

MARRIAGE ENCOUNTERS, OF THE *wilderness* KIND



■ (Left) Jeff and Jennifer Young and (Below) Matt and Cece Schultz enjoy the Yukon wilderness.



By Jennifer Young

“Wow. We’re going to the Yukon.” That was my initial reaction after deciding on a trip to this unique destination early last year. I knew it would be special because of its location and because *All-Canada Adventures* had never been to the Yukon.

This was a couples’ trip and joining my husband Jeff and me to Wolf Lake Lodge were my sister, Cecilia and her husband, Matthew Schoultz. Cecilia and Matt had never fished in Canada, so their first time experience would be a trip of a lifetime for anyone, even the professional anglers at the lodge. Both Matt and Cece doubled as photographers so they were excited to take pictures in such a beautiful place.

I was shocked Cece had never fished in Canada, since our dad, Dave Hutchison, founder of the All-Canada Show had fished in Canada every year. I guess with seven sisters, one of us was bound to slip through the cracks.

Dad did take her to Canada in high school, but it was a tour of Québec City. She loved it so much she majored in French at college and now she teaches French at Seymour High School (near Green Bay, WI). She rotates yearly trips to Québec and France with her students. That Québec trip did change her life. Maybe this trip did too.

Have you ever heard of marriage encounter? Jeff and I have never been on one, but I would imagine that you spend lots of time with your spouse. On this trip we spent so much time together...many days we were alone on a lake with just the two of us in the boat. It was really great to be in such a peaceful setting talking and having fun with my husband of 16 years. We laughed a lot, and shared a lot...Jeff was my hero one day getting us safely back to the lodge despite rough water, rain and even hail. Cece said that this was the most time she and Matt spent together in their entire marriage. That’s incredible.

The Yukon is not a familiar destination to Midwest U.S. travelers. In fact most visitors to the Yukon are just passing through, driving on the Alaskan Highway to the state recently made famous by its ex-governor, Sarah Palin.

It’s amazing more people don’t know much about what I would call Canada’s “secret territory.” It has excellent hunting and fishing. ➤



■ Yukon Territory

July 10, 2009

Weather Conditions:

Sunny and high
50’s – low 60’s



■ An arctic grayling is released back into the crystal clear waters of the Wolf River. Photos by: Colin Pacitti



Fishing opportunities include lake trout, northern pike, arctic grayling, plus inconnu, dolly varden and bull trout. Big game hunting includes moose, woodland caribou, barren ground caribou, mountain sheep, mountain goat, grizzly bear, black bear, wolf and wood bison.

In addition, the Yukon provides a plethora of outdoor activities including snowshoeing, dog sledding, whitewater rafting, skiing, snowmobiling, wildlife and Aurora Borealis (northern lights) viewing, canoeing, golfing, hiking, horseback riding, and kayaking, to name a few.

Obviously, during our short stay, we were concentrating on fishing and exploring the vast wilderness, but hopefully some day we will return to the Yukon and take in other attractions. Wolf Lake does have great

kayaking rivers, and they have all of the equipment as well.

Wolf Lake Lodge is about an hour float plane ride from Whitehorse. It is on a fairly small lake (by Canadian standards) that is about two miles wide and eleven miles long. It has one fairly deep hole (280') but it averages from 25' to 90.' The lake is easy to navigate and the fishing packages are semi-guided. The owners, Wes and Michelle Walker, went over the fishing map with us and had their staff personally show us around the lake.

The food at Wolf Lake Lodge was fantastic. In their remote wilderness setting, it was astonishing to eat five star restaurant quality food, wine, and beverages. Wes is a pilot, so if Michelle ever needed anything, he would jump in the float plane and go to

the store. Matt and Jeff thought that was pretty cool.

Our group consisted of a couple from England: Colin and Marguerite Pacitti, another couple from Indiana: Jerome and Cherry Gumz and friends: Timothy Rose and Dan Wherry, who left their wives behind, both from England.

Healthy meals are a top priority at this lodge. Breakfast included: Red River cereal, pancakes, French toast; lunch was hot soup and sandwiches, homemade pizza, or you could pack a lunch for the boat and dinner was fabulous: fresh fruits and vegetables, salads, lasagna, Greek and BBQ ribs and steak. Dessert was also a highlight and included key lime pie, strawberry shortcake, homemade cookies and on and on. The coffee was always regular and always strong – it reminded Cece of France. Plus no dish washing...we were in heaven.

The group hung out each night after supper in the screened-in clubhouse which also had a fire-heated hot tub, a full bar, and plenty of chairs. >



■ (Far left) Lodge owners Wes and Michelle Walker cook shore lunch.

(Left) The couples take time for a group photo. Photo by: Michelle Walker.



■ Jennifer and Cece enjoy a nice grayling caught by Jennifer.



■ (Top) A moose calf explores the Yukon wilderness as well. Photo by: Colin Pacitti

(Above) Matt and Cece pause for shore lunch.

Getting to know the other guests was so much fun. Dan (from the U. K.) was a “hoot.” In college I had studied in Grantham, England, and he currently lives 20 minutes from my old stomping grounds. It is such a small world. While there, Dan caught a 25 pound lake trout and this was the first time in his life fishing for lakera. We spent hours talking and laughing with the group.

Marg and Colin have fished all over the world, and their fish stories were unfathomable. After this trip, they were heading to British Columbia to go sturgeon fishing. Marg caught a 400 pounder on a previous B.C. trip! While at Wolf Lake, Marg caught two lake trout over 35 and two over 40 pounds. Colin also caught three fish over 35 pounds (See page 18). They were very willing to share their fishing spots and lures with us. It was fun to be around such expert anglers who liked to teach others the fishing techniques that worked for them over the years.

Cece and Matt were new to the entire Canadian fishing experience and so we



■ (Above) Colin Pacitti from England battles a trophy lake trout. (Right) Colin with his trophy trout. Photos by: Marg Pacitti



thought it would be fun to fish for big lake trout (trolling and jigging) in the morning and then fly-fish in the afternoon. At night we went on moose tracking expeditions and we all came home with smiles on our faces after seeing five to eight moose each night, some with calves at their sides. Wes brought us out on the first night and guided us up to the moose. After that, Jeff and Matt were able to navigate without any help at all.

Moose are such huge animals, and they didn’t react when the boats approached. They are beautiful creatures. The “moms” take care of their “babies” and seeing them in the wild is very cool. I asked Wes if they were really his pets, because they seemed to be trained. He laughed and nodded his head, “yes.”

In the Yukon in July the sun sets at 1 a.m. and rises at 3:20 a.m. So it was completely light out at 10:30 at night.

The Wolf River provided some excellent fly-fishing, even for us beginners. We had never done fly-fishing and we were eager to learn something new. Wolf Lake Lodge provided all of the equipment and a fly-fishing guide, Max. I mean everything, the rods, reels, nymphs, dry flies, and waders (high quality in men’s and women’s sizes). Max was a great teacher. He was patient

with us, and he showed us exactly what to do.

Walking into the water is wild the first time you do it. You are dry, but you can feel the cold water against your body. It really cools you down on a hot sunny day. You become one with the river. As you stand still the water rushes around you, and it is easy to stay balanced. When you move or take a step, it feels like you are going against gravity and the water fights you. Walking takes 10 times more effort, and one misstep and you are wet. The river will win that battle every time.

We were fly-fishing for arctic grayling, and this is the spot to do it. Gord Pyzer, fishing editor from *Outdoor Canada*, said that the Wolf River is one of the top spots in the world to fly-fish for arctic grayling. As complete novices, we all were catching fish left and right. We would have to agree with Pyzer. Max taught us how to remove the fish safely and return it into the water.

Arctic grayling are some of the most beautiful fish in the world. Under the water their colors include silver, gold, pink, peach, yellow, mint green, blue, with chocolate brown speckles on some. Since the water is crystal clear, you can see them in the water flashing as they swim by ➤

or as you pull them in. The bottom of the river is filled with tiny stones.

I felt like I was in the middle of a beautiful aquarium at the zoo. The tan and brown rocks under my feet, the water rushing around me, and the fish were everywhere. It is amazing how grayling can remain so still in such a strong current.

We were in a class five river for kayaking, and we could hear the rapids (like a waterfall) while fishing. I looked down at my big boots in the water, and I saw six or seven huge grayling hovering around my feet. It was very odd. I asked the guide what was going on, and he said that our feet stir up the bottom of the river, and the fish are looking for food. Jeff thought he could

reach down and catch them with his bare hands, but they were too quick for that. He looked like a hungry bear trying to get his supper.

Cece and Matt had a great time fly-fishing too. They were naturals. The first day we started counting how many grayling we caught. Believe it or not, it was hard to keep track. When you fly-fish, you are much further apart than fishing in a boat, so you have more hands on experience. In other words...you take your own fish off of the hook. The hooks are tiny, and it is very easy to take the fish off without causing it any harm.

With fly-fishing, when you get a “fish on,” you don’t reel it in; you pull the orange

string with the opposite hand. It is quite a scene when there are five or more people fly-fishing yelling “fish on,” pulling in their line, holding up the long rod, getting the fish off and releasing it into the water.

At first our guide was running up and down the river helping us with our various techniques – casting and releasing the fish back into the water. We finally noticed that it was much easier for everyone, including the fish, if each of us could do it ourselves. Empowerment was another awesome part about Wolf Lake Lodge.

We learned so many new things, and as the owner of the All-Canada Show, I am glad I did. My husband, Jeff, learned how to maneuver the boat and fish at the same time. Matt and Cece learned how to use a GPS. Cece and I learned how to run the boat on our own (with no men). We all learned how to fly-fish. We learned how to read a lake map. And we all learned how to catch and release lake trout.

Wes and Michelle, owners of Wolf Lake Lodge, came out to the river one day and prepared a spectacular shore lunch. They cooked up grayling and trout, and boy was it mouthwatering. Cece and Matt had never had a shore lunch before, and they were hooked. Cece said, “This is the best fish that I have ever eaten in my life.” And she wasn’t kidding.

Our cozy cabin was nice with two bedrooms and a full bath including hot running water. It was quiet and Matt was able to get the Internet connection from the lodge, so we were able to contact home via email. Wolf Lake Lodge has two laptops in the lodge available to guests. They have voice over Internet via Skype, and so we called home every day and said hi to our kids. That was unexpected, being so remote.

This trip with our spouses was a trip of a lifetime. Appreciating the time and place together, having the peace and quiet of the wilderness, having fun and laughing out loud together, enjoying meals and other people in our midst, being close to God during this time, reading, sitting, and just “being”...that’s what I think a marriage encounter should be.

A “marriage encounter of the wilderness kind” is what it was for the four of us. I am so thankful for finally making one. 🍁



■ (Above) The couples fish the Yukon’s mighty Wolf River. Photo by: Marg Pacitti
(Below) Relaxing back at camp. Photo by: Michelle Walker

