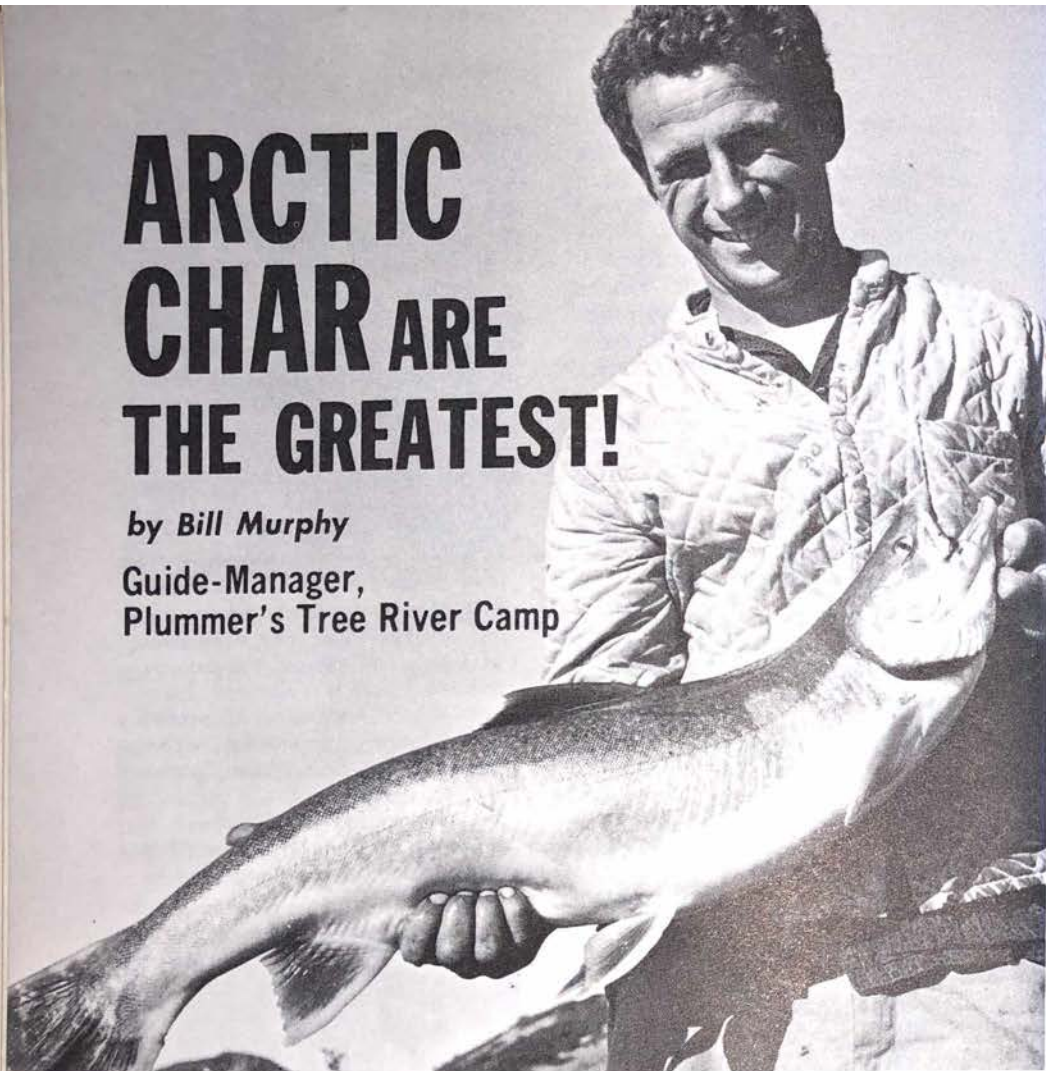


# ARCTIC CHAR ARE THE GREATEST!

by Bill Murphy

Guide-Manager,  
Plummer's Tree River Camp



**T**HANKS to a "dream" job, I've probably caught more Arctic char on rod and reel than anyone in the world. I've also been whipped, humiliated and humbled by almost as many!

That's char fishing! You win some, lose some—in about equal numbers. Either way, it's an experience that leaves most anglers shaken and trembling—and it still happens to me after taking nearly 1,000 of these fabulous fighters, including the 27-lb. 4-oz. holder

of the current world record.

I've about given up trying to tell anglers what char do when hooked. The simple truth defies reason and only those who have been bloodied in battle are believers.

But I'll go way out on a limb and say this: Compared with the savage fighting qualities of Arctic char, muskies are complacent carp, smallmouth bass are sluggish suckers and bonefish are slow-pokes.

Okay, you're skeptical. Well, so was the guest who came to our Tree River outpost camp last year, convinced despite warnings that he could take a sizable char on spinning gear and six-pound line.

I posted him at a lively spot and said dryly, "I hope you brought plenty of reel spools."

"I've got six, each with 200 yards of line," he replied rather stiffly. "But I don't expect to need them!"

The first char he hooked leaped once, then headed downriver. It wasn't particularly big—perhaps 12 to 15 lbs. But out went 200 yards of line—and ping! No char, no line!

As I watched—chuckling discreetly out of sight—that guest lost four more 200-yard spools of line to char before he finally landed a modest 10-pounder. He went home a believer!

So did Ed Eppinger, the man who makes Dardevles. Ed, a skillful, lifelong angler, came to Tree River with two sturdy casting outfits. One char snapped his best rod. Another tore loose and disabled a good new reel.

Ed finally borrowed a spare outfit from his partner, Al Spiers, and managed to get a fine, 16½-lb. trophy—after a frantic, heart-chilling 40-minute battle.

Yes, I said 40 minutes! That's not unusual. It took me 90 minutes to subdue my world record char, and the last few minutes was a wrestling match on the river bank with a fish still full of fury.

Perhaps if I describe that experience you'll understand why char have me as hooked as a heroin addict and spending almost half my pay replacing smashed tackle and lost lines and lures.

I was born in Nova Scotia and grew up wedded to the outdoors.

After a hitch in the Canadian Air Force, I began guiding in Manitoba and Ontario because I love to fish.

In the mid-1950's, I joined Warren Plummer who pioneered sport fishing in the far, far north—first at Great Slave Lake, then at Great Bear.

As head guide, I made several early out-flying trips to the Coppermine river for char. It was a good initiation, but char fishing in the Coppermine was hard and erratic.

Early in the 1962 season, we discovered fabulous char fishing in the remote, isolated Tree River about 100 miles east of the Coppermine. Since then, I've been stationed full-time during July and August on the Tree—guiding outflying groups from Plummer's Great Bear Lodge, supervising the 20-man outpost camp we built in 1963 and fishing whenever possible.

In the process I've learned a little about a fish that is spectacularly beautiful, savagely strong and still largely an enigma to biologists.

Some say the Arctic char is a brook trout that went to sea, thrived and grew. In configuration and coloration, the char does resemble a brookie.

But the flaming spawners also seem to be one third rainbow, one third salmon, one third lake trout—so I've given up guessing about origin. Let the biologists decide! We do know there are two big char runs up rivers like the Tree which spill into the Arctic Ocean—one in Spring (early July) the other in Fall (mid-August).

During the run, some char acquire a flaming crimson coloration which makes them breath-



takingly beautiful. Others remain bluish silver, with faint pink spots.

Once it was thought only the males grew crimson, but after finding roe in brightly-colored char, biologists now tend to believe that char spawn every third year—and that only the spawners color up.

But flaming red or sleekly silver, all char fight like hell—and the Tree gives them enormous natural advantages.

Our camp is about three miles above the Tree's Arctic Ocean mouth at the first long stretch of wild rapids. Upriver the swift stream tumbles over a succession of splashy falls, roaring rapids and fast-flowing stretches.

We keep a boat above the camp rapids to post anglers on both banks for about a mile upstream. Beyond that, the boat is stopped by tumultuous white water.

On Sept. 2, 1963, season over and last guest gone, I had a late-day breather from camp-closing chores. I also had a grudge. Big, Fall-run char had been driving me crazy. In 10 days, I'd hooked almost a dozen potential record-breakers. Every one had whipped me, furiously shaking loose or ripping my line apart.

I took the boat a mile upriver to an island in midstream and began to cast the fast water on both sides, using a sturdy, seven-foot Heddon rod, a Pflueger spinning reel with 125 yards of 15-lb. monofilament and my last red-and-white Seadevlet.

Char respond best to spoons like Dardevles or the heavier (1½-oz.) Seadevlets. You cast as far as possible across the swift current, then let your lure roll and flutter downstream, close to the bottom. You snag and lose many lures—but they must go



**Ed Eppinger, with a borrowed spare outfit, managed to land a 16½ lb. trophy—after a 40 minute battle.**

deep to get the big ones.

(Smaller, lighter 3/5-oz. Dardevlets are ideal for jigging in eddies below falls or big rapids.)

That day I got a smashing strike within minutes. When I set the hook hard, a huge, flaming red char leaped high out of the river. I gulped, knowing I had a real prize—and a peck of trouble.

For about 20 taut minutes, I managed to keep that char in the area, hoping to lead it into quiet water below the island. But I also worked back to my beached boat, got the 10-horse outboard started with one hand and left it idling in neutral.

The char finally got smart, turned abruptly and surged straight downstream. I leaped into the boat and followed, trying desperately to handle fish, motor and swift current. It was impossible, so I beached hard on a mainland clay bank and ran the shore.

Almost an hour later, that char was still full of fight. By then, it had thrice run out my line to the last few turns as I stumbled along the shore. We were now ¾ of a mile below the boat—and only 500 yards above the big rapids at camp. Once over that brink, he'd be gone for sure!

But the magnificent fish finally  
(Continued page 37)



## 5 WAYS TO FISH A DARDEVLE

**L**EARN as much as you can about the waters you intend to fish. The kind of bottom, depths and nature of the under-surface world. Successful fishermen take time to learn the location of sand bars, rock formations and deep pools and plan their attack. Indiscriminate casting and reeling takes its toll on equipment and fishermen. Here are five basic methods of fishing a Dardevle. Experiment. Use the method you feel best suited to the immediate situation.

**NORMAL RETRIEVE:** Cast the Dardevle, allow it to flutter a few feet, then reel in at a moderate speed.

**FAST RETRIEVE:** Cast the Dardevle as above, reel in rapidly. Don't be afraid of reeling too fast. A fish can move faster than you can reel. A rapidly retrieved lure travels at less depth. Use in retrieving over obstructions.

*(Continued from page 32)*  
was tiring. Ahead, I spied a small, quiet backwater near shore. Gingerly I led the char into it, then waded into the river.

Lacking net or gaff, I had to beach the giant—or lose him. Belly-deep and rod high, I waded behind him, then inched closer—keeping between char and open water. For a few moments the fish threshed wildly in the shallows, then rested.

At last, I got my free hand in one gill. Holding tightly, I dropped the rod, grabbed the other gill, charged 10 feet up the slippery bank and fell on the huge fish.

We had a wild, final wrestling match until I was able to apply a coup de grace with a stone. Then I just sat—shaking utterly

**SLOW RETRIEVE:** Reel in with just enough speed to give the lure action. A slowly moving lure tends to travel at greater depths.

**DARTING THE LURE:** Retrieving the Dardevle with a series of short jerks. Lower the rod tip about a foot and raise it sharply, then repeat. This produces a lifelike, darting action, effective when you run across a big fellow that refuses to strike a lure retrieved in the ordinary manner.

**DEEP WATER RETRIEVE:** Allow Dardevle to flutter to within a foot or two of the bottom with rod held in horizontal position. Reel in, raising rod to vertical position. This brings lure diagonally toward the surface. Then lower rod to original position and allow lure to sink. Repeat until retrieve is completed. Diving, darting action invariably fools those big, “educated” fish in heavily fished waters.

exhausted, wet, muddy and bloody but exultant.

You're probably thinking, “Man—what a tall tale! No fish can fight that long and hard!”

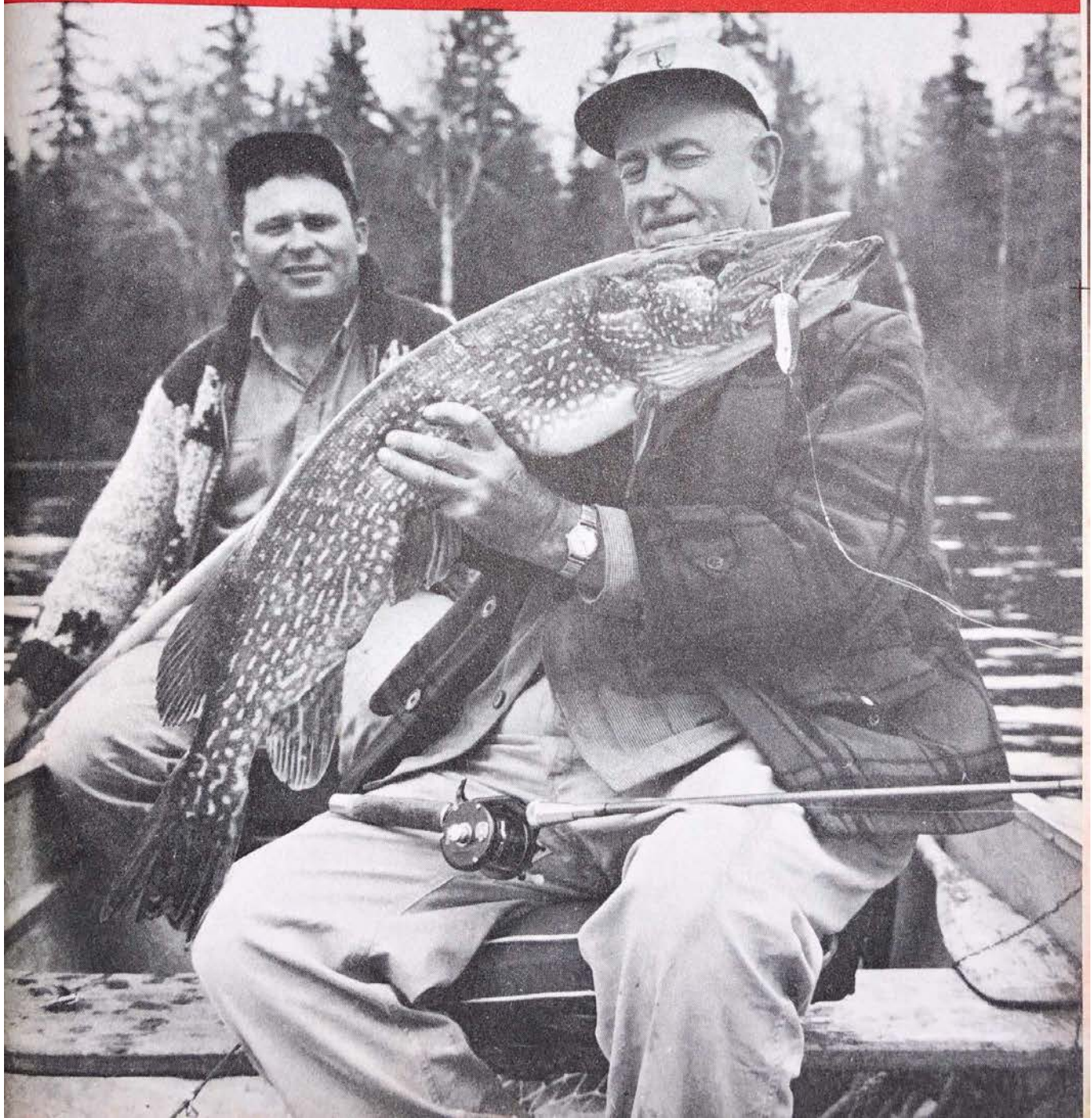
Okay, be a skeptic! But if you want one of the greatest thrills angling can offer, come to the Tree River next July or August. Be the good Lord willing, I'll be there to offer the help you'll sure as hell need when you tie into an Arctic char.

One tip: Bring plenty of Dardevles and Seadevlets. You can't get big char without losing a lot of spoons to bottom rocks.

But while you may leave with fewer lures, you'll go home a believer . . . and with precious memories of a fishing experience beyond compare. ■



# ALL ABOUT FISHING WITH EPPINGER'S FAMOUS DARDEVLES





# LONG AGO THERE WERE NO DARDEVLES

The number of Dardevles sold since then has been so astronomical that actual count has long been forgotten

**G**ETTING there had been an adventure. By train and by wagon up the rutted trail which finally stopped, deep in the bush country. But when the young taxidermist from Detroit unloaded his gear and bade goodby to his Canadian host, a vacation in paradise began. The year was 1897 and Lou Eppinger had long planned this month's fishing trip in Northern Ontario. He drifted along clear streams and paddled in his canoe over the waters of pine encircled lakes with craggy rock bluffs which echoed the call of the loon from across lonely bays. He caught his limits quickly of huge Northerns, Bass and Rainbows and had time to study the fish and the lures he was using. He began testing his assortment to determine which lures attracted the fish under many varying conditions. Most baits got action, but one was outstanding . . . a homemade affair hammered out of an old silver table-spoon. The action of that lure, its glitter and movement, tantalized all the game fish and they struck on it constantly.

Lou was pretty sure he could improve the lure and in the evening at his campsite, on a broad flat shelf of rock, he hammered and varied the shape of the spoon,

tested it in the clear, crystal water of the lake and hammered some more. He at last arrived at one particular design that proved a sure-fire killer!

Returning home from vacation, he continued his experiments with spoon-shaped lures in the rear of his shop. He found that different areas of the metal had to be of varying thickness to insure the fish-fetching wobble, to give balance, to prevent it from twisting the line. The hammered shapes were painted in patterns and colors to improve their effectiveness under varying water and weather conditions. Each received a triple coat, baked on for even greater durability.

What to call this killer lure? After some deliberation the name **DARDEVLE** hit and stuck. The first Dardevle lures, named for a rough, tough Marine unit of the era, were announced to the trade in 1904. Sportsmen, sports editors and sports publications immediately hailed them with fullest enthusiasm.

The number of Dardevles sold since then has been so astronomical that actual count has long been forgotten. Millions of fishermen have bought and used genuine Dardevles . . . the greatest game fish lures in the world. ■

## DARDEVLE

The old original killer. Available in 30 colors and patterns.  $3\frac{3}{8}" \times 1\frac{1}{4}"$ . Weight—1 oz. **\$1.25**

Crystal Finishes, **\$1.55**



## DARDEVLET

All colors and patterns.  $2\frac{7}{8}" \times 1\text{-}3/16"$ . Weight— $\frac{3}{5}$  oz. **\$1.25**

Crystal Finishes, **\$1.55**

