

# Labrador



John L. Field

*No matter whether you call them speckles or brookies, Labrador's big trout are among the prettiest in the world.*

## Truly SPEC-TACULAR

by John L. Field



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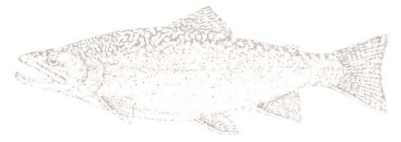
I came to Labrador to satisfy my need for visual gluttony. Just seeing those big speckled trout would be enough to warrant the trip. It's not that they fight so much harder on a fly rod than a smallmouth or lake trout of equal size, but that they are quite possibly the most spectacularly coloured fish in fresh water. Sometimes when feeding in shallow riffles they porpoise, uncovering their heads and backs completely, as if to come up for air. These trout stand for everything that civilization is not, and those that thrive are the wildest, least impacted creatures that swim. Brook trout are incredibly intolerant of over-harvesting, competition and pollution. Truly great brook trout fishing exists only where the earth is as it has been since before European man's arrival in North America. And nowhere does it get better than Labrador.

Labrador has been attracting tourists of all sorts for hundreds of years. European whaling ships stopped there in the 1500s,





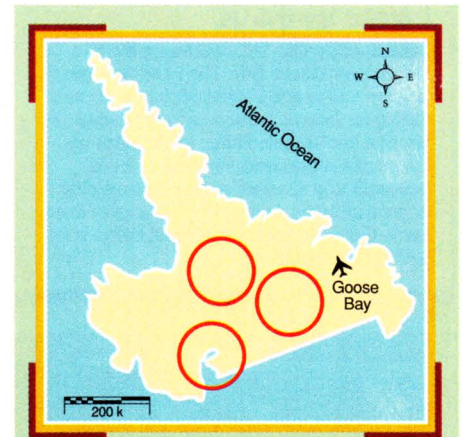
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and there is evidence to suggest Vikings were there hundreds of years before. Yet it remains largely uninhabited. Labrador is a land of more than 30,000 square kilometres with more caribou than people. That's some 250,000 migrating critters to 30,000 folks. Polar bears hunt its north, while puffins adorn the south. Everywhere the northern lights dance across the sky 240 days of the year. We're talking heaven on earth.

The typical terrain in Labrador's speckled trout Mecca consists of spruce laid over rolling hills, all interspaced by streams, bogs and lakes. Many of its waters are somewhat tea coloured. From the air, the sandy reefs and shallows peeking out through the stained waters are truly striking.

Any time you visit Labrador you really are visiting one of North America's last remaining chunks of pure wilderness. That means wild weather too, so always carry clothes to deal with wet, windy weather. Summer highs are usually around 16 degrees celsius.



## Destination Labrador

Western Labrador lakes and rivers can't be beat for pure numbers of plump brook trout. Waters in the central region may not produce as many specks, but they offer more trophies. And for the adventurous, the northern coastal rivers offer untapped fishing for big sea-run brookies that have never seen lures.



### Last Frontier Lodges

Fish for Arctic char to 12 pounds, northern pike to 15 pounds, brook (speckled) trout to six pounds and Atlantic salmon to 30 pounds. Pick from one of three comfortable lodges in the Labrador wilderness. Ciyho Lake Lodge offers outstanding Arctic char, while the nearby Hunt River Lodge specializes in Atlantic salmon, with speckled trout as a bonus. The ultra-modern Park Lake Lodge offers some of the best brook trout fishing in Labrador. One-week packages start at \$2,500.



### Labrador Sportfish Ltd.

Labrador Sportfish Ltd. operates a trio of lodges near Goose Bay. The Flowers River Salmon Lodge and Eagle Lodge offer superb fishing for Atlantic salmon up to 25 pounds. For big pike and speckled trout, Igloo Lodge on Igloo Lake is the place. All three of these professionally operated establishments offer anglers all of the comforts of home away from home. Call the Sportfishing Travel Network for pricing and details.



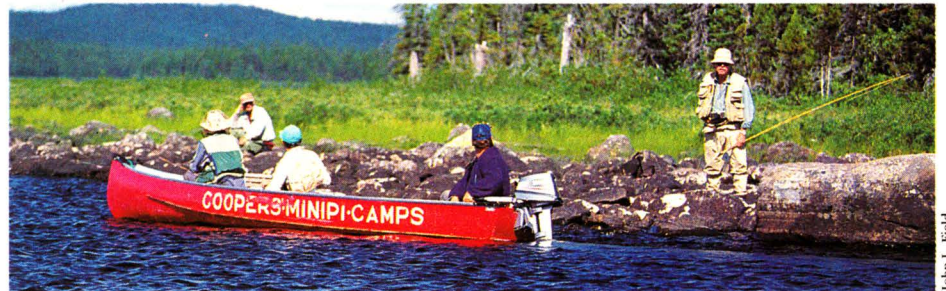
### Cooper's Minipi Camps

Pick from one of three comfortable lodges on the upper Minipi River system where trophy brookies are the order of the day. Fly-fishing-only, catch and release and one trophy per angler policies have maintained this superb fishery. In fact, four fly rod records have already been established at Minipi Camps. At the end of the day, enjoy a hot shower, delicious, hearty meals and great companionship. Seven-day packages start at \$2,800.

## Picking Your Spots

Exactly where to go depends on what you're after. For sheer numbers, it's just about impossible to beat the western part of Labrador. Try Atikonak Lake, Crossroads Lake, and Shaw Lake. All of these waters produce incredible catches of two to three pound brookies pretty well day in and day out. There's nowhere else on earth where you can catch so many brookies on the fly.

Central Labrador lakes and rivers tend to produce fewer brook trout than those to the west, but they have a reputation for coughing up much bigger ones. The top watershed is the Minipi, including Minipi, Anne Marie and Minonipi Lakes. There, the average brookie weighs near five pounds, and the chance of a six or seven pounder is excellent. Ten pounders have come from this area. Still not convinced? Then take a look through the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) record book and see for yourself where most of the biggest brookies have come from.



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Additional hot spots in this region worth checking out include the Little Minipi River, the upper Eagle River, Parke Lake, Awesome Lake (well named!) and Crook's Lake.

And what of the little-explored coastline of northern Labrador? It's really anyone's guess. Most coastal rivers support big runs of Atlantic salmon, plus Arctic char, which are also found in some landlocked lakes. But the big attraction, for me at least, is the sea-run brookies that ascend many of the big coastal rivers. They're big, brawny and silvery when they first arrive from the Atlantic. But as they spend more time in fresh water, those ocean-run specks take on the same brilliant hues worn by their stream-dwelling cousins. Only their size gives them away.

## Catching Fish

Labrador specks look a bit like their surroundings, with backs as dark as the rock, peat and soil-stained water. This dark cloak is capped with cherry-red bellies with lower fins trimmed in white, while yellow and red spots, occasionally haloed with blue, fleck their flanks.

Catching the little devils is largely a matter of taking advantage of fly hatches. Starting in spring, more than 30 varieties of mayfly hatches occur in southern Labrador. The insects vary in size from five to 30 mm in length, but most have cream or brown coloured bodies. Therefore, a selection of March Browns, from size 10 to 16, is usually all you need.

In central Labrador, the predominant hatches are two large hexagenias, which usually occur in July and August. The best dry fly representations of these are the Brown or Green Drake. This time of year also sees trout feeding heavily on Caddis (try Elkhair caddis, from size 10 to 14) and small fish (go with the ever-useful Muddler Minnow, in size eight or 10).

Perhaps the most unusual sight in all of trout fishing comes in the fall when lemmings begin migrating and have to cross lakes and streams. Don't laugh — the trout greet them with unmatched enthusiasm. Mega Divers, or other surface bass bugs that can pass for mice and can be worked fast, will usually do the trick. Practice at home on your cat with a hookless mouse!

## Gearing Up

Rod-and-reel-wise, it's tough to beat a five or six weight fly rod for general purpose brook trout fishing in Labrador, but I would also bring along an eight weight for "mousing". Because Labrador brookies aren't particularly shy, go with weight-forward lines and take advantage of the extra distance they allow. Similarly, use tip-pets from 0X to 5X.

If you're not into fly rodding, bring along a light or medium-action spinning outfit with six to eight pound test. Armed with a small box of jigs, spinners, spoons and mini-crankbaits, you'll be ready and able to handle just about any brookie in the swim.

## Putting It All Together

Go East, young man, and take your rod. With a small selection of flies, spinners and spoons, plus a bit of adventure and a wee drop of bug dope, you're in for the brookie trip of a lifetime. Just one thing — don't forget your camera!