

# KEEP IT DRY

**F**or miles and miles European road No.6 follows the whirls and swirls of the great Reppafjord River. We stop at a gas station where the tributary Skaidi joins the Reppafjord. Surprisingly the walls by the counter are covered with quantities of dry flies in all patterns and sizes. We dine at the cafe where the ever present television speaks of drive-by-shooting at police cars out on road E6. Nobody pays much attention. We have come to Finmark in Northern Norway to fish.

The fishing permits await at the nearby youth hostel where the book with the day-to-day catch record shows good numbers of fish being caught in both the Blue and Yellow zones. We chose the Red zone to get some privacy; miles of undisturbed, pristine river unfold as we climb down the hillside. The river is wide and shallow and the rocks and water have a faint tint of green.

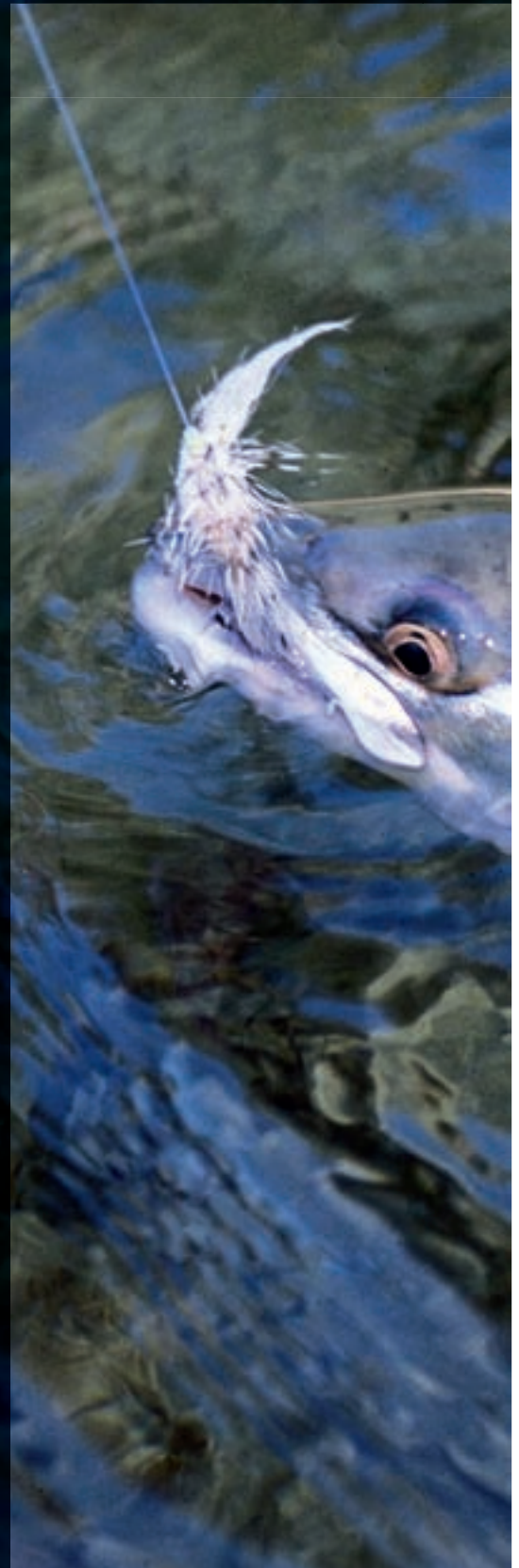
My huge white fly is riding high on the fast water and only overeager salmon parr try to drown it. By a big rock a sudden flash of silver appears beneath the fly and I set my casting

radar for precision bombing: the salmon breaks the water close to the fly but doesn't connect. I leave it awhile to try for another one. On returning half an hour later the fish at the rock grabs a small white tube-bomber the first time it passes it.

## A century of dry fly for salmon

Salmon on the dry fly is not a popular sport in Scandinavia; the dry flies are often oddities in the fly box - only to be tried briefly as a last resort. If we journey westward to the Northeast of America we will find rivers where dry-fly fundamentalists rule and the regular, wet salmon fly is the odd one out in the box of dries. It was here almost a century ago in the New Brunswick region that the first pioneers launched their dry flies for salmon.

In his book, *The Salmon And The Dry Fly* [1924] George M. La Branche wrote for the first time about dry fly for salmon, but it was the fly fishing legend Lee Wulff







**By Jesper Fohrmann**

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Recent scientific research tells us that salmon in some Scandinavian rivers actually eat when they enter freshwater... that might explain why certain salmon so eagerly rise to the dry fly. Follow the gin clear rivers of the north together with Jesper Fohrmann in his quest for salmon on the dry fly.

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**Flies from the Wulff series. Originated and designed by Dan Bailey & Lee Wulff. A landmark in modern design of insect imitation**

who in the late 50's made dry-fly sport popular with his book, *The Atlantic Salmon*. Here Lee Wulff and his fishing companion Dan Bailey presented a new design of flies specially for Atlantic salmon named the Wulff series. For decades these big and bushy cartoon like imitations of mayflies were closely linked with everything concerning dry fly for salmon. To this day the Wulff series stands as a landmark in modern design of insect imitation and the spun deer hair bomber has become the No. 1 dry fly. This fly dates back to the 1960's and was designed by Mr. Elmer Smith who originally intended it to be a commotion fly to be fished subsurface.

### The gate between wet and dry

The water surface is an all-important hunting ground for the parr, but a highly dangerous twilight zone for the water insect seeking to leave the river and also the land insect struggling not to drown in it. The salmon parr is principally a surface feeder and looks upwards for food as soon as insects start to move.



The parr detects the slightest indication that the insects are about to leave the surface and have to act quickly if it is to seize its quarry. Even an insect flying off above the surface will often be grabbed by a leaping parr. The land insects too big to be gobbled up right away will be pulled underwater to be dismembered gradually. This intensive surface feeding is an important part of the great puzzle that is fly-fishing for Atlantic salmon, and a vital element for the dry fly salmon angler.

### Keep it dry

A conventional salmon fly does not need to look anything like the aquatic life that salmon feed on in river or sea. It can be something so outlandish that no real fly on earth is remotely like it, but the good salmon fly contains elements that capture the attention of the fish. Furthermore the fly must maintain the deception having caught the salmon's eye. With combinations of feathers, fluffy hair and shimmering strands of iridescent material it will pulse underwater giving the impression of something very much alive. The drag from the line, the speed of the current and the incoming light will – maybe - make it all combine to create one grand illusion.

In many ways the dry fly man has a much easier task. The most important feature is keeping the fly floating high and dry. The salmon is an expert in spotting tiny insects on the surface and the little clues that

**Quality fly-floatant from Thames Fishing Tackle. Condition your flies well before fishing trips. And keep your fly box well stocked with fresh flies.**

**FROM TOP: Dark Tube-Bombers the perfect choice for big late runners. This Monster Tube-Caddis designed by the author is more a caricature than an imitation of the Limnephilidae caddis that it is meant to represent. An Owner ST-36 BC treble size 16 makes this fly dangerous. The real thing ! A big specimen from the limnephilidae family curing its wings. A nutritious meal to any trout or salmon.**

these creatures give away are the main things that have to be built into our dry flies.

By using bushy hackles and lightweight flies that soak up silicone or other floatant, we can create a lifelike image that can hang in the all-important surface film.

Even though we take care to impregnate the flies, the floatant will, sooner or later, wear off and the fly will drown. This is the time to change to a new, high-floating fly. Keep the old one in a box with some Amadou \* or take it home to dry out on the radiator. To get the best results it is advisable to rinse the flies down with soap and water, dry them with a hair drier and then re-impregnate them with silicone.

Fly colour can also prove to be significant and in some rivers one fly will work better than others. A golden rule often applied in trout fishing says

\* Amadou is a type of mushroom, farmed in Europe, originally used as jacket insulation but better known as the material that will make your wet dry-flies – dry again.







that the colours in the environment can help boost the colours in your fly. In clear water and open landscape calls for white or pastel colours. Green tinted water and abundance of water plants will enhance the green colours in your fly, and so forth. For some reason the darker flies, such as brown and black, work remarkably well at the end of the season, sometimes bringing the big salmon into a near hypnotic state.

Size does sometimes matter... so it is generally a good idea to bring flies of different sizes. The colder the water the bigger the fly is one rule but smaller flies will also work fine in cold water, although they can be hard to spot on a turbulent river. Smaller flies become more important later in the season when temperatures rise. In relation to the use of small flies it can be useful to start out with a bigger pattern to identify possible salmon in the pools. These will often roll at the bigger fly but hit the smaller one.

Watching at the riverside day after day you will witness hatching insects suddenly filling the air. Salmon parr and resident trout feast on the hatch and you might also notice adult salmon sharing the banquet. One particular fly I have had great success with in times of hatching caddis is an imitation of this insect made with a body of spun deer hair. The abdomen alone measures 1.4 inch (3.5 cm.) making it look like a phantom version of your regular sedge imitation.

### Caddis summer

Summer is coming to an end in Northern Norway and big brown caddis rush out of the river fluttering away to dry off in nearby trees. Down





at the neck of the pool resident trout are hitting the insects hard. I have changed my tube-bomber to a big monster-tube-caddis more than 3 times the size of the resident caddis of the *Limnephilidae* family.

I am covering a big dark fish that has occupied this lie for 10 days and, as on previous days, the salmon slowly rises toward the drifting fly – ending up just below the surface. I can see every spot on the 40-inch (100 cm) salmon, but something is missing! The fish doesn't take the fly. I am still watching in disbelief when another fish, hitherto unseen, comes straight out of the deep, grabs the fly and falls back with it clutched in its jaws, but for some reason the

fly slides out before I can react. This salmon is even bigger than the one I had been fishing for but as it is so often with big salmon...there is no Da Capo.

### Presenting the fly

In 1924 pioneer George M. L. LaBranche advised that one should seek out places in the river where the currents drift the insects to the waiting salmon. LaBranche, also an avid trout fisherman, was of the firm belief that the salmon would only react to a fly presented through a very accurate cast, delivering the

fly in these feeding lanes, or *grooves*, as LaBranche called them. We now know that it isn't down to that very specific cast. The salmon isn't always *on-line* and much fruitless casting is an intrinsic part of the sport. In fact casting can be used as constructive groundwork preparing the salmon to take. One method I favour is to make a series of 5 or 6 precise casts, then letting the fish settle for 30 seconds: the next cast will be my best shot at that fish. Another trick is to swing the fly over the place where the fish is lying. The nearness of the fly seems to agitate it, and when you finally place

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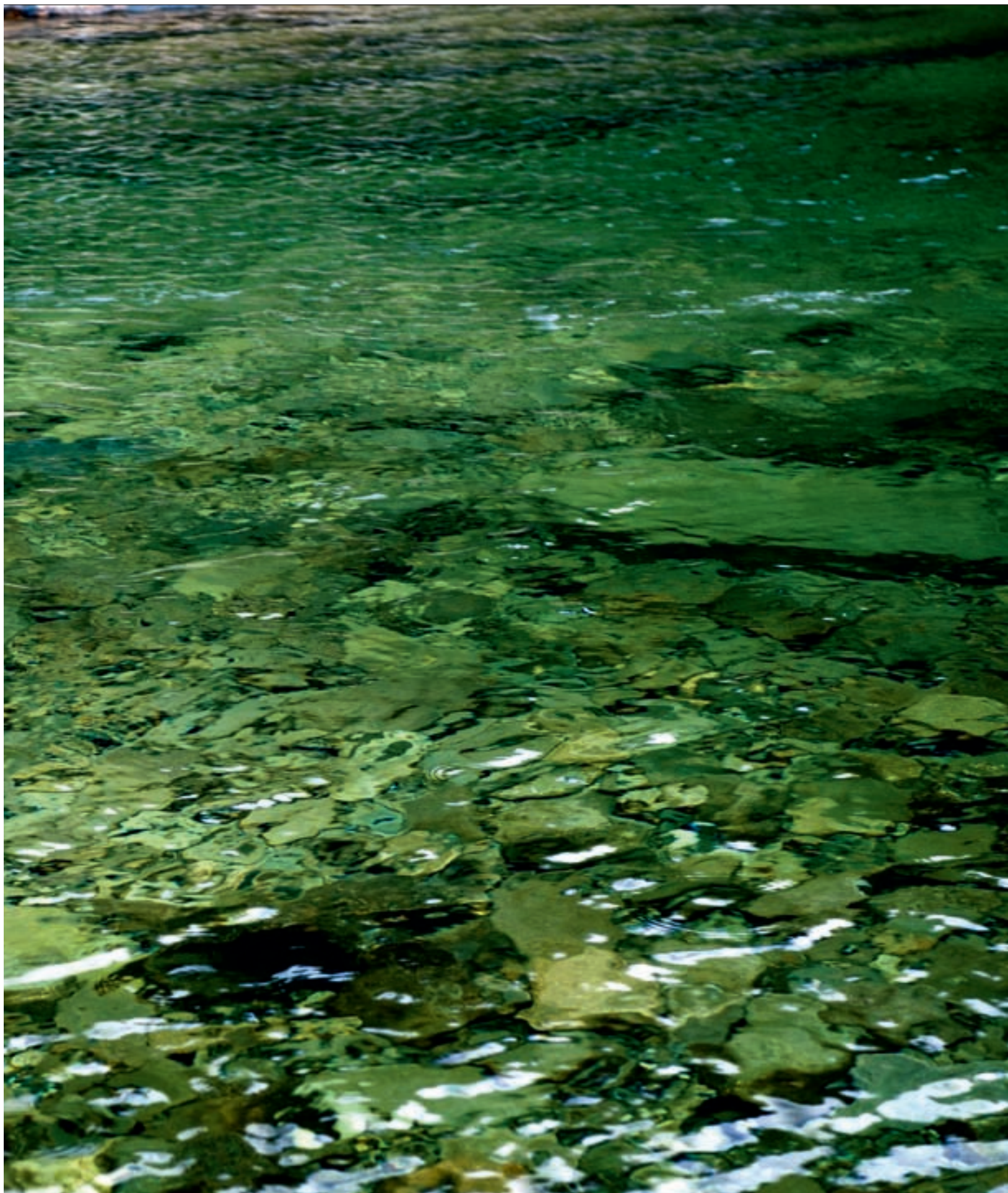
## Find the spot

A flat and anonymous water surface will tell you little of possible holding spots for salmon. Given a bit of wind and wave you will see a build up of bigger waves where the water gets deeper. Down and up-stream of such a place could be a top spot for salmon.



**Trio of big salmon resting on the riverbed. Biggest fish at an estimated 18-20 kg.**







## Tube Bomber

The Bomber was originally intended as a commotion-fly fished wet and soon it earned the reputation as the all time greatest dry fly. Jesper Fohrmann ties his Bombers on tiny tubes. Flies are feather light and can be fitted with tiny tube fly trebles, singles or a double hook.

Visit the homepage on the subject at [www.fishmadman.com](http://www.fishmadman.com)



**STEP 1** – Fix an ex. Small tubes to a needle (Here a 1,4 mm tube) tie down hook-guard. In this case silicon tube. Tie in a length of 0,06 Fireline to use as ribbing later in the process.



**STEP 2** – Tie in a bunch of hair from calf tail. Ad strands of Firefly Mylar(The Mylar strands will help you keep track of the fly in low light and fast water)

**STEP 3** – Tie in two quality hackles. Add yet another bobbin-holder, this time with 0.06 mm Fireline to be use in the following job. Add drops of super-glue to the tie-down of wing and tail.



**STEP 4** – Tie down sections of deer body hair. Make sure to tighten each section securely with the Fireline

**STEP 5** – Ad all sections and finish up the Fireline with a couple of hitches.



**STEP 6** – Trim the body to a cigar-shape with your scissors or a razor blade. Ad a little hump of fly tying treads to make the wing stand slightly upward

**STEP 7** – Run the hackles down the body securing that the stem of the hackle gets inside the structure. Run the ribbing upwards through the body and hackles. Secure and whip-finish. Trim excess material. Ad a drop of super-glue to the head.



the fly in front of him the chances are good.

When placing the fly on the water I find it is best to fish it dead drift. Even though salmon are known to take flies pulled through the surface, 9 out of 10 Atlantic salmon will take the dry fly fished at dead drift. Pulling or wading the dry fly across the water can, in some circumstances, spoil the fishing - especially for bigger fish in shallow water that are easily spooked by such methods.

To avoid the fly dragging, the angler can resort to a range of tricks. Most of these will come fairly naturally when you get acquainted with the big fluffy flies. Like badminton this is a sport with a lot of wind resistance. To get maximum deliverance from my fly line I always use poly-leaders, intermediate or hover. I customise them to my preference at about 5 – 6.5 feet and use them in connection with a 3.28 – 2.4 feet piece of tippet material. I recommend Clear Blue Streen 0.35 and 0.30, the tippet will stay in the surface but the backend of the leader will go under water thus avoiding disturbing shadows. If conditions are

difficult one can use a fluorocarbon leader. I recommend *Airflo Sightfree Fluorocarbon*.

## Time for dry fly

You can hook up with salmon on the dry fly in the very early season when water temperatures are low, but dry fly is foremost a summer sport and during the season there will be times when the dry will out-fish conventional flies. Best sport is had when water temperature is 12 – 14 degrees Celsius, 53 – 57 degrees Fahrenheit, and air temperature is rising 4 – 5 clicks. It could for instance be when early morning turns into midday, or if a cold and clear evening sky suddenly clouds over. During times like these there can be a noticeable change in water temperature. All changes in the river are key to our fishing for salmon and there will be times during the day when salmon will rise more eagerly to the fly. These periods are often linked with changes in light, such as at dawn and dusk, but it can also be related to local conditions such as the sun coming around the mountain shining on the river, or when direct light during afternoon is changed to a flickering indirect light coming through trees.

## Searching for salmon

Rivers with clear and low water are the best places for salmon on dry fly but I will add that I have had fish on the dry in peaty rivers like the Beauuly and the North Esk in Scotland, and in deep and slow parts of the Swedish river Ätran. I believe strongly that salmon could be brought to the dry

fly in every single river in Europe; it is merely a matter of determination and a box of high floaters.

To seek out and put the fly on the fish as precisely as possible you must know the lies and locate the places where they rest between holding pools. If you're lucky you might see a fish jump or splash. Take note of these spots and picture how the fish will be about 4 feet below the point where it jumped. Hold your fire, and let the fish settle before presenting the fly. A fish that jumps clear of the water is not often the one to be caught, but other fish could be close by. Remember to bring state-of-the-art polarized glasses. Depending on the circumstances I use yellow, red or grey tints.

Finding the fish in the water is a sport within the sport, and sunlight can be helpful when salmon spotting but do not expect to see the whole fish. Look for details or shadows of the fish such as a fluttering pectoral or tailfin... or the distinct caudal fin that often is in clear contrast to the riverbed.

## The hook-up

The moment of truth; the salmon is coming to the surface to grab your fly. This is the time when even the old hand on the river gets the trembles and not without reason as the salmon can act in heart stopping ways. Sometimes the fish will come to the fly time after time without hitting it. On occasions it may dunk the fly to drown it, or so it seems. Other fish will push the fly or even try to sink it by pulling the hackle. This intensive form of

## Literature

*Salmon On Dry Fly,*

Derek Knowles, 1989

*The Dry Fly And Fast Waters*

↳ *Salmon And Dry Fly,*

M.L. LaBranche, 1972 (reprint)

*Tying And Fishing The Riffing*

*Hitch,* Art Lee, 1998

*The Atlantic Salmon,*

Lee Wulff, 1983 (2 edition)



curiosity can go on for some time and it is clearly a form of activity closely linked to the salmon's life as a parr. This kind of behaviour is seen with salmon that have been in the river for some time, the newly arrived are less cautious in their attack but the type of strike can differ. In a fast run you will see the salmon take the fly with very little fuss, maybe with just a tiny sprinkle of water as if it were a little trout hitting the fly. Others will jump straight out of the water and grab the fly from above. Try to keep a straight line between you and the fly, and do not strike before you actually see the fish take in the fly. Set the hook with a fast movement.

### Lee Wulff on lines

Lee Wulff had his own design of fly lines, and was of the general opinion that the resources and quality of the fly line were of greater importance than that of the rod. His own design, Triangle Taper was a fly line with a very progressive taper and a long body. Today this type of line is made by most fly line manufacturers and it is ideal for distance fishing. Particular lines designed for delicate delivery of the fly are also valuable, especially in small river systems or quiet waters.

### Choice of rod

Dry fly fishing is a sport with a lot of different casting involved – precision and delivery are key words and rods are an important part of the plan. I use fairly long rods, often with a small fighting butt that will keep the reel away from my body when playing fish. The grilse love to hit the dry fly but are renowned for throwing the hook.



## Salmon do feed in freshwater

In Northern Norway region Finmark you will find numerous rivers ideal for dry fly sport. In some of these rivers it is not uncommon to catch salmon that have devoured insects. Biological field studies of salmon intestines prove this. (*M. Johansen, Evidence of freshwater feeding by adult salmon in the Tana River, Northern Norway, Journal of fish biology (2001), 59, Page 1405-1407. The study showed*

that some 45 % of salmon from, tributaries of the Tana River actually had eaten during their stay in the river system. Stomachs contained both aquatic and terrestrial insects. You can order the biological papers through [www.blackwell-synergy.com](http://www.blackwell-synergy.com) Put, Evidence of freshwater feeding by adult salmon in the Tana River - in the text search.

Fighting is often quick and close and I choose a lighter rod, # 6 – 8 with a sensitive top that can cushion the movements of the fish

The long rod comes in useful when having to negotiate rocks and obstacles in shallow rivers. In addition these rods are handy when holding and working flies near salmon just a rod length away. A good example of a top dry fly rod in the 11 foot # 8 Z-Axis from Sage. The Sage team have succeeded in combining the latest graphite technology with the features of a long, single hand rod, making an absolutely delicate, precise yet powerful salmon rod. ■

### Fly fishing for wheelchair users

Superb fishing can now be enjoyed in the famous Bro kulpen pool in the Blue zone, where the riverbank has been altered to aid Wheelchair users.

Learn more about this noble project by contacting Reppafjord Youth Centre at telephone: 0047 - 78 41 61 65



