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## Outdoors: Trout color this Labrador fishing trip a success

### Mark Blazis Outdoors

As our foliage peaks, native brook trout — not to be outdone — don their spectacular spawning colors. Marbled vermiculation on their backs and flanks sets off splashes of red spots surrounded by blue halos.

With brilliant red bellies and fins bordered with white, they are, in my eyes, the most beautiful game fish in the world. For those of us enthralled by these dazzling char, fishing for them now is a rite of autumn that must not be missed.

Being used to fishing Labrador's remote Igloo Lake for giant brook trout from June through August, I didn't know what to expect during the week leading up to the Sept. 15 closure. No one else knew, either. We were the first to fish here this late, as Labrador outfitters traditionally shut down their lodges by late August.

From the moment Jim Burton landed his classic beaver-float plane, I noticed much had changed. The neo-tropical migrant birds that flew here in late spring to bear their young were gone. The northern water thrushes that previously occupied every section of shoreline and flew out over the water revealing mayfly hatches and giant brook trout had vanished. Only a few black flies, mosquitoes and stouts reminded me of summer.

The black spruce and tamarack forest was comparatively silent except for a few rusty blackbirds, gray jays, red-breasted nuthatches, white-crowned sparrows, juncos and boreal chickadees. Scoters flocked on the lake below an occasional bald eagle or osprey.

Water was the lowest in memory, diminished by a serious lack of rain and temperatures that reached the high 80s this past season. Brookies were preparing to spawn, massing at nearby Burton's Lake, named after the family that introduced the concept of catch-and-release trophy fishing here. Their vision is responsible for the sustainability of the greatest trophy brook trout fishing in the world.

The walk into Burton's Lake provided periodic handfuls of deliciously hydrating blueberries, cranberries and the little-known creeping crowberries. Mushrooms and lichens were prolific, the latter explaining the caribou droppings in our path. Strangely, the locals don't eat any of the fungi, some of which are edible boletes.

Wayne Moores, an old friend, veteran guide and innovative fly tier, correctly suspected the brook trout that we sought would be concentrated along a rocky shoreline where they would soon deposit their eggs. On our first morning, my wife Helen and I, well supplied with flies tied by Worcester angling legend Felix Stolulonis, caught and released 26 giants over 4 pounds before being satiated.

The following day, Hurricane Leslie's ferocious winds prevented us from returning to Burton's. Instead, we fished Igloo Lake Stream down to Archie's Pool. Most Igloo veterans would not have recognized the algae-tinged water flowing at only one-quarter capacity, strangely accessible with only muck boots or sneakers. At every rocky projection were piles of freshwater clamshells, leftovers from many otter feasts. Pre-spawning fish were concentrated in the deepest water just below Cabin Pool, and we caught them at will — dozens from 2 to 3 pounds. But our thoughts were on the giants that awaited us elsewhere as soon as the winds diminished.

We would have the privilege of fishing Burton's Lake two more times. On our last day, a loon, knowing where the fish were concentrated, moved in alongside us, diving to feast on the abundant trout.

The first major frost of the year had turned the birches and leather-leaf a bit yellow. The goldenrods already had gone to seed, but a few hardy asters were still in bloom around the bogs. A lone hermit thrush, normally the boreal forest's most beautiful singer, wagged his red tail as two greater yellow legs fueled up along the shoreline preparing for their long flight south.

Despite more threatening winds, our guide put us in position for one last try at Burton's giants — and the strategy paid off brilliantly. We landed 30 more giants, a few approaching an honest 6 pounds on a certified digital scale — by far our best day. Using barbless hooks to prevent injuries, we lost many others to speculate about. I know these waters have numerous 8-pounders (Igloo already has produced one brookie over 10 pounds). I suspect that one particularly large giant that shook free was close to that size.

Igloo Lake freezes up first and opens last in Labrador. Its fly fishermen traditionally come here right after ice-out in early June, catching up to a hundred fish a day as the voracious trout feed eagerly on sucker caviar. They also come the last week of June or first week of July during the amazing emergences of big mayflies that concentrate the giants and provide epic dry-fly fishing.

But only we fished for them as they achieved their climactic, full-flaming metamorphosis. September fishing should never be missed on Igloo Lake — or anywhere else where brook trout thrive.

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