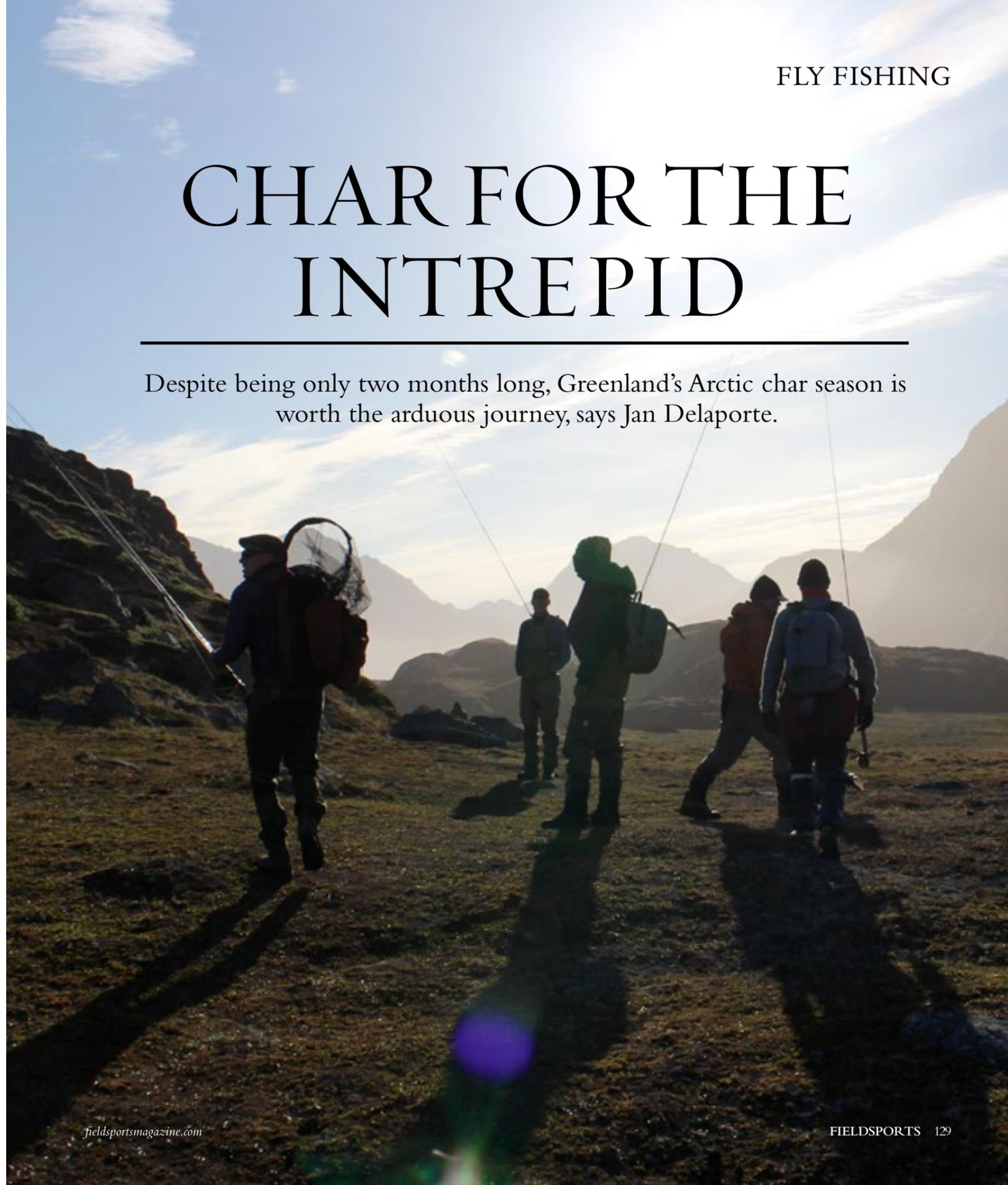


CHAR FOR THE INTREPID

Despite being only two months long, Greenland's Arctic char season is worth the arduous journey, says Jan Delaporte.



FLY FISHING

Greenland is the world's largest island, over three-quarters of which is covered by the only ice sheet outside of Antarctica. With a population of approximately 56,000, it is also the least densely populated country in the world. No wonder the fishing is so good!

The Arctic char, in both its resident and anadromous form, is the dominant freshwater fish species, and Greenland only has one Atlantic salmon river with predominantly small and few fish. The rivers there are simply too cold for salmon to spawn, even though they thrive and feed off the coast in large numbers.

Greenland is a great place to go fly fishing, though – but only in the summer! The run of Arctic char starts in late June and most camps open their fishing season in early July. It's a rather short season, lasting from early July until late August. In September, the fish are ready for spawning and should be left alone.

Although there are char in most large rivers in Greenland, the rivers that offer great fly fishing for bigger char of 5 – 11lb are relatively few and far between. The area where I fished around Sisimiut is blessed with several outstanding rivers, both north and south along the coast. As with other salmonids, the biggest fish tend to enter the rivers first, but trophy sized char are caught throughout the summer.

If you appreciate clear water and strong fish in good numbers, Greenland is one of the best fly fishing destinations for salmonids in the world.

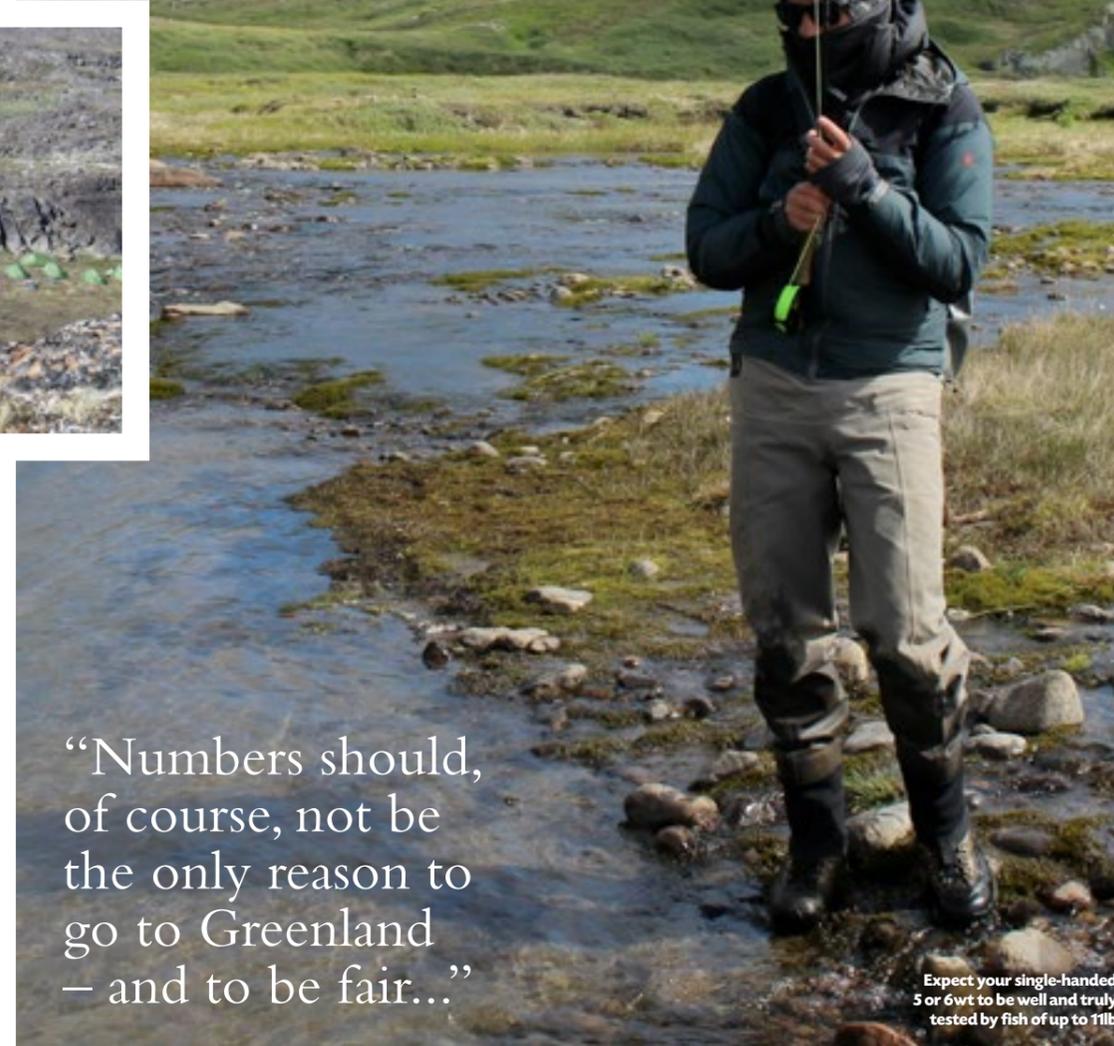
If you go, you'll need to take a 5 or 6wt fly rod, floating line and sink tips or poly leaders. The Greenlandic rivers are crystal clear and generally quite shallow with both fast and slow currents in places. It's no secret that the most effective fly fishing technique for arctic char is weighted streamers or nymphs (tungsten, copper and brass bead heads etc.) fished slow and deep near the bottom. Fifty-fish days are not uncommon for 'bottom dredgers', but I think it would be a great shame not to fly fish in a much more entertaining way, i.e. with skated surface flies. It may not be as effective, but it sure as hell is a lot of fun. Seeing an infuriated char chasing a foam fly from the opposite bank, right across the river, raising a substantial wake behind it in the process, and slamming the fly right in front of you, is adrenaline-inducing



The accommodation is basic – not ideal for non-fishing partners



There are several rivers in the Sisimiut area that produce double figure Arctic char



“Numbers should, of course, not be the only reason to go to Greenland – and to be fair...”

Expect your single-handed 5 or 6wt to be well and truly tested by fish of up to 11lb

stuff – visual action that is hard to beat in any fishery. You may not catch 50 char a day on dries – they tend to be more 'moody' with this type of fishing – but 20 fish will provide you with more action than you can imagine.

Numbers should, of course, not be the only reason to go to Greenland – and to be fair, there are days when the fishing slows down to an almost unimaginable level – the wilderness is another very good reason to pack your bags and travel north. It is an awe-inspiring place, and it's highly unlikely that you will see anyone other than your fellow anglers. Musk ox, wild reindeer (reindeer were never domesticated by the Greenlanders), polar fox and white-tailed eagle are regularly spotted. Polar bears are not an issue as they live further to the north.

Be prepared for some travelling, though. You will need to fly to Kangerlussuaq which is the international airport in the northern part of Greenland. From there, a short 30-minute light aircraft flight will take you to Sisimiut, Greenland's second biggest town (5,600 inhabitants). Most people stay overnight in a hotel in Sisimiut. The next day you will embark on a small, modern vessel for a 5 – 6 hours boat ride to one of the camps. Providing visibility and weather is good, sailing along the rugged and desolate coast is an adventure in itself. You are likely to see humpback whales, beluga whales, seals and icebergs.

Fishing camps in Greenland sit in some of the most remote and isolated places in the world, as there are next to no roads in Greenland, meaning you need to be prepared to rough it a bit; camps are basic, usually tented, but with most amenities such as camp beds, an outhouse, a larger tent or small hut for eating and as a



Location:

West coast of Greenland, Sisimiut area

Nearest international airport:

Kangerlussuaq

Target species:

Arctic char, 5 – 20 fish per day

Tour operator:

Getaway Tours

Note: There are no fly shops in Greenland, so make sure you take everything you need with you.

safe haven from mosquitos. As you come in by boat, the camp cook and guests are actually able to haul in a lot of good supplies for a week, including meat, vegetables and liquor.

The camps are placed close to estuaries with only a short walk to fetch supplies and baggage. And yes, there are mosquitoes and black flies galore in the Arctic summer – so do take plenty of repellent...

You should take weighted streamers in purple and pink; Egg Sucking Leaches work well, and so do Woolly Buggers in olive, black and brown colours. Nymphs such as Prince and Pheasant Tails with gold or tungsten beads are deadly fished upstream dead drifted, or downstream on a slow swing through the deeper parts of the river. As mentioned, don't go there without surface foam flies. Pink and orange colours seem to work best. Remember to take some

FLY FISHING



“In fact, some of the hottest action and biggest fish often come from these fast stretches of the river.”

fly floatant for keeping your fly moving on the surface after being drowned by ferociously attacking char. Spinning is allowed and very effective, but why fish with lures when you can have much more fun with the fly rod?

I do not recommend bringing non-fishing members of the family to the area. There is not much else to do apart from fishing!

If you want to try the incredibly exciting fishing with foam flies on the surface, pick a day without too much direct sunshine. The char seem to dislike bright light, and tend to stay down in these conditions. Overcast days are best. The alternative is to fish into the evening – it doesn't get dark, though, as the sun doesn't set during the summer months – when the char tend to be bolder and less flighty.

Try to cast to likely looking spots near the opposite bank. The char tend to get all worked-up when a big surface fly lands on the surface above them, racing after it as it is dragged by the current. They will literally chase

it across the entire width of the river!

Don't be deterred by fast, white water in the shallower sections of the river. Every little dip in the stream will most likely hold a char defending its lie against any intruders. In fact, some of the hottest action and biggest fish often come from these stretches. These fish have less time to react, so tend to be more aggressive and less suspicious of your fly. Remember to skate the fly – dead-drifted foam flies aren't effective.

The more sedate parts of the river are also exciting, though, because you can easily spot hundreds of char from the bank. However, they are not stupid, and if you can see them, it is likely that they can see you. In other words, they spook more easily in these spots, and you'll need a more clandestine approach. Try nymphing them with a well-delivered upstream cast or, if you see them feeding on the surface, don't be afraid to try small dry flies.

On the Erfalik river, south of Sisimiut, there is a waterfall approximately 15km upstream from the sea. If you make it up there, you will be blessed with an amazing spectacle. Thousands of arctic char congregate below the waterfall, resting before attempting to scale the falls. It is not a place for fishing, but for contemplation – truly one of nature's most awesome sights, and comparable to what you may see in Alaska and British Columbia's Pacific salmon rivers.



A good fish that fell for a skated foam fly