

ALBERTA BORDERS adventures inside and outside of Alberta and beyond

CREE RIVER LODGE, SASKATCHEWAN

by Duane Radford

It was pike fishing at its best! Last year, my son Myles and I visited the Cree River Lodge (www.pvisuals.com/fishing/saskatchewan/cree_river/cree_river.html) in northern Saskatchewan. The lodge is situated on the Cree River, south of Stony Rapids, which is a small settlement east of Lake Athabasca.

The lodge ownership changed hands in 2008 being purchased by Pat Babcock and Kim Kruchkowski both of White Fox, Saskatchewan. Pat and Kim are keen outdoorsmen whose priority is to ensure that clients enjoy their stay at the lodge.

As with most trips to a fly-in fishing lodge in Saskatchewan, clients generally depart on Transwest Air from Saskatoon, the provincial northern transportation hub—much like Edmonton is the gateway to the north in Alberta. Myles and I stayed overnight at the Saskatoon Inn before departing on an early morning flight the next day. The Saskatoon Inn is located a short distance from the airport.

From Saskatoon, Transwest Air is the principle carrier that ferries clients to various lodges enroute to Stony Rapids, itself another hub for various lodges in the vicinity of Stony Rapids. Our plane stopped at several airstrips where clients departed for different lodges before we arrived at Stony Rapids. Myles and I then took a 1954 de Havilland Beaver float



Cree River Lodge, Saskatchewan—Northern Pike Capital of the World!

plane from Stony Rapids to the Cree River Lodge. The ancient Beaver is truly the workhorse of bush planes in

you really do have a legitimate shot at 40-50 inch pike on any given day. And that's fly-fishing for pike, not using hardware. In my

books any pike over 36 inches is a fine trophy.

As a bonus, the area is lousy with walleye; it also boasts excellent Arctic grayling fishing on the Cree River, just a short distance from the lodge. Although the Cree River and Wapata Lake both feature great

walleye fishing, we were having so much fun catching MONSTER pike and trophy Arctic grayling we mostly gave the walleye a break.

The Cree River Lodge has long had a policy of catch-and-release fishing with barbless hooks only. It would be a shame to take any of the large pike although some smaller pike and walleye are eaten for shore lunches.

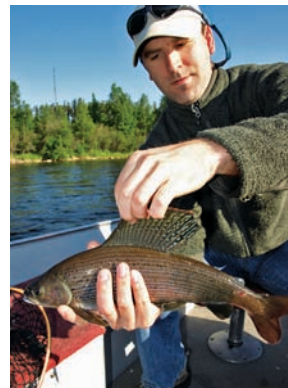
You don't have to worry about being blown off the water during a trip to the Cree River Lodge, which is situated on the Cree River a short distance from Wapata Lake, there's always an opportunity to enjoy some fishing close to camp regardless of the weather.

The lodge features five modern cabins with wood burning stoves, separate bedrooms with comfortable beds, hot and cold running water,

showers, indoor toilets, a sitting area and veranda. Clean linens and bedding are provided daily. The open season runs from June 1 to September 15, annually.

I really appreciated the 16 foot Lund Alaskans boats at the lodge, which had a spacious open floor design and swivel seats, as well as enclosed storage areas to keep items dry and secure; these boats were among the best I've ever seen for fly-fishing in many trips to different fishing lodges across Canada. There was nothing to snag a fly line on, which made for worry free casting for two fly-fishers.

The maximum capacity of the Cree River Lodge is 16 people; Pat and Kim will make special arrangements during July and August to accommodate parties with 12 or more people in a group for sessions such as conventions or team building meetings.



Myles Radford with a Cree River Arctic grayling.

They are the only lodge on Wapata Lake and in fact the only lodge on the Cree River system between Cree Lake and Black Lake, consequently they have very little fishing pressure which translates into good fishing year after year.

Breakfast and dinner are

served in the main lodge. Fresh coffee is delivered to your cabin at 6:00 am. Breakfast is served at 7 am. A shore lunch is prepared by your guide at noon. At 5:00 pm you'll return to the lodge for hor'dourves. A buffet style, all you can eat evening meal is served in the main lodge at 6:00 pm. There's also a bar service, including wine. Arrangements can be made for some after-dinner fishing if you decide not to simply kick back after your day on the water.

The boats are powered by 40 horsepower 4 stroke Yamaha outboards and are operated by experienced local Dene fishing guides who know the area like the back of their hands; we paired up with Joe Toutsaint from the nearby Black Lake settlement, on Black Lake, Saskatchewan. I've never seen anyone fillet fish faster than Joe, and he was a great guide. A shore lunch is a tradition at a Canadian fishing lodge and Joe and his partner Martin Robillard cooked up a dandy for us on our first day, one which I've written up in my "Fish and Wild Game Recipes" column in this issue of the *Alberta Outdoorsmen*.

Despite having a rather late start on day one of our arrival, I got off to a good start with my largest northern pike tapping 37 inches, with Myles besting me with a 44 inch brute, all on a fly rod. It got better, though. On my last day,



Duane Radford (L) and fishing guide Joe Toutsaint with a 44 inch pike.

once I found the groove, I landed a 41 inch beauty and two 44 inch MONSTERS. Plus, Myles tied the score with another 44 behemoth of his own—not bad for a short trip—and again, all on a fly rod. Fly-fishing for pike just doesn't get any better than that. I actually lost count of

how many pike I landed that ranged from 36-40 inches. On my best day there were so many I didn't even break out the camera unless they topped 40 inches, fishing was that good!

We had timed the trip perfectly for a late June outing. Slender shoots of equisetum were just emerging in the shallow bays and water lilies were starting to bud out—submergent aquatic plants were but a faint promise in the shallows. Winds were generally calm. Day time temperatures ranged from 20-25 C. Water temperature held steady at about 15 C, which is just about the perfect temperature for pike fishing as pike have a preferred range of 13-18 C water temperature.

And they were hungry—it shaped up as the perfect storm for pike fly-fishing.

An additional feature at the lodge is an exciting side-trip to vast sand dunes south of the lodge along the tortuous Cree River which I'd highly recommend. The scenery along the

Cree River is spectacular, featuring pristine boreal forest wilderness and riparian areas. Not only is the sand dunes a sight to behold, but there's fantastic fishing along the route with many outstanding pike in the 40" plus range. At "No-name" lake near the sand dunes



Myles Radford (L) and Joe Toutsaint with another 44 inch pike.

Myles and I caught three pike that topped 44" all on fly rods, while another member of our party took one that reached 47" inches, his taken with spinning gear.

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