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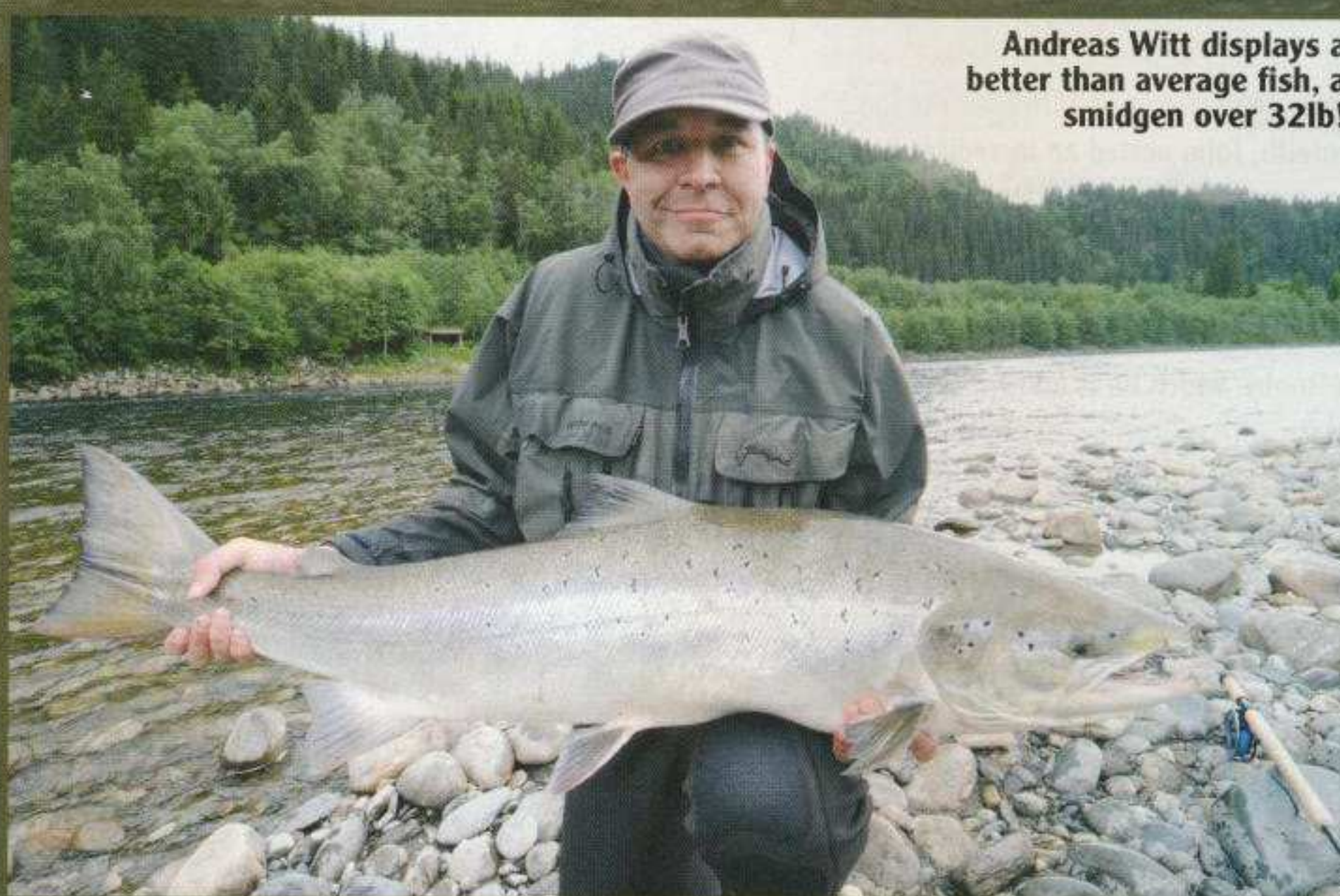
Extreme Sports

Norway, the Gaula, The Gauntlet and 1,000 yards of pain! Tim Gray recounts the tail of a mammoth salmon, hooked in the Bridge Pool of the mighty Gaula River, which just wouldn't give up.

The international recreational trend, perhaps on account of our dull and cosseted lives, is towards what has become known as extreme sport. People travel extensively to participate in rock climbing, abseiling, white-water rafting and base jumping. Why not go salmon fishing on the revered Bridge Pool of the Gaula River and combine all four? But without any of the requisite equipment and handicapped further by being connected to a kicking horse of a salmon at the other end of your line.

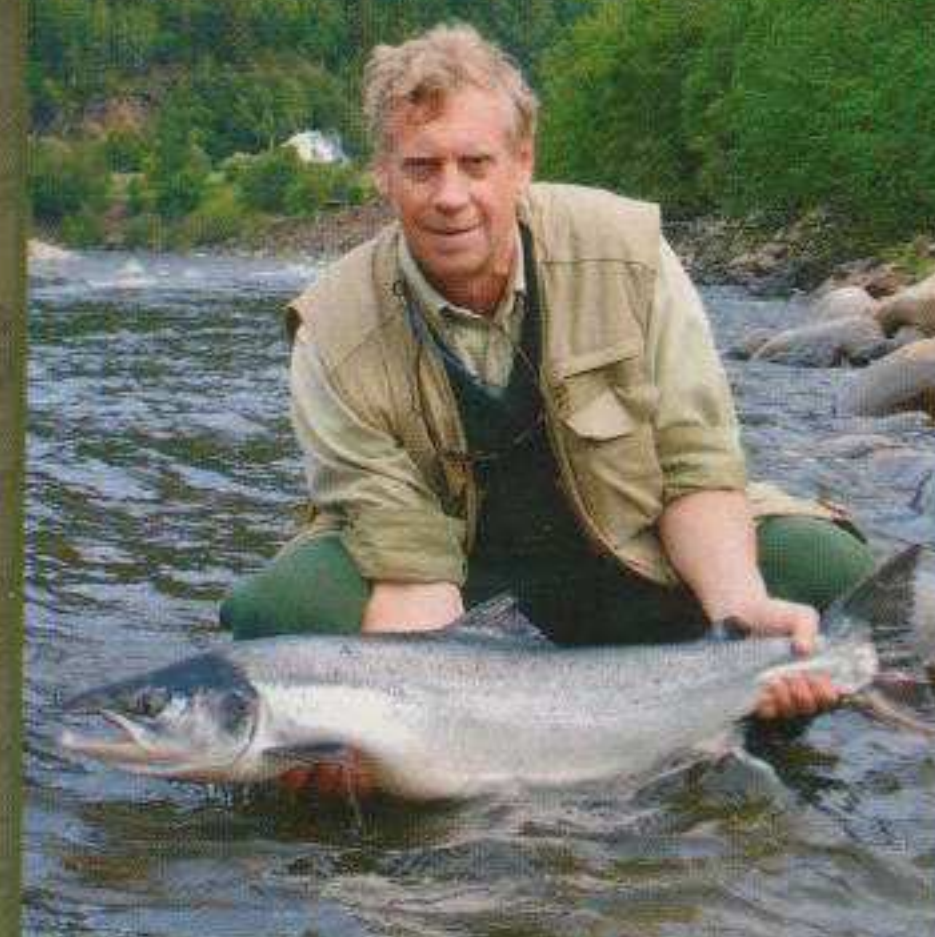
If you, in common with all decent people, relish the chance to poke a stick in the eye of the 'health and safety' industry, and therefore double the thrill of the escapade, here is the designer package.

The drive from Støren up to Rognes tickles the senses and emotions. Aesthetically it's an ancient landscape nurtured only in part by human hand. But the human touch has been kind and elevates nature to fairy-tale status. Then there are glimpses of the mighty Gaula,



Andreas Witt displays a better than average fish, a smidgen over 32lb!

The author with a decent Gaula fish.



of the pools and runs that tug deep in the soul of any salmon fisherman... and always the anticipation of what is possible. And what could go wrong? The nervous energy built up is reminiscent of a rugby changing room before a match.

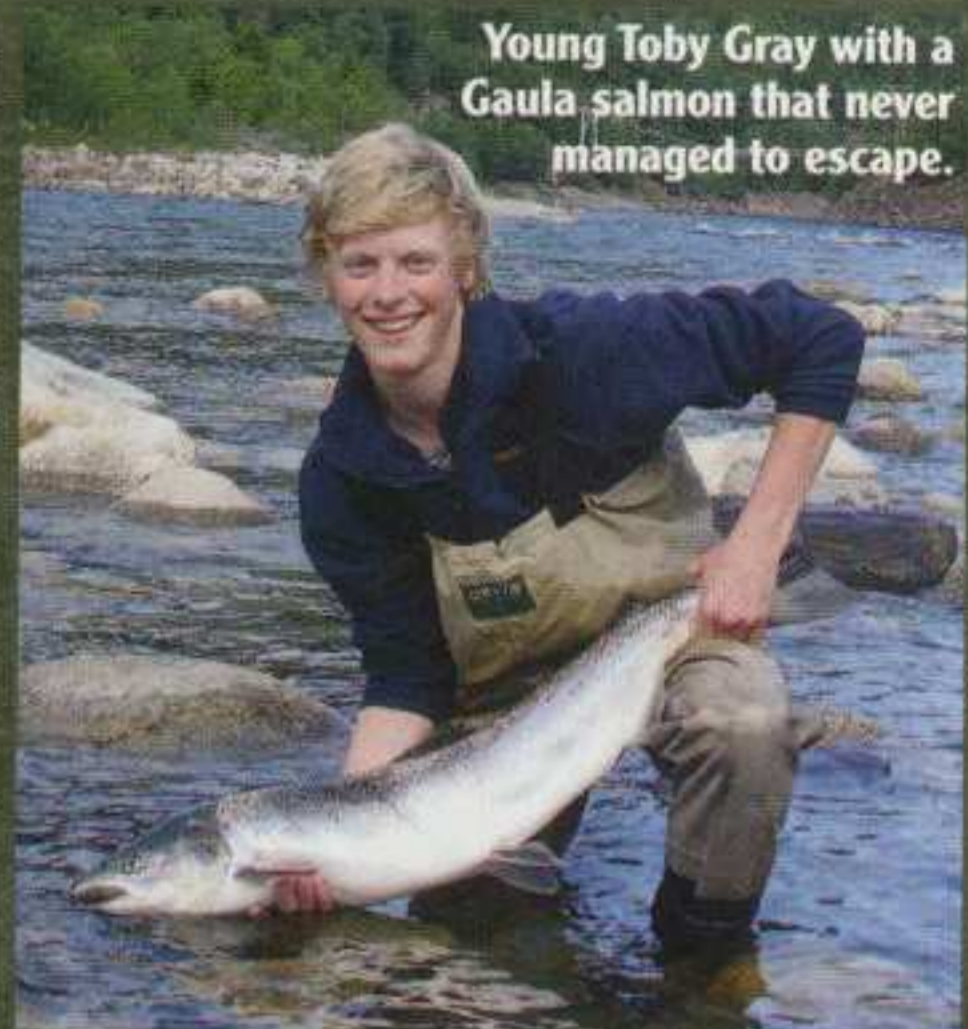
The Bridge Pool itself is a geological marvel. A slab of rock so solid and proud, that even this river has to defer and run round it, defines the left bank. Chillingly, there's an engraved memorial on the face, possibly to an angler who fell in. Even at low water that would be a serious misfortune but in spate there is no doubt you'd be done for. How exactly you would perish is uncertain but your eye is drawn to the ferocious cauldron below, which runs for half a mile, steeply enough

that you have to look twice to believe your eyes. It's called The Gauntlet and far below is the optimistically named Landing Pool. At that point the Gaula bears left simply because there's a steep mountain in the way. Not even divine intervention, once in the water, could prevent you from being hurled down The Gauntlet nor alter the shape you would be in upon reaching the calmer water in the distance. Any debate about survival is redundant. In high spate one is also aware of a huge white-water torrent forcing itself 20 yards into the main river on the right bank near to the end of The Gauntlet.

And so it was on the evening of June 30th, 2008, that my son Toby Gray found himself selecting a fly with Marcus Thomasson,



Young Toby Gray with a Gaula salmon that never managed to escape.



his remarkable ghillie. Toby is 17 years old and Marcus is 23. Both are whipper thin, fit for anything and, having fished together here for more than three years, have a good understanding of one another. The Gaula was just over the top of a summer spate and this year, as a result of sightings, losses and even catches, fish of great size and condition were known to be in the river. As a result of snow melt augmented by recent rain, fresh fish would have run at least as far up as the Bridge Pool. The pool holds these mighty fish because they have to rest after The Gauntlet and to contemplate the next ascent through rapids to Upper Pool and beyond to the redds in the headwaters.

At this height of water one dare not wade, but this doesn't matter because the fish lie closer to the right bank out of the swollen main current. Toby's elegant Spey cast touched the water lightly but the weighted Green Highlander tube registered on the surface before it was dragged down by the sinking line and across by the ever-moving water. Round swung the fly. Toby retrieved, lifted the line and cast again, working his way down the pool. Marcus was at his shoulder, watching with intense concentration and eager anticipation. The fish took at the worst place, right in the tail of the pool. His screaming Hardy Angel reel superfluously drowned out Toby's cry of "fish on!"

If you want to add drama to the occasion, add a parental dimension. All three of us are prudent and intelligent, each owes a responsibility to the other, and each has a good idea of his own limits. A decision was needed very quickly. Around 100 yards of backing had gone already. Toby and Marcus went 30 yards. I picked up the net and joined the party.

Nobody wasted energy on a decision. Now 200 yards had gone and the rod looked fragile and entirely inadequate.

At 100 yards down The Gauntlet we were

struggling, not just with the fish but with the decision. We shouted above the roar of the Gaula and the scream of the reel that it was only a fish. We shouldn't take no risks. But we had already taken several and we all knew that not only had we been lucky, but we were now committed to something we shouldn't have joined. And 300 yards had gone. But we had found a system and a rhythm. I was below supporting Toby when a difficult step over the wet boulders was necessary, and Marcus was above, hand on Toby's upper sleeve, moving branches and saplings. The line sang over a rock way below. Toby howled that he was now out of backing. So that was 350 yards. How many fishermen have seen the bare spool in action?

The fish stopped, and every sinew of Toby's upper body strained to hold the rod. We scampered like lunatics over a clearer section of rocks and Toby won perhaps 30 yards back onto the reel. A glance passed between us. Could this be possible? And off went the fish again – it was so strong.

Exhaustedly we arrived in very ragged shape at the surging tributary. We had come this far. The fish had taken us, in total, almost 1,000 yards. We had overcome all obstacles. Toby had searing muscles and lacerated fingers from the line. We ached and drew oxygen, and were wet from perspiration and spray. We wanted more – loving these adrenaline courses. But

this obstacle was impassable – we all knew it... and we hated the fact that there was no choice.

We never saw the fish in the 30 minutes that raced by – we only felt him. Momentarily Marcus and I held the rod while Toby climbed round a large rock or tree. We understood the power and didn't need to discuss that aspect. We took turns to retrieve the line onto the reel. The fly came back at the end of the leader.

So all the combatants had survived and spirits were remarkably high, but the spirits of the fish must have soared highest. We pray that he ascends The Gauntlet again and finds the redds. Most of all we want him and his kin to thrive and to populate this magnificent Gaula River.

The Gaula River – The Private Beats Of The Norwegian Flyfishers Club

The great reduction in netting in Norway's Trondheim Fjord over the last three years has given a tremendous boost to the numbers of salmon returning to local rivers. The Gaula in particular has benefited, reconfirming its stature as one of the finest and most productive salmon rivers in the world. It's now quite capable of producing 11,000 salmon per season to rods. And we're talking about a high proportion of large salmon – the top 10 biggest salmon landed by anglers averages 40lb!

The beats of the Norwegian Flyfishers Club (NFC), the best-known private fishery on the Gaula, have enjoyed an excellent season in 2008. Almost 500 salmon with an average weight of over 12lb were caught during the short three-month season from June 1st until August 31st.

There were numerous encounters with monster salmon, which were played on the fly for up to two hours or more – leaving broken lines and hooks and dejected anglers behind. If one views the detailed reports on last season on the NFC's website (www.nfc-online.com), there are reports of battles with leviathan salmon that emptied all 350 metres of backing from the spool and of anglers who have followed fish for some 500 metres along boulder-strewn river banks. Usually the fish are the winners! Every year many anglers catch their biggest-ever salmon on the beats of the NFC, though. This is often the case, even if they've been fishing for salmon for 30 years or so in other countries. It's not unusual for individuals to achieve their personal record on their very first day on the Gaula!

The largest fish caught on the Gaula last season weighed 48lb, while the largest fish from the NFC beats was 117 centimetres long and estimated at 38lb to 39lb; it was carefully released back into the water.

While fish may still be killed – there is a limit on the Gaula of one salmon per day

– the NFC is now very much spearheading a revolution in attitudes to conservation in Norway, notably the practice of catch and release. This year, anglers on the NFC beats released more than 60 per cent of the salmon they caught. This extraordinary achievement has caused something of a stir nationally, attracting the attention of the main Norwegian TV channel, which gave the story due prominence on its news bulletins – prompting a long overdue debate on the subject.

NFC has three fisheries on the Gaula:

Rotation Fishery

The NFC's main fishery is the group of rotating beats between Rognes and Kvål (centred on Støren). It's an exclusive fishery where pairs of anglers experience a large number of excellent and varied pools in rotation, changing beats every six hours – fishing on the Gaula is permitted around the clock. During each six-hour period the particular beat is the exclusive reserve of the two anglers on the rota. This ensures fair access to the water, maximising chances of success, as these beats extend over a large section of the river and include a variety of pools to suit varying conditions. The rotation includes legendary pools such as the Bridge, Long, Junction, Langoy, Tilseth and many others.

Bogen Sondre Beat

The Bogen Sondre Beat is a very attractive, exclusive beat for a group of four to six rods. It is let with the 'English House'. Located on the riverbank and constructed around 1837 to accommodate some of the English fishermen who pioneered angling on the Gaula, this house is probably the oldest building of its kind in the Gaula Valley.

Upper Gaula Beat

The Upper Gaula Beat is a little further upstream and also very exciting fly water, but at a lower price. This suits the more experienced angler; the ability to Spey cast or do the underhand cast is a clear advantage. Given the wilder nature of the banks, a good level of physical fitness is also an advantage. The beat (which is 3.2 kilometres long, including 1.5km double bank) is let with a country house nearby. Bookings are for single rods or full parties of four to six rods.

Highly qualified, knowledgeable guides are available from the NFC for all beats. Season: June, July, and August. Prices range from £600 per week per rod for fishing, including self-catering accommodation.

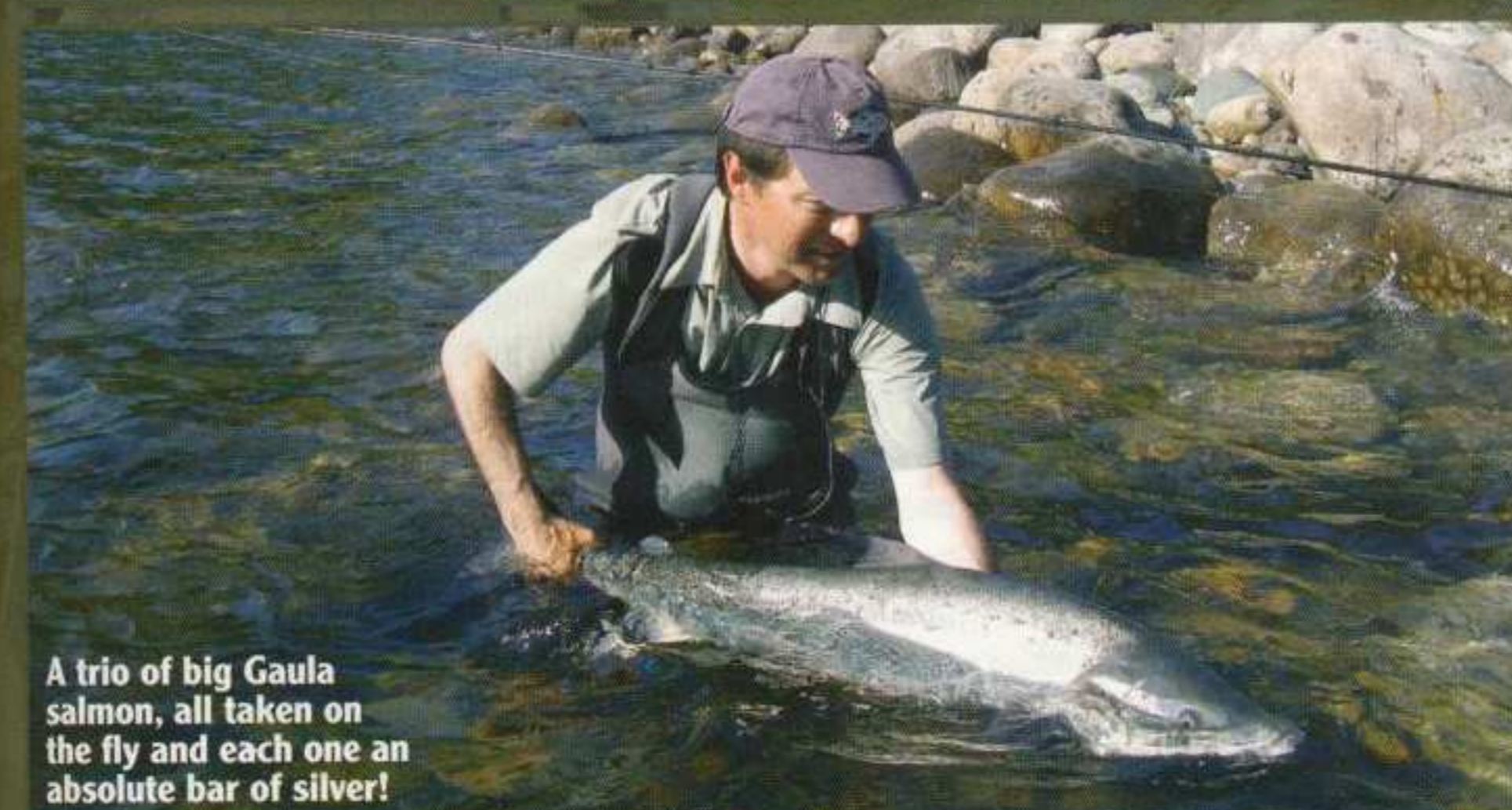
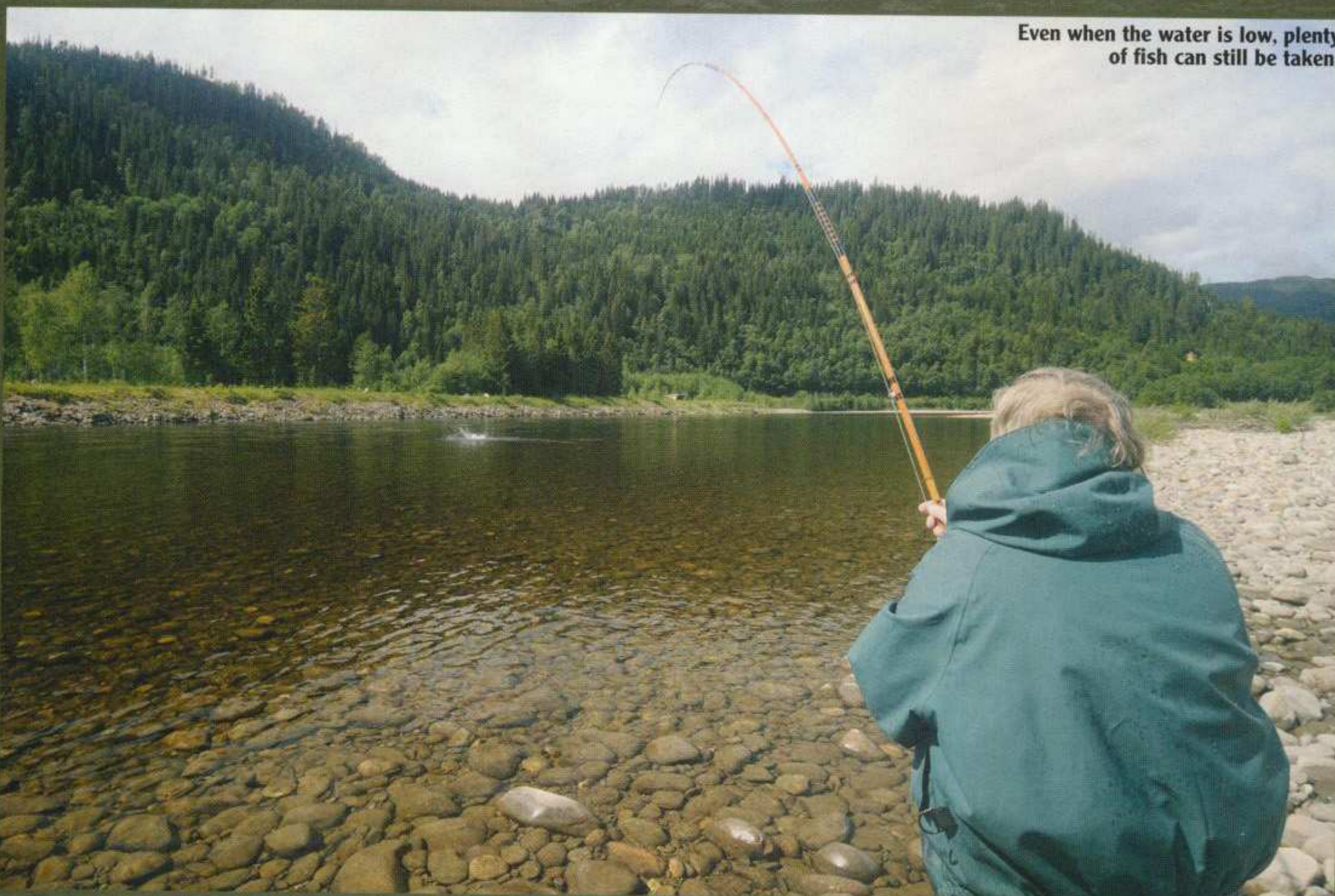
For further information:

Tel: 00 49 40589 2302 and ask for Manfred Raguse

Web: www.nfc-online.com

E-mail: info@nfc-online.com

Even when the water is low, plenty of fish can still be taken.



A trio of big Gaula salmon, all taken on the fly and each one an absolute bar of silver!