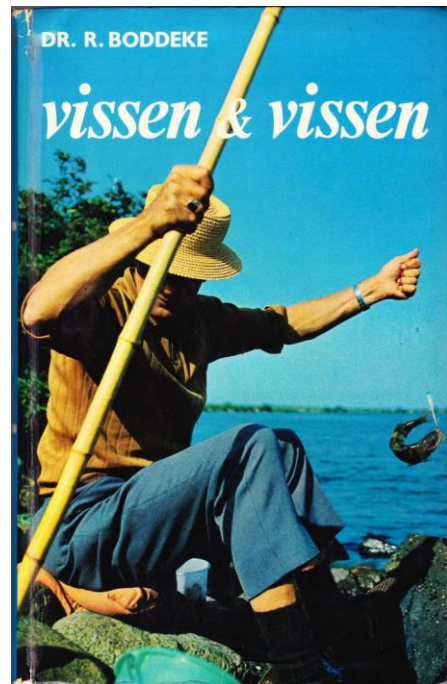


Polar problems and the ABU Reflex spinner, 1956

In 1971 the Dutch biologist dr. R. (Dolf) Boddeke published a book called *Vissen & Vissen* ('Fishing & Fish'). It contained all sorts of information on the subject, largely from a biological point of view. One of its chapters is called 'Polar Problems' and describes some of Boddeke's experiences in Abisko, a small village up in the north of Swedish Lapland. With a group of Dutch biology students he had travelled up there from Holland all the way by train. That was sixty years ago, in the summer of 1956. It was a botanical excursion, for the purpose of studying the arctic vegetation in Abisko National Park and its surroundings, an area of breathtaking beauty. Along with some other tackle, Boddeke had taken his delicate splitcane spinning rod with him, which he managed to keep intact during the crowded train voyage of no less than 3000 kilometers! Around Abisko he intended to do some fishing in the evenings, after having done his biological research during the day. And as it was July, the sun wouldn't set up there, so the nights would be almost as bright as the days.

There was only one shop in Abisko, a 'Lanthandel' (country store), which sold an unlikely variety of goods. Here Boddeke inquired after the local possibilities of fishing. He had planned to fish the lake that Abisko was situated on, called Torneträsk, a huge body of water, over 70 kilometers long and up to 168 meters deep. But the shop owner told him his chances of catching anything in that water were poor and he advised him to hike southwest across the tundra behind Abisko, towards the mountains. There he would find a small lake called 'Pajeb' which would give him a good chance of catching a few 'röding'. He also emphasized he happened to sell exactly the right bait for that purpose. It was an eye-catching spinner in a cheerful paper box with the name 'ABU-spinnaren REFLEX' printed on it. The spinner was a 12 gram model with a zebra coloured blade, a red body and some orange skirting on the treble. Boddeke politely bought the spinner, but left the shop rather puzzled and doubtful. That spinner had been about the only lure in the store, no wonder the shop owner had so highly recommended it. Could the man be trusted? And what was a 'röding' anyway? It did sound a bit like 'rudd', but surely there weren't any rudd up here, 200 kilometers above the polar circle...



When I contacted Dolf Boddeke in July 2016, he still had the original ABU Reflex spinner he had bought in Abisko and used in lake Pajeb in 1956. He generously sent me this picture of it.

That evening Boddeke took his fishing gear and went on his way. And after a long walk through rough terrain he found his lake Pajeb. He fished it for over an hour, caught precisely nothing, got very cold and seriously began to doubt the quality of the fishing as well as the potential of his lure, when suddenly a fish grabbed the Reflex spinner. The first glimpse he caught of it in the crystal clear water, left him breathless. This had to be one of the most beautiful fish ever!

It still took many exciting minutes to play the fish until it was tired enough to grab it by the tail and lift it ashore. There it clearly displayed all its wonderful colours: a greenish blue back with white specks, a bright pink belly and deep red fins, as Boddeke describes it. Later the fish turned out to be a so-called 'fjäll röding', known to us regular folks as an arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*). Boddeke took his catch back to the school building, where his group was lodged and where everyone was sound asleep, and laid it in the sink. Next morning found all the students crowded around the sink to admire the splendid fish. And in the evening three Swedish girls that took care of the cooking, prepared it in a most admirable way into a great dish.



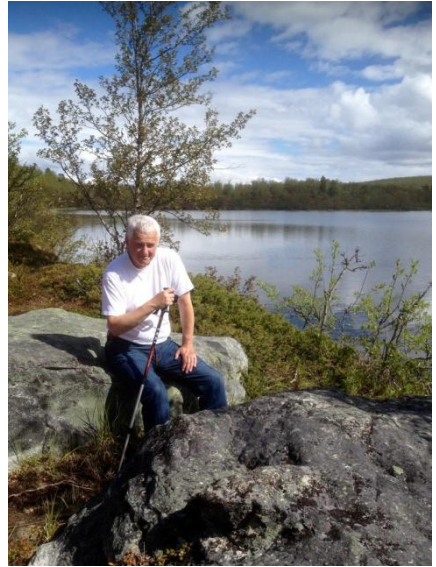
A nice 'fjäll röding' or arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*).

I had always liked this particular story very much, as it strongly appealed to my imagination - the story itself as well as the peculiar country store in Abisko and the wonderful scenery Boddeke described... But I never dreamed that I might ever see the place with my own eyes. Yet, last June (2016) when on holiday in Lapland, I was lucky enough to spend a few days near Abisko. I had a good look at the village - although you could drive through it while holding your breath - but the irresistible challenge was of course to find this small lake called Pajeb. It wasn't on the road map I had, but at the local fire station I managed to look into a detailed survey map that showed the lake by the name of 'Pajep Njakajaure', or 'Bajib Njágajávri' as the local Sami call it. I made some notes, took my compass, rucksack and trusted Leki trekking pole, and went off: '*trudging across the tundra, mile after mile*', as Frank Zappa called it in his song about Nanook the Eskimo. Did I find it? Yes, siree! It did take some time, I confess, but it was worth every bit of the effort. For I had not just arrived at a lake, I had reached the place of my boyhood fantasies. ■

- Hans van der Pauw -



Across the tundra, searching for lake Pajeb.



Found it!



Lake Pajeb and its surroundings.