

## Lodge

Back in 1988, I got my first job as the “camp boy” at Arctic Circle Lodge on the east end of Great Bear Lake. It's hard to believe that summer 2007 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> time I have been up to the arctic. Things have changed a lot since I first started. I was 16 years old. There were no fish finders and nobody had even heard of GPS. Somehow we managed to survive, catch fish, and have a great time.

I remember my first night in the arctic. I was so excited to be there. We had found our cabins, unpacked most of our bags, and a few of us were trying to fish off the back dock. I remember thinking to myself, “it must be about 9:30 in the evening by now”. Turns out it was 2:15 in the morning—welcome to the midnight sun, “newbie”. I remember the first fish I caught; it was about a six-pound trout. I remember learning a lot that year. I spent almost every afternoon and day off out on the lake learning and exploring.

Something else I remember from that first year is a guide named Pat Alexander. It was his sixth year on the lake. Pat, as he always did then and for many years to come, shared much of his love and knowledge of the lake. I am sure many of you have had the pleasure of working with or being guided by Pat over the years. Pat was one of a kind. I think he actually thought like a fish! I, just as many others, was saddened by his loss.

In the late 1980s, “Catch and Release” was just starting to “catch on”. Back then, I would see several large fish a week crated away in cardboard boxes, or “fish coffins” as I called them. As replica mounts improved and guides and guests became more conservation minded, the number of big fish leaving the lake declined. Since 2001, thanks to Plummer's “Hug and Release” policy, only shore lunch fish have been kept.

The result of all this is that the fishing has improved, especially for the big ones! Fish in the 60-pound range that would once have broken the world record are now caught almost each year on Great Bear Lake. Nowhere else in the world has there continually been record lake trout like this caught *and released*.

Over the years, I have seen quite a bit of Great Slave Lake, and especially Great Bear Lake. Twice I have driven “The Bear” from the east end by Arctic Circle Lodge, to the west end by Trophy Lodge—a 225-mile trip by the time you go around the islands and along the shorelines. I have chased after the barge in the middle of the lake in near darkness. I have been in glass calm waters in the morning, only to be in 14-foot waves by late afternoon. I have been on the lake in the sun, rain, fog, snow, hail, cold, and heat. I have driven across the lake in a winter jacket one day, and then done the same trip later in the week with no shirt on. I have walked on the lake in May when the ice is starting to retreat, and swam in it during July and August. I have done a lot, been very blessed, and am very thankful for the chances I have had.

In 20 years, there is one thing I have failed to do—I have never lost my wonder and love for the lake. Something keeps drawing me back. Maybe it's the remote, rugged beauty. Maybe it is the serene, crystal clear waters. Maybe it's the fishing and the opportunities and challenges it presents. Maybe it's the people—I have guided and worked with so many great people over the years, many of whom have the same “arctic itch” I do. To tell the truth, it's probably all of the above. One thing is for sure; there is no place like it.