

## THE EDITORIAL PAGE

Barry and Brad's Excellent Adventure-by Barry Cooper  
Calgary Herald , Wednesday August 1,2007

Tradition guides the summer fishing trip to the Northwest Territories. Once arrived in Yellowknife, after a final forage for tackle, we head to the Wildcat Café for lunch. On the outside, it is a dumpy log cabin, unremarkable except for having been lived in so long it sags like an abandoned chicken coop. Inside is a friendly repository of local history extending back to the '30s when Old Town really was close to the end of the line

Over the years, we have packed away our fair share of caribou burgers and heard enough of the oral tradition of the place to enjoy, rather than believe, the legends told by locals.

After lunch, we hung out at the sea-plane dock waiting for the 45-minute flight north to Gordon Lake, a place with a history nearly as long as Yellowknife's. Once it was the scene of scene of several gold operations and annually a couple of thousand people over-winter.

For a while, it was a toss-up whether Ottawa would choose Gordon Lake or Yellowknife to be the base from which it extended its administrative tentacles. In winter, the lake provides a major chunk of the ice road, but today it is clear, cold and empty of people, though filled with fish and solitude, which is what we came for.

There are lake trout that grow to the size of Chinook salmon and prehistoric pike for anglers, as well as whitefish and a kind of freshwater cod called, appropriately enough, "inconnu," for netting. I was partnered that afternoon with my friend, Brad, a downtown litigator, and we were going for pike on the fly, like English gentlemen.

On the east shore is Jackfish Bay at the north end of which is Berky's hole, a tangle of weeds and logs with a few open channels, perfect habitat to conceal lurking pike. Some fisherman call places like this, "nervous waters" because you know something sudden is going to take place. It is smooth as glass. A few bugs join us, but the frogs are silent and the gulls ride at anchor in quiet meditation.

The light is starting to slant away to the northwest and thicken up as it cuts through the atmosphere. There are occasional rumblings of thunder a few kilometers away and grey clouds gather to the east. A muskrat swims by, his mouth filled with weeds. It's easy to become a part of a romantic postcard and reflect upon the hard-working rodent and the difficult life of a northern seagull. But it was time for serious business.

"This water is eeeeeelectric," I said, as I reached for a fluorescent pink item made of rabbit fur and tied it to my extra-hard, 11.3-kilogram monofilament leader, protection against giant pike jaws. Apart from frogs and mice, pike "flies" don't have to imitate anything specific. Certainly, this folk-art bunny-bug was no more natural than the jackalopes mounted in the rural bars of Alberta. They are, however, heavy with tradition,

though light on the endless scientific rationales that justify the use of a Royal Coachman or '52 Buick down south.

The scientific fact is that a pike bug needs only to imitate life in general to be a proper human offering to the reality of a large mouth lined with sharp teeth set in a huge head, belligerent, aggressive and hard-wired to eat anything smaller than itself.

In the water, the pink bunny-bug looks to Mr. Pike like a struggling, helpless, vulnerable snack that he can simply come flashing out of nowhere and nail.

I see the water bulge and admire the wake as he heads for the twisting piece of fur. There is a great boil and the reel sings as the fish heads for the far shore. Brad yelps with joyous profanities.

After an hour or so, we are engulfed in pouring rain (and hail) from the east. By then, we have landed a dozen or so and probably hooked the big guy at least three times- pike are slow learners. There is no thought of stopping because dinner is not for another 20 minutes and no one needs a drink beforehand in a place like this. A last cast. The ratty pink bunny lands a couple of feet ahead of a cruising pike the size of a U-boat. It turns away, clearly terrified. Brad and I look at each other and start laughing, renewing another tradition.

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