

# Loch-Style For Lakers

Full-time fishing guide John Horsey takes prizewinner Frank Daley to the Yukon to catch immense grayling and buzzer-feeding lake trout. John tells the story...

I had arranged to meet Frank Daley by the Air Canada check-in desk at Heathrow Airport. This would be the first time I'd seen Frank since he caught the biggest trout in the 2008 Lexus European Individual Final to win himself a 10-day fishing trip of a lifetime to Wolf Lake Lodge in the Yukon,

courtesy of Anglers World Holidays.

Being an experienced overseas angler, Frank had already checked in and soon our long-haul flight to Whitehorse, via Vancouver, began. But the most exhilarating part of our journey was without doubt the 100-mile float-plane

flight from Whitehorse to our fishing-lodge destination, on the shores of Wolf Lake.

It was fascinating looking down from our 1956 De Havilland float plane as we flew over mountains, rivers and lakes where, a little over 100 years ago, prospectors fought their way to Dawson City during the era known as

the Klondike Gold Rush.

Wolf Lake soon appeared on the horizon; at two miles wide, with depth of 275 feet, this lake would take some prospecting! However, once we met our hosts, Wes and Michelle Walker, we knew that their intimate knowledge of the lake would make our visit action packed.



Frank Daley's 15lb lake trout, caught on a Buzzer in a quiet bay. A home-made tarpaulin drogue helped with controlling the drift - it's that hideous orange thing in the corner!

- 1 Superglue **Buzzer**
- 2 Woolly **Bugger**
- 3 Super Tinsel **Lure**



We checked into our cabins and made our way to the main lodge where we sampled some of Michelle's home cooking and a couple of beers. Wes gave us a detailed map of the lake and suggested where we should fish for the remainder of the afternoon. Off we went, accompanied by two other guests in another boat, laden down with fishing tackle and heaps of enthusiasm.

We'd brought a selection of fly rods and I also had a spinning rod with me. We both set up nine-footers, with me on a Di3 sinker and Frank using a Di7. I felt that my normal pike flies would do the business, while Frank had brought with him a whole array of flies designed to catch our main quarry: lake trout.

Now lake trout, or 'lakers', are really a strain of char and the Wolf Lake record stands at 52lb, with Wes himself having caught that monster. There are also pike, whitefish and grayling, but our main target species were the lakers.

Our boat had a fishfinder, which was invaluable for checking the depth on such a vast, new venue. Wes headed for a shallow bay opposite the lodge to fish the drop-offs. Our fishfinder soon showed the lake shelving from 35 feet to six feet and we, in true loch-style fashion, drifted along this ledge... or so we planned! With no drogue, the light-but-variable winds hit our aluminium boat and turned

us round time after time. As I was on the engine, I had to repeatedly reposition the boat.

Both Frank and I had a few abortive hits before I finally latched into my first Yukon laker – a hard-fighting fish of about 4lb that took a large, sparkly, pike lure. Sadly, neither of us hooked another fish. Dinner that evening was rushed, to say the least, because we couldn't wait to get back out on the water.

This time we headed for the west end of the lake where we hoped there would be some sedges hatching, which would give us the chance of casting to rising fish.

Frank took his first laker on a Black Woolly Bugger and sinking line, while I managed our only whitefish of the entire trip. At about 11lb, it reminded me of a grayling minus the long dorsal fin.

As midnight came, the sun was still setting in the distance, so we decided to call it a day.

At breakfast the next day, we asked Wes if he ever used a drogue. It soon became apparent that most visiting anglers fish for lakers using spinning rods and either drift and cast or fish on the troll. As we were determined to fly fish in loch-style fashion, we needed a drogue to steady our drift and keep us broadside to the wind. The others watched in silence as we set about redesigning our boat. It's amazing how a sheet of orange tarpaulin, some ropes



The sport with the grayling of the Wolf River was hectic, to say the least. No matter what was tried, it caught fish.

“The water was crystal clear and so clean we drank from it. We could see dozens of grayling all over the riverbed.”

and a bit of ingenuity can produce the desired effect. We were ready to drift.

Our refinements now enabled us to fish properly on the drift and our home-made drogue enabled us to catch six lakers between us on either Di3 or Di7 sinking lines. I kept to my sparkly pike lures while Frank used Woolly Buggers.

By the end of the third day, Frank and I were catching lakers on each session and more than holding our own against the lure fishers. Patrick Walsh and Gord Pyzer of Canada Outdoors magazine soon became our fishing gurus. They were both experienced anglers and targeted the species using

lures. We figured that if we got anywhere near their success rate, we had to be doing well.

Now Frank and I had what I can only refer to as a 'midweek fishing crisis' during our trip – I was becoming more and more influenced by trolling soft-plastic lures. This never really helped. Frank on the other hand was convinced we should be using smaller flies. We compromised, in that I would control the engine and direct the boat but use a spinning rod to fish with lures, while Frank cast his full Airflo 40 Plus Di7 line and trolled a standard-sized Black & Green Woolly Bugger. We both caught fish, but Frank outscored me three to one.



This little laker just couldn't resist a slowly fished Superglue Buzzer.

### Wolf River Grayling

I'd heard great things about the Wolf River and its grayling fishing but rarely do these things live up to their reputation. However, this time it exceeded the hype by a country mile.

I started by fishing a team of three weighted nymphs on 8lb fluorocarbon and soon caught a lovely 2lb arctic grayling. These fish are very similar to their UK relatives but fight more aggressively.

Frank and I stood opposite each other fishing the same run; not a big pool, simply a 3ft-deep run with a soft gravel bed. The water was crystal clear like Wolf Lake, and so clean we drank from it without hesitation. We could see dozens of grayling all over the riverbed.

Fishing Czech Nymphs resulted in either a take or a solid hook-up almost every drop. Several times I hooked two fish at once and even managed the grand slam – a grayling on each of all three flies! The action was so prolific that I actually kept a running total of my catch rate. Unbelievably I managed 50 grayling in just 35 minutes, and during that time I never once moved my position.

I tried fishing spiders and wets – they worked. I used a single dry, a double dry and a triple dry with the same

result. The duo and trio worked so efficiently that I felt I could empty the place. The average size was around the 1½lb mark, but we also had several over 3lb and countless others over 2lb. It was hard to imagine that these wonderful grayling were the staple diet for the big Wolf Lake lakers, but they were. We soon witnessed the water erupting as a big laker crashed into a shallow pool chasing grayling – and what a sight!

Patrick had witnessed this many times and quickly rummaged through his fly box until he found a sizeable lure. We all watched in anticipation as he waded across to the shallow bay with his rod and big lure at the ready.

A couple of false casts and the fly landed close to the disturbance area. Patrick stripped the fly across the top as it was still only partly submerged. Crash! The water erupted again, but this time the quarry was Patrick's lure and all hell let loose. The big laker thrashed about in the shallow water and made several efforts to get into the deeper runs, but Patrick soon subdued the fish with his powerful rod. We put it around the 18lb to 20lb mark, and certainly the biggest fish we had seen so far on our trip. After it was released we headed upstream



The guys were flown in on a noisy but comfortable 1956 De Havilland float plane.

for a shore lunch of pan-fried freshly caught grayling before heading back.

### A Bit Of Buzzer Fishing

We had now reached our final two days and, although we had caught plenty of fish, the double-figure lakers had eluded us. Frank had taken a big solitary fish using a dry sedge one evening, but these rising fish were spookier than our hardest reservoir trout.

We had both noticed, however, that there were fantastic hatches of buzzers whenever the wind dropped – just like at home. We also spotted lots of leech marks on the underside of the trout and some even had clusters of leeches attached to their bellies. We made an assumption that these fish must be feeding hard on the bottom, possibly on bloodworm and buzzers. We asked Gord, Patrick and Wes about this, but they said that the principle diet was fish.

So, on our penultimate afternoon, Frank and I decided

to drift loch-style, towing our home-made drogue. He used Black Woolly Buggers and I used nymphs. Now I hadn't even bothered to bring my small flies but luckily Frank was better prepared. I set up my 10ft 7-wt floater and a 20ft leader of 10lb fluorocarbon. On went a Gold Head Pheasant Tail on the point, with two size 10 Superglue Buzzers on the droppers that were spaced just two feet apart to get them all down close to the bottom.

The lightest winds were at the top end of the lake, so we drifted along over 30 feet of water in areas where we had caught the most trout. Frank soon had a couple using his Di7 and Black Woolly Buggers, but I didn't get a touch. I felt, however, that I wasn't getting down to the bottom, so I searched through my waistcoat and found an 8ft tapered leader, which I added to my main tippet. I also found

a 5ft fast-sink polytip, so I stuck this on as well.

I was now casting a 28ft leader with five feet of sinking polytip and, amazingly, the rod handled it easily. My countdown was 45 seconds to one minute before retrieving and, just like at home, I focused my concentration

and drank far too much red wine and beer.

On our final day, Frank and I headed back to our 'Buzzer Bay' and both of us fished nymphs. Amazingly, we boated 17 fish that day, including a 'double-up' for me with a 5lb fish on the point and a 3lb fish on the

“ We boated 17 fish, including a 'double-up' for me, a 5lb and 3lb laker on the same cast ”

top dropper. At the stroke of midnight, Frank also caught our biggest fish of

the week, weighing 15lb, with a truly memorable sunset in the background.

We had come to a strange venue, fishing for a new species, and had come away wishing we had used our English loch-style tactics earlier in the trip. However, we know that this was the first time that our British reservoir-nymph tactics had been used on this immense Wolf Lake, and I hope one day we'll return to see if they will account for some of the truly huge lakers!

on watching 'the loop'.

After a few casts, the loop straightened and I struck – hard! A couple of minutes later and a fat 5lb lake trout nestled in the net – the Gold Head Pheasant Tail Nymph was right down its throat!

Excited and relieved, we fished on until dinner and I put another four fish in the boat and Frank also joined in the action with a couple. We couldn't wait to tell the others – and we had photographic evidence to prove it.

That night we talked tactics

Just before its capture this 20lb laker was hitting grayling in a shallow pool in the river. Patrick Walsh stripped his lure through the commotion and the trout nailed it.

