

Pro Advice for Fly Fishing at Tunulik II

I have been fortunate to fish the Lagrève River at Tunulik II several times in recent years and am happy to pass on some of my thoughts and tips to others planning a trip there. The river is fairly small and in normal water conditions anglers with chest waders can easily reach the fishable water. The river consists of miles and miles of rapids and pools and you travel between the pools in large freighter canoes with jet outboard motors. The pools hold Arctic Char up to 20 lbs and Sea-run and Native Brook Trout up to 7 or 8 lbs. Let's cover the trout fishing first.

Brook Trout

The pools near the camp, and downstream as far as the sea, contain large numbers of strong Sea-run Brookies. These run from one to 3 lbs and usually rise freely to dry flies. Upstream of the camp the fish are bigger and there are more Native Brook Trout in the pools and steadies. Fish of 3 lbs and up are common here. The Native and Sea Run Brook Trout can be caught with any of the usual methods but streamers and dries are the most productive. Hatches of large Blue Winged Olives occur on overcast days but the Trout will usually come up for a dry fly even when there is no hatch. The fish are not hard to catch- even for new fly fishers- but the right flies, skillfully presented, can result in some truly amazing catches! Number five, six or seven weight rods from 8 to 9 ½ feet long are ideal. Reels should contain at least 50 yds of backing and a good floating line. A nine foot leader tapered to 3x will allow you to fish both dries and streamers with the same setup. Many flies will work but here are some well proven patterns:

DRIES

- Royal Wulff, Au Sable Wulff and Goddard Caddis. Size 12.
- Madam X and similar hopper type patterns with rubber legs. Size 8.
- Parachute Adams size 14, if the fish become selective during a hatch.
- Mouse patterns, Bombers, and floating Muddlers about size 4. Fish these dead-drift for large Trout anytime.

STREAMERS

- Double Bunny, black on top and brown underneath. Size 4 long shank. Overall length should be three inches for the Trout.
- Mickey Finn, Muddler Minnow and Magog Smelt. Size 4 long shank.
- Wolly Bugger, black or olive, in size 8 long shank.

If the fishing slows down try a sinking line as described below for Arctic Char.

Arctic Char

Char up to 20 lbs have been caught in the river but they are more commonly around 8 lbs. They are fresh from the sea so expect Char of this size to take you well into the backing several times! The Char seem to favor certain pools so check with the guides for the most productive ones. Arctic Char will not rise to dry flies and to catch them consistently you must fish large flies near the bottom where the Char are holding. If you are concentrating on the Char a heavier rod of 7 or 8 wt may be better but as you catch a lot of Trout as well, you may want to stick with a six weight. I have tried both sink-tip and full sinking lines and the latter are more productive and easier to cast. The best would be moderately fast sinker about Class 3. Attach a leader loop to the line and tie on 2 feet of 10 lb tippet. The Char are not leader-shy. If you use a leader much more than about two feet of tippet, the sinking line will not get the fly down quickly enough and the fly will pass over the Char. Cast up and across and allow the fly to swing in the current until it's directly below you. Keep the rod tip low. Retrieve the fly by fast stripping. You will not miss the take!



FLIES FOR ARCTIC CHAR (all tied on size 4 long shank hooks)

- Double Bunny, black on top and light brown underneath. This is the most consistent fly and should have an overall length of three and a half inches for Char.
- Magog Smelt, Grey Ghost and other smelt patterns work well. Smaller bright orange Steelhead patterns are also effective.

Here are few final suggestions:

- All flies should be barbless, of course.
- You will probably catch some very large Trout. Large fish should be carefully released so they can continue to reproduce.
- If you are an expert, you will probably want to limit the number of fish you catch after a day or two. Try targeting the char with large streamers on a sinking line or large Trout with a floating line and mouse patterns. In the 2001 season two Trout of 10 lbs were caught on consecutive casts in one pool!
- Sinking lines, as opposed to sink-tip and floating lines, cast very well in windy conditions.
- Don't weight your streamers as it makes them unpleasant to cast and they can become dangerous in a gusty wind. Rely on the sinking line and a SHORT tippet to get the fly down.
- Take plenty of flies, a spare rod and reel.
- The most versatile outfit for Trout and Char would be a 9' 6wt rod with both floating and sinking lines. Two flies to try first? Double Bunny and Goddard Caddis.

Article by John Beaven, who has fished several years at Payne Bay and Tunulik II fishing camps with Arctic Adventures.

