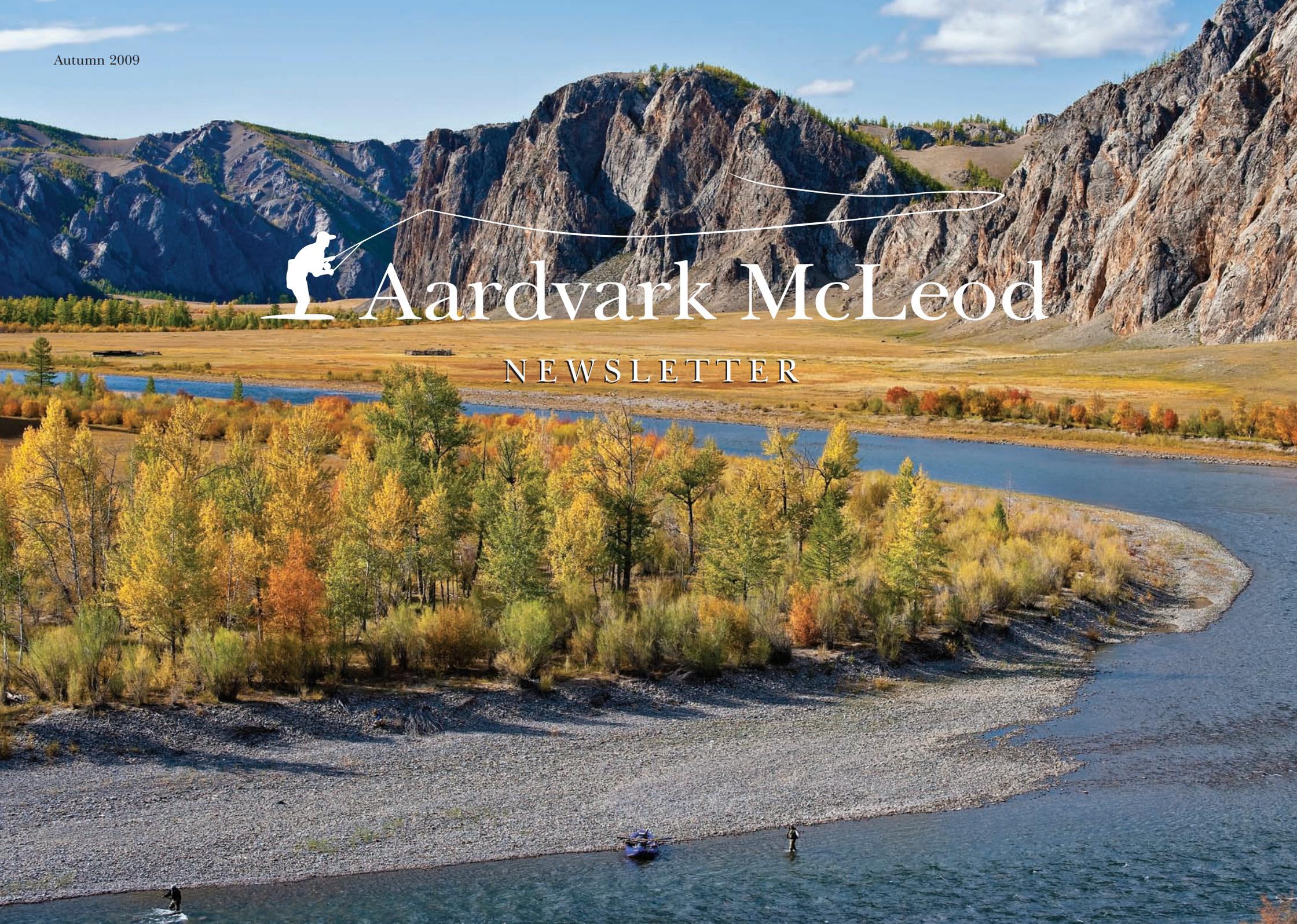


Autumn 2009



Aardvark McLeod

NEWSLETTER



Welcome...

The autumn leaves are beginning to turn already and now is the perfect time to be thinking about an end of year escape to the sun. I know that many would rather be wading across a bonefish flat or lying on a beach than going to work in the dreary rain. It has been another frantically busy summer for us as we continue to grow despite the recession's best efforts. The addition of the Latin American Fishing Company has been a great success and our first trip for Europeans to the Bolivian jungle was incredibly exciting. Being able to stalk giant golden dorado and pacu in clear water has created a huge amount of interest.

The Icelandic season started with a bang with one group of six rods landing 104 salmon on the Nordurá in three days, and this was to be a marker of things to come on numerous rivers. The fishing in Iceland was extremely consistent this year with larger fish entering the system. Many have fallen in love with the unique clear water fishing and have discovered the joys of hitching small tube flies. I also experienced first

hand the phenomenal trout fishing to be found on the Myvatnssveit and Laxardal beats of the Upper Adaldal and can testify to the huge trout it contains. I am pleased to say that World Champion fly fisherman, Iain Barr, will be leading a group there for us next July.

I have just returned from a Mongolian adventure travelling to the steppes to do battle with the prehistoric taimen. For anyone thinking of quite literally getting away from it all then I would highly recommend immersing yourself in Mongol culture for a while and hunting these river wolves. Next year I will be returning to Los Roques and British Columbia.

Charlotte travelled to both Seychelles and Los Roques this year and landed a bunch of bones. She will be heading out to the Bahamas this Autumn to have a look at a number of new operations we will be representing there.

We have some new and exciting operations coming on line at the end of this year from the Delphi Club in the Bahamas to Kiwayu in Kenya, and as always we strive to find the latest and most exciting new locations around the world for fishermen and non fishermen alike.



Start 'em young





Hunting River Jaguars

By Gordon Richmond



An adventure beckoned – a new lodge and a never before opportunity to fish three rivers in a remote and pristine Bolivian national park, with only the indigenous tribes for company.

This area had never been open to fly fishermen before and I was fortunate to be amongst the first European group to cast a line here. Let me colour this picture for you ...

I have crept along 200 yards of boulder covered riverbank spotting golden dorado in the pockets between the rapids below me on the other side of the river. There's a twenty pound plus fish holding in the current just below the rapids tucked close behind a rock. I am on my knees hiding behind some large boulders as I cast what I can only describe as a 5 inch long Hairy Chernoble Ant tied on a 4/0 hook. As my fly floated out from the rapids, the fish rose about a foot behind it drifting down the pocket before sipping in this massive floater. I strip strike hard and the river jaguar quickly shows me its spots and gleaming golden flanks as it erupted in fury and headed back downstream at speed. No stealth required here – just a prayer for my ankles.

Golden dorado aren't the only targets here. There is also the pacu.

Imagine a freshwater permit – just as frustrating and, like buses, you don't see one for hours then six turn up at once. It fights like its saltwater counterpart, indulging in long runs and heart stopping turns.

This is a truly unique experience. Fishing is split between two lodges on three different rivers, sight fishing for South America's most sporting of fish. Jaguar tracks cover the river banks and brightly coloured butterflies often distract you from your quarry.





I ♥ PONOI

The Ponoï River on the Kola Peninsula is a name that many in the salmon fishing fraternity are familiar with. As one of the world's most prolific Atlantic salmon rivers it has captured the imagination of those who have spent long weeks on the water in Scotland for not much return. Acha Camp certainly lived up to its reputation this year by producing 407 fish to six rods in one of our June weeks giving an average of 67 fish per rod for the week. Most of these were caught on a floating line which has always been one of Ponoï's greatest features. The river is wide but not intimidating with a relatively shallow even bed. Jet boats are used to move between beats, but it is not necessary to fish from them. Wading is the preferred method, which we find appeals more to British fishermen. The guides, along with the camp staff, are highly experienced.

Acha Camp has come a very long way from its early years when safari style tents were used. Subsequent seasons have seen numerous improvements to the facilities including wooden cabins replacing the tents. Each cabin has twin beds, stove and electric heaters. Considering that there are only 10 rods fishing the camp this means that it is nearly one cabin per client and perfect for those who like a little privacy. With the addition of a central mess cabin containing kitchen, separate dining room, salmon bar and fly tying corner along with a new shower and sauna house in 2007 this permanent camp has a great deal to offer. The fact that the prices for a week here are lower than many of the other operations on the Kola Peninsula makes it very good value for money. Peter Baxendale will again be hosting weeks here next year.

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PONOÏ

Giant bonefish and free taking trevally... has to be every flats fisherman's dream. St Brandon's in the Indian Ocean is proving to be the home of just such quarry. It is a group of over 50 small islands, islets, coral ridges and vast sand flats on an extended reef in the Indian Ocean. Situated 268 nautical miles north-east of Mauritius this untouched atoll is rich in fish stocks, flora and fauna. The magnificent condition of the coral and the lobster infested outer reefs is proof that other than a small population of Creole natives who live on Raphael Island in the north, this area has had very little human interference.

St Brandon's is a saltwater fly fishing paradise with scattered islands, vast connecting sandbanks, flats of hard white sand and broken coral. There are even flats that are covered in turtle grass although they are few and far between. The atoll has some of the most spectacular bonefishing you will ever encounter, and on most tides fishermen can expect to see vast shoals of these grey ghosts as well as enormous singles and doubles. On recent expeditions fish of 15 lbs and more have been caught. There are also numerous Indo-Pacific permit for those anglers wishing to target this ultimate shallow water gamefish. Other notable species which frequent the flats of St Brandon's are bluefin, golden, yellow dot and green spot trevally, as well as the notorious giant trevally which reaches weights in excess of 100 lbs. The guides will lead you onto the flats and help you identify the desired target species, the areas which they frequent and the tactics used to target them.

Your home for the week, "The Gryphon" is a 96 ft motor yacht with a 23 ft beam and a 7.5 ft draft catering for long range expeditions. She can accommodate up to eight fly fishermen, three guides, as well as a crew of four who will cater for your every need. She is a large and comfortable vessel equipped with stabilisers for a smoother ride, and the perfect base with which to explore St Brandon's in luxury. The Gryphon is a three decked vessel offering four spacious guest cabins situated at the aft of the lower deck. Each has a spacious en-suite shower, basin and flushing toilet. All cabins and indoor dining or entertainment areas are fully air conditioned and on the mid deck there is a separate salon, dining area and aft seating area all with a magnificent view of the surroundings. All meals are served in the dining room with the chef preparing a mix of Creole and international food. This trip will not be for everyone, but for those who like the sun on their backs and wading on the flats this just could be the ultimate saltwater trip.

every fisherman's dream

St Brandon's



The end of the “fishing widow” *at the Delphi Club*



The Bahamas have long been synonymous with stunning white sand, aquamarine water, and is historically one of the areas in which bonefishing first became popular. The flats were the playground of the early saltwater fishermen who were discovering what sport this bonefish was on light tackle. As new destinations evolved globally many have forgotten the giants that lurk the flats. The Bahamas is also at the top of the list for that perfect beach holiday for couples, and it is possible that the days of the “fishing widow” are numbered.



In October this year a new lodge will open on Abaco called the Delphi Club and it has been designed with both fishers and non-fishers in mind. Quite apart from its beautiful sandy beach and turquoise seas, the club has a lovely infinity pool and a gazebo for massage and other therapies. There's an eclectic library, a great wine cellar and a well-stocked honesty bar. Whether dozing in a hammock or quietly reading with a glass of chilled Meursault on one of the club's large verandahs, guests may relax thoroughly and enjoy one of the world's most pleasant climates and beautiful seascapes.

Designed in the style of an 18th century colonial plantation house, with large wrap-around verandahs, the eight bedroom lodge stands on a small hill to catch the sea breezes and panoramic ocean views. The club will capture the style of a classical house party, where the characters change from time to time. Everyone generally eats together at one big table from a set menu. There are no bell hops or room service – it's just a relaxed gathering of kindred spirits. The fishing on Abaco is top quality and far less crowded than on the better-known island of Andros. The famous Marls on the west side of the island offer over 200 square miles of first-class bonefishing flats which also give anglers an occasional shot at permit and tarpon in the summer. On the east side the stunning sandy flats at Cherokee Sound provide more bonefishing options, including some gorgeous wading flats. Whether wading alone on the flats, paddling a kayak or poling gently through the mangroves in a guided skiff, fishermen will enjoy many opportunities to cast to these most powerful, but stealthy of fish.

Bahamas



In June, I headed off to Los Roques, slightly apprehensive about how well my casting was going to stand up against the dual challenges of wind and distance and so I arrived, rather nervous but looking forward to fishing the pancake flats.

Unwisely, I had ignored Blofeld McLeod's advice to wear my flats clothes on the flight out to Grand Roques and "wasted" at least 15 minutes changing before heading out for my first day in Los Roques. The guides timed me; apparently I was quicker than the Italians but slower than the Swedes! We spent the next few days working our way around the mud flats, fishing from the beach or stalking the pancakes in search of nice big bones, of which there were plenty. My casting improved daily,

the distances cast increased and my double hauling actually started to have an impact. I caught big bones, little bones, middling bones and the occasional hat. I walked miles and miles, my right arm felt like it was going to drop off but I eventually began to see what my guide was pointing at. It was heaven. Having arrived worrying about whether I was good enough to fish in Los Roques, I realised that it really didn't matter. The two guides I fished with over the course of the week were patient teachers and I was a keen pupil; it was a pleasure to be able to spend time learning from them. Spanish lessons took place at lunchtime and during the brief spells under the (very welcome) bimini. With much solemnity, the dual entities Jesus and Jesus whipped out a milk crate they had secreted on the boat to speed up my re-entry process when in deeper water. I blame the food: it was so good and in such abundance that my centre of gravity changed.

Los Roques, for a relative novice can be a daunting prospect – yes, it was windy and yes, those pancake flats are big. Being able to smack out 50 yards of line without blinking is enviable but even with my meagre offering of 20 yards I still managed to fish the pancakes and caught some really good bones. Admittedly I probably had to do more walking than Blofeld McLeod to make up for my shorter casts (not legs) but it didn't detract from my enjoyment and those rare, magical, moments when everything worked the right fly, a decent cast and a big bonefish that happily took my offering.

What is so great about this operation is that there are no set arrival or departure dates and you can fish all year round: there is little seasonal difference being so close to the equator. The posada was fantastic and the rooms simple but very comfortable. The water pressure was great (its a female thing), Angelo and Mimo were entertaining hosts, the food was fantastic despite affecting my ability to get in the boat and the pelican/minnow/bonefish relationship was fascinating to watch. The offshore day fishing with Alejandro and Amalio was amazing fun. Watching the baby tarpon rolling by the dock first thing in the morning was wonderful and it really is a place for non-fishers who just want to relax and unwind away from it all.

My biggest disappointment was that my Blackberry had signal everywhere: Blofeld could keep tabs on me whether onshore, offshore or inbar. Next time, I'm leaving it behind.



Venezuela

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Seychelles...



Desroches is a beautiful island escape for a couple or a family. The accommodation on the island is being expanded to include a number of four bedroom villas, all with pools but still only a short walk from the beach. The fishing around Desroches itself is excellent and the lower channel not

far from the beach is particularly good for trevally species. The lodge also now has an excellent fly fishing guide on site. The islands of Poivre and St Josephs are about an hour's run from Desroches with some stunning flats to explore complete with good sized bonefish and trevally. It is also possible to fish offshore, targeting the bigger pelagic species. With the surrounding deep troughs, deep water jigging gives you the opportunity to target reef fish. Whether diving, snorkelling, cycling or playing tennis, there is plenty for everyone and if all of that activity is just too much to contend with, you can always avail yourself of the spa treatments available.

Strictly for fishers... Alphonse deservedly retains its reputation as one of the best saltwater destinations in the world. The consistently prolific waters of St Francois and Alphonse provide ample opportunity for big bonefish and giant trevally as well as a plethora of other species. Sadly no longer able to accommodate non-fishers, Alphonse is a fishers only destination. The maximum group size is ten so whether you are travelling as a whole party, singly or in a small group, the lodge retains its personal feel and the guiding and hosting are as good as ever.

Denis Island is much more of a retreat with some lovely villas to choose from as well as the traditional rooms set further back in the gardens or on the beach front. The food here is of a very high standard and there is ample to do if you are so inclined. Snorkelling and diving from Denis is exceptional and there are also some small flats around the island that are worth casting a line over. An offshore boat is available if you wish to spend a day or two fishing the blue water around the island.



*something
for everyone*

Kiwayu *by Peter Gibson*

Kiwayu, in northern Kenya, is a fisherman's paradise and I last fished there in the mid 90's when I was involved in the running of Hemingways Resort at Watamu. Kiwayu was talked about by the local fishing fraternity as a mythical location where an unlimited bounty awaited those willing to make the trek. On all my visits we were never disappointed with the fishing: sailfish, yellowfin tuna, wahoo, king mackerel, dorado, giant trevally all readily came to the baits. Inshore, snapper, bonefish, grouper, wolf herring, pompano, several trevally species and ladyfish were the norm.

Nine years on, Aardvark McLeod, asked me to go back and see how good, or bad, the fishing now was. As an avid fly and spin angler I was keen to try many techniques from both disciplines and any fears I may have had about the fishing were dissolved on the first morning. Straight out from the lodge I was into nice sized trevally and pompano on fly. By the end of day one I had fourteen fish under my belt and eight species in the bag along with many missed and lost opportunities.

Over the remaining week I explored all regions of the archipelago, all of which have huge tidal inlets and coral structures along with mile after mile of untouched mangrove creeks. Every nook and cranny has the potential to throw up that fish of a lifetime. The back country fishing for mangrove snapper and grouper is mind blowing. Sight casting to structure with #10 fly rods, heavy sink lines and 6 inch flies is simply a recipe for fun.....

The offshore fishing is boundless – with five species of billfish available during the season. These are sailfish, black, blue and stripped marlin, and the ultimate broadbill – swordfish. Other offshore quarry includes wahoo, king mackerel, dorado, barracuda, and several tuna species.

Deep water jigging is also a fantastic option to be pursued at Kiwayu as the underwater peaks and drop offs hold phenomenal quantities of bait fish so the predators hang around waiting to pounce.

After a week of just scratching the surface of the Kiwayu fishery my fish count was 17 species and over 70 fish. The majority were taken on the fly which for me was just awesome. The lodge here is fantastic, the rooms are spacious and comfortable. It really does work if your wife or family want to come along – even if they don't fish there is ample for them to do here. Added to that, regular flights make this part of Kenya easier to reach than ever.





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Upper Laxá I Adaldal

Finest Trout fishing in Europe?



Above the famous salmon beats of the Laxá I Adaldal on the North coast of Iceland are two beats called Laxardal and Myvatnssveit. This summer I fished these beats and re-discovered why I love fishing for wild brown trout. The two areas combined have over 20 miles of fishing and are divided into 15 beats, each accommodating between one and three rods. Each year numerous fish between 5-7 lbs are caught with the occasional 8-9 lbs fish making an appearance. Three fish of over 12 lbs have also been caught – staggering for wild brown trout. These beats, which are very different in nature, are serviced from two lodges, Raudholar and Hof, both of which are simple and comfortable. The lower beat

Laxardal is wide and shallow, and reminded me of flats fishing as I waded out and cast at rises. The upper section at Myvatnssveit is wonderfully braided with fast runs, pockets and crystal clear water.

As these fish live in fast, powerful water they are extremely strong, and hooking one will test your tackle and skill. The first fish I hooked on a black hopper was just over 5 lbs and I landed it 150 yards below where I hooked it after an incredible battle. Some Icelandics fish with streamers, but upstream dry fly and nymph tactics are considerably more effective. Although there are none of our normal variety of biting mosquitoes in Iceland they do have a number of other chironomids that the trout feed on readily. The brown trout in the Laxá I Adaldal have only a few short months of the Icelandic summer to eat as much as possible, so they really feed hard below or above the surface. I would hasten to add this does not make them stupid, but by matching the hatch you have a good chance of experiencing some of the best trout fishing in Europe.