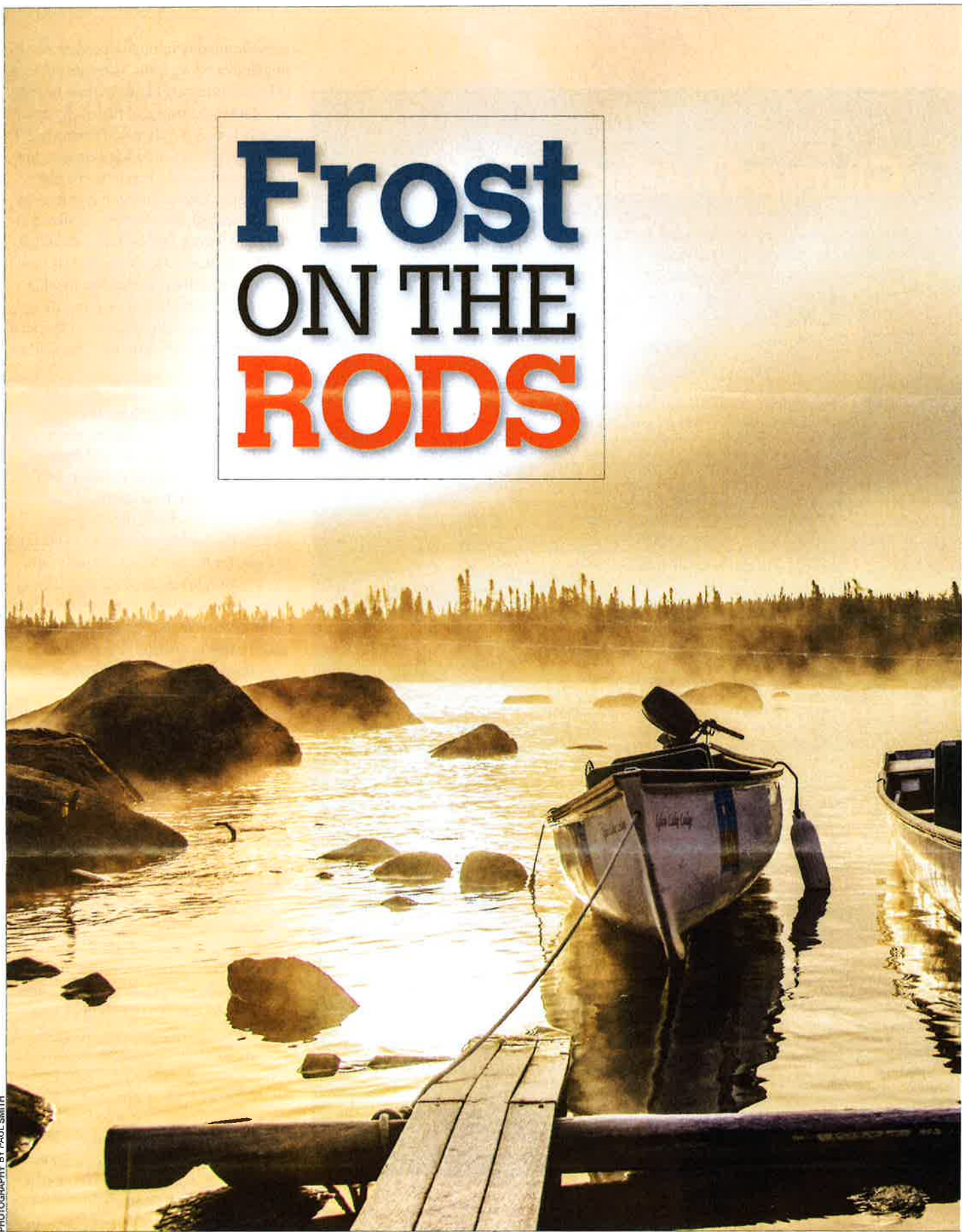


Frost ON THE RODS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL SMITH



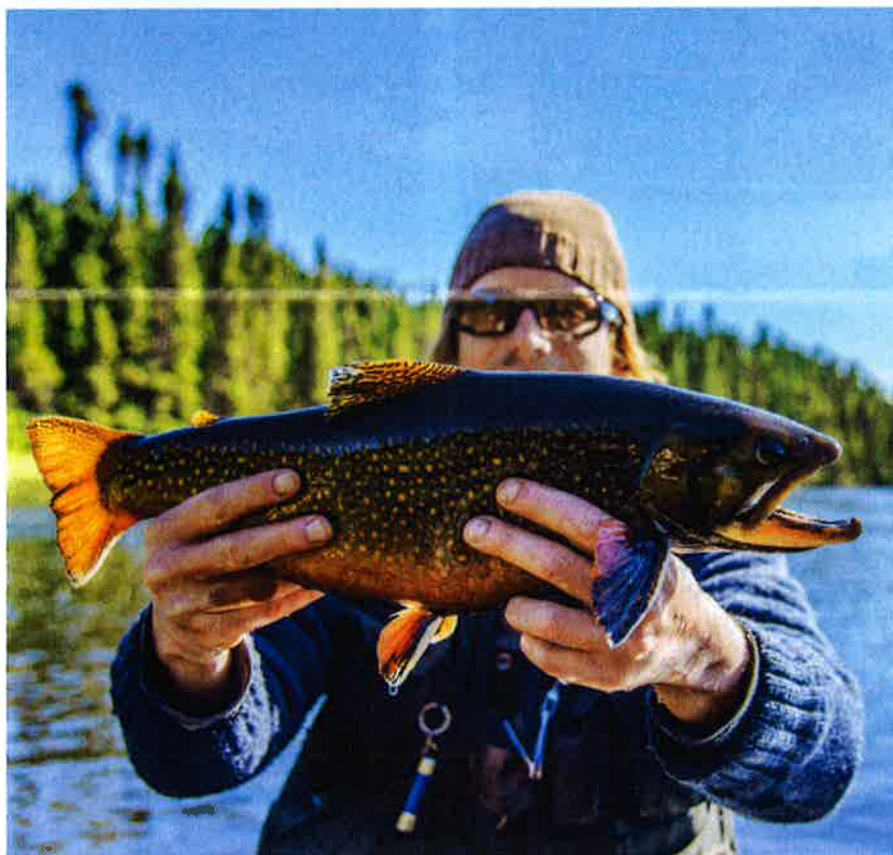
Brook trout nirvana in the heart of the Big Land.

BY PAUL SMITH





It looks pretty chilly this morning. I pour a cup of strong black coffee before walking to the window to look outside. The massive iron woodstove is stoked and roaring in the corner of the room. The pine trim around the window feels warm to my touch, belying the cold, crisp northern air that swirls about on the other side of the iced glass.



It's barely September, early for frost, but I'm standing in a fishing lodge in Labrador, too far north for balmy autumn winds. There's a mist on the lake, the morning air being cooler than the summer-warmed water. A light frosting coats the nearby spruce and fir. A photographer's dream awaits to blossom with the rising sun.

I drink my coffee next to the stove and fiddle with my camera gear. I cannot resist an opportunity to photograph the Big Land in its autumn morning glory. That's how east coast Canadians refer to Labrador, the Big Land, and for good reason. It is a vast wilderness. I'm here on a mission to catch big spawning colored brook trout in full splendor, but hey, it's never just about fishing.

My fellow fly anglers are gathering around the stove in anticipation of breakfast. Two guys are discussing leech patterns; another is knotting up a new leader. The smell of frying bacon is tantalizing, mingled with java and blazing black spruce. It takes dedication to

angling journalism, and to my planned portrayal of the Zen Labrador experience, to get myself outside and recording my surroundings in full digital splendor. I pause to take a shot of my 6-weight Loop hanging by wooden pegs just outside the lodge. It's covered in frost, a most beautiful thing. I'm pumped for autumn brookies, and Labrador is the place to be.

Archie's Gang

After bacon and eggs, my angling partner, Andy Gould, and our guide, Colin Preston, don waders and boots while continuing to discuss tactics. Andy is from Nova Scotia and Colin is a fellow native of Newfoundland and Labradorian. We decide to head downriver to Archie's Pool. This beautiful and fishy-looking piece of deep moving water is about a mile below the main outflow of Igloo Lake. The lodge is situated strategically where the river exits the lake, and Archie's is a 45-minute

While the heat of summer may still blanket the southern portion of North America, frosty nights (top) come early in Labrador, but wood stoves in rustic cabins (right), and thoughts of big, spawning brook trout (left) help anglers "suffer" through the long, dark nights.

walk along the river's riparian zone. There are plenty of other pools, but Archie's is rumored to host good numbers of gigantic trout. I think the pool's location, where the river flows into a football-field-sized pond, or "steady," known locally as a place where one current meets another, and into a "big steady," is prime trout holding territory.

We arrive and survey the scene. The sun is above the spruce and the crisp air is warming. The morning mist barely clings to the pond, and dissipates with haste, though the frost lingers on the Labrador moss and lichen, highlighting our every boot print.

I love fishing run-ins. This is just dandy. I make my selection of fur and feather and approach the deep pool with stealth and caution. I've waited too long for a go at world-class September brookies, and now the game is on.

My black rabbit-strip leech imitation swings just perfectly on a classic down-and-across presentation. Colin has wisely instructed that these big trout don't like wasting energy. Winter is nigh, and food will be scarce for many cold northern months. So I try to swim my fly in a

lifelike fashion, right in front of the fish's noses. That means starting short and lengthening my cast at half-foot increments. Colin also reasons that the trout are lying close to the bottom, so I mend appropriately, even though I'm using a sinking polyleader.

My first trout attacks my fly just before it reaches the dangle. It's not an abrupt tug, but rather a powerful, slow pull that lights up my senses. I allow a foot of line to slip between finger and cork before lifting my rod to make steely contact with my quarry.

This is no mountain-stream-variety brookie. In milliseconds, line viciously peels off my reel, surely melting any remnants of morning frost. My 6-weight rod bows in deep respect to what is undoubtedly a trophy trout. Even small Labrador brookies are trophies to the outside world, especially after gorging themselves all summer.

The to-and-fro battle goes on for minutes. It's hard to track time with any precision when adrenaline is coursing wildly through your veins. But flesh and blood must eventually tire, and I guide my deep-bellied trout to Colin's wait-



ing net. My heavens, what a fish—these Labrador trout are so deep and wide across the back. I can't believe what my eyes insist upon. It is a female, so I have yet to catch and see the most spectacular colors of a male, but this is a gift from the angling gods to be appreciated with utmost joy and thankfulness.

The World's Best Brookies

The Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador is arguably the best place

to catch brook trout on the planet. Let me explain the geography for folks who haven't been here. Situated on Canada's east coast, Newfoundland and Labrador cover an area of 156,453 square miles. It is one province, with one government, but comprising two distinct landmasses.

The island of Newfoundland alone is 42,813 square miles, bigger than all of Canada's other Maritime Provinces combined. It is separated from Labrador by the 10-mile-wide Strait of Belle Isle. The population of

Because so much of Labrador's flowing water is surrounded by wilderness, few fish see anglers, making it a prime destination for trophy hunting.

Newfoundland and Labrador is around 500,000 people, most living on the island near the capital city of St. John's. There is much wilderness and tons of fine brook trout fishing on the island as well, although you'll not likely find something that parallels the monster brookies of Labrador.

From Goose Bay, Jim Burton's Beaver airplane will ferry you to brook trout fishing extraordinaire. Jim is the owner of Igloo Lake Lodge and has more hours on a Beaver than he cares to recite, though in his early years, he flew water bombers and an air ambulance. To say he is an accomplished bush pilot would be an understatement.



where in the world, though most travelers venture through Toronto (YYZ) or Montreal (YUL). There are some direct flights to St. John's, from Orlando and London for example, depending on where you live.

You can drive to Goose Bay if you feel so inclined. There's a ferry from St. Barbe, Newfoundland to Labrador, but then there's 375 miles of mostly gravel road. On the bright side, the drive is very scenic. You can easily trace the route to St. Barbe, on the Great Northern Peninsula, using Google Maps or other mapping software.

The last leg of the journey is from Goose Bay's Otter Creek seaplane base to Igloo lake via a Twin Otter or Beaver float plane.

LICENSES

A non-resident trout license is just \$8 and you can pick one up at any number of commercial vendors, sporting goods retailers, service stations, or a Provincial Government Service Center. For more information visit www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

GEAR

A 6-weight rod is perfect for Igloo Lake, but bringing an additional stick, either one-rod size heavier and lighter would also make the grade. I've used a 4-weight before but it's on the light side. You will need waders and rain gear. Bring a wading staff if it makes you feel more confident, though know wading is generally either easy or unnecessary. Quality polarized glasses are essential, as is a hat to shelter you from the sun. Don't forget sunscreen and bug repellent. Standard tapered trout leaders terminating to a 6-pound tippet are fine. I like fluorocarbon for wet flies, but I'm not sure if it makes a difference to the fish. For tossing big leech patterns, I use level 8-pound leaders, just to be on the safe side.

FLIES

Tying my own flies gives me the added pleasure of catching fish at Igloo. That said, the guides tie flies and will provide you with what works at a reasonable price. Olive and black leech patterns worked best for me in autumn. Salmon bombers have also produced at times. During the mayfly hatch you will need dries in black, brown, tan, and olive. I also caught trout on various beadhead nymphs in sizes 8 to 12. A standard Hare's-ear and Pheasant-tail nymph would be fine choices, though if you bring an array of standard dry and nymph patterns, you will surely catch trout.

CLOTHING

Labrador's northern weather varies, so never visit Labrador without thermal underwear. Then again, some days might be "very hot," like in the '80s, so it pays to plan for warm weather too, depending on the time of year. There's frost on both extremes of the fishing season, so just be prepared for anything, including a little snow.

If You Go

LODGING

There is only one wilderness fishing lodge on Igloo Lake so unless you choose to "tent it," it's your final destination. Igloo Lake's main lodge is 1,440 square feet of floor space with four twin bedrooms and two full bathrooms, which can accommodate eight people. The lodge's newly built Labrador Room has over 1,000 square feet of space, two large bedrooms with full ensuite, a large game or meeting room (for business gatherings), kitchenette, and a covered veranda offering a sweeping view of gorgeous Igloo Lake. Solar panels and a diesel generator provide the entire complex with electricity, and there is high-speed Internet and telephone service. The food is fantastic, but if you desire alcohol, bring it with you from Goose Bay. For more details visit www.igloolake.com.

GETTING THERE

You can fly to Goose Bay (YYR) from St. John's, Newfoundland via Air Canada, Air Labrador, or Provincial Airways. They all have daily flights connecting with international flights in St. John's (YYT). You can get to St. John's from any-