This is a tale of two wilderness rivers, the Ozernaya and the Two Yurt. They flow through the vast uninhabited wild tracks along the 1,000-mile-long mountainous spine of Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula in a remote region called the Russian Far East, which extends from eastern Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. The spring-fed Ozernaya River and the lake-fed Dvukhyurtochnaya River, commonly called the Two Yurt, hold some of the largest surface-feeding wild rainbows on earth. The Ozernaya also teems with incalculable numbers of migrating Pacific salmon, sea-run char, Dolly Varden, and the largest grayling in the world, while the Two Yurt can see runs of up to 300,000 sockeye annually. In partnership with Utgard Expeditions, a Russian company, Colorado-based The Best of Kamchatka uses helicopters to fly anglers to wilderness rivers inaccessible by road.

Geographically isolated for centuries, the Ozernaya and Two Yurt Rivers appear frozen in time and are the last places left on our planet where entire cold-water watersheds flow to the ocean unimpeded by dams. They also offer unimaginable solitude, seeing less angling pressure than entire cold-water watersheds are the last places left on our planet. Rivers appear frozen in time and centuries, the Ozernaya and Two Yurt can see runs of up to 300,000 sockeye annually. In partnership with Utgard Expeditions, a Russian company, Colorado-based The Best of Kamchatka uses helicopters to fly anglers to wilderness rivers inaccessible by road.

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The ozernaya and two yurt rivers are loaded with trophy-class salmonids, such as this huge, colorful Dolly Varden (above). Anglers enjoy a double hookup on the 100-mile-long ozernaya, which is primarily a wade-fishing river (below).

The Best of Kamchatka

Ozernaya and Two Yurt Rivers are home to some of the most sought-after salmonids in the world, including Dolly Varden, Grayling, and Rainbow Trout. The rivers are known for their stunning scenery and abundant fish, making them a must-visit destination for any fly fisherman.

Volcanoes appeared almost side by side. Nowhere was there the barren Arctic tundra that so common in Alaska. Sourced from cold-water springs, snowmelt, and a single tributary that flows from a mountainous lake, the Oz twists and turns on its 100-mile journey to the Bering Sea. Beneath its surface swim huge rainbow trout ranging from 18 to 27 inches, with larger specimens a cast away.

A 7-weight with a tapered 6-foot, 10-pound steelhead/salmon leader is perfect for chucking streamers. Without exception, you can expect a violent strike on every second or third cast. And you never know what you have until the fish either stays deep (it’s a Dolly or grayling) or rockets out of the water to show its rainbow stripe.
When tired of throwing big streamers, I grabbed my 6-weight and cast a size 6 Morrish Mouse. You make more casts with a mouse before a strike, but when a huge bow charges your rodent like an angry bull chasing a rodeo clown, the extra effort is well worth it. Hands down, the Ozernaya is the ultimate adventure for anglers seeking high catch rates and battles with fat, sassy, willing rainbows while discovering true wilderness and a touch of rustic luxury.

The Two Yurt
The Oz, and the Drudky-urotchornaya—more easily pronounced when you call it the Two Yurt—are as different as chalk and cheese. In a nutshell, the Two Yurt is more confined than the broad, open reaches of the Oz, making countless twists and turns through a picturesque valley framed by towering buttes covered with dense stands of poplar, birch, and tamarack. The climate can be harsh and wild regions of the Russian Far East, but no immunizations are required. Information on Russian visa requirements can be found at www.bestofkamchatka.com.

Of Mice and Fish
“Every angler who comes to Kamchatka wants to catch a rainbow trout,” adds Blair. “The Kamchatka trout experience is the ultimate adventure for anglers seeking high catch rates and battles with fat, sassy, willing rainbows while discovering true wilderness and a touch of rustic luxury.”

When you venture into the "wild, wild East" of Kamchatka, the rainbows that did charge a mouse would literally push water like a Trident submarine surfacing. More often than not, the fish would come unhooked yet be undeterred. A trout in any other river would head for cover. Not here. Once, twice, even three times, the rainbow would frantically search and slash the water for its injured prey. The water is so clear you can see the entire attack. I have never seen a trout just keep attacking a fly.

“The Kamchatka trout adventure with dry flies is about hunting big fish [that are] also on the hunt,” notes Blair. He adds, “I guess you could say predator hunts prey and prey turns into predator to hunt more prey. Kinda wild, really.”

You simply have to experience the thrill of fishing a mouse in Kamchatka firsthand to even begin to imagine the rush. In 30 years of fly fishing the world’s rivers, I never imagined I would experience such an abundance of species in such a wild setting. It was indeed my trip of a lifetime. When I returned to the States, my wife, Pam, asked, “Is Kamchatka for everyone?”

It’s probably not. But if you want to experience the best rainbow trout fishing left on the planet, walk in rivers where few humans have ever stepped, and lay claim to visiting one of the most remote and wild regions of the Russian Far East, then you must make Kamchatka to the head of your list.

Michael Hamilton is a veteran journalist and freelance outdoor and travel writer who lives in Seattle, Washington.