

NORWAY CALLING

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ON THE LURE OF THE GAULA,
NORTHERN EUROPE'S
PREMIER SALMON RIVER.

One of the best holding pools on the NFC waters of the middle Gaula. Following a strong fish down the rapids below is known as 'running the gauntlet'!



For most experienced and discerning salmon anglers brought up on British salmon rivers, there usually comes a point where choices have to be made. Assuming that one does not have the luxury of an unlimited budget (or indeed unlimited time), then inevitably one begins to rationalise where and when one pursues the king of fish. Salmon angling careers tend to begin with the pursuit of any fish (no matter what the size or colour), before gravitating towards fresh-run silver fish (including springers) and perhaps as well, often through luck more than judgement, towards big days and big weeks of multiple fish – such as we have experienced this summer on many of Scotland's northern rivers.

Once a British angler has achieved a reasonable degree of success on home rivers and enjoyed fairly consistent catches perhaps totalling in the hundreds over time, then the appeal of pitting his or her wits against heavy salmon often comes to the fore. Of course big salmon run British rivers but they are the exception; the number of fish landed by anglers in the 20lb class amounts to a few hundred each year and those of 30lb or over probably no more than one or two score. In other words, if one is limited to two or three weeks fishing per annum, the odds on hooking such fish are poor.

Historically Britain was never a really prolific producer of very large salmon; indeed, according to Fred Buller's seminal volume "*The Domesday Book of Giant Salmon*", no more than a handful over 50lb have been caught on rod and line in British rivers since the 1920s. Thus it stands to reason that anyone seeking to maximise their chance of hooking (and perhaps landing!) a very large salmon should look elsewhere – particularly to Norway.

Of course the British pioneered angling for salmon in Norway. From the 1820s the great and the good made their annual pilgrimages, renting the best rivers in pursuit of huge salmon. However most of these tenancies were not renewed after 1945 and local angling associations then exploited the vacuum, tying up much of the best fishings. This drastically reduced the number of privately fished beats.

This was the case on the River Gaula, now



widely considered the best salmon river in Norway. Much of its 60 fishable miles are club waters – accessible to the visitor at low prices but inevitably the downside is that the best pools are often swamped with anglers using a range of weaponry – “combat fishing”. Fortunately there are still some private beats. In my experience the best organised operation (offering the greatest variety of private fishings at comparatively moderate cost) is the long-established Norwegian Flyfishers' Club (NFC).

But first, what is the great attraction of the Gaula? It is a remarkably natural medium-sized river – with no impoundment, no hydro dams, essentially no pollution and an abundance of natural spawning and juvenile habitat. There are very few fish farms in the Trondheimfjord to the benefit of outgoing smolts. The Gaula's in-river netting was stopped in 1979. Almost all the local bag-nets were bought out in 2005 and from 2010 the Norwegian Government introduced severe limitations on the netting season – to a total of just eight days fishing on the Trondelag coast, 15 days fishing for the Trondheimfjord and Hemnfjorden and 18 days fishing for the inner Trondheimfjord. Critically there is no netting whatsoever before July – allowing the valuable early-running heavy salmon to reach their home rivers. ➔

SCANDINAVIAN SALMON

Battle is joined on the NFC's Beat B2

The main beneficiary of these restrictions on netting is the Gaula where in the last six years the number of spawning redds has quadrupled in some areas; the rod catch now exceeds 10,000 per annum – in the short three month season (from June to August). An astonishing 45 per cent of the fish are over 16lb, having spent at least three winters at sea. Indeed the statistics on weight are staggering – averaging over 17lb in June (over 20lb in the first fortnight), 11lb in July (including the main grilse runs) and 9lb in August. In each of the last two seasons the ten largest salmon caught had an average weight of over 43lb!

The NFC waters consist of ten miles of first class fly water on the middle Gaula (centred on the small town of Støren). NFC, with its loyal

international clientele, currently tops the league table for catches on the Gaula; this has been achieved on a fly-only basis. The release of fish is encouraged but not mandatory (NFC now achieves a 62 per cent release rate). On the river as a whole the daily bag limit is one salmon per angler; once a fish has been killed (for whatever reason), then fishing must cease until midnight.

The NFC beats are fished on a rotational basis (two rods per beat) including some water downstream of the awesome Gaulfossen rapids. In addition all NFC rods have access at anytime to several “free for all” beats. There is certainly no shortage of fishing. The rotation moves on every six hours round the clock. There is much night fishing (it hardly gets dark in June and July) and one’s sleep pattern is dictated by the

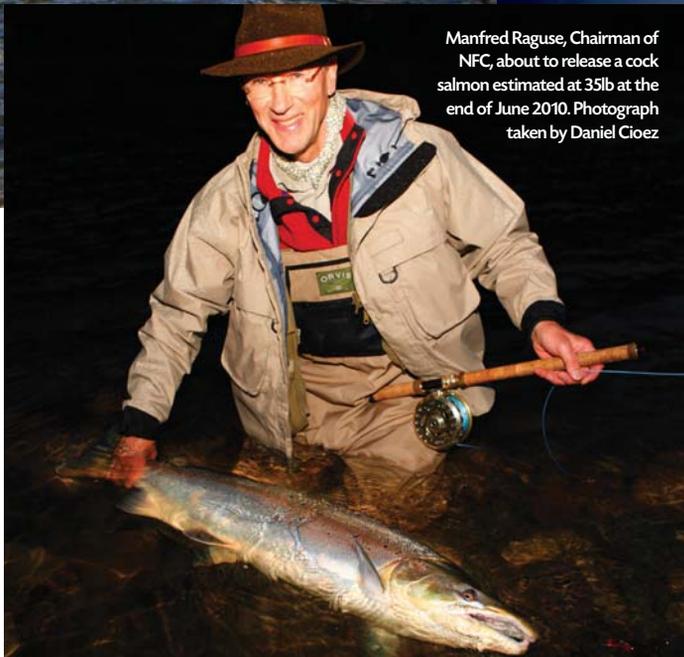
prospects (given the conditions) of the allocated beat rather than the hour.

To get a real flavour of the NFC fishings visit www.nfc-online.com and click on ‘season reports’, which provide vivid testimony to the epic sport the Gaula can offer. Whether one actually hooks the salmon of a lifetime or not, such fish are very much present and it is both awe-inspiring and sobering to be fishing down a pool with a 40lb plus salmon regularly breaking the surface.

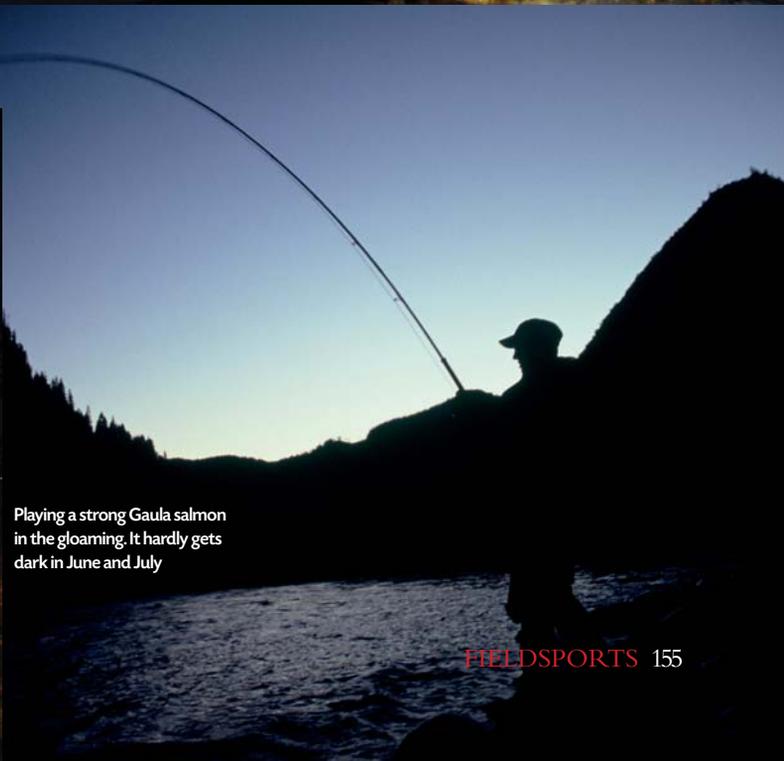
*NB: The Gaula is free of *Gyrodactylus salaris* (Gs). However it is vitally important that anyone fishing in Norway (or indeed elsewhere abroad) ensures that all tackle (including waders) is thoroughly disinfected before it is used in any UK water.*



The author with a late June Gaula salmon.
June fish average over 17lb



Manfred Raguse, Chairman of
NFC, about to release a cock
salmon estimated at 35lb at the
end of June 2010. Photograph
taken by Daniel Cioez



Playing a strong Gaula salmon
in the gloaming. It hardly gets
dark in June and July