

**Into the Wilderness and Wild Steelhead**  
**By Art Lingren**



*It took one hour to fly into Hannah's wilderness lodge from Smithers, BC.*

Sometime last year Hannah Belford bought a reel from the Jim Kilburn estate. She happened to be staying at an RV site in North Vancouver--her partner Warren was working on a construction project close by. I delivered the reel and while we were having coffee Hannah said she would like me and Frank Amato to come to her lodge. When Hannah's parents were wanting to get fishing clients, they invited Frank up and he helped get the lodge's fishing program going. This past February 2023, I saw Frank at his estancia Amato in SW Washington state when Hugh Lewis and I went down to do Frank's oral fishing history. Frank said he would love to go back to the lodge, but health issues kept him in the USA.



*Always nice to share fishing and grizzly bear stories with friends—Charles and Art Lingren, Bob Clay, Len Vanderstar, Andrew Williams, and Doug Vaday across from Bob.*

I made a deal with Hannah so my son Charles a.k.a CT could come with me and on October 14<sup>th</sup> we flew to Smithers. Hannah's mother Alice picked us up at the airport, took us to the Hudson Bay Inn. There a few friends—Bob Clay, Andrew Williams, Doug Vaday and Len Vanderstar joined us for dinner, and we had a good bs session about fishing and grizzly bears.

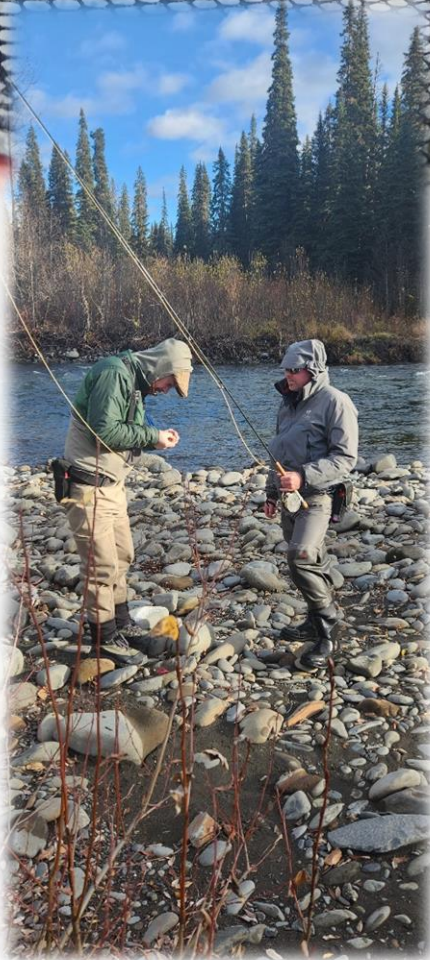


*The camp's cookhouse.*

The next morning Alice took us to Canadian Helicopter for the one-hour flight to the lodge where we were met by Hannah and her guide Toby Gilbert. They were both enthusiastic—the river was in good shape, and warm enough with fish eager to take a well-presented fly skated across the surface. Toby took us downriver to a long run and in the next three hours Charles and I rose five steelhead. Charles didn't connect but I did with three steelhead, landing two.



*The first steelhead on the first day.*



Every trip has highlights. My son has not done a lot of steelhead fishing and fishing a waked fly is new to him. He took his first steelhead on a waked fly the next morning. But it was the third day that we had our best memories. Toby rafted us across the river where we hiked upriver and on a nice run Charles had his fish of the trip. Toby had him fishing a waked fly and there were fish in the pool that were rising and eventually Charles connected and landed a nice hen steelhead of around 15 lbs. I was fishing lower down and came up to get some pictures and asked CT about how many fish came up. He said that he had at least eight rises to flies before he hooked the fish.

*Toby Gilbert changing fly for CT.*



*CT and Toby with CT's 15 lb. hen steelhead.*

Later in the day in the pool we fished the first day I had my trip's fish memory. Fishing my 7 weight Ron Grantham bamboo rod with Toby's Moose Hair I made a cast to the other side along a log and as it just started to come across, I had a large surface eruption as a steelhead grabbed the fly. It got hung up on the logs but eventually the line freed and the fish headed down to the spill over into the rapids. Toby told me to "walk the dog" and I put my rod down into the water and then started walking the fish up the river away from the pool's spill into the rapids. The fish followed along as I walked upriver and eventually Toby slid a male steelhead in the high teens into the net.

Toby's Moose Hair.



Toby Gilbert and me with a two stripe male steelhead in the high teens with Grantham's 7 weight bamboo rod and Hardy St. Aiden reel.



That afternoon the rains came, and the river rose some over the next two days and although we did find some fish every day for the rest of the trip most came to a fly fished on a sinktip. The river did settle down and I rose my last fish, not hooked however, on a waked fly. But the cold weather was coming, and the river was cooling.

*The large male with Toby's Moose Hair in its jaw.*

This is black and grizzly bear, moose, and wolf country. Other than scat from those species we didn't see any big game animals. Just the little guys. The last evening a vole was wandering around our tent eating grass. It wasn't wary of us when we got close and usually small animals scurry away. Maybe it was old age, but I found a dead, frost-covered vole outside our tent the next morning.



*The vole.*

I enjoyed the hiking to the pools, and we fished maybe 4 kms of river during the week. I am pushing 81 and I did fine but did have two mishaps. Toby had taken the raft into the shallows, and I was just getting ready to sit on the raft and swing my leg over, but I



wasn't high enough on the side and the raft slipped from under me and I went into the river. Fortunately, my son and Toby were quick and got me up before I got wet. Another day Charles and I were walking over the cobbled riverbed, and I stepped onto a rock that tilted and I went over banging my titanium knee. My rod with my Hardy Taupo Perfect reel fell onto the rocks and I was more concerned that I damaged my reel as I lay on the rocks. Charles had to lift me up to get me on my feet. The moral of the story is: be extra careful when you get my age. Even my wading staff didn't prevent my fall.

I enjoyed being in the wilderness. We lucked out with water and weather conditions and had a very enjoyable steelhead fly fishing trip to a wilderness river with wild steelhead.



*Charles Lingren with Hannah Belford.  
Both CT and I to Hannah and Toby say merci beaucoup for the memories.*