Pheasant tail, hex nymphs, woolly buggers, black leeches, even egg patterns have connected angler to trophy. Salmon patterns like the blue charm and its variations, the green machine, polar shrimp, thunder and lightning, black bear, and others would be an option as well.

Brook Trout :

As with the ouananiche, ice out is followed by movement of juveniles from the lakes into the rivers. Smaller mixes of males and females up to 3 ½ pounds move to occupy holes and runs before being followed by females up to five pounds. The fish are smaller on average, but are numerous. 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 itself, so by the first week in July, brook trout up to five 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 ¼ 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 two 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. They generally will take almost any fly. These stacked up fish will not be around long, as they soon will leave the river and head into Andre Lake, to begin a perilous trip up to the other two rivers in our system.

The more mature males and females are harder to find up until the second week of August, when the colorful males with hunched backs and black kypes appear from the lakes and into all three rivers. Large males and females move into all three rivers, up to eight pounds. It is these fish we seek out in earnest. As brookies pair up during the latter half of August, it is increasingly difficult to get them to readily take a fly. 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 8 to 10 pound test leader material. They are in no way leader shy, and a five to seven 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 ¼ pounds. In June and July, an angler can realistically expect brook trout between two and six pounds. They will generally be pushed out of the rivers by the incoming ouananiche, so the

brook trout that remain, or travel at the same time can be big. In August, an angler has a realistic chance at a brook trout up to eight 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 last season 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. We believe 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 58 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 the traditional 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, and what I'd recommend to clients willing to listen, is to begin with a dry fly search using attractors, and if large brook trout are in the mood to rise, they will take the fly on the first few passes. Large opportunistic feeders have succumbed to mice, bugs, bombers, large wulffs, turk's tarantula, and stimulators to name a few of the more common choices.

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.

What Hatches Am I Trying to Match ?

To fish on the McKenzie just prior to, or at the beginning of an emergence is a fantastic experience. Sometimes over a dozen trophy brookies are sipping duns and emergers in the same hole. This was videotaped by camp staff earlier this past season as trout took emerging mayflies in a foam spattered eddy...with fins and tails sometimes three at a time on video.

Matching hatches is concentrated mostly between the last week of June and into the first two or three weeks of July. The McKenzie river provides the richest insect hatch action during that time. Prior to that, almost anything seems to work on spring brook trout. After that, streamers and attractors account for most of the brook trout. As the season progresses, flies go

from small to large.

Should trout not rise readily, then quickly switching up to streamers on a floating line would be my next choice for most river water. Muddlers that incorporate lots of motion, like rabbit strip muddlers, are my favorite. Relatively few anglers spend time nymphing, although this can be very productive at times as well. Stonefly and mayfly nymphs are readily available in all three rivers.

I am not an entomologist, so I will only identify a few species I'm sure of, the rest are generic descriptions with the intent of helping potential clients prepare for fishing under our conditions.

June / July Hatches and flies...

Stoneflies : the giant Pteronarcys stoneflies emerge at the end of June, beginning of July, sizes 4 to 6. It never ceases to amaze both myself and the clients how many large insects crawl out of a river. Dark stimulators (# 6), foam bodied stones (# 6 and #8), and dark tarantula style rubber legged flies prove effective imitations. Smaller dark stoneflies (#6, # 8) emerge throughout July. Dark large bodied nymphs (# 4 to 8) drifted into holes or over shallower faster riffles work on occasion for the few anglers spending time at it. Also, smaller golden stonefly nymphs in sizes 8 or 10 have worked to turn on several stubborn trout this season past.

Caddis : Caddis species really begin to emerge in earnest during the first week of July. Size 12 to 14 black caddis appear first, followed almost immediately by a # 8 dark brown caddis I imitate with a brown stimulator. During the second week or so, larger # 8 tan caddis emerge. I often try a goddard, elk hair caddis, stimulator, anything in a size 8 or 10 will work as long as its light colored. A size 12 pale gray and olive species emerges during this time too. This hatch is particularly heavy. The caddis activity really drops off after the third 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. Tan / brown pupae and olive / brown pupa combinations in sizes 8 to 12 would cover most species encountered. Beadheads would be recommend for a lot of the river water.

Mayflies : The mayfly action also occurs in earnest from the last week of June up until the third week or so of July. # 10- # 12 march brown patterns are effective at June's end, and into the first half of July. Extended foam body duns are effective, size 10. A number of size 12 species emerge during the first half of July, and sometimes large brook trout take these with reckless abandon. A collection of size 8 to 12 mayfly duns in the following color schemes would cover most scenarios :

- black with gray hackle, black wulff
- all white, white wulff
- cream with light brown hackle, grizzly wulff

- gray with brown / grizzly hackle, gray wulff, minonipi wulff
- blue winged olives
- quill gordons

During the second or third week, *Hexagenia limbata* (Hex) and *Ephemera guttulata* (green drakes) will make an appearance, and this is particularly interesting. These are big, size 6 - 8 mayflies, so duns and nymph patterns are handy. Smaller species of mayflies will emerge by now as well, what are best described as black quills, quill gordons, blue winged olives, size 12 in olive, black, and brown. 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 June, 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.

As for other brook trout fly recommendations, the list no different in most regards from other Labrador brook trout waters. Here are a few of the most productive types of flies :

- Early season :
- Mice (brown) size 4, see my McKenzie Mouse pattern
 - Orange bugs, tan bugs sizes 6 to 8
 - Orange bombers, brown bombers, blue bombers sizes 4 to 6
 - Stimulators, tan, brown, black in sizes 6 to 10
 - Size 4 to 6 baitfish streamers, my favorites being the rabbit strip muddlers in black, fl. Orange, fl. Yellow, white / rainbow, olive, and black, size 4
 - Woolly buggers, sizes 4 to 8
- Mid season :
- A wide variety of mayfly duns, emergers, and nymphs (my favorites being the extended foam bodied drakes, and the Wulff series). Humpies, caddis pupa and adults, stimulators, bugs, and bombers continue to top the list.
- Late season :
- Big streamers and sculpin patterns, size 2 to 4. Orange rabbit muddlers, smelt streamers, olive sculpins, brown sculpins, black leeches, baby brook trout, the Cat's Ass, and DW Special. The earlier spawning starts, or the warmer the water, the less effective these patterns become.

Tying in Preparation

A Few Locally Developed Variations

During the 2009 season, I spent more time tying smelt streamer patterns, mayfly duns, rabbit strip muddlers, and mice than anything else. I'm always up for new patterns or tying techniques that might apply to my two favorites : 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, but they are patterns we prefer here.

If I had to Pick Just One ?

I'm absolutely convinced that if I were stuck with only one pattern to use for an entire trip...and I HAVE done this...a two week trip consisting of camp preparation and free time fishing... that one critical pattern is going to be a deer hair mouse. I spent two weeks fishing only one fly pattern during late June / early July 2008. I caught brook trout from one to just over six pounds. 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. I probably landed over a hundred brook trout over the span of the two week trip. Salmon are sometimes hooked with mice as well, I've landed smaller ouananiche of two or three pounds with a mouse, and know clients that have landed salmon between six and nine pounds using mice and trying for brook trout. I have also landed lake trout in the rivers deepest holes using a mouse, and the fact that pike slash at them goes without saying. It's the one fly for four species.

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've said to clients..."If they're going to come up, they're going to come up for that." I just love seeing either 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. 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 into 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 last 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 belly 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 tie most often is called the McKenzie Mouse :

Hook : Mustad 3277 wide gap popper hook, size 4
Tail : Brown rabbit zonker strip, extending almost 2"
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

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 with my favorites.

Rabbit strip muddlers :

Hook : Mustad size 4 3x1 streamer, 2xh straight eye
Gold tungsten conehead optional
Body : pearl medium mylar tubing over white underbody material, red ring to secure rear of the tubing, allow tubing to fray and extend to form a 1/4" tail
Wing : rabbit magnum zonker strip to extend slightly past the tail
Head / Collar: Light natural deer

Colors:fluorescent orange (brook trout), fluorescent yellow (ouananiche) - known locally as the "Gabbro muddler"

Variations : A) 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)
B) gold cone head, optional 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)

- C) silver cone head, red hackle fiber 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)
- D) black cone head, red tail, copper diamond braid body with copper wire rib, 4 strands of copper krystal flash underwing, red clump of krystal flash or short red marabou on each side as gills, or one as a throat, a black rabbit strip wing, black collar and head. (This is a “muddlerized” variation of the woollen headed “widowmaker” pattern from camps in eastern Labrador)
- E) my “Brown Bull”, golden brown hackle tips tied as a tail, flanked by shorter brown barred marabou. The rear half of the body is brown / black varigated chenille, the front half cream sparkle yarn. That front section has a grizzly dyed dark brown hackle palmered over it. Brown wire is then ribbed through all body materials. A brown rabbit strip wing, and a mottled black / brown deer hair collar and head, trimmed flat on the bottom and cut wide and flat to mimic the sculpins pronounced head. Optional black eyes glued on, 1/3 back from the front of the head, positioned at a 45 degree angle. Similarly tied in olive.

Squirrel tail muddler :

Hook : streamer size 4 to 6, straight eye, 2 or 3 xh
 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 Winsor, 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 they way the squirrel tail muddler worked for brookies.

We tied up a couple for Danny to take with clients downriver. 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 season when other patterns didn’t. It 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.

The “Cat’s Ass” muddler :

Hook : mustad straight eye, size 4, 2xh 2 xl
 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

Danny's not done. While I was out of camp in 2009 to attend a wedding, Danny combined with Paul Ostiguy, camp owner, to develop another deadly streamer for the late season salmon.

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". Over the remainder of the season, it was responsible for several ouananiche in the 5 to 9 pound range, and many smaller ones.

Hook : Mustad size 2 straight eye streamer, gold tungsten conehead
 Body : holographic silver tinsel, silver wire ribbing
 Underbelly: orange bucktail
 Belly : white bucktail
 Underwing : four strands of gold holographic flashabou, brown bucktail
 Wing : black bucktail
 Collar / Head: natural deer, spun and clipped

We've noticed that streamers incorporating orange on white proves effective on late season ouananiche. Orange in general triggers more strikes.

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. Here's a dressing for the "Daren Dicks Special".

Hook : size 4 or 6 streamer, size 6 salmon
 Tail: sparse red hackle fibers
 Body : silver crystal chenille with silver wire rib (I tie a long streamer hook version with a hot orange unistretch tag, covered with a clearcoat nail polish, silver flat tinsel ribbed with holographic flashabou and silver wire for a slightly speckled pearl look)
 Wing : yellow marabou, with orange marabou on top, flanked by two grizzly hackles
 Throat : orange hackle fibers, then white below
 Short topping in front of the wing tie in point...yellow hackle fibres with white on top
 Cheek : jungle cock eye
 Gloss black head

The Blue and White :
Blue Smelt :

fourth week... Pteronarcys hatch (orange / black # 4)
6 dark stone stimulator, flies emerging June 30 2009
8 brown caddis
10 brown drake
14 black caddis
2009 Ice breakup on Andre is late, 20th staff trip to camp postponed, lake ice covered. Breakup between 24th and 26th, staff return, snow behind fuel shack. Water temp high 40's - low 50's. Two to three week delay...cool spring.

July -

first week...
mayflies

8 rusty brown caddis, # 12 black mayflies, # 12 olive / gray

Comeback : bottom is slow, chute is full..heading for Marion

McKenzie : A. small ouananiche on top, cool weather no dry fly action, (mice, smelt streamer). High cool water

B. Top is loaded with trout (50), 6.25 lbs on mouse, nothing below

Quartzite : pike in front, small speckles on smelt in riffle, up near the chute...good trout 2-4.5 lbs

Laker cove full, breaching, cool water, whitefish west of lodge supertime, trolling off points above Lonetree for lakers, many lots of panfish at Gravel Rapids

2009 - Spawning pair of pike behind the lodge, in the cove. Large lakers in the top holes and Beaverpond, pike gathering at Island Narrows in large numbers. Big fish 15 - 20 lbs. Whitefish in top hole. Suckers moving up behind Andre's Island to spawn.

second week ...

10 tan **mayfly**, medium black **stonefly**, # 10 tan **caddis**

whitefish passing the camp (clay pigeon)

Drake mayfly hatch 15th - 20th # 8 march brown / green, warm weather

Heavy small pale caddis hatch, whitefish filled the top hole before dark (green rockworm dropper, EFB mayfly, caddis)..laker at the bottom. Lakers a little deeper water in their cove, breaching on W side Heat wave follows, water drops considerably over next 2 weeks, fishing will taper off.

2009 - Water temp 13.3 C, shorelines productive, Pike Cove, ouananiche in McKenzie, Island Narrows really hot fishing, giants. Stoneflys hatching, ovipositing. Ouananiche in the buoy channel and hole below. Caddis and mayfly hatches. No male brook trout yet, sparse trout are females first. Salmon run...males first, females follow. Big males at end of season at elbow pool and third rapids.

third week..

Slow at Gravel, decent pan speckles

2009 - Trophy ouananiche at river bottom on # 6 Magog, Big female. First male brookie. Whitefish at funnel. Mixed bag of fish at Quartzite, sparse trout. Black quill mayflies, medium black

stones, caddis, and brown duns hatching.

last week... Slow fishing at Gravel (Chapman's smelt, Magog smelt, EFB mayfly dun)...lots of panfish
Ouananiche stacked at Galway Bay...jumping (rapala, mayfly, pixee)

Struck at head and lower pool of Gravel 2-4 lbs (rapala, magog)
2009 - River dropping 8 - 10", # 12 tan mayflies emerging, water warming, trout sparse. Big males showing up, not taking. Small trout in Comeback, larger fish appearing in Quartzite. Big fish in front. Big pike at Island Narrows. Big speckles on small mayflies..McKenzie top holes. 66 F water, sparse trout action. Brookies need <58 degrees, the cooler the better. 7.5 lb salmon at 2nd canoe. Will continue to hit salmon all season long at Boulder Hole, salmon hole, and the run above it on the West side. Top section holds sparse salmon. Some moving to Comeback. Females. More trout stacking on top holes of McKenzie, finicky with water temp changes. "Cat's Ass" created. Giant salmon moving through top holes. Big male brookies on new fly.

August -

first week... 2009 - Large brookies in top holes, hookups sparse. Salmon at Boulder Hole, Sparse trout working up, most numbers in top section.

second week... Ouananiche at Galway Bay hole in AM, (magog smelt, cyclops / smelt), one lost at Gravel...lots of pan fish

A. 17 degree lake surface...no lakers, many small pike in Andre...Pike cove good fishing. Not much in top of McKenzie. Sparse trout in Comeback. Some pike. Laker cove empty. Pike at Lonetree. Saw ouananiche jumping from 2/3 across lake, W of laker Cove.

B. Ouananiche at the very bottom of McKenzie, from canoe launch downwards...3 - 5 lbs . Sparse trout above canoe (mouse) (magog, rabbit muddlers, D. Dicks Special) funnel is good. Trout at boulders below Beaver Hole (rabbit muddlers, mice)

C. Quartzite holds ok # of trout (widowmakers, rabbit muddlers olive/chartreuse sculpin) 1.5 - 3.5 lbs. Nothing hit on top above the chute. Lakers breaching before dark.

2009 - first week of colorful male brookies. Big salmon moving up from 2nd canoe. 5.5 lb brookie. Lake fishing slowed. Warm water shuts everything down. Hex nymphs...big #6 .

Third week... A. Lake fishing is slow, 8 lb ouananiche at Lonetree - first one. Pike numerous on S side of point. Pike cove reasonably steady fishing.

B. Comeback trout is very slow going, small pike on top,

averaging 1-3 trout per walk.

- C. Ouananiche at canoe launch and funnel, not much below, slow trout fishing. Salmon hole held a couple big ones...lost both. Lakers in top of McKenzie, trout sparser. Nymph feeding film shot...fish active in top section with no sign on the surface.

2009 - Comeback slowed once emptied. Salmon below McKenzie, salmon in buoy channel and hole below. Hanging around for weeks. Sparse but good trout from 2nd canoe upwards. Big salmon at Quartzite tailout, 9 lbs.

2009 Season.....

Fly pattern recommendations :