



See the mayflies? — Photo by Paul Smith/Special to The Telegram

Brook trout heaven

Chasing the mayfly feeding frenzy on Igloo Lake



Woods and Waters

Paul Smith

As an outdoors sort of people, growing up in Newfoundland, we dream about catching big trout. It's a natural thing.

Our ponds, lakes, streams and gullies are brimming with brook trout. By the way, you might know them as mud trout. That's how many of us refer to those beautiful pink-bellied and speckled swimming creatures. Other folks call them speckled trout, a reference I first heard while enjoying a stint of angling in Ontario during my preteen years. It took a tad of discussion to figure out those mainland guys were talking about catching mud trout.

In today's fly fishing world, most aficionados of the long rod call them brook trout, or just brookies for short. The scientific name is *Salvelinus fontinalis*, in case you want to sound smart. Whatever you call them, brook trout are a highly regarded species to seek with rod in hand, either by fly, bait casting or spinning. Even a bamboo, bobber and worm will do the trick.

I think we sometimes don't appreciate the bounty of angling opportunity that we are blessed with. There are not many places on Earth where you can catch brook trout in just about any water. I've ranted before about how little we do to protect and enhance our trout fisheries so I won't get into that today.

Brook trout require cold, clean water, and that we have plenty of. Other places have excellent water as well, but they also have species that prey upon brook trout, or compete for territory. On the island portion of our fair province, we have no pike, muskie, lake trout, bass, pickerel or other such fishes that might interfere with a proliferation of trout. That is certainly a good thing.

For most of us, we have to content ourselves with catching pan-sized brookies, with the occasional lunker for good measure. Of course, it depends upon where you live. There are some hot spots for big trout and if you are lucky enough to reside nearby you are truly blessed. Indian Bay comes to mind, Ten Mile Lake, Jonathon's Pond, to name just a few. And if you live in Labrador, you are double blessed, for you live in the world's premier land for giant brookies. I am jealous.

Here on the Avalon Peninsula, a 10- or 12-inch trout is decent. Anything over 16 inches, that's a pound or so, is quite a catch. At least that is my experience.

My modus operandi is to downsize my fly rod to the point where pan trout force a deep bend in my stick. All is relative, you know. That said, I find that I catch the biggest trout when I am lucky enough to happen on an aquatic insect hatch, like the mayfly or caddis. The more prolific the hatch, the bigger are the

trout. I think that bigger trout don't waste their time chasing around tiny meals. They like to gorge themselves while the time is ripe. Last week, I fished the mother of all mayfly hatches.

Igloo Lake, 72 miles southeast of Goose Bay, is a part of the myriad of trophy brook trout waters that feeds pristine cold water to the mighty Eagle River. Jim Burton runs a trout camp there (www.igloolake.com). Jim's been telling me for years about the amazing hatch of mayflies that begins in June and fires up giant brook trout for weeks. They go into an absolute feeding frenzy. After all, summer in Labrador is not long, and trout must fatten up to survive through a long cold ice covered winter.

I landed in Goose via Provincial Airlines and Jim picked me up at the airport, along with some angling folks from south of the border who I'd be fishing with.

After a short weather delay, the six of us landed safely on Igloo Lake in one of the most capable bigger bush planes, the De Havilland Twin Otter. We disembarked, lugged our gear up to the camp, and got our rods, lines and flies all sorted out for big nasty brookies. We would be on the lake early next morning.

Mayfly mayhem

I have never in my life seen so many mayflies. They were everywhere, floating on the water, hovering above riparian bushes, on my jacket, absolutely beyond belief. No wonder the trout grow so big in this neck of the woods. I knew before my first cast that this was going to be super special, a gift from the fishing gods.

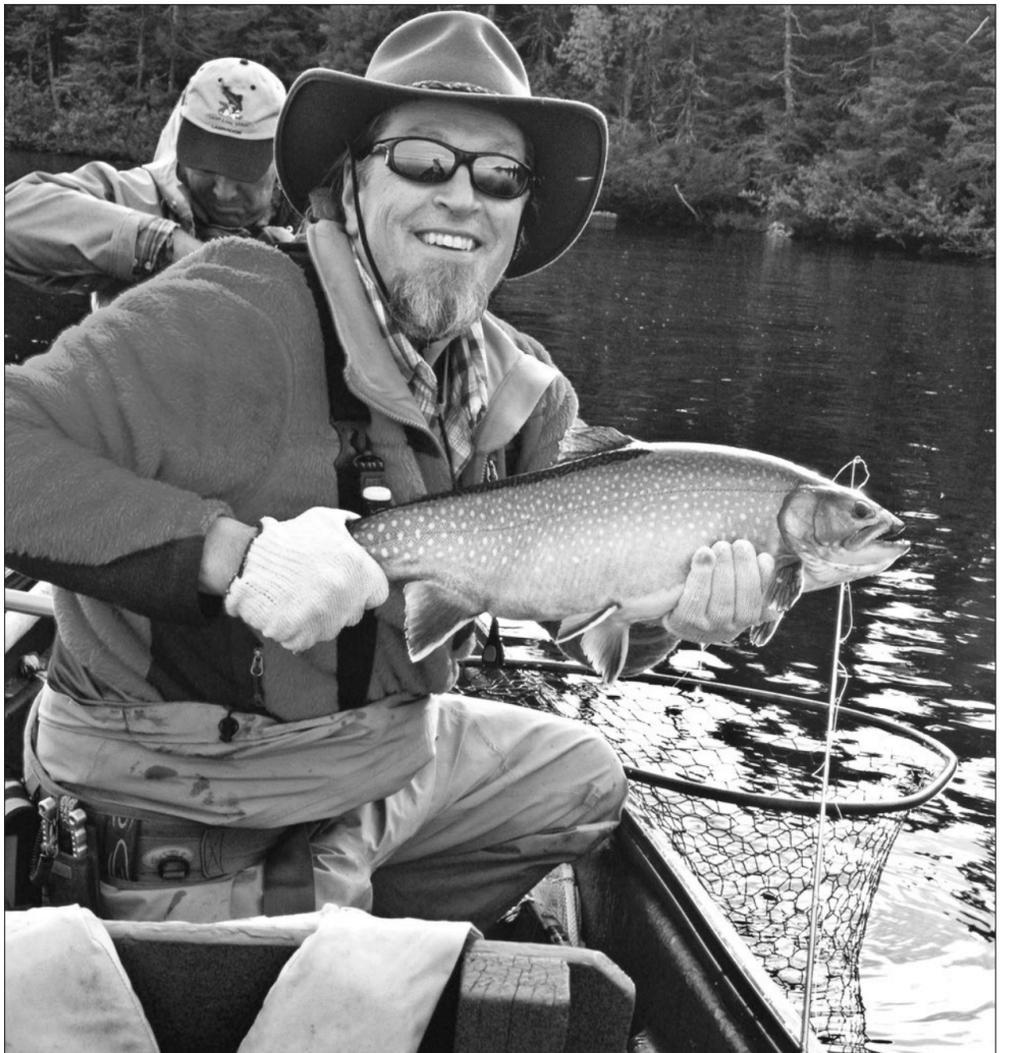
I was in for a brand-new brook trout angling experience. It's more akin to hunting than fishing, at least the sort of trouting most of us are familiar with here on the island. Most times we cast out a dry fly, let it float around and hope for the best. Many times a trout will eat it, or sometimes not. Luck of the cast is of the essence.

Dry fly casting on Igloo Lake is not at all roulette like in nature. The game is to target individual trout and gently place your offering of fur and feather in the feeding lane. It is an absolutely awesome way to catch big trout.

Frank, our guide, slowly cruised our Gander Bay River Boat along the north shore of Igloo, directly across from Jim's camp. I could see the Canadian, U.S. and Labrador flags stretched out and dancing to the tune of a mid-morning breeze. John from Delaware and I were focused intently on the smooth surface on the lee lakeshore. Mayflies were hatching profusely and covered the slick watery surface.

Frank's keen eye spotted a pod of feeding trout. He shut down the motor and paddled towards them.

It was my turn to cast, and I balanced myself in the long, narrow boat, rod on the ready, fly in the water, and 60 feet of line stripped off the reel and laying at my feet. Every nerve end was tingling, senses tuned to the critical task at hand. A gigantic



(Above) Happy me with a trophy brook trout (submitted photo). (Right) My buddy John Lupinette from Delaware with a deep bend in his rod. (Page E1) Loading up the Twin Otter in Goose Bay before heading to Igloo Lake.

— Photos by Paul Smith/Special to The Telegram

trout took a fly about 40 feet from the boat, then another as he gulped protein while moving in an arrow straight line. I did the math and figured where he'd be in a few seconds, simultaneously making the first false cast, then another, and my tiny Size 14 Black Gnat dropped into the big trout's feeding lane.

In short order, he gulped it down and my line went tight. An absolutely euphoric rush of happy chemicals coursed through my body. This was a very serious trout, one I've dreamed about since childhood, since my first rubber boots.

I held my breath till I had my slack line sorted out and the reel clicking. Now I'd be able to battle off the reel's drag and hopefully tire the relentless fish before my barbless hook hold failed — eventually, they all do. After a few minutes of back and forth tussle, splashing, and encouragement from John and Frank, we had my adversary in the dip net. An epic trout, at eight whopping pounds, it was the biggest brook trout I'd ever caught, and on a tiny barbless fly hook.

After a quick photo op, Frank expertly released my prize back into the fertile and pristine water that's Igloo Lake.

I've travelled far and wide to chase fish, but sometimes home is best. We have some fantastic fishing in Newfoundland and Labrador. Get out there and enjoy it.



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nity. He can be contacted at flyfishtherock@hotmail.com or follow him on twitter at [@flyfishtherock](https://twitter.com/flyfishtherock)