

NORTHERN ONTARIO FLY FISHING PRIMER

Scott Earl Smith

Fly fishing in Northern Ontario is a well kept secret. When I wrote my book, *Ontario Blue-Ribbon Fly Fishing Guide* (available at www.scottearlsmith.com) in 1999, I suggested Northern Ontario was the next fly fishing frontier. Although the population of Ontario is approximately 10 million people, most of the population lives in the southern belt of the province within 50-miles of the Canada-US border. The remainder of the province is sparsely populated – but teeming with wild fish.

Northern Ontario's lakes and rivers are habitat for some of fly fishing's most coveted species. Brook trout inhabit most of Northern Ontario, where the majority of rivers and lakes are in the watersheds of either Hudson Bay or Lake Superior. Indeed the world-record brook trout (14 pounds 8 ounces) was caught in Northern Ontario. You can still catch huge brook trout in this northern hinterland. Each year, I bring at least one brook trout to hand that is in excess of 6-pounds. I've seen them as big as 10-pounds, and dream of a new world record some day on my fly rod.

Over the years I have traveled much of Northern Canada in search of the continent's biggest northern pike. I've caught them as big as 46-inches. But I know that the biggest pike live in Northern Ontario. This year my goal is to land and release a pike of 50-inches or better. I have full confidence that fish of this size are possible in the Albany River system in Northern Ontario.

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I have developed some innovative systems for fly fishing in Northern Ontario. While these techniques may be quite different from what most people envision fly fishing to be, they are simple and very effective.

Although it's difficult to give fly fishing lessons on paper, I can outline some basics, so that you when you arrive at least you'll be armed with the right equipment. For brook trout in Northern Ontario I use a high-quality graphite rod in the 7-weight category (www.sageflyfish.com). I match the rod with a large arbour reel (www.islander.com) and spool up with a floating line, and a sink tip line on a spare spool. I choose the fastest sink rate I can find because big brook trout live in the deep runs and pools on the swiftest of rivers. There they can find adequate food and available cover from predators – like northern pike as long as your leg. I use large rabbit-strip streamers sometimes 4-inches long on a short stout leader. I utilize the sink-tip system for most of my brook trout fishing unless I encounter a good hatch of caddis or mayflies. Then I'll switch to my floating line. A Yellow Stimulator or a Royal Trude in sizes 12 – 8 are all your really need for rising Northern Ontario brook trout.

Basically the streamer system I've described for brook trout is in essence how I fish for northern pike – with a few adaptations. First of all, you'll need a bigger system. I recommend a 9- or 10-weight rod with a matching large arbor reel. Again, you'll need a floating and a sink-tip system. Because pike have razor sharp teeth, I use a 30-pound-test steel leader. The basic 12-inch, bait-casting steel leader is the best leader on the market. Specialty fly fishing bite leaders don't work any better (just cost more). I use a short

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monofilament leader between my bite leader and fly line – usually about 40-inches or so. This monofilament leader should be 30- to 40-pound test. I've seen some awfully big pike lost at the boat on a final head shake simply because someone skimped on the monofilament leader. In my opinion you want to bring your trophy to hand for that nice photograph as quick as possible. Skimpy leaders contribute to a lot of “You should have seen the one I lost” stories around camp. The flies I cast for pike are large rabbit strip concoctions, often with a deer-hair head and/or bead chain eyes. A lot of pike anglers say that eyes on baits provide a target – or landmark – for a striking pike, so I go along with that theory. The pattern of streamer is not really all that important – but color and movement are vital. Your streamer patterns should undulate in the water and be very visual. Black, chartreuse, white, red and orange patterns have all taken large pike. Come with a good selection and you'll be well prepared.

I should mention that I've caught lots of lake trout and walleye using these same streamer techniques. Lake trout and walleye will hammer a nicely swung streamer – especially in cooler water temperatures.

I hope this helps you plan for your trip to Northern Ontario. If you're looking for more specifics and fly pattern information, you can visit my website at www.scottearlsmith.com and order a copy of my book. Hope to see you soon.

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This document has been brought to you by the fly-in fishing experts
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walleye and pike trophy fishing.

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