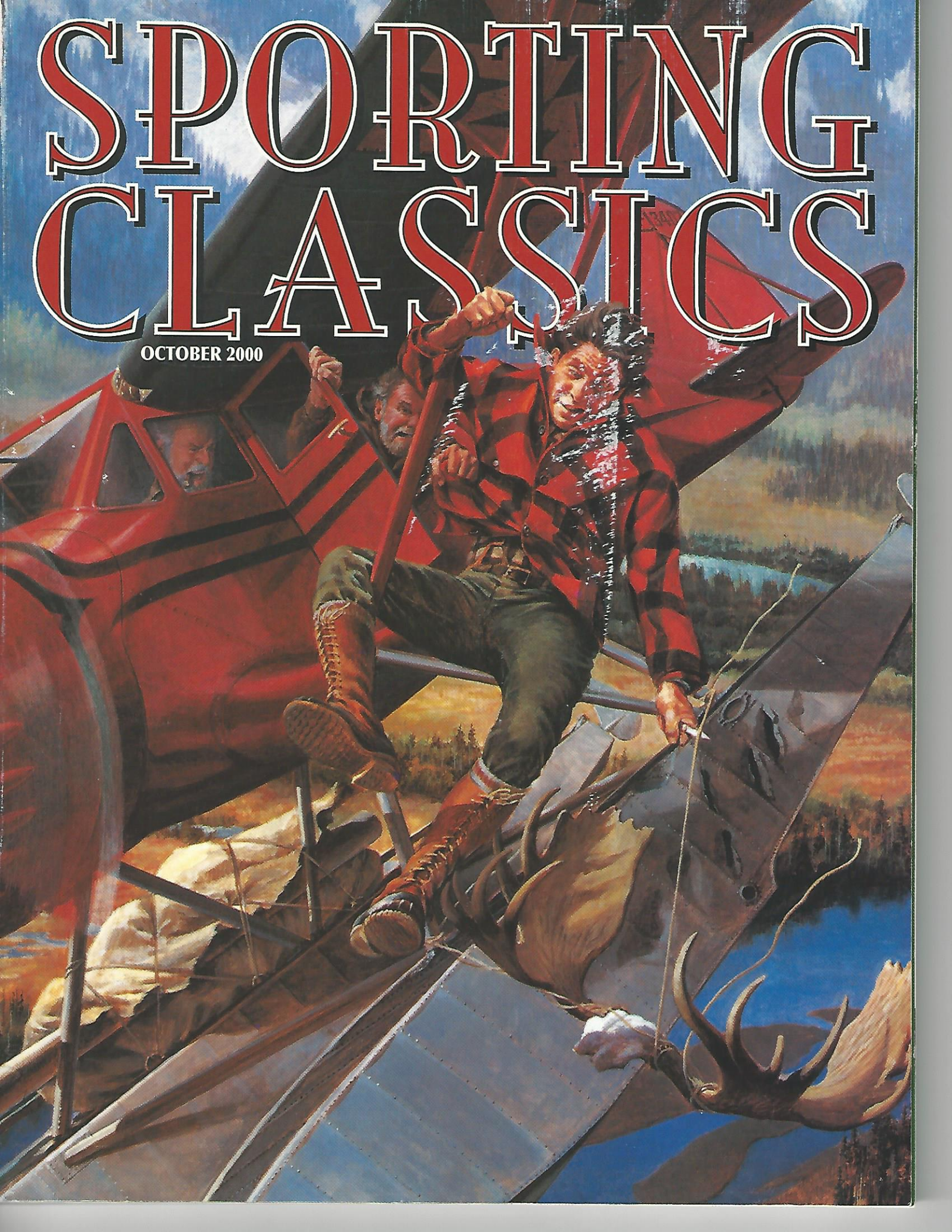


# SPORTING CLASSICS

OCTOBER 2000





# T r a v e l

By John Ross



Playing tag with remnants of a rainy front that had been washing the Northwest Territories along the Arctic Circle, the DC-3 – a 1943 vintage Gooney Bird now ferrying anglers and supplies among Plummer's lodges – pivoted on its port wing, swung around to the south and greased into the strip just west of the Tree River with grace lacked by more modern aircraft.

On the way up from Plummer's headquarters lodge on Great Bear Lake, I'd been watching the boreal forest of jackpine and black spruce fade to a tableau of gentle ridges and rock outcrops separated by swaths of ground cover alternately kelly green or loden, depending on sun or cloud. From the air, lakes and ponds took on the sheen of galvanized roofing and the streams the color of pale topaz.

This, at last, was the tundra I'd longed to visit. Though treeless, the terrain was hardly barren. Swaths of yellow Arctic poppies and creamy avens ran like fingers through the newly minted tussocks of sedge. Willow, the predominant tree, seldom stands taller than a foot and a half, spreading instead as a dense mat. Shaped by glaciers moving northward from mountains in central Canada, the land is at once rugged and gentle. But don't be deceived. Getting disoriented and lost in a terrain with only subtle landmarks is quite possible and can kill you in a matter of days.

Traveling to Canada's tundra is easy. Take my recent jaunts up to Plummer's Tree River camp in

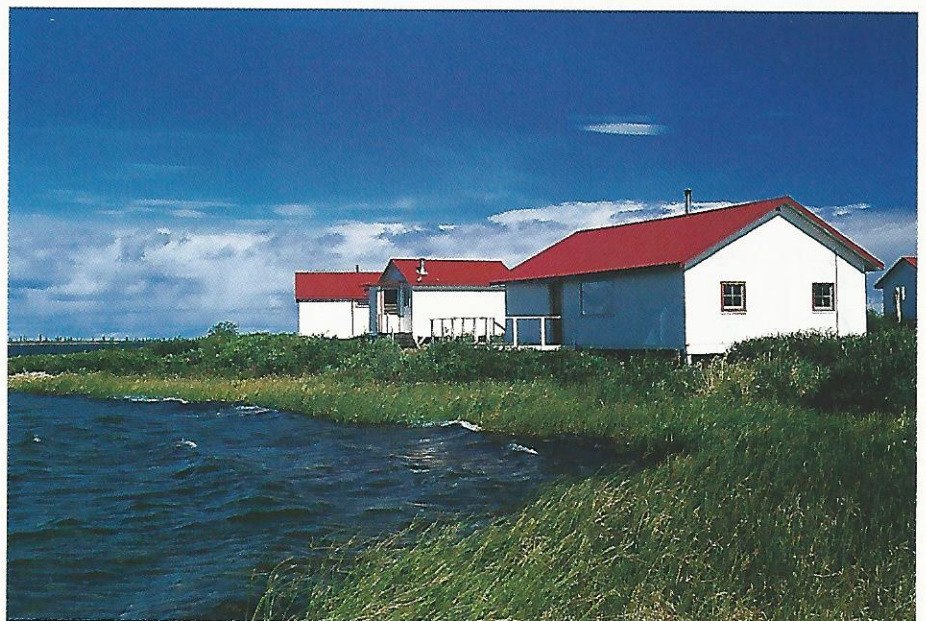
Nunavut and to Diana Lake Lodge west of Kuujjuac in northern Quebec. From Dulles, Air Canada delivered me to Winnipeg and Montreal respectively, where I hooked up with flights run by First Air, an Inuit owned and very efficient airline flying 727s. A day and a half after leaving home, I was trolling for lakers in one of Plummer's 18-foot

Alumarines on Great Bear Lake. Weather held us up for a night at Kuujjuac, but by noon I had my first

forty-five pounds. In addition, you're allowed a tackle box or satchel, a rod case and a carry-on the size of a small duffel. My carry-on contains cameras; socks and long underwear; medicine; toothbrush; copies of passport, ticket and emergency numbers (credit card and phone); a seven-piece rod by Thomas & Thomas, matching reel and a few flies. I wear a sweater and a Gore-Tex shell. If worse comes to worse, I can fish for a week in this outfit as long as I don't have to wade.

If you're primarily in tundra country to fish, a stout pair of wading shoes and a pair of breathable waders will get you through. Don't fret about rain-pants for fishing from a boat. Your

*The tundra promises priceless memories of superb hunting and fishing— as long as you're well prepared for your Arctic adventure.*



Diana Lake brookie, a nice two-pounder, on a fly. Bad weather can play hob with travel to the Arctic; allow yourself an extra day or two.

Plummer's charter arrangements with First Air restrict you to one piece of luggage weighing no more than

*The cabins at Plummer's look out over the icy waters of Great Bear Lake.*

waders will work just fine. When I travel, I wear a pair of 6-inch Gore-Tex lined boots. I find them very



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comfortable and useful in a pinch.

Arctic freshwaters carry four major species: lake trout, grayling, Arctic char and northern pike. In Quebec and Labrador, grayling and (to some degree) pike are replaced by brook trout, landlocked salmon and Atlantic salmon. Most outfitters in tundra country cater to spin-fishers and carry supplies of popular spoons, wire leader and line. Flyfishing is something else. You'll need to bring your own flies.

The fish are seldom finicky about the pattern. Particularly effective are muddlers, woolly buggers and leech patterns, stimulators, caddis (elk hair and black) and orange parachute Adams. On Great Bear, lake trout favored chartreuse snake flies and big, dark-green and white Clousers or deceivers tied with a bit of sparkle in the back. Char in the Tree River fell to leech patterns and flash flies because the water was high and gray. Bring at least a dozen of each size and pattern.

Take two rods: a five/six and an eight-weight, and floating, sink-tip systems and sinking lines. You may have little use for a sinking line on the five/six-weight, but you may find that char, brookies or medium-sized lakers lie too deep to fish comfortably with other lines. And after a while, you might prefer to fish with the six, just because it's fun. Multi-piece travel rods — for spin-fishing, too — are much preferred over longer two-piece models.

Spin-fishermen should slip an ultralight rig into their gear for grayling or brookies. A three-pound grayling on a whippy five-foot rod with four-pound line is nothing if not pure fun.

If you're planning to hunt in Canada, your first concern will probably be the country's constantly changing gun laws. Effective Jan. 1, 2001, non-residents will need to pay a firearms declaration fee to bring in rifles or shotguns. For the most up-to-date information, call the Canadian Firearms Center at 800-731-4000.

No matter how carefully you pack your guns and scopes, they'll most likely get knocked out of adjustment by baggage handlers. At Diana Lake in Quebec, I discovered I couldn't hit



a paper plate with my traveling rifle, a Winchester Model 70 in .30-06 that shoots 1.25-inch groups from my shooting bench. From a prone rest, I shot nearly a box of 165-grain boat-tails before I was satisfied the rifle was hitting exactly where I wanted it. Having been stymied by an off-target rifle in the past, I brought three boxes of ammo just in case. The two bulls I took at less than 100 yards required one shot each.

You'll also want to bring plenty of shells if you want to hunt ptarmigan, not because they're rare or difficult to hit, but because the limits are generous – usually ten birds or more. Shells

other than 12-gauge are almost non-existent in Canada. One group of savvy hunters contacted Joe Stefanski at Diana Lake in advance and arranged to have a case of 20-gauge shells shipped up long before their trip.

Best boots for hunting ptarmigan and caribou come to mid-calf and are made of rubber. I wear 12-inch Gore-Tex Danners that when laced tightly, will keep my feet dry even if

the season for caribou, ptarmigan and waterfowl, generally late August and early September.

Above all, plan a multi-faceted trip to the tundra. I chose Plummer's because of its excellent reputation for fly-outs to outposts and for the range of fishing. From the Tree River camp, we boated down to the gulf, sat on a vast ledge worn smooth and sinuous as an Inuit

carving, and watched seals dine on char in the waning twilight. At Diana Lake, Joe Stefanski fired up his Cessna and flew me 160 miles west in search of caribou. On the way I saw the terrain change from deep, U-shaped valleys, each filled with lakes and rivers and separated by low, craggy mountains, to a grassy tableland laced with ageless game trails and pocked with countless ponds.

These images of the tundra will stay with me long after the memory of my fish has faded. 🐟

## If You Want To Go

Plummer's operates one lodge on Great Slave Lake, three on Great Bear and another on Tree River. Packages vary from \$1,995 for three days at Great Slave to \$3,795 for a week at Great Bear. Flying to Edmonton or Winnipeg and connecting with First Air charter is included in your package; flyouts are additional. Contact Plummer's Lodges, 950 Bradford St., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3N 0N5. Regular season – 204-774-5775; fax 204-783-2320; [www.plummers.mb.ca](http://www.plummers.mb.ca)

Rates for Diana Lake begin at \$3,495. Combination bird, caribou and fishing packages are available. Fly to Montreal and connect with First Air flight to Kuujjuac included. Contact Joe Stefanski, Diana Lake Lodge, PO Box 1053, Kuujjuac, Quebec J0M 1C0. Regular season – 800-532-6404; off-season write 33 Gibbs Rd., Jaffrey, NH 03452. Web site: [www.higharcticadv.com](http://www.higharcticadv.com)



I step into water that's deeper than the boot is tall.

When to travel to the tundra? The best fishing is in late July or early August. If you're combining hunting and fishing, aim for the first weeks of

*Decked out in its autumn spawning colors, the brook trout is one of the world's most beautiful gamefish. Left: Two days of steady rain charged the Tree River with clay sediment and sent it rumbling down to the Arctic Ocean. Still, the author managed to catch several char on flies.*

