



BY JAMES S. FOWLER III



OUR MAN MAN FRED

Live release has a powerful advocate in Norway.

DAMN, I COULDN'T SPEY CAST IF MY LIFE depended on it. At two in the morning, under the never-ending Arctic Circle twilight that blankets Norway, it was only the second hour of our first day of fishing. Still, I was already cursing my two-handed, thirteen-foot fly rod and myself. Sometimes, however, there is no accounting for just plain, dumb luck. And of course there's the fact that the Norwegian Flyfisher's Club guide—Englishman Chris Henshaw—with twenty years experience on these waters, had placed me in an ideal spot.

All of a sudden there was a huge boil and my line came tight. The line hissed off my reel and the tip of my rod bowed down to the water. It was obvious that this salmon wasn't going to be landed without a fight. Gaula salmon have to make it through the Gaulfossen, which is not a typical water-fall. It is actually an extended narrow gorge, around 800 meters long. The power of the river as it is pressed through this constricted stretch is truly impressive and it is easy to see why salmon in this famous Norwegian River are renowned

Manfred Raguse at N.F.C. headquarters in Storen, Norway. Facing page, Chris Henshaw helps the author (casting above) release a Gaula salmon.



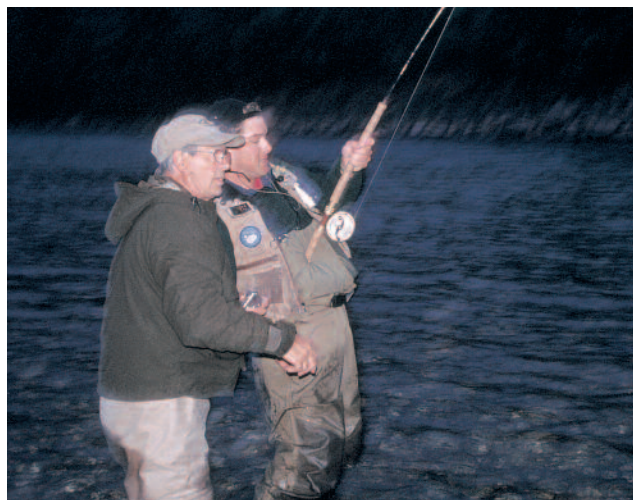
PHOTOS BY JIM FOWLER



Above, the famous Bridge Pool on the Gaula River. Right, a stony beach frames Tilseth Pool.

for their strength and fight. After about 15 minutes and several more wild runs and jumps, I was finally able to lead the chrome bright, 18-pound Gaula salmon to shore for a careful and quick release. It was time to celebrate and my father, Jim, Chris and I joined our host, Manfred Raguse, of the Norwegian Flyfisher's Club, to share in some of Norway's best homemade moonshine.

Raguse has been fishing the Gaula River for the last 38 years and not surprisingly, he has also fished all of the named rivers in Norway, as well as many rivers in Finland, Denmark, Scotland, England, Wales, Canada, Iceland, Sweden, and Russia. During Manfred's first years on the Gaula, around 1970, he would camp in a tiny tent set up in the forest close by the river bank. The fishing was run by the local fishing association, where two tickets



DURING MANFRED'S FIRST YEARS ON THE GAULA HE WOULD CAMP IN A TINY TENT SET UP IN THE FOREST CLOSE BY THE RIVER BANK.



were sold to fly fisherman from outside the village. As the tickets were sold on a first come basis, he was the first in line every morning. Manfred achieved this by sleeping on the stairs in front of the office after a night's fishing. Soon, however, there were as many as 42 outside anglers per day wrestling for the two elusive tickets. Manfred realized he would have to lease private water and share this with some of his friends so, in 1983, he leased his first water on the Laerdal River. Then in 1985, Manfred purchased his first small piece of water on the Gaula River. Each year he added new productive stretches of water and in 1988 he established the Norwegian Flyfisher's Club (N.F.C.) together with a few friends.

Today the N.F.C. has exclusive rights for a maximum of 26 to 30 rods on approximately 40 pools. This ensures the best chance to catch salmon under any conditions during all parts of the season and provides a maximum



variety of salmon pools. Salmon enthusiasts from around the globe come every year to fish the N.F.C. beats.

Manfred has worked hard for the conservation of the Atlantic salmon. The Winter 1979 issue of the *Atlantic Salmon Journal* carried Manfred's first story on the fight against drift netting on the Norwegian coast. Seven years later, it was followed up with "Survival or Extinction," that also focused on the interceptory net fishery. Manfred works closely with Orri Vigfusson of the North Atlantic Salmon Fund. He is also one of the founding members of the German Salmon Conservation Organization, that is working for the reintroduction of Atlantic salmon in that country (see Salmon in Switzerland, page 12).

Manfred encourages live release on the N.F.C. beats, and he is certain that the operation has released more fish than any other on the Gaula River. The release rate last season was as high as 60.5% of all fish caught on their waters. Next year, he hopes it will be even higher, especially since the salmon run has been so productive. Bear in mind that live release is a concept that is less popular as a conservation tool in Europe than it has proven to be in North America. Outfitters like Manfred Raguse are working hard to make live release as popular abroad as it is on this side of the pond, especially with younger anglers like myself.

James S. Fowler III is a senior at Boise State University in Idaho and a third generation salmon angler. 🐟

A rainbow glows above Langoy Pool after a summer shower. Below, yet another bright salmon, caught on N.F.C. water, is released back into the Gaula River.



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