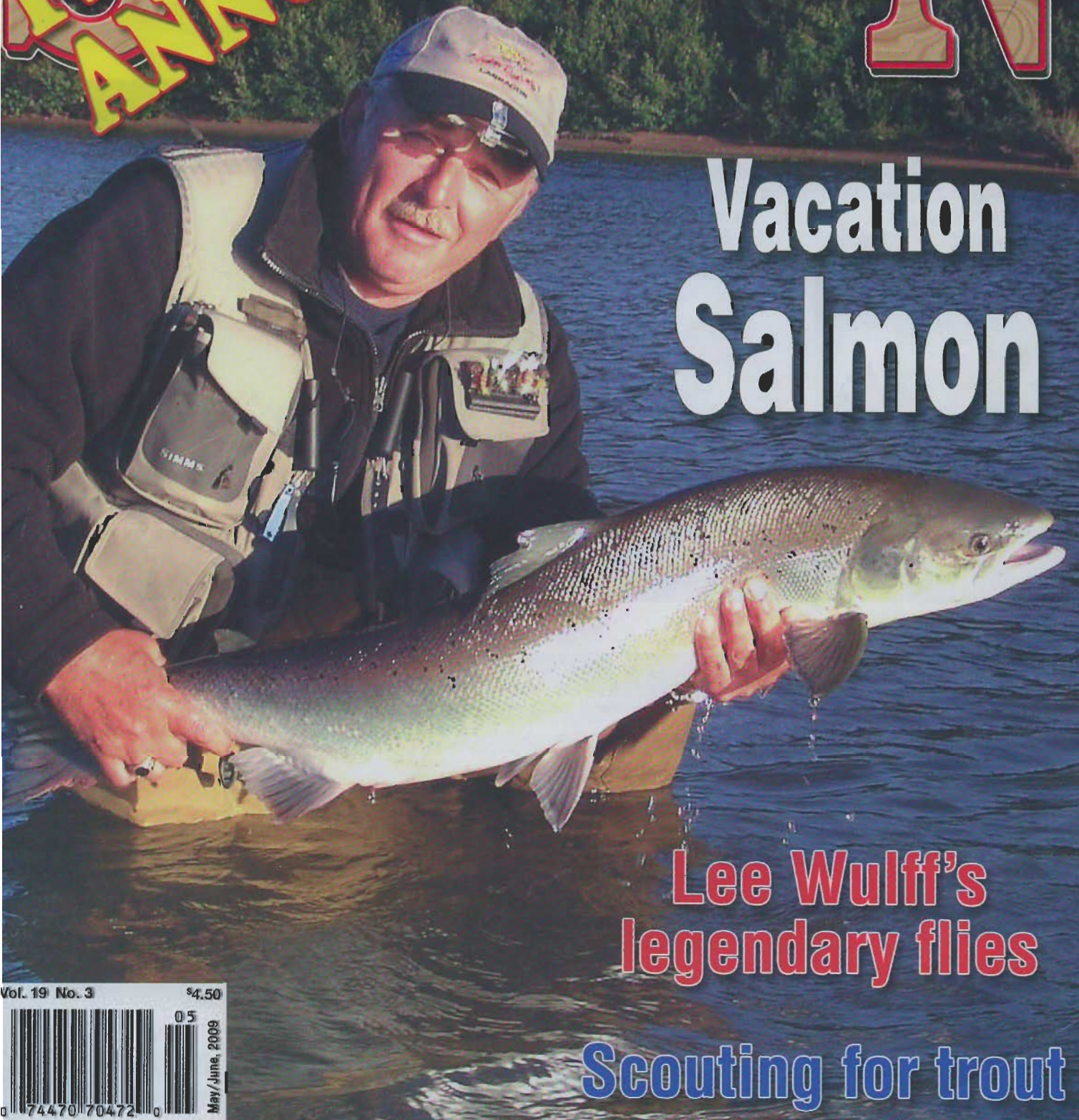


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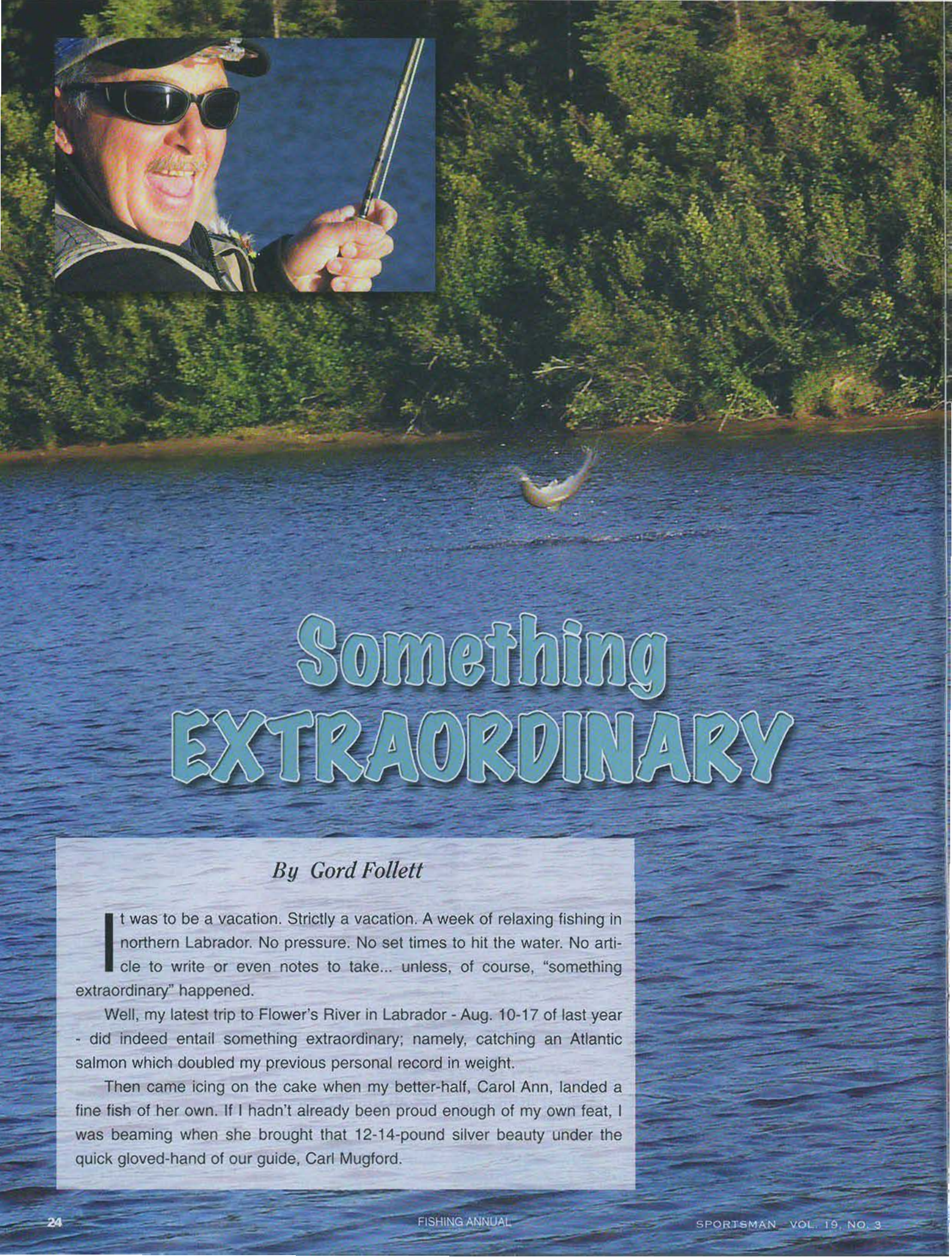
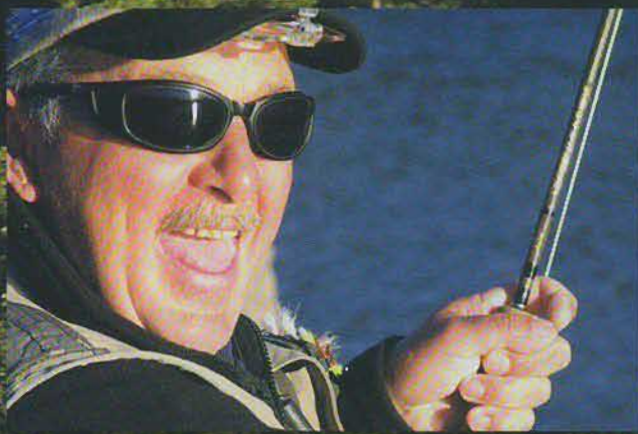
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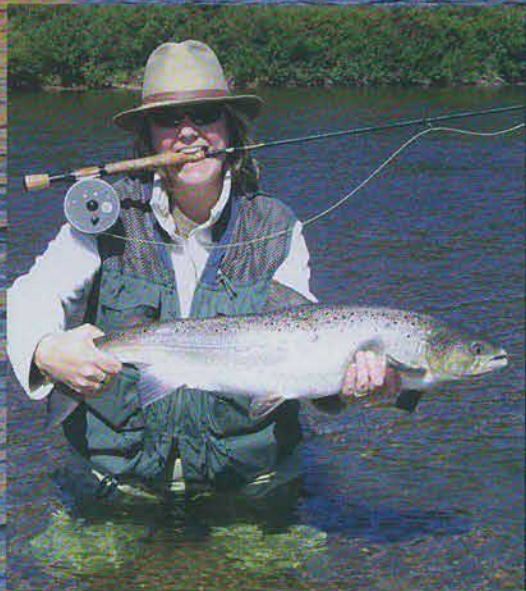
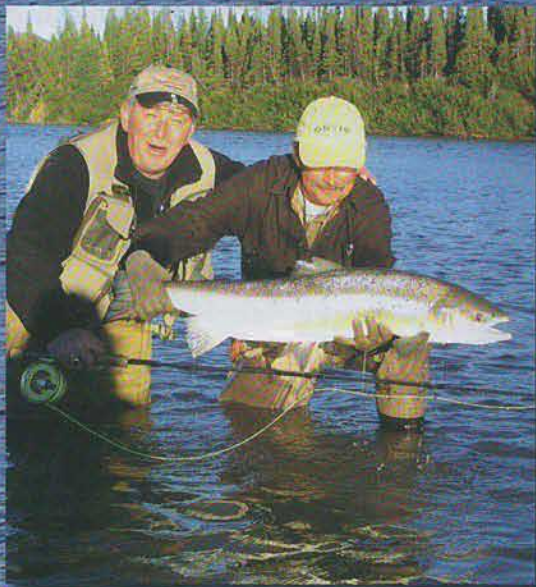
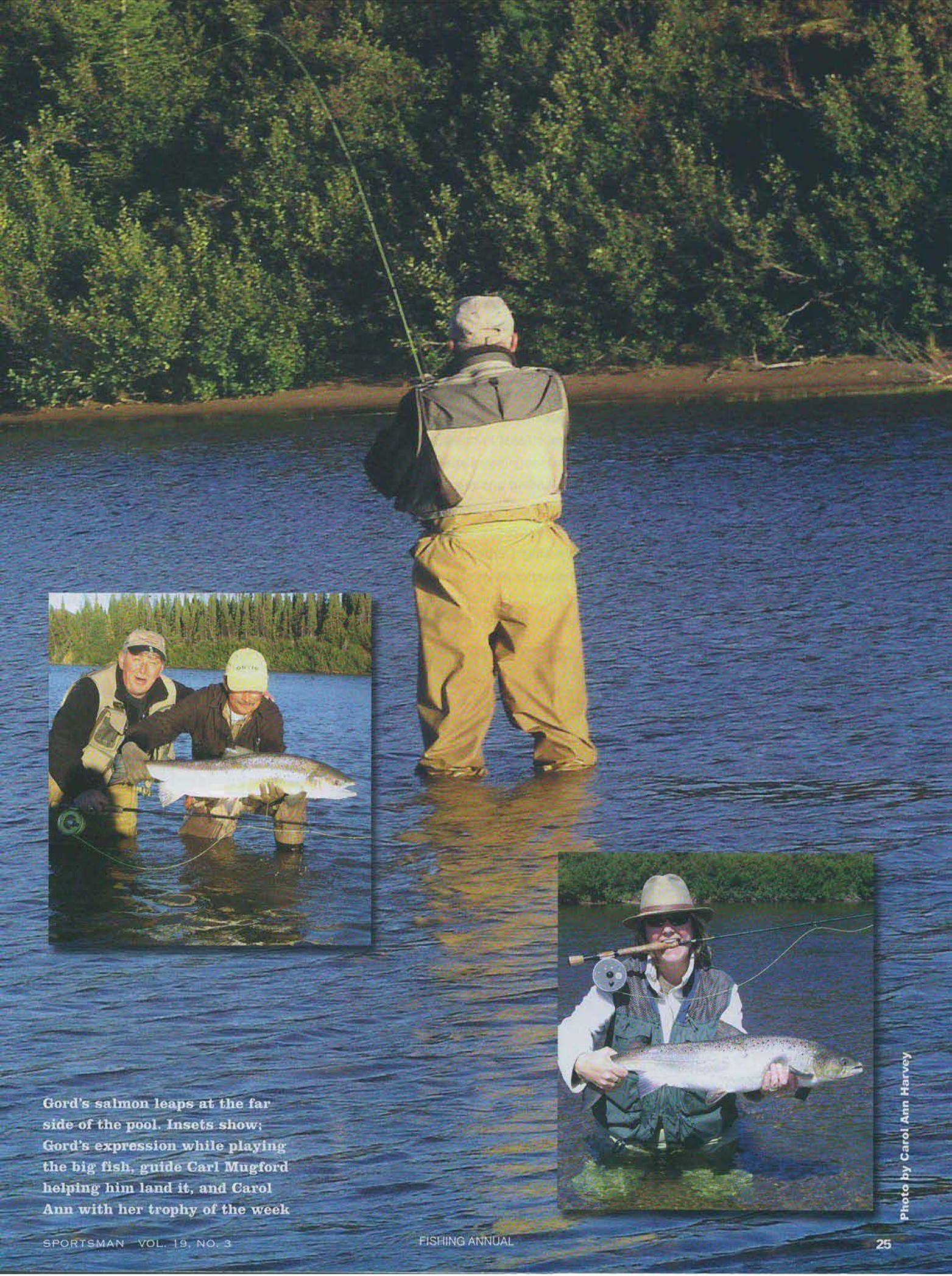
Something EXTRAORDINARY

By Gord Follett

It was to be a vacation. Strictly a vacation. A week of relaxing fishing in northern Labrador. No pressure. No set times to hit the water. No article to write or even notes to take... unless, of course, "something extraordinary" happened.

Well, my latest trip to Flower's River in Labrador - Aug. 10-17 of last year - did indeed entail something extraordinary; namely, catching an Atlantic salmon which doubled my previous personal record in weight.

Then came icing on the cake when my better-half, Carol Ann, landed a fine fish of her own. If I hadn't already been proud enough of my own feat, I was beaming when she brought that 12-14-pound silver beauty under the quick gloved-hand of our guide, Carl Mugford.



Gord's salmon leaps at the far side of the pool. Insets show; Gord's expression while playing the big fish, guide Carl Mugford helping him land it, and Carol Ann with her trophy of the week

Photo by Carol Ann Harvey

It was actually Carol Ann who received this invitation from lodge owner Jim Burton during the annual Home Show in St. John's last spring.

"You can take Gord along with you, too, if you like," he added with a grin.

"I'll have to think about that... maybe, if he's a good boy over the next few months," she said.

Even as we prepared for takeoff from Goose Bay in Jim's float plane, the expression of excitement on her face - as much as she tried to conceal it - had already made my trip. If I hook just one fish over the next week, I smiled to myself, it will be a bonus.

Other guests on this excursion included friends Peter Tucker and Don French of Portugal Cove-St. Phillips, Gil and his son Geoff Smith of St. John's, along with the Sparkes boys from Glovertown; Dad Don and sons Ken and Barry. To say we all shared "a few laughs" that week would be nothing short of an understatement. We even convinced camp cook Sheila Ralph and some of the guides to join the festivities a few evenings.

Of course, we had good reason to celebrate each night because every single guest - with perhaps Peter leading the way - hooked his/her share of salmon, along with Arctic char and/or brook trout; the majority of those species being caught on the short fly-outs from the lodge.

The first few hours of fishing for Carol Ann and I took place at a pool called Calvin's Rock, a 20-minute steam upriver from the lodge.

A few salmon were showing, but none seemed interested in our wet and dry offerings, so I suggested we head back early for a glass of wine before supper. Gotta love that vacation-style fishing!

Next morning, we headed to Max's, the pool closest to camp, where I hooked and lost a grilse of about 4-1/2 pounds before landing and releasing another. The afternoon session saw Carol Ann hook and release a five-pounder at Long Beach, shortly after Carl spotted it in the clear, shallow water as we steamed through.

"We'll pull the boat into shore a little further up the river," he said, "and then

Carol Ann can work her way down to those fish; there's three or four behind that rock."

With her guide close by, she began casting as much line as she felt comfortable with, inching her way downriver after every five or six casts.

Less than 10 minutes into her routine, she tossed her No. 8 Black bear (green butt) towards the far bank and watched it swing in to the rock.

Bang! Her line went tight and she hauled back, watching the silver missile make two quick leaps before stripping her fly line to within 20 feet of the backing.

"Fish on, Gord!" Carl shouted.

By the time I made my way back upstream to snap a few pictures, the fish had already been tailed and the hook removed. I managed one quick, out-of-focus shot before the fish was set free.

Although you are permitted to retain a couple of Arctic char on Flower's River, catch and release is the lodge policy when it comes to Atlantic salmon, and the vast majority of guests have absolutely no problem with it. As someone who has fished Flower's for five or six of the past nine years, I can vouch for the success of this policy, having consistently seen large runs of fish year after year, including many well over 20 pounds... which now brings me to my "fish of a lifetime."

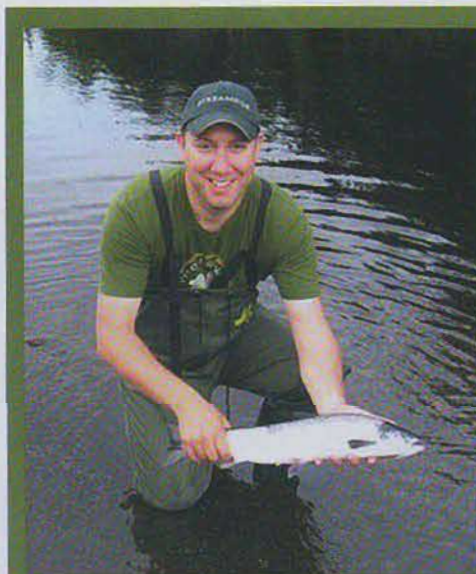
It was the afternoon of Day 4 - under mostly blue skies with a gentle breeze and temperatures in the mid-to-high teens C - when we pushed off for the five-or-six-minute steam back to Max's Pool. From the bow of the boat I turned around to snap a few pictures of and Carol Ann and our guide, with spectacular scenery as the backdrop.

"Now this," I shouted above the sound of the engine, "is what I call a vacation; nice and relaxing, eh?"

She smiled and nodded in agreement.

Little did I know at the time what was in store.

With the Gander River Boat hauled onto a pebble beach, Carl brought Carol Ann to the top of the pool while I waded into the deeper, slower-running water below.



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"Don't forget to use the hitch on your fly," he reminded me. Carl and I had a couple of "friendly discussions" about the hitch over the past few days, with him arguing in favour of using it in virtually every salmon fishing situation, while I opt for it only on occasion.

This time, however, I tied a double-hitch behind the head of my fly and began casting to the far bank where I had seen a couple of fish barely break water. The fly, incidentally, was a No. 8 or 10 Blue Charm with a red butt and a few strands of crystal flash that was given to me by Barry Sparkes the previous evening. He had hooked a few fish on it earlier at Top Pool. Not necessarily "hinting" for his fly, I told him I'd hooked a few fish on a very similar version a couple of weeks earlier on the Torrent and Forteau Rivers, but that I'd misplaced the only one that I had. Because I don't tie my own flies, Barry was gracious enough to hand over his, and in doing so helped create the highlight of my angling career thus far.

At first I was too far down the pool and

On the fourth or fifth cast, I felt a tug and set the hook, figuring I was into a "pretty good" fish

couldn't get the proper angle that would cause my fly to swing just above the fish. I wasn't quite reaching them, either, so I made 10 or 12 steps back and further out into the river, then began throwing as much line as I possibly could, occasionally watching it end up in a ball half-way through.

After getting the "flow" back in my cast, the line was landing straight at a 45-degree angle and the swing of the fly was coming across just a couple of feet above where I figured the salmon were holding.

On the fourth or fifth cast, I felt a tug and set the hook, figuring I was into a "pretty good" fish, probably in the 10-12-pound range.

"Fish on!" I shouted.

Then the mighty salmon jumped and headed downstream, taking me into the backing in mere seconds. It was still too far in the distance for me to get a good guesstimate of its size, though I could see that the silver hen was at least 15 pounds.

I reeled frantically as she came back, gaining valuable backing and about 20 feet of fly line on my reel. Then she leaped and twisted three feet above the surface before slicing line through the water and heading back downstream, taking me into the backing for the second time.

"That's a fine fish you got there, Gord, b'y," Carl noted.

Three more times over the next 10 minutes this fish jumped - not a common occurrence with big fish, from what I understand - and took me well into the backing; leaving no more than 30-40 metres on my spool on the third run.

After a strenuous 20-plus minute struggle, I managed to bring the fish to within five or six feet of my guide. I can picture Carl now, leaning over, placing his



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hands on his knees and saying, "Gord, that's a dog you got there!"

It was then that my heartbeat really went into overdrive. Although I had every intention of releasing the fish, I didn't want to lose it before Carol Ann could snap a few photos; proof that I did indeed hook and land a monster Atlantic.

The fish thrashed furiously and made another run as I prayed for my LX4 Islander reel, 15-pound test leader and 8-9 wt. graphite rod not to fail me now.

Neither did.

Twenty-five minutes after snapping my fly, this beauty was under my guide's control. I grabbed a tape from my vest pocket for a quick measurement... 42 inches, making it between 27 and 28 pounds, according to the "salmometer" table.

My prize was carefully revived after a couple of minutes and with a flick of her tail she headed to the back of the pool.

I was completely ecstatic and couldn't wait to get back to the lodge to share my news.

While Geoff was downloading pictures from my camera onto Jim's website, some-

one asked how Dwight, my co-worker and regular fishing buddy, was going to feel about this fish.

"Oh, I think he'll be impressed," I said. "Mind you, he'll be wishing that he had been the one who hooked it - as would I if the situation were reversed - and he'll probably call me 'flukey-arse,' but he'll be impressed."

Despite wearing sweaters or fleece jackets, most guests still found it a little chilly on the lodge deck that evening. I couldn't understand their occasional body shivers because even though I was wearing only jeans and a t-shirt, the temperature on Cloud 9 was quite comfortable.

More glorious weather greeted us (late) the following morning as we motored to Island Pool, just below Calvin's Rock, where we continued our routine of Carol Ann casting into the shallow waters at the head of the pool and me fishing the back.

The first hour failed to produce a single rise, so I made my way back to the beached boat where my fishing partners joined me for a snack and a short chat.

"Okay, enough of this sitting around

stuff," my better half said. "I'm going back out fishing."

I finished my juice and sandwich, tied on an orange bug and slowly waded back to my destination 80 metres below. While hauling line from my reel to begin casting, I heard Carl holler, "Carol Ann's got one!"

Back up I slogged through the water as fast as my legs would push, watching Carol Ann keep her rod high and listening to our guide telling her to "let him go" each time the fish wanted to run - and run it did. I first figured she'd hooked another four or five-pounder, but when it made two twisting leaps within a 10-second span, there was no doubt it had passed the grilse stage a long time ago.

At one point, two or three minutes into the battle, the fish performed an entertaining tail dance before taking off across the pool.

Although not an experienced salmon angler, Carol Ann is certainly gifted with patience - more than a decade of putting up with me can be a great training ground - and it was her patience that eventually tired the fish out enough for Carl to tail and remove the yellow-butt Blue Charm from its mouth.

My guess was 12 pounds, his was 14. Too busy snapping photos of the action, I didn't think of measuring the fish until it was revived and on its way to the far side of the river.

"Don't worry about it, Gord," she said with a grin, "I like Carl's estimate, anyway."

Jim stopped by the Sportsman office a few months later and it wasn't long before the 27-28-pounder became the topic of conversation.

"Yeah, my fish of a lifetime," I said. "I'll never hook another one like that."

"Why would you say that?" asked Mr. Optimistic. "You shouldn't say that. You're coming back next summer, aren't you? Maybe you'll catch a 30-pounder."

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