



FIRSTS

by Wanda Taylor

photos by Gangler's Seal River Lodge





I didn't know what to expect flying from Winnipeg to the North Seal River area of Northern Manitoba to Gangler's North Seal River Lodge. It was 6 am and barely light when departing on Calm Air Charters' 10 passenger plane. We were greeted by our German-born pilot and native Madagascar co-pilot, both speaking better English than my Southern slang. They went over the safety rules and offered us snacks and water before takeoff. The flight was two hours, so we all settled in for a morning's nap with dreams of fishing in our heads.

By 9 am, we were landing on the lodge's sand-packed runway. ATVs met us with a warm welcome. We settled into our cabins and met for breakfast at the lodge. Amazing blueberry French toast, bacon, and, of course, Canadian maple syrup. The staff came by and introduced themselves and outlined our first day fishing. We met our native Cree and Dene guides, who were waiting in boats to take us fishing on the endless waters out the lodge's back door.

All tackle is welcome at Gangler's, but my favorite is fishing with a fly. I was fortunate to have Kelly, a Cree guide, who has experience with fly anglers, and who is learning fly himself. Being a fly instructor, I welcomed the opportunity of instructing him, while he guided me to my first pike. We came to an early partnership and the mission was on for both of us. We took a boat ride around islands, granite rocks, little stick trees, eagles, otters, and did not see one person or boat for miles.







We came to a gliding stop and he suggested I rig up a 9 weight sinking line. I showed him my flies and he picked one. I tied on wire bite tippet for those notorious toothy critters. I made my first cast to get control of my line, and the fly accidentally hit the water. **BAM!** I missed my first pike. After that, it was **GAME ON!** We caught and released 25 to 30 fish before heading back to the lodge for dinner. I had caught my first pike on a fly. The beast and I are one.

Back at the lodge, we had hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. I headed to my cabin for a shower before dinner and fish stories. The five star dinner started at 7 pm. After that, we could relax to great music in the lounge area, take an Esker trail ride through the erratic boulder fields, kayak for an evening paddle, or ride a mountain bike. Most nights, when the sky was clear around the campfire, you could take in a meteor shower. In the early hours of the morning, the Northern Lights were something to behold. Yet another first for me.

At 6 am the next morning, I was awakened by the engines of float planes. They were staging themselves at the dock, readying to fly us to parts unknown, to fish water that hasn't been fished in the recent past. Staff delivered coffee to my cabin at 6:30 am and I couldn't help but call them angels of the morning. I do love my java. After breakfast, it was time to board the float plane. Again, another first. I absolutely loved being able to visually see the clear water and islands below in hopes of maybe spotting a moose or sasquatch.



THIS IS WHERE IT GOT STICKY.

Every fishing location has its own lunch tradition, and this was no exception. My guide told me it was my responsibility to catch a pike or walleye for our shore lunch, or we did not eat. As you can imagine, the pressure was on and no fish showed. I had a granola bar we could split, but that didn't sound very tasty by 1 pm.

It was like we had bananas on the boat.

The pike would look at my fly, and turn or bite the tail tasting to see if it was real. Finally, I caught a medium-sized pike and we boated it for lunch, but it was a bit oversized for two people. I then caught a junior and Kelly revived the medium one for a release. We headed to the shore for lunch.









Wanda holds a beautiful lake trout.

What happened next was another first. For a brief moment, I forgot I was with a native Cree. He used his boots to move dirt and make a pit. Next, he gathered rocks to make a circle around the pit and added twigs and moss to start a fire. He filleted the pike, and added spices while the oil was bubbling in the skillet. He sautéed diced potatoes, onions, and mushrooms.

Lunch was served. Fresh pike, cool shade, music from the loons, and I was happily enjoying the experience of a lifetime.

An hour passed and we headed for the historic North Seal River in search of walleye. I had never seen a walleye, much less caught one. I love streamer fishing and with the moving water of the mighty Seal, I was in my happy place, as an angler. Using a down and across presentation,

I caught my first walleye on a fly, which was a dream come true. It was as beautiful as I had been told. Over the next few days, I had other firsts; my first grayling, lake trout, and arctic char. I even got to swim with the whales.

- ✓ FIVE STAR FOOD
- ✓ QUALITY LODGING
- ✓ WI-FI
- ✓ ECO-TOURISM
- ✓ NORTHERN LIGHTS
- ✓ BIG PIKE AND WALLEYE



