

SUNSET ON GREAT BEAR LAKE, NWT

LATE SEASON LAKE TROUT FLY FISHING TECHNIQUES

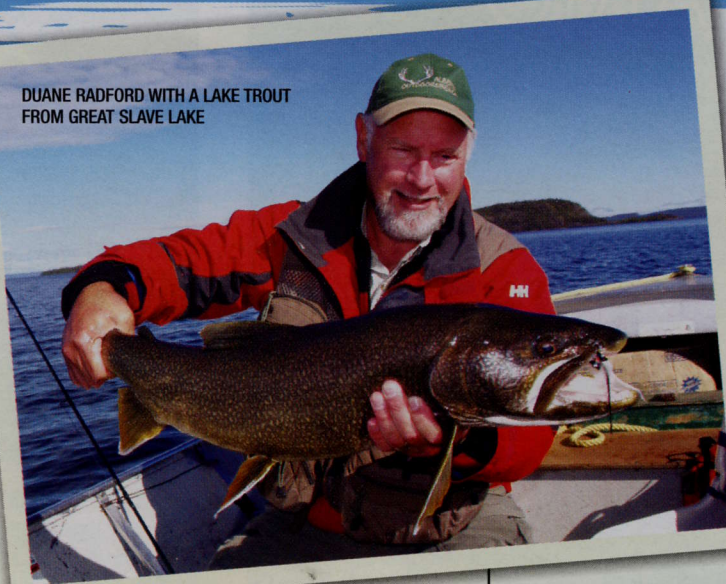
At the time when many fly fishers are putting away their gear for the year, lake trout fishing is hitting high gear. Consequently, they miss out on some of the best fishing to be had for lake trout throughout their range in Canada.

As water temperatures cool to 10 C, or thereabouts, lake trout once again find their preferred water temperature in relatively shallow, littoral zones, and the action picks up as they move inshore from their summer quarters in the hypolimnion in the deepest part of a lake. The "hypolimnion" is a limnological term for that part of a lake beneath the thermocline which separates it from the epilimnion, in the surface waters. The "thermocline" is characterized by a marked change in temperature that keeps the upper and lower levels physically apart due to differences in the density between warm and cold water.

Locating Fall Lake Trout

Lake trout are fall spawners and home in on windswept shallow reefs and shoals in anticipation of the annual spawning season. The exact date of spawning is affected by fac-

DUANE RADFORD WITH A LAKE TROUT FROM GREAT SLAVE LAKE



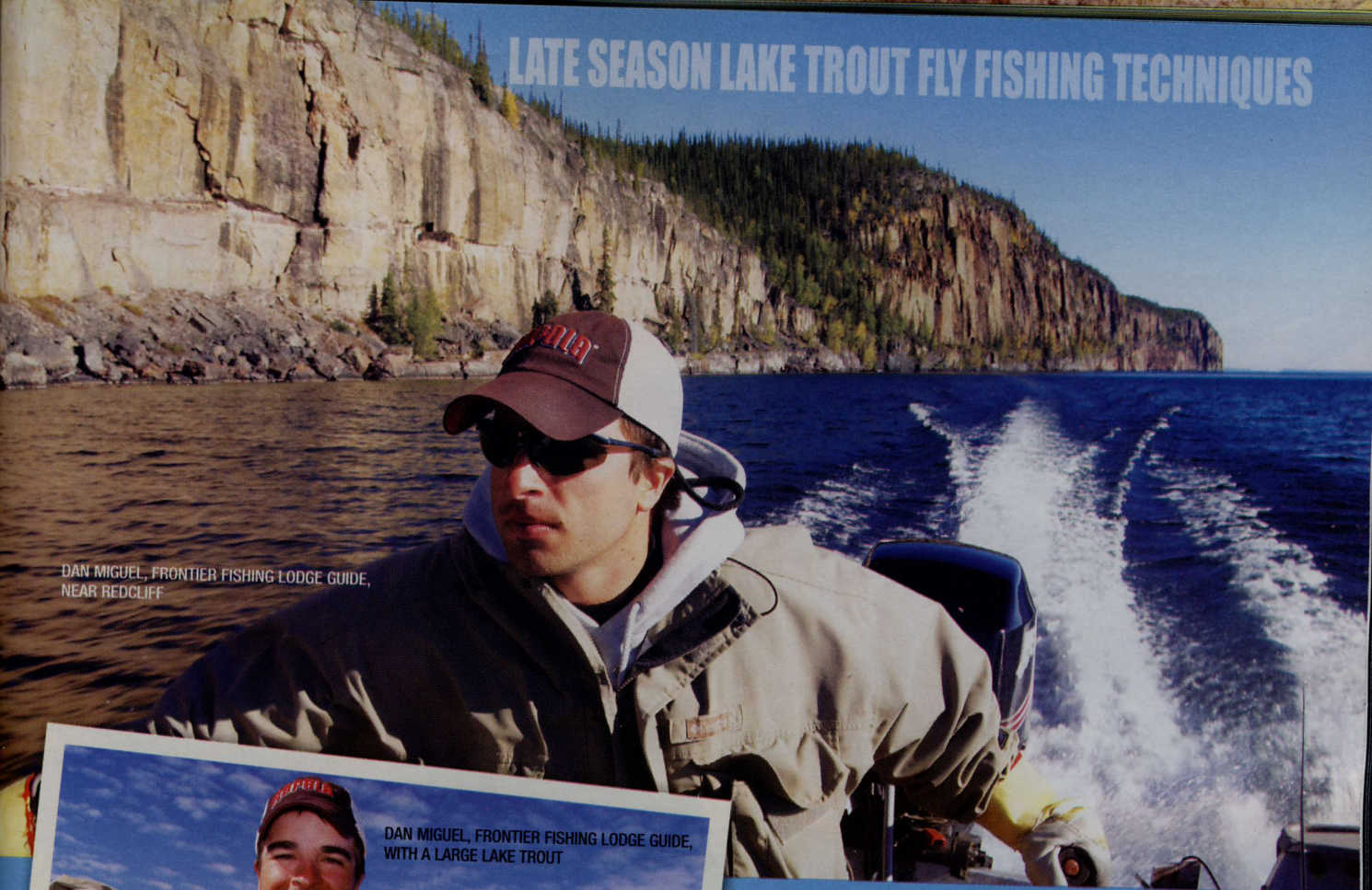
tors such as the latitude, weather leading up to the spawning period, as well as the overall size and topography of a lake, but it can start as early as September in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and through to October and into November further south on the southern edge of the

lake trout's range. In some lakes, adults may also spawn in tributary streams. Prior to the spawn, adult lake trout stage near key spawning areas. During the late summer and early autumn, they also feed actively in preparation for a long, cold winter.

Consequently, action can often be red hot at this time of the year.

While it can sometimes be difficult to pinpoint actual spawning beds on large lakes, they're usually located in areas which feature bottoms of large boulders and rubble in relatively shallow water, anywhere from 1-40 feet deep, often on the windswept side of

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DAN MIGUEL, FRONTIER FISHING LODGE GUIDE, NEAR REDCLIFF



DAN MIGUEL, FRONTIER FISHING LODGE GUIDE, WITH A LARGE LAKE TROUT



PLUMMER'S ARCTIC LODGE, GREAT BEAR LAKE LODGES, NWT

islands and shorelines, or on relatively shallow reefs offshore. Typically, on sunny, late summer and autumn days these places can be detected by their light yellow colour, which contrasts with the darker hue of deeper water. As lake trout tend to spawn in the same places each year, it's useful to locate these during the spawn and store the information for the following season.

Techniques

Once you've zeroed in on prime lake trout waters, start by fan casting in a grid if winds are relatively calm. Let the fly sink to the bottom or near bottom before starting a strip retrieve. Should you be fortunate and

actually spot a cruising lake trout, by all means switch to sight casting, targeting the area in front of or beside the trout. If there's a chop on the water, you can use the wind drift and troll over productive water or simply troll using an outboard motor at a slow speed. Slower is better when trolling; try doing some figure eight patterns to cover spawning beds that are offshore, paying attention particularly on the turn because that's often when you'll get a strike. Be sure to power strip the line from time to time when trolling to entice passive

fish. Patience is necessary, as the trout aren't everywhere and you'll have to search them out. On another note, an old

trick is to cast behind a hooked trout when fishing with a buddy. This often pays dividends, because lake trout tend to travel in small schools. One hooked fish may attract the attention of another lake trout, and the straggler will often charge a second streamer.

When the bite drops off, switching a different pattern often does the trick. As a frequent cause of a lull in the action is because the trout have dropped into deeper water, a more heavily weighted fly is what is needed to get some extra depth.

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Beat the Cold
 In order to fully enjoy late season action, ensure you're geared for some "relatively" cold weather, because even on sunny days it can be crisp on the water. In fact, when the water temperature drops to 10 C it can be downright cold at times because of the wind chill when you're traveling in a car top boat from one point to another on a big lake. Dress in layers, wear thermal underwear, wind-proof pants and a waterproof jacket, a warm shirt and a couple of polar fleece vests, wind-proof gloves, a toque and cap.



LAKE TROUT TAKEN WITH A DECEIVER PATTERN



LAKE TROUT DECEIVER FLY PATTERNS

done promptly as soon as things are under control. If necessary, you can always palm the spool during runs to slow a bursting fish.

Lake trout usually hit a fly hard, but as they have hard, bony mouths, it's necessary to haul on the line strongly in order to set the hook, particularly when using barbless hooks, which is mandatory in the North. Otherwise, the trout will shake their head and throw the hook. Very large lake trout tend to dog and simply refuse to move when first hooked. They'll often remain suspended in the water column, hardly budging. At this juncture you should quickly try to reel in



PLUMMER'S ARCTIC LODGE GREAT BEAR LAKE LODGE, NWT

It's a good idea to have the drag set relatively tightly to get the initial hook-set because of their tough jaws and mouths. Loosen the drag once you've brought the fish to reel which should be

any slack line and attempt to bring the trout to reel as soon as possible. You'll have to be patient and carefully pump your rod to get it to make a move; be sure to set the drag midway, not

too tight or you'll risk breaking the tip of your rod or snapping a knot. Then it's just a matter of playing the fish until it tires and can be netted. Follow the basics. When a trout runs, give it some line; when it stops its run, slowly pump it in. Try to prevent it running underneath the boat, as this can result in the line tangling the prop or, worse, a broken rod.



Hotspots

I've enjoyed some great late season fly fishing for lake trout on both Great Slave Lake out of Frontier Fishing Lodge and on Great Bear Lake out of Plummer's Arctic Lodges, both in the Northwest Territories. Lake trout are stacked in the shallows in preparation for spawning on both these lakes in late August and early September, and catches in excess of 20 big lake trout a day are the norm.

IF YOU GO: Contact Frontier Fishing Lodge (www.frontierfishinglodge.com) or Plummer's Arctic Lodges (www.canadian-arcticfishing.com) for details regarding late season lake trout fishing in the Northwest Territories (NWT). Check out the spectacular NWT Tourism Web site (www.spectacularnwt.com) for vacation planning in the land of the midnight sun.



white rabbit-strip Zonker. Some commercial flies that I fancy are black and olive Slimy Sculpins or the Mickey Finn, and a red and

white Pixies Revenge. Generally, larger flies (#2 and bigger) are most productive. The points should also be kept razor sharp with a hook hone to ensure hook-ups. ✧

Gear

Because lake trout grow large, it's necessary to use a #8 or #9 outfit that's capable of handling fish up to at least 35 pounds. A medium action rod is better than a fast or slow action one for pitching large streamers. A large arbor reel with plenty of backing and a reliable disc drag is a must for handling large, hard-running fish. Use a sink tip line and a short (3 feet) 20 pound + test mono-filament leader. Short leaders will turn large flies over better than long leaders; they'll also get a fly into the strike zone more quickly.

Flies

Streamers are the ticket for lake trout: large Deceivers, Zonkers and coneheads with enough weight to quickly sink through several feet of water, at least. Use natural patterns that imitate baitfish such as the cisco, a species of whitefish which is one of the laker's favorite prey. While many different colours will entice, strikes my favourite colours are white, yellow and orange, all of which are good producers. If the action on these colours drops off, then switch to more natural olive, purple or black colour. An orange conehead Woolly Bugger pattern is usually a good producer, followed by a