



CHASING SILVER IN TUCKAMORE LAND

International Field Editor at Large **HANS VAN KLINKEN** tells the story of how Barb Genge's Tuckamore Lodge in Newfoundland became his favourite salmon fly fishing destination.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HANS VAN KLINKEN & INA STEVENS

HOW WORDS AND FEELINGS COME TO LIFE

In the early Eighties, I had an unforgettable meeting on the banks of the mighty Klara River in Sweden. I saw an old angler who was having much more success than I was, so I struck up a conversation with him. He generously gave me some useful tips and information about the river and the area. I listened in awe to his stories so we invited him to join us for a shore lunch at our humble campsite just 200m downstream. While sharing a fine bottle of wine with him, I paid close attention as he discussed his philosophy of fly fishing and his respect for nature and wildlife. His attitude touched me so deeply that it initiated my style as a starting author. Years later, in the late 1990s, while visiting Barb Genge's Tuckamore Lodge in the wilderness of Newfoundland for the first time, I experienced a similar awakening when Barb shared her long-held views about nature, wildlife and ecotourism, which inspired me tremendously and has made my stories even more mature.

WHY ATLANTIC CANADA?

Atlantic Canada, also known as the Atlantic Provinces, consists of Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island in eastern Canada. My ultimate goal was to find out why a salmon takes a dry fly so well and aggressively in certain rivers and yet refuses to come to the surface in others. I also wanted to compare 30 years' knowledge of water quality, water levels, water flows, bottom structures and weather conditions which I had gained in Norway with these new destinations in Atlantic Canada. The only material available at the time was some detailed information I had written in several of my fishing diaries over the years. Since 1971, I had successfully caught grilse, sea trout and sea-run char in the northern part of Norway using dry flies, but by the end of the 1990s my success was limited to only 17 river systems in central and southwest Norway. Another important observation I made was that my success in catching salmon on dry flies in Norway was greater during warm or even extremely warm weather conditions.

Insert left: Tuckamore is a Newfoundland term for the stunted balsam fir and spruce trees that grow in some alpine areas and along the coast. All along the shoreline of the Great Northern Peninsula and the Labrador Straits, you will find this rare and peculiar vegetation. Even more unusual, at certain times of the year this vegetation can produce a very nice fragrance which becomes stronger especially after rainfall or when the trees are covered with dew. On windy days the coastal air can reach far inland and the people in Newfoundland call it the smell of tuckamore. I call it "the perfume of the wild".

Another striking conclusion was that nine out of these 17 rivers were in estuary regions with good tidal current or serious tidal pools. The salmon or sea trout I caught in these rivers were some of the largest I've ever landed in Norway. The biggest salmon I'd caught in Europe near the city of Stavanger was around 10kg, and had been seduced with a #4 Klinkhamer Special – the right place at the right time as a prime run was on the go and water levels were perfect. Reading my diary from back then I caught five grilse, nine sea trout and two salmon – all on Klinkhamers in #8, #6 and #4.

ALAN BRAMLEY AND WARREN DUNCAN

In the late Eighties, my interest in dry fly fishing for salmon and sea trout had become so intense that I searched for every article ever written on Atlantic salmon caught on dries. This led me to some fly fishermen and fly-tyers familiar with Atlantic Canada, Quebec and even parts of the state of Maine in the USA. By then the Klinkhamer Special was also garnering international recognition and, as a result, I was able to make new contacts more easily. With the help of friends like the late Alan Bramley from the UK

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Left: The Salmon River.
Right, from top to bottom:
Double hookup for the Van Klinkens.
Hans with a 95cm salmon.
Ina's biggest salmon close on 90cm.



and the late master fly-tyer Hans PC de Groot from Holland, I was put in touch with other well-known fly fishermen such as Warren Duncan from New Brunswick and Al Worthington from New Hope, PA. Before long, we were swapping flies, discussing fishing techniques and of course sharing our experiences in catching Atlantic salmon on dry flies on both sides of the Atlantic. Al and I developed a close relationship although we never had the opportunity to meet in person. He imported quality capes and saddles and was the owner of the Hackle Hut in those

days. I still have about 40 letters from him written on his Hackle Hut notepaper (and some envelopes postmarked from his fishing residence in Nova Scotia), all filled with his latest fly fishing information, catch reports and fishing techniques over those years we corresponded.

Sadly, I lost the letters from Warren during a house renovation several years ago, but fortunately I still have some of the flies that he specially tied for me to try on my trips to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Lab-

rador. I confess that I've never fished them simply because they were too beautiful to fish, so I copied them and have used those instead. Warren was a great teacher and mentor to me, especially in perfecting my own hairwings. I still marvel at his ability to create these tiny little heads on his hairwings and have always been impressed how he was able to do that. Even today, it's hard to adequately express my gratitude for what Warren and Al taught me, and the information they shared so freely with me.

LEE WULFF

In my eagerness to learn as much as possible about dry fly fishing for salmon, I am most pleased with my contact with Lee Wulff. At first our correspondence was technical in that we mostly discussed his dry fly experiences and successes in Newfoundland and mine in Norway. Lee was touched by my story and the fact that people in Europe found it hard to believe that I was catching sea trout and salmon on dry fly. He sent me a few of his books and videotapes in return for some of my Klinkhamers. Thanks to reading his books



and watching several of his videos, my excitement to visit Atlantic Canada grew to a fever pitch. A few years after Lee's tragic death I was able to make one of the most exciting fly fishing journeys imaginable, actively fishing in the footsteps of Lee and visiting several of his favourite fly fishing spots in Newfoundland.

THE LADY OF THE WILD

Starting in 1996, my wife and I began taking extensive trips to fish the salmon rivers in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador. Although

we learnt a lot, we found that the most successful fly fishing techniques on these trips weren't that much different from what we'd been using in Norway for so many years. For us, Newfoundland and Labrador quickly became our favourite destinations for catching the elusive Atlantic salmon on dries. That is not to say other provinces in Atlantic and eastern Canada are not spectacular for dry fly fishing. The Miramichi with all its feeders in New Brunswick, the rivers on the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec and the rivers on Cape Breton Island in Nova

Scotia can all be superb dry fly fisheries. We stayed at many locations and fished with knowledgeable guides like Tony Tuck, Gord Robinson, Barry and Janice Sweetland, John McCarthy and not to forget Tuckamore's Junior, Brandon and Clarence. But in the end, we always seemed to end up at Tuckamore Lodge with Barb. Barb has this amazing ability to bring people back to nature with her stories of the wild. Barb is involved in so many activities regarding tourism and conservation that I would need pages to simply list them for you. I became so

Right, from top to bottom:
Whale encounters of the third kind!
Double puffins.
The author and Barb Genge –
the lady of the wild.

Main photo and inserts page left:
Tuckamore Lodge, one of Atlantic
Canada's foremost eco-lodges.

impressed with Barb's enthusiasm, that I wrote a story about her entitled "The Lady of the Wild". Although this was meant for publication in Canada only, I received so much positive feedback from travellers across the globe. Survival in the wilderness presents many challenges and it's not for the faint-hearted. Similarly, the achievement of success by a female in a male-dominated environment also presents unique challenges. I doubt that it's gotten easier, but Barb continues to demonstrate that it is possible to prevail where many others fail.



TUCKAMORE LODGE

Barb's Tuckamore Lodge is first-class wilderness accommodation that is almost entirely engineered in Scandinavian style. Situated in the northeastern tip of the pristine wilderness of the Great Northern Peninsula (GNP), it is about 2.5km from the small village of Main Brook, and just a 25-minute drive from St Anthony Airport. The lodge was built on the banks of Little Pond and fits in beautifully with the landscape. After some major renovations





Left, from top to bottom:
An osprey with a fresh kill.
Leaping silver.
Steer clear of a moose crossing!
Main photo right: Ina into dry fly action.



GOOD OBSERVATION

- From experience, I have learnt that as soon as the air temperature gets higher than the water temperature, it's time to start using dry flies for salmon.
- However, when air and water temperatures get too warm and the oxygen levels in the water have dropped to critical, most salmon go into hiding in deep lies with their noses right on the bottom to save their strength for their upstream journey and spawning. (When it gets hard for any fish to survive I don't fish any more; the reason I don't fish in subarctic regions during August.)
- My experiences have also proven that Atlantic salmon survive easily with proper catch-and-release tactics, especially in colder water.
- Another lesson I learnt is that the Atlantic salmon generally stress a lot quicker and don't for example come up for flies when water starts rising or drops too fast. I suspect they're too busy finding new lies and ignore all else.
- Fish in Newfoundland and Labrador mostly hold very close to the bank, but in high-water conditions I've seen how many salmon moved upstream right behind a fly fishermen standing in the middle of the river, and this is often the only chance to succeed in high water.

started in 2004, Tuckamore Lodge today is one of the top lodges in Canada. Barb takes special care of her guests and works hard to please them.

Not many people know that Tuckamore Lodge has survived solely because of Barb's perseverance and dedication. Although Tuckamore originally started as a hunting lodge, Barb was quick to realise she needed to give the lodge a new identity to be successful. As she strove to be the best-of-class, she improved not only her knowledge, but her management style as well. She was not afraid to experiment with new ideas relating to the

outdoors and she became one of the first who introduced ecotourism to Canada. The area is renowned for its abundant populations of moose, caribou and black bear, so it is no surprise that *Outside* magazine recognised Tuckamore Lodge as one of the six best lodges for encountering Canada's great outdoor activities.

One of Barb's first steps in her effort to get the salmon to return in serious numbers to the area was to restore the nearby rivers from the neglect and the aftermath of the logging industry. To ensure that returning salmon would be able to follow their way upstream to the

best spawning grounds required an enormous cleanup programme. Under Barb's watchful leadership a few dedicated enthusiasts began cleaning up the Salmon River with their bare hands. Thanks to them, there is now a new and much larger generation of salmon – and that in record numbers!

MY RESEARCH CONTINUES

During our first visits to Tuckamore Lodge, Barb was already offering a fly fishing paradise. The nearby Salmon River and Southwest River were perfectly suited for my research in identifying any connection between my fishing successes

in Norway and those salmon that took the dry fly so well in Newfoundland. The travel time from the lodge to the nearby rivers is short, and the watercourse, current and bottom structures were very similar to the rivers I had fished in Norway. The similarity of the river systems was crucial for testing and evaluating my Norwegian fly fishing techniques objectively.

Fishing the Southwest and Salmon rivers extensively in those days, I ran into very cold air and water temperatures and also experienced very low as well as high water levels. Air temperatures around 10



Right: Ina with a grilse – the name given to a young Atlantic salmon returning to its native river for the first time after one winter at sea.

Below: Hans with a 97cm whopper.

Bottom right: The confluence of the Salmon and Southwest rivers.



degrees Celsius and lots of rain during a 1997 trip resulted in poor dry fly fishing conditions, but my Bondal series of flies worked well under those circumstances. The most difficult conditions for Atlantic salmon I ever experienced were during the Newfie drought of 1999. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans had closed most rivers in the south and southwest and it was a really bad year for the fishing lodges. The fishing in Main Brook had also become poor, even with plenty of fish in the river. Using small dries and wets was useless, so I wracked my brain to find a solution. With temperatures far over 30 degrees Celsius and with no rain for several weeks, there were no other fishermen crazy enough to be out, so we had all the rivers to ourselves. The current was slow, almost dead still in several places, so I experimented with some small, un-

weighted nymphs on slightly thinner tip-pet. I'd never tried this before in Atlantic Canada because the technique is meant for upstream casts only and not allowed with wet flies. Following the rules, I had to do it properly and use the slow current to my advantage. Out of the challenge an idea was born – and it worked!

Over the years, I have witnessed firsthand how the fishing has developed. I was amazed to find that the salmon runs remained stable in the rivers that I fished, but there were also new rivers to try, including some estuary fishing. Today it is estimated that about 12,000 - 18,000 Atlantic salmon return to the nearby rivers each year. The salmon fishing season begins in late June and continues until early September, with the average weights ranging between 6lb and 10lb. I have caught the most real salmon (salmon longer than one year at sea) in the Salmon River, and the number of trophy fish grows each year. Years ago I only caught grilse in the Beaver Brook, but since 2008 I also started catching salmon. In addition to the salmon there is also the challenge of brook trout, Arctic char and sea run brook trout.

For less experienced fly fishers or when it is simply too windy to fish the Southwest or Salmon rivers, one can visit the Beaver Brook and also have a look at the famous underground hole – a real geological wonder. As far as I understand, this is the only place in the world where Atlantic salmon swim through

underground chambers to reach their spawning grounds. I've even heard stories that blind salmon reach their spawning grounds and that they migrate underground in complete darkness. The fishing is allowed up to 100m before the underground hole.

DRY FLY TACTICS AND LESSONS LEARNT

You do not have to see fish moving to be successful on dry, so if you're in a pool that you know holds fish, you can cover the water as effectively as with a wet fly. I often fish a good-looking pool imagining it's an empty chessboard. I don't walk through the pool right away, but rather fish it from the most upstream position first, and try to cover as many rows and squares as I can by casting slightly upstream and working my way downstream through my invisible grid. When I have a pool all to myself, I will start as far upstream as I can, and try to cover as many rows and squares as possible. Each square I imagine about eight steps wide and long. This makes the fishing more effective and organised. Once I have finished all the rows within my casting range, I take eight steps downstream, and repeat the process in the second column. This is how I work myself through the entire pool, with casts sometimes not much longer than 10ft - 12ft. I am a big fan of long drifts, but I also discovered that in some waters, too many long drifts will put the fish down, so in those rivers the chessboard method works extremely well.

The biggest mistake I see anglers make is to get into the water as far and as deep as possible, and take position exactly where the salmon have their lies. Then they proceed to cast as far out as they can, their flies covering water that actually holds no fish. In smaller rivers, I try to not get into the water at all. I have a preference for smaller rivers, since you can cover all the water from just one bank. Despite this preference, I've had some great experiences with fly fishing in estuaries, sea pools and brackish water in Norway, and my recent experiences have led me to believe that it doesn't matter how far away you are from the sea when using a dry fly in the rivers in Newfoundland.

On both sides of the Atlantic, I discovered that when water temperatures stay low and the rivers are also low, fish would stay longer in the pools and come up for much smaller flies. I believe that the longer a salmon stays in one pool, the stronger their old feeding memory returns. I remember very well fly fishing in three huge pools directly below a big waterfall in the Nordelva River in Norway. The pools are deep and hold dozens of fish, but I only succeeded in catching them when the fish started head and tailing, and I used small flies presented with an absolutely drag-free drift. The fish only porpoised for about 20 minutes, and only once every four hours or so, but each time I caught fish, and that has been going on for many years. I've had exactly the same experience in several of





“THE ONLY DEFINITE THING YOU CAN SAY ABOUT SALMON, IS THAT YOU CAN NOT SAY ANYTHING DEFINITE ABOUT THEM.”

Newfoundland's rivers and the times fish are willing to come up are quite similar. The greatest example of small fly success was my catch-of-day limit in the same day on a #16 dry fly in the Salmon River, and all fish were head and tailers. But big salmon also grab those tiny flies – Lee Wulff proved that many times in Newfoundland. However, I always keep in mind what Lee Wulff once told me: “The only definite thing you can say about salmon, is that you cannot say anything definite about them.”

OTHER ACTIVITIES

One of our favourite nonfishing activities when staying at Barb's is to sight-see by car or boat around the tip of Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula. The shoreline is hypnotic and by following the coastal network of roads you pass many historic fishing villages and breathtaking landscapes, making the photographic opportunities endless. We have driven

our favourite roads many times and each time we still have a new experience or adventure. The entire coastal region is the summer residence of millions of seabirds and many build their nests on small islands and rocky outcrops offshore so their eggs and chicks are protected from the predators on the main island. In summer, the coastal waters are also home to many species of whales and sometimes in large numbers, feeding just a few metres from shore.

From the east coast of Labrador to Newfoundland's southernmost eastern shore, you find yourself in Iceberg Alley, and the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula is in the centre of it all. Most of the icebergs in this area come from glaciers along the Greenland coast, and scientists estimate that between 35,000 - 40,000 reasonably sized icebergs carve annually in Greenland. Less than a thousand will make it as far south as St John's. It is also

interesting to know that the glacial ice may be more than 15,000 years old.

Another fascinating site about an hour's drive from Tuckamore Lodge is L'anse aux Meadows – a 1000- year-old Viking settlement, the Vikings having discovered North America between 990 - 1050. Across the site they have built a replica of the Viking trade village Norstead, which has won several tourism awards. Barb is also involved with this project. It was also the centrepiece of a series of events held in 2000 to mark the 1000th anniversary of the arrival of Vikings in the New World.

Tuckamore Lodge is truly an exceptional venue from all perspectives.

For more information about Tuckamore Lodge, e-mail: info@tuckamorelodge.com, visit www.tuckamorelodge.com

