

Editor's Note: This is the fifty-fifth in a series of articles dealing with people, places, and developments in New Brunswick.

Fabulous Fishing

For 30 or 40 years a good year can buy a Restigouche salmon that has been captured in a commercial fisherman's net.

But if you want to land one yourself with rod and reel, it may cost you somewhat more than its weight in gold.

Jack Harney, of Miramichi, tells about a multi-millionaire from the United States who spent \$25,000 bringing a group of friends on an angling expedition. The party took two fish which tipped the scales at 25 pounds each. Had they been pure gold the mount would only have paid \$25,000 for them.

You will gather from this that casting a fly by on the Restigouche and its equally famous tributaries, the Patagonia, the Miramichi, the Irapuatch and the Kedgwick, is not exactly a pastime sport. And that conclusion is quite correct.

One stretch of the Restigouche, at the confluence of the Patagonia is known for instance, as "The Million Dollar Pool." This is not merely in name but a rough estimate of its value.

It is owned by the Restigouche Salmon Club, which carries the old spelling, "Restigouche," in its more modest form, "Restigouche" and which is the most expensive and exclusive organization of its kind on the face of the earth.

In 1904 a legal dispute was raised as to the title to a small portion of the Million dollar pool. The club gave the New Brunswick government \$20,000 to keep the case out of court. And that, mind you, was just a settlement. The club was fairly sure it already had a clear deed on all the pool, including the section in question.

The Restigouche Salmon Club was founded in 1818 and its list of past and present members names the social registers look democratic. Vanderbilt, Cadwalader, Gablets, the royal families of Manhattan, led the way.

Among other names you find those of Sir Montagu Allan, of princely lineage; merchant prince Marshall Field; H. G. Don of Don and Don-ville; Walter C. Tingle of Stamford City and J. K. L. Don, banker and sportsman; you also see the name of Sanford White, the great U. S. angler. He joined the Restigouche not long before he was murdered in New York by the notorious playboy, Harry K. Thaw.

F. J. Rowley, formerly of Saint John, salt-spoken, efficient manager of the club, a few years ago picked up a sterling silver pocket-body handle. The blades had been eaten away by rust but engraved in the silver was the name "Sanford White."

The big rambling clubhouse is at Miramichi, Quebec, just across the international bridge from New Brunswick. In its lounge there are photographs of celebrities who have fished the Restigouche in 1907, including several Governors-General of Canada and a representative assortment of princes, dukes, and such. There are paintings of Restigouche scenes by outstanding artists.

The furniture is massive and Victorian. But the establishment, in spite of this, is sophisticated and lacks the heavy you might expect when you realize that the 25 members of the Restigouche Salmon Club owned billions of dollars of wealth. Of course, these men don't rough it in the wilderness. They have at least a dozen bathrooms. On their staff are the manager, a bookkeeper, a butler, a cook, 12 maids and 26 guides, as well as casual help.

And when one of them feels like indulging a whim, he can almost surely afford to do it. There is a number of suites, each with everything. He has two suites of two bedrooms each, and each bedroom has two blinds on every window, together with double doors.

He spends the first half of the season in one of his suites and the latter half in the other.

But both his suites, like all the sleeping accommodations in the clubhouse, are almost spartan in their plainness. Nobody ever forgets that this is a fishing camp, not a New York hotel.

One of the downstream rivers is set aside for fishing rods and the majority probably fish the western section in the river the entrance to the club's name—the highest and most of fishing salmon head in North America. It's larger than the Lake of the Clouds and has a long history hooked fish.

This fish was found dead early one spring. It had been in between logs which were being driven down the river, and killed.

Even at that time of the year, when it was thin as an eel, it weighed 25 pounds. Had it been coming in from the sea in the condition it would have weighed more than 50 pounds. A member is not met annually with such excitement, even the sport is all but its stilled and mounted head is buried and left there from beginning to the end of the fishing season.

In addition to its main clubhouse at Miramichi, the Restigouche Salmon Club has five lodges along Miramichi on various stream water it runs or flows on the Restigouche and its tributaries.

The Duke and Duchess of Windsor stayed at one of these lodges when they fished in New Brunswick. So did Vincent Astor and Governor General.

While the Restigouche Salmon Club is the oldest and best known it is not by any means the only one. There are also several other establishments. One of these belongs to the Strain family which Max's department store in New York... it costs \$100,000—this year even when no guests see them.

A conservative estimate is that wealthy Americans have invested of \$7,000,000 to \$10,000,000 tied up in angling rights buildings on the Restigouche, the Patagonia, the Miramichi, the Irapuatch and the Kedgwick.

They own most of the water rights, having purchased it people with old deeds which included the water with the water land. Through the years, the price of the better pools has risen.

Max M. Mowat, of Campbellton, sold some property on the pond to Americans 20 years ago, for \$12,000. They, in turn, for \$20,000, and it afterwards changed hands again for \$125,000.

The water and owned outright is leased from the government New Brunswick and Quebec, and the New Brunswick treasury in tens of thousands of dollars, each year from this source of it.

Why are the Restigouche and its tributaries worth so much?

The answer is that the Atlantic silver salmon is the most priced game fish of all, and that these rivers offer the best Atlantic silver angling. Multi-millionaire devotees of the great Atlantic salmon angling will pay fantastic sums for the privilege of fishing streams.

That leads to a second question: why is the fishing on the Restigouche and its tributaries so good, when salmon angling elsewhere either vanished or deteriorated. The answer, here is the Restigouche Riparian Association.

A private organization, which, in a sense, is like a police force, has more than 50 guardsmen, who protect the rivers from poach.

It has a budget of \$10,000 or \$20,000 a year and all individual clubs contribute to its support in accordance with the amount of water they hold.

The first chief guardian was Max M. Mowat. When he retired after 21 years ago, salmon fishing on the Restigouche was nearly on the downgrade. In that day there was a continuous system of crews carrying supplies and provisions to anglers and logging camps.

Each crew had a net and poachers made a practice of dragging the poach, killing scores of fish with one blast.

Mr. Mowat's instructions were to stop illegal fishing, regardless of expense. He was given the power to arrest and prosecute one.

As a result of his efforts, angling came back. Today Mr. M. is retired, but his son, G. A. Mowat, succeeded him as chief guard and upholds Max Mowat's tradition of relentlessly pursuing poach.

On top of that, many of the commercial fishing stands, the sites below the head of tideswater, have been bought up by the Restigouche Riparian Association, and the nets eliminated. With these of the picture, more salmon succeed in breaking their way upriver.

This season members of the Restigouche Salmon Club alone catch close to 2,000 mature salmon and more than 500 girls or young salmon.

The fish, on the average, were large, with hundreds weighing more than 20 pounds apiece. The bag limit on the Restigouche is 20 men a week, and most anglers got the limit.

All kinds of amateur statisticians have tried to figure out how much anglers leave in New Brunswick for each salmon they take in the Restigouche or its tributaries. The estimates go as high as \$5, but probably \$100 to \$500 is nearer the mark.

The multi-millionaire who spent \$25,000 bringing to New Brunswick the party that only caught two fish was the exception rather than the rule. He was just unlucky. But his experience did prove that an Atlantic silver salmon, in the Restigouche and its tributaries can be worth its weight in gold and also...

The article scanned in above is called 'Fabulous Fishing' and is about fishing on the Restigouche River, Riparian Rights and the Mowat river guardians. It was written for the Telegraph Journal Newspaper printed in Saint John, NB in 1948. Copies of this and other articles written by Ian Sclanders about the early history of the Campbellton area are to be found in the NB Provincial Archives in Fredericton in the Clippings Box labeled (MS19 – 19A).

Except for the first short 5 paragraphs, the right hand column of the article has been transcribed below:

“While the Restigouch Salmon Club is the oldest and best known it is not by any means the only one. There are also many private establishments. One of these belongs to the Straus Family, which owns Macy’s department store in New York. It costs \$100 a day to keep this open even when no guests are there.

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The water not owned outright is leased from the government of New Brunswick and Quebec, and the New Brunswick treasury.

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A private organization, which, in a sense, is like a police force, this river has more than 50 guardians, who protect the rivers from poaching.

It has a budget of \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year and all individual clubs contribute to its support in accordance with the amount of water they hold.

The first chief guardian was Max M. Mowat. When he assumed office 51 years ago, salmon fishing on the Restigouche was distinctly on the downgrade. In that day there was a continuous procession of scows carrying supplies and provisions to upriver settlements and logging camps. Each scow had a net and poachers made a practice of dynamiting the pools, killing scores of fish with one blast. Mr. Mowat’s instructions were to stop illegal fishing, regardless of expense. He once spent \$3,000 to track down and prosecute one poacher.

As a result of his efforts, angling came back. Today Mr. Mowat is retired but his son, G.A Mowat, succeeded him as chief guardian and upholds Max Mowat's tradition of relentlessly pursuing poachers.

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The multi-millionaire who spent \$35,000 bringing to New Brunswick the party that only caught two fish was the exception rather the rule. He was just unlucky. But his experience did prove that an Atlantic silver salmon, in the Restigouche and its tributaries can be worth its weight in gold and then some."