

The Best Salmon Fisher

By Bill Carpan

This St. Mary's River adventure takes me back to the early 1980s. On a lovely July morning I joined some anglers taking turns fishing the West Branch run just above Silver's Pool. Fish were present but not taking readily. I did luckily manage to catch a grilse and then moved on to try the beautiful Wire Pool just below Silver's, which I'd noticed hadn't been heavily fished that morning.



The Wire Pool is a long and wide stretch of water with a big rock ledge and the local kids swimmin' hole at the end. Salmon lay mostly around grassy underwater sods in the pool and I fished them carefully with my dry fly.

As I fished, my thoughts went back to an earlier summer when a pair of bald eagles nested in the tallest tree overlooking the pool. We watched them feeding and caring for their young all summer until the young appeared to be full grown and fledged. We even witnessed the maiden flight of one of young eagles. He glided across the pool but crash landed into some alders, all part of growing up as an eagle, I guess. Such majestic memories are still vivid in my mind as I write this some forty years later.

I'd reached the end of the pool and apart from a few weak and questionable rises my dry fly produced nothing, so I crossed the river below the swimmin' hole to try the meadow pool, another favourite of mine. I caught a second grilse and headed back upriver for lunch and an afternoon nap.

Approaching Silver's Pool the sun was high and an osprey, Nova Scotia's provincial bird, was circling above the run from where my first fish had come. I decided to stop and watch, as did Gary Anderson and Ann Brimer who had spent the morning fishing Harrison's Pool. Gary and Ann had each recently published authoritative books about Atlantic salmon & fishing, and they too chose to stop for the spectacle we were about to witness.

Now ospreys are fish eaters, but seldom would one dare attempt to take a salmon because of a salmon's size and strength. An osprey would be risking his life by sinking his talons into a fish that could head for deeper water and drown him. With no scarcity of food in July, maybe it was the challenge and sport of catching an Atlantic salmon that motivated him. I knew that feeling very well, so we may have shared more than a taste for salmon.

Suddenly the osprey made his move with a dive and a big splash. He slowly struggled to the surface gripping a lively and thrashing grilse that seemed as heavy as himself. With great difficulty the pair became semi-airborne over Silver's Pool and somehow managed to reach the grassy island below, grilse still thrashing and flipping in the grass.

As the osprey dined, Gary, Ann and I expressed amazement at the achievement. We agreed that for bravery, skill, determination and sheer energy, we had just seen the best salmon fisher in action.

We also felt very fortunate to share another great adventure on Nova Scotia's beautiful St. Mary's River.