

(Editor Note: Subscriber Donald G. Dusanic can't say enough nice things about the trip he and his wife made to Flowers River Lodge in Labrador this past July. No, they didn't catch a ton of fish. But that's not the whole point of Atlantic salmon fishing, Dusanic learned on this trip. His report so accurately portrays the special pleasures of salmon fishing and does such a thorough job of reviewing an interesting lodge that we are putting Donald G. Dusanic on our Subscriber Honor Roll. See page 2 for more details on our Honor Roll Program.)

The most memorable fishing trips are not necessarily those that result in outstanding numbers of fish. My wife and I consider our recent visit to Flowers River Lodge as one of those. I had never landed an Atlantic salmon. On a trip to Newfoundland two seasons ago, we fished for a week on the Humber River and only caught a few fish that had never visited the Atlantic Ocean. Last year, we fished the Spey in Scotland with the same result. We understood that Atlantic salmon, known as "the fish of a thousand casts," are difficult to catch. Fishing is "fishing" and not necessarily "catching." We were disappointed, but not discouraged and searched the web for another place to try.

We decided on the Flowers River Lodge, and in February of 2004 made arrangements to visit there the week of July 18th. Jim Burton, who owns Flowers River Lodge, met us in Goose Bay and immediately made arrangements for my wife, Jane, to find emergency dental services to repair a crown that had loosened during our trip. This was the sort of considerate attention we also found at the lodge.

Once we were ready, we boarded Burton's De Havilland Beaver for the 166-mile flight to the lodge. The landscape was reminiscent of Alaska's Bristol Bay drainage, relatively barren with many large and small lakes and few trees, except along the rivers. We de-planed, met the staff, and were shown the two-bedroom cabin we would share with another angler. After unpacking, we got into our waders and went off in a Gander boat with our guide, Barry, to fish the Flowers River.

The Flowers is purported to be Labrador's northern-most Atlantic salmon river. It is 50 miles in length and this year was expected to have a run of 3,000 to 4,000 fish. The fish move into the river from approximately July 15 to September 15. The river was high, but quite clear and easily waded. This suggested to me, not being a seasoned Atlantic salmon angler, the fish would be difficult to catch. I was not far from wrong.

We returned from our first experience on the river for dinner. As we ate, Jane was amazed at the level of excitement over a couple of "swirls" some of the other guests had experienced during their first casts for salmon. I was envious, since I had not had a swirl, but the week was just starting and their swirls were encouraging.

Jane and I worked out a schedule for our fishing. We fished for about three hours in the morning, ate lunch, took a nap and then fished some more. We like a relaxed schedule, and this certainly did not bother our guide, Barry, who was available whenever we wanted to fish. The second day of fishing yielded two swirls, but no hooked fish. On the third day, I had a couple of attempted takes and hooked a grilse that leaped once and swam directly at me with the speed of a bonefish. I was left with handfuls of line and an empty hook. On the fourth day, I almost experienced sweet success. I hooked and played a grilse and had it at the side of the boat, but the net was half a step late, and we practiced a quick release.

The evening of the fifth day, I was filled with frustration and decided to set aside the Blue Charm, Cosse Boom and Bomber flies that were supposed to catch fish and tied on a big, beautiful No. 2 Mickey Finn. The water exploded on my second cast. I set the hook and watched the salmon make a spectacular leap and cartwheel. Thirty-five minutes later, after seven equally acrobatic jumps and getting well into my backing five times, the fish came to the net. It was a beautiful 15-pound female, and I realized then why the Atlantic salmon is considered such a very special sportfish. During the next 10 minutes, Barry resuscitated the fish, and she was released to continue her upstream journey. What an experience!

Our final two days at the Flowers yielded three attempted takes and only small trout and parr. There are some who might conclude that this was not a successful trip, but from our perspective it was wonderful. We saw bear, muskrat, ducks and geese. The scenery was spectacular. Snow was still on the mountains. Black spruce and alders of various sizes bordered the clear, classical salmon river. One night, the cook, Effie, neglected to close a window on the lodge kitchen door. The screen offered little resistance to a black bear that tore it out and came through the two-by-two-foot space, moved the range around and trashed the kitchen. One of the guests, upon hearing the noise, opened his door and was face to face with the bear. Both were startled and frightened. The guest closed his door, and the bear exited through the original entry. The guest then came out yelling for help. He forgot to yell "bear," and when I went out to give assistance, I met the beast.

Around midnight on another evening, there was a knock at our door. We got out of bed to see what was the matter. Several of the guides had awakened us so we might view the Northern Lights. We had seen them on other trips in other places, but never as magnificent a display as this. They filled the sky with an intense bluish-white and seemed to dance and leap across the heavens. We really appreciated being alerted to the spectacle.

The complete experience at the Flowers River Lodge was very satisfying. Most important from my perspective, I caught my first Atlantic salmon. We found our guide, Barry, to be capable, congenial and considerate. He was also a good conversationalist. The boat was always clean, and when I had a problem wading, Barry was there to provide a stable shoulder for support. Effie, the cook, prepared tasty and nutritious meals, making adjustments for guests with specific dietary needs. The rooms were adequate and heated by wood-burning stoves on cold nights. In the morning after the generator was started, the baseboard heaters took over. The other guests were, as one would expect of fly fishers, a really nice group of people. We enjoyed their company and exchanging stories with them. We will recommend the Flowers River Lodge to our friends and fish there again for Atlantic salmon. – Donald G. Dusanic.

(Postscript: To inquire about Flowers River Lodge, the person to contact is Jim Burton at 877-725-6664; or 709-682-8663. Or send an e-mail to: jburton@flowersriver.com. The lodge's web address is: www.flowersriver.com.)