

# Early Fly Fishing For Atlantic Salmon - Only The Hardest Of Filthy Rich Need Apply

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Only the very rich and very hardy could fly fish for Atlantic salmon before the twentieth century. Early primary sources produce wonderful accounts of inordinately expensive fishing trips which took several months and demanded far more of the participant than is normally imagined.

Pre-twentieth century fly fishing for Atlantic salmon in Europe required expensive gear made up of handmade twenty foot rods which had to be spliced together on the river; cases of expensive flies which were lost far more frequently than in modern times because of comparatively weak spun-silk leader materials and coarse casting lines usually woven from horsehair. The best Atlantic salmon fishing was done in restricted waters for which expensive riparian permits had to be acquired.

Much time was spent in trip preparation - including the packing of fishing gear, special clothing for all weather conditions, special boots for wading, camping gear and barrels in which to carry home the

catch. Most participants devoted a very large portion of their winters tying flies, swapping stories, maintaining their gear and planning the next season.

Those who planned to fish in North America usually had to make extensive travel arrangements and prepare for trips which were unpredictable in duration and frequently resulted in unpredictable hardships. These trips were rarely undertaken without hiring water craft including the schooners to get to the river mouth, small boats to get to shore and then canoes to get up river. All of these came with the professionals - some of whom captained the ships, some rowed the boats - some toled all the gear required to make camp and some paddled canoes and guided.

The hardships of fishing and camplife were multiplied a hundred fold by the horrid aftermath of being eaten alive by the insect attacks. Many a day's fishing was called short when the "sports" could no longer see because of the swelling which usually accompanied the fever and other serious symptoms with which they had to contend.

Each of these "sports" was an amateur chemist who had his own combination of spices to preserve the fish for transport home - and more importantly, his own formula for bug repellent, stuff which inevitable stunk to high heaven and was not effective against the Canadian swarms of black flies and mosquitoes.

In addition to all the expenses, the leisure time required to make a trip to a wilderness river was such that only the landed gentry could afford it. It was not uncommon for a couple of months to pass between the time the nineteenth century sport left home and returned. This paper contends that the combination of all factors makes salmon fly-fishing the most exclusive or popular sports in the period.



**Good Friends**