

## **Great Bear Lake: Diamond in the Rough**

by Dave Jackson

For the last several years, I have had the opportunity to spend my summers working around Great Bear Lake. While much of that time has been spend at our secluded camp at Neiland Bay, I've also had the pleasure of working at Plummer's Great Bear Lake, Trophy Lodge and the Tree River. It is understandable how staff and guests alike grow attached these remarkable places. Simply put, Great Bear Lake is the most isolated, most pristine lake on Earth; not to mention one of the largest. The fishery, the landscapes and the wildlife that we experience at Great Bear are truly unique; even in the Canadian North.

This spring, I had to make the difficult decision to work for a mineral exploration company rather than spending my summer guiding. Though I new I would miss terribly being out on the lake everyday, I was keen to see more of the Sahtú region (Sahtú is the Dene name for Great Bear Lake and the name generally accorded to this area of the NWT).

Stretching from the Mackenzie (Rocky) Mountains to the Barren lands, the Sahtú region is vast and sparsely populated. However, we are not alone. Seismic lines dominate the Mackenzie Valley, west of the Lake. Diamond mining is bringing industry and workers to many isolated corners of the territory. Uranium mining, despite its controversies (Uranium from the Echo Bay mine near Branson's provided the uranium for the Manhattan Project and the first nuclear weapon) may again occur in the region. A hydroelectric dam has been proposed for the Great Bear River.

Being able to visit areas and communities around the lake has given a greater perspective on the potential of the region, its resources and its inhabitants. Needless to say, the excitement I feel landing on Chummy's airstrip or landing in the Otter at Neiland Bay is greater now than ever. Even in a region as remote and pristine as the Northwest Territories, our "Bear" has a timeless feeling all to itself; with ancient fish, bountiful arctic wildlife and flora, bewildering scenery and the best fishing lodge in North America. There is only one Great Bear Lake.

Mahsi cho Sahtú! (Thanks a lot Great Bear!)