

## The Season 2000

Norwegian newspapers reported on June 2nd "The rivers are full of big salmon". After a very hard winter with huge amounts of snow the season had been expected to get under way later than usual. Due to the unexpected warm weather the snow has disappeared completely from the valleys and these conditions have led to the salmon running early from the beginning of may. The conditions on Gaula were just about ideal at the start of the season on June 1st. The water temperature was about 8 degrees Celsius and the river only 60 cm above normal summer level. Everyone was looking forward to the first salmon of the new millennium.

One hour after the midnight start a fisherman had the first take on the water of the Norwegian Flyfishers Club but unfortunately didn't hook the fish properly. Mary Anne Sawada, the wife of the well known Japanese flytier Ken Sawada, lost a very big salmon after a hard and dramatic fight on the Bridge Pool. Ken and Mary Anne saw the fish about ten times and Mary Anne said "It was the biggest fish I ever played on a fishing rod, I nearly had no chance at all".

The first salmon of the millennium was caught on June 2nd. This 18 pounder, as bright as a button, took a Sunray Shadow on a single hook at 10 am. It was caught by Norwegian rod Arnt Henning Brunberg with a single handed rod on the Lower Langøy pool. A complete 15ft Trident Outfit, which has been donated by Orvis, is the prize which the lucky fisherman received for his historic catch. The total value of this Outfit Trident rod, Vortex Reel and Wonderline was about £1.000.

After this the fishing got underway fast. The dream water of the Norwegian Flyfishers Club produced a total of 13 salmon up to 31 pounds up to June 5th. The average weight of the first ten fish was 20.5lb. These fresh run salmon were all real beauties. The fact that only three of them carried sealice proves that most of the fish had been in the river for more than a week. The biggest salmon this week is the 31 pounder caught by Ken Sawada. He said of this catch: "The fish which Mary Anne lost on the first day was much, much bigger". Ken caught both his salmon on a 2 inch Aquamarine tube fly.

English regular rod Grant Foreman used a Green Highlander to catch his three beautiful June fish (22 lb., 21 lb., and 17 lb.). 16 year old Mathias Richter who learned to cast with a double handed rod in August 1999 on the water of the Norwegian Flyfishers Club caught two fish of 22lb and 19 lb. Although the overall conditions were not very favourable with water temperatures of 5-6 degrees Celsius, nevertheless fresh fish with sealice were taken above Gaulfossen. The major changes in the Gaulfossen itself during the spring of 1999 seem to have resulted in an earlier run through the white water and up into the middle reaches of the Gaula where the Norwegian Flyfishers Club has most of its beats.

On June 3rd the water level rose about 15 cm and the Gaulfossen produced in an 8 hour spell, a total of 11 salmon. The guides there reported that during this period at least 150 big salmon passed through. From this moment on it seemed certain that the "big fish" season which had been predicted was becoming a reality. More of these wonderful June salmon were caught during week 23. Predictably, they weighed between 15 and 21 lb. Regular Grant Foreman had another nice fish of 21 pounds and Manfred Raguse released the first Gaula salmon of the new millennium, a nice 20 pounder and lost another good fish shortly thereafter. The water temperature fluctuated between 6° and 10° Celsius and the water level was only 30 to 50



Season starts with a "Bang", a Fjord fresh bar of silver of 18 pounds from the Gaula (NFC water), taken by Arnt Henning Brunberg...



...and the next eight salmon averaging 20 ½ pounds from the Norwegian Flyfishers Clubs Støren beats on the River Gaula.



Regular NFC rod Ken Sawada adds yet another big fish to his tally on NFC waters with a cracking 31 pounder.



cm above normal summer level.

At the end of week 23 the average weight of salmon from the Norwegian Flyfishers Club water had decreased to 19.8 lbs. Heavy rain at the end of week 23 brought the river up and the cold weather lowered the temperature to 8° Celsius again. None of the fish caught in week 23 carried sealice. In week 24 sealiced fresh run fish were caught once again. Two hours after the start of the week British composer Terry Oldfield caught a salmon of 15.4 lb. on a "Red and Silver" in Renna Pool. The following day a total of four salmon were caught between 13.7 and 25.4 lb. Ken Sawada had a great day, catching two beautiful salmon, one of 22.3 and the second of 25.4 lb. These fish from the Bridge pool took an "Orange Flame", his own pattern of Tube fly. His wife Mary Anne caught a fresh run fish of 13.7 lb. on a Gaula Parson. The water temperature was only 9° Celsius and therefore few fish were seen breaking the surface. The average weight on the NFC water was still at 19.0 lb. at the end of week 25. Heavy rain and a rise in temperature turned the salmon into more lively takers. The water level rose to 180 cm at the Frøseth Bridge and hovered at a very high level for some days. Bridge pool, Renna, Langøy and New pool were the most productive on the NFC water at this time and week 25 produced 17 salmon and the first sea trout of 5.5 lb. which was caught by Phillippe Metzger from France.

A professional film crew, accompanied by Bernard Cribbins and Terry Oldfield, had a busy and productive fishing week and collected a lot of very useful material for the new NFC Salmon fishing video. On Midsummer's night (23rd June) Manfred Raguse went out with the team and caught firstly a salmon of 10 1/2 lb. and later on a superb cock fish of 31 lb. Both fish were caught on camera. Three more takes proved that the fishing was still very good. Terry Oldfield caught several good fish and Bernhard Cribbins had a nice 12 pounder from the Bridge pool. Camera man John Waters caught a stunning fish of approx. 20 pounds in the tail of Renna and released him carefully. Other fantastic fish were caught; 25.4 lb. (Michael Werner) and 25.8 lb. (Valentin Maul). The first grilse of the season was also caught during this period. Higher temperatures expected at the end of June will lead to more activity among the fish in the Pools. The remaining traditional fjordnets ("Kilenöter") have reported record catches. More and bigger fish than in normal years have been caught this year. Week 26 has started with four brilliant fish of 21.6 lb. (Dr. Peter Goodwin), 18.7 lb. (Dietrich Renken) and a cock fish of 18.5 lb. (Yoshinobu Toide) and another one to Ingo Berlth 18.3 lb. showing that the trend toward a season of big three sea-winter fish continues.

However a serious cold weather spell, coupled with heavy rainfalls, brought temperatures down from 10°C to 6°C (water) and the river went up to over 2m at the gauge, the highest water level this year. The chaos was complete when suddenly the air temperature increased from 7°C to 27°C! But this welcome change in the weather came too late to improve the fishing in week 26 which ended with only 12 fish averaging 13 1/2 lb. on the NFC water. The fishing on the Gaulfossen was very successful due to the high water situation, the bag limit of 18 fish being reached nearly every day after the high water arrived. These good catches indicate that there are large numbers of fish passing through every day. Huge quantities of fish of all sizes were entering the river and nearly all experienced anglers were of the opinion that they had never seen so many fish running the Gaula. A mixture of different sizes were now being caught. The returns were good for week 27 with 48 fish registered in the NFC records. The largest fish, taken by Hans Fischer from Germany in the House Beat was just under 25 1/2 lb. Ken and Mary Anne Sawada, who had returned for their second stay on the Gaula, had some good fishing. Ken was able to catch 3 salmon of 14, 12 and 12 1/2



pounds on his "Aquamarine" tube fly in only 11 casts. Mary Anne had a 22 and a 12 1/2 pounder on the Sunday.

In week 28 the NFC beats fished brilliantly and the total number of fish caught rose to a sensational 93 salmon up to 39.3 lb. Two magnificent cock fish were the largest during this week. NFC regular Leo Niemantsverdriet from Holland caught the largest of 39.3 lb. in the New Pool on a Garry Dog tube which came out of the fish's mouth as soon it was landed. Leo took a "ride" on the fish's back to secure the fish. Grant Foreman, another NFC regular who returned again after great fishing in June hooked a monster in Renna and lost him after a long fight close to the bank. Scottish angler Robert Smellie reported that Grant was pulled through the entire pool by this huge fish. Terry Oldfield reported another monster lost in the Renna Pool at the end of the week. The second largest this week, a 35 pounder, was taken by Valentin Maul on a "Black Night" tube fly in the Railway Pool, one of the large holding pools on the NFC water. Valentin reports: "... there were a lot of fish jumping in the Railway pool, several were clearly larger than the 35 pounder I caught!". The fight lasted 45 minutes until the fish was landed 500 meters downstream. Ken Sawada caught, mid week in the New Pool, a 24 1/2 pounder and a 12 1/2 pounder. Grant Foreman caught a tagged fish (no. 84558) of 21 1/2 lb at about the same time. Since we only catch a tagged fish about once every two years it is astonishing to consider that it was also Grant who took the last tagged fish two years ago.

In week 29 heavy rainfall caused another rise in water level up to 1,60m at the gauge, but from mid week the weather cleared with the water going down to normal summer levels again. The air temperature became more and more like it should be in a real summer, but fishing continued to be good. The run of grilse had started in good numbers. Anglers were glad to see them not least because they are the foundation for the runs of medium sized salmon for the next season. The next two weeks both resulted in catches of more than 40 fish from the NFC' Gaula water and it was now abundantly clear that this was to be a season better than we had experienced for a number of years. The August weeks all passed with good results, with some fish of up to 30 pounds taken, but with medium sized salmon and grilse in the majority. The pools were well stocked with fish of all sizes and some fish were even caught on dry fly during low water spells. Fishing during season 2000 can only be described as marvellous and was even better than the previous two years which have been very productive on the NFC Gaula water.

Whilst many Norwegian rivers have experienced better fishing than for the last 10-12 years, some rivers have been markedly better. Now the first catch figures are coming in from the fishing consultant Ingvar Korsen. He stated that the Gaula catch in the year 2000 was in excess of 41 metric tons. This is the best catch result on the Gaula since the official statistics began more than a hundred years ago! The previous best was 1985 with 30 1/ metric tons. But then prawn and leaded worm tackle was still allowed and fish caught in season 2000 saw a much higher proportion of fly caught fish. Also since numerous restrictions on river fishing are now in place that were not there before this must be seen as an even more successful season. Looking at some reasons why the Gaula has fished so well, a combination of several factors need to be considered. Key factors were the good temperatures on the feeding grounds at sea and the relatively good river conditions during the summer (too much water!). Poor conditions on the feeding grounds in earlier years seem to be responsible for the poor fishing in the years leading up to 1997. There are now two complete salmon life cycles completed since the introduction of the drift net ban in 1988. It looks like the 12 year absence of the driftnets, which used to take 50-60% of the Norwegian annual catch up

to 1988, is paying off now. As all salmon year classes were well represented in the annual catch of the 2000 season, we can anticipate another good fishing season in the year 2001.

The catch percentage (% of total weight caught) on the Gaula beats of the Norwegian Flyfishers Club consisted of 31,7% grilse (fish up to 6 1/2 pounds), 26,9% medium sized fish (10 to 15 lb.) and 41,4% large salmon (more than 15 lb.). There should be enough medium sized fish (as the grilse were so numerous last season), enough large fish and even very large fish running the Gaula next year, provided weather and river conditions permit. And from the scientist comes the basis for hope that 2001 will be a good grilse year as well. They confirm that sea temperatures have been perfect for the smolt migration in May/June 2000. We are hoping that season 2000 was the beginning of not only a new millenium, but also the beginning of a new period of better salmon fishing and security for the wild salmon stocks in Norway.

Manfred Raguse, November 2000