



## Legend of Russia's Great Rivers

by Rene Limeres

Perhaps no other fish has played more on the imagination of western sport anglers than the legendary giant trout of Russia's cold, deep rivers, the Siberian taimen, *Hucho taimen*. Much of what one hears about these freshwater leviathans is undoubtedly folklore, but a substantial part of the taimen myth is rooted in fact. The taimen belongs to a relict group of fishes thought to be the ancestral form of all salmon & trout species in North America, Europe and Asia. Solitary and long lived (up to 100 years or more), they are voracious and insatiable predators that can grow to enormous proportions in the vast productive river habitats of Siberia (the largest verified specimen, taken many years ago, weighed 109 kilograms- close to 250 lbs!).

As fish of anywhere near this size become almost impossible to capture on rod and reel, it is easy to fathom how an old, wise river monster can become the fabric of fantastic legends, bestowed with almost supernatural prowess by natives. A famous Mongol tale tells of a wandering group of starving tribesmen who come upon a giant taimen imprisoned in the ice of a frozen river. They hack off pieces of frozen flesh to stave off certain starvation, returning to feed on it through the long winter. In the spring, when the ice melts, the giant fish swims off, none the worse for wear!

Many of the first expeditions to Siberia by western sportsmen were not very successful. The Russian- led trips were poorly organized, and catches were disappointing, as it was apparent the more accessible waters contained few large taimen because of overfishing. In the years since, the more successful taimen fishing programs in Russia and northern Mongolia have concentrated effort in remote drainages inaccessible to natives. Though many big fish are still taken on heavy bait or spin casting gear, there is increasing flyfishing effort, with modest success. The current IGFA All Tackle World Record for the species stands at just under 100 lbs., a mark that is certain to fall as more and more anglers direct their attention to this interesting and challenging exotic.