

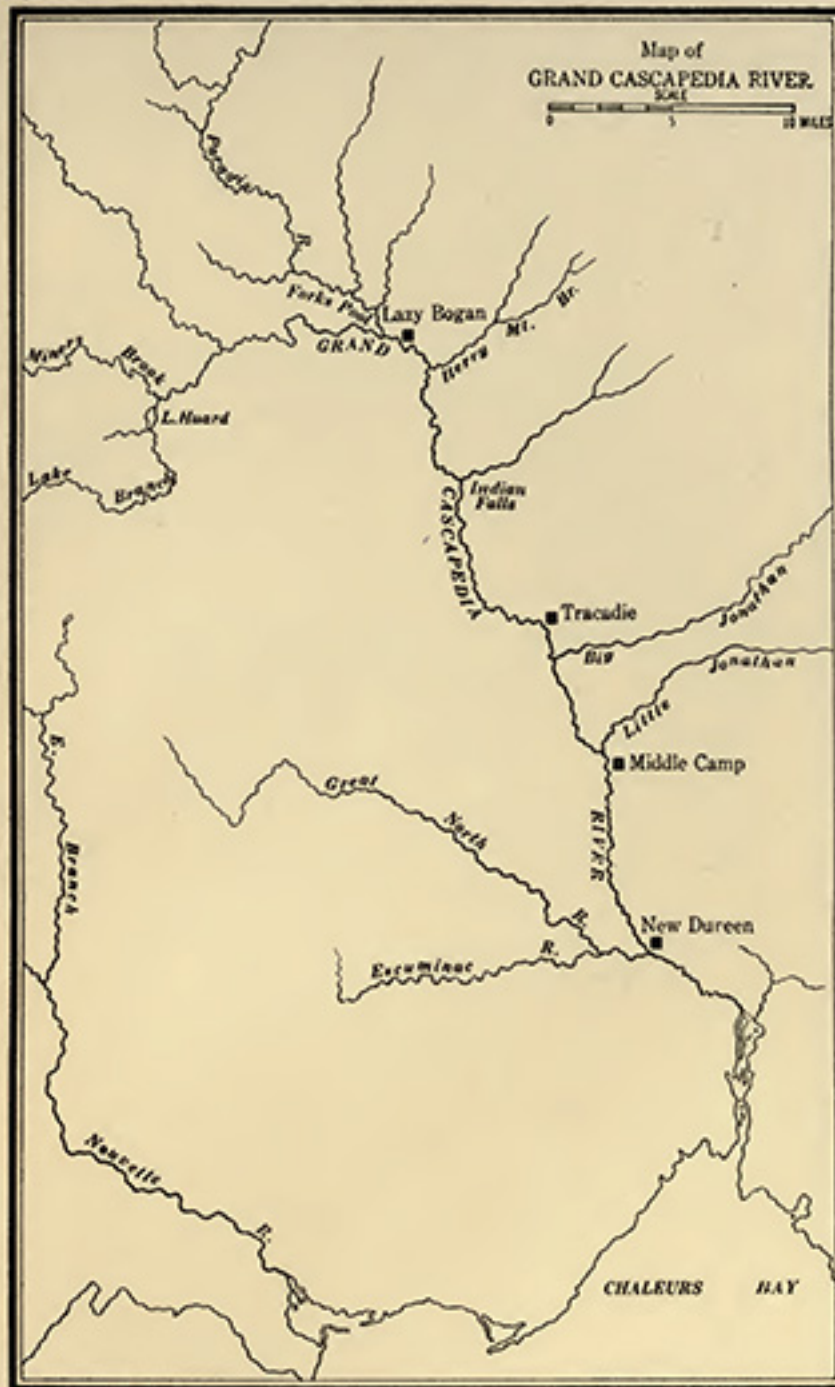
## **Atlantic salmon on an Early (1927) all Deer-hair Dry Fly**

By

Paul Marriner

Although of English, not Irish, extraction, Frank Gray Griswold (1854 - 1937) certainly lived the life of Riley (Reilly). In truth a great deal better. A wealthy icon of New York society, he hunted to hounds on two continents and fished for practically everything interesting to be found in North American waters, fresh or salt. Three of his favourites were striped bass, tarpon and Atlantic salmon although he considered marlin "the greatest of all game fish." Primarily for fishing, he sailed the east coast from Cuba to Newfoundland in his 56-foot yacht, Kona, including several trips to the south shore of Nova Scotia, Cape Breton and Newfoundland for tuna. One of Griswold's most fortunate angling choices was to join the Cascapedia Club.

After 1878 Canadian Governors General had summer homes on, and controlled the salmon fishing of, the Grand Cascapedia. At least until 1893 when Lord Aberdeen, clearly not an angler, showed no interest in taking advantage of the "perk." Most of the river was then leased to a small group of Americans who formed the Cascapedia Club. In 1920 Griswold became a member and at the end of that season penned, *The Cascapedia Club (1920)*, detailing its assets and tabulating catch statistics from 1910 to 1920. The club controlled four camps and 40 miles of river featuring, by their count, more than 50 salmon pools. New Dereen camp, club headquarters, was at the bottom of their water, some 15 miles above the river mouth, then came Middle, Tracadie (now Old Tracadie), and finally Lazy Bogan, just below the juncture of the Lake and Salmon Branches. Members generally fished only the waters around the lower three camps as Lazy Bogan was effectively a two-day run upriver from New Dereen.



Map of Grand Cascapedia as presented in The Cascapedia Club by Frank Gray Griswold

Hoagy B. Carmichael (*The Grand Cascapedia River: A History*, (2015)), quoting a private letter, writes that Griswold resigned in 1930 due to the poor fishing in 1929—none too soon it would appear as two years later the club decided not to renew their lease. Although most of us today would be pleased with Griswold's results—27 in 1928 and 34 in '29—one can sympathize with someone who had taken 75, 72, 94, 81, 74, and 67 salmon during a month's fishing from 1922-27. He detailed these catches in, *Salmon Score of F. Gray Griswold for Ten Seasons, 1920-1929*. It's worth noting that the club had a self-imposed 8-fish daily limit so good-year catches could have been much higher. Nevertheless, upon reflection, as Griswold typically fished for 20 – 22 days from mid-June to mid-July with virtually no competition, averaging little more than one salmon per day would be less than many of us would expect even today.

Quitting after two “bad” seasons might seem somewhat hasty, but he was, after all, in the home stretch. Nonetheless he wrote, “When I approached old age, I took up the more gentle art of fly-fishing for salmon, and fished the beautiful Grand Cascapedia River in Canada for ten seasons. In the ten years I landed 595 fish that weighed 13,693 pounds, an average of 23 pounds; 4 salmon in the 40's, 61 in the 30's, and the heaviest 43 pounds. Salmon fishing is the best sport one can enjoy in fresh water, and the life on a Canadian river is a continual joy.” Sentiments with which most of us would agree.

Intermittently between 1913 and 1936 Griswold had privately printed a number of, typically slim, volumes of his travels and/or activities. Some of these were compilations of earlier publications, with or without additional material. Never self-effacing, fishing accounts were liberally salted with catch statistics. Most of his “journals” were printed by the Plimpton Press. Apropos of nothing, this company was founded by the great uncle of the eclectic sports and literary journalist and author, George Plimpton, whose grandfather founded another publishing giant, the Ginn company.



So why the dive down the Griswold rabbit hole? In January a friend sent me some notes on Canadian fly-fishing history which referenced a comment in Michael Brislain's *Bugging the Atlantic Salmon* (1995). "During the 1920's, F. Gray Griswold fished the Grand Cascapedia, Quebec. It is recorded that using his deer hair bug creations he landed two salmon of 25 and 32 pounds. How the bugs were fished is a matter of conjecture, and it must be remembered that using something as revolutionary as bass bugs on tradition-bound salmon waters was not the norm. With the passage of time Griswold's patterns were forgotten until Father Smith's reintroduction on the Nashwaak." I queried Mike about the source of this material and he responded, "F.G. Griswold - *Memoirs of A Salmon - Grand Cascapedia*. Private publication 1931 Plimpton Press. The reference to Griswold was some obscure comment that caught my attention many years ago. I wish I could nail it down further."

Unfortunately the reference was incorrect but it got the scent up my nose. *Atlantic Salmon & The Fly Fisherman* (1985) by Gary Anderson proved to be Mike's source. Anderson wrote, "The early attempts at dry fly fishing often horrified the guides who had never seen salmon caught other than with wet flies. F. Gray Griswold was one such angler who dared experiment in the 1920's with large, clipped, deer-hair bass bugs on the most tradition-bound of salmon rivers, the Grand Cascapedia." "Using one of his deer-hair creations Griswold took a salmon of 11.4 kilograms (25 pounds) and later another of 14.5 kilograms

(32 pounds). That particular fly pattern became forgotten until the late 1960's when Father Elmer Smith created a similar sort of pattern...." Gary was essentially, but not entirely, accurate.

Time to delve into Griswold's recollections. As he occasionally repeated reminiscences in several volumes with different titles, two titles which are occasionally confused are *Observations on a Salmon River* (four known printings during 1921 and 1922) and *A Salmon River* (1928). As the former was written after his first or second year of Cascapedia Club membership and the latter near the end, some of the content is different. The chapter, *Fishing for Salmon with A Dry-Fly*, began on page 73 of *Observations*. Herein Griswold quotes Hewitt (*Secrets of the Salmon*, (1922)) concerning the types of flies, tackle and methods. However, he makes no mention of dry-fly fishing himself. Interestingly, since his quotes appear in a volume published in 1921, he must have had a pre-publication copy of Hewitt's book or the material preexisted in a magazine article. *Fish Facts and Fancies* (1925), has much to say regarding the fabulous 1924 season including a list of successful flies with catches. Included at the bottom of the list is, "Assorted and Dry Flies ... 69." Once again, however, no mention of Griswold fishing dry. No surprise here though, salmon were so plentiful that of the 94 he landed, fully 81 took his own wet-fly pattern, the Griswold Gray. Although unable to find a recipe I include, courtesy of Margaret Dakin of the Amherst College library, a reasonably clear illustration from an original printing of *A Salmon River*.



“GRISWOLD GRAY”

All past is prologue and here the story warms up. Unfortunately, I've been unable to see a copy of *Big and Little Fishes* (1927). Nevertheless, an on-line snippet search revealed a chapter titled, *Bucktail Flies*. Fortunately, with the help of Normand Trudel of the Universite de Montreal library, I confirmed that the



identical material appears in *A Salmon River* (1928), to which I have low-resolution digital access. *A Salmon River* is, according to a Griswold note, a consolidation of two earlier books, clearly, based on contents, *Observations on a Salmon River* and *Big and Little Fishes*. In what follows it's important to remember that Griswold fished from mid-June until mid-July. Thus he rarely, if ever, encountered warm water, but both high and low water periods were frequent.

First comes a tease in a chapter on flies. "I took two salmon last season on "June Bugs," bright yellow bucktail flies as large as a half dollar and containing no feathers. These flies were cast down-stream and did not sink, but floated on the surface. One fish weighed 25 pounds and was taken in rapid water, but the other, a 32 pounder, was taken out of a glassy pool. These two fishes had scorned several regulation flies of different sizes, but took the "June Bugs" with gusto. This shows we know but little concerning flies, or was it luck? One fish might have been, but certainly not two." While this description lacks clarity, a later chapter, *Bucktail*, offers further details.

"It has been fully proved that late in the season, when the water is low and clear and its temperature above 60°, the fish are listless and disinclined to move, and that by casting a dry-fly upstream directly above them they may sometimes be persuaded to take. It occurred to me that if a salmon would rise and take a hackle dry-fly in low and warm water there could be no reason why it should not do likewise in high and cold water. The colorless hackle flies used in dry-fly fishing I knew would not answer, for in high water conditions they would hardly prove attractive even if a fish could see them, also in heavy water it would be impossible to mark your fish and cast directly to it. What I looked for was a large, brilliant, bucktail fly that would not sink and that could be fished in the usual manner down stream."

"I found the South Bend Bait Company of Indiana made large and small bucktail flies that were formed and dyed in most grotesque ways. These flies are intended to be attached to spinners for trolling purposes. I ordered a selection of these fuzzy-wuzzies and put them in my tackle box. I was fishing a pool of rapid running water one day last season and rose a fine fish on a 5/0 fly. This salmon was evidently lying just above a rock where the flowing stream divided. I rested the fish and changed the fly to another and smaller pattern, and the salmon rose again leisurely. This happened several times until I was disheartened by the fish's casual indifference. Looking through my tackle box to see what fly I should try as a last resort, I saw the bucktails. I selected and tied a large sized fly of this description to my cast. The second time this fly, floating on the surface of the rough and rapid water, danced over the spot where the fish was lying, the salmon rose and took it with such keenness that the large hook was driven completely through its lower jaw. My canoe men laughed with delight and I was greatly pleased when a 25 pound salmon was gaffed, yet believed that it was perhaps an accident and not likely to happen again."

"One day a week later, when the river had fallen, I was fishing the upper waters in a pool with a glassy surface where the bottom could easily be seen. After dropping down and fishing without rising a fish we finally arrived at the last drop. Standing in the canoe I could clearly see three large salmon in the tail of the pool some distance apart. I noticed well where the largest of the three fish was quietly lying on a smooth rock and proceeded to fish for it. The salmon paid no attention to the different flies I tried to tempt it with and seemed quite contented to remain where it was, gently fanning the water with its fins.

It is always most discouraging not to be able to move a fish that you can plainly see and I was about to give it up and leave the pool, when my gaffer said: "How about one of them funny flies?" This time I selected a red and yellow striped ball-like bunch of bucktail that hid a large sized hook. The first time this queer looking object floated over the salmon the fish rose with a strong flirt of its tail and seized the lure to our great satisfaction. This salmon weighed fully 32 pounds. As these flies are not intended to be used for casting it is probable no salmon ever saw one before. The fish were probably attracted by the air bubbles contained in the large floating bunch of bucktail as it skipped about on the surface. It was perhaps its strange appearance that appealed to them, yet I feel certain we do not begin to know all there is to learn about fly fishing and the lures that might attract fish. Here were two big salmon that spurned the renowned Jock Scots and Dusty Millers, yet took with glee the absurd, round bunches of brightly colored bucktail cast downstream and floating on the surface. By the time they arrive upstream, although perhaps maiden fish, they no doubt have all had some experience with salmon flies, and a fly made to look quite different from those they have toyed with probably causes surprise and interest."

Dating the events proved a bit of a challenge. "One day last season..." is pretty vague unless one knows when this was penned. A bit of luck unearthed a copy of "The Salmon Score..." at the Acadia University library, within easy range. A review of the '26 and '27 seasons established with 99.9% certainty that the 25 pound fish was caught on July 1 and the 32 pounder on July 8 of 1927. Here, sadly, my luck ran out. I'd hoped there might be camp logs listing the pools where these salmon were caught but the New Dereen logs only go back as far as 1933. The fate of earlier volumes appears unknown. Cascapedia River Museum Director, Julie Schlie, did find a few Griswold entries in a Tracadie log and another from the Lazy Bogan camp but the 1927 season remains opaque. Nevertheless a few clues exist. Griswold writes, "...the upper waters in a pool with a glassy surface..." referring to the 32 pounder. If fishing from New Dereen, there are only 5 pools in the "upper waters," of which Limestone is the closest to the description.

One might still dismiss all this as not germane to the subject were it not for the photo of the fly included in the text as well as one with his "gaffer" holding the 32-pounder. At first glance the body could be clipped bucktail or deer body hair although the wing and tail are certainly bucktail. The image quality to which I had access was too poor for reproduction and besides I wanted to know more about the pattern; so I entered another branch of the rabbit hole.

Fortunately, although now part of a conglomerate, the South Bend company still exists. Anglers of my generation will remember the Bass Oreno as a popular lure. Seems the original company name was Worden Bucktails, which might have been the source of Griswold's chapter title. Old tackle catalogs are collectibles and I tracked down an enterprising Utah collector offering some digital copies. He had a 1926 South Bend catalog which I bought. And there they were, South Bend Fuzz-Oreno Flies. So now we know where the Griswold appellation "fuzzy-wuzzies" came from. Color 7: Yellow wing, yellow body, red stripes, red tag (a tail), seduced the 32-pounder. Contrary to Griswold's assertion these patterns were not intended to be trolled, rather cast for bass and trout with or without the addition of a small spinner.



The images were still too small to pin down the body material but the catalog continuously refers to the material as bucktail: "More lifelike lures than those made of buck-tail hair cannot be designed." Another contact put me in touch with George Chrisman, a Texas lure collector. Not only did he have the pattern pictured by Griswold (at 3/0 perhaps a size or two smaller), but he offered to send me a high-res image. This, and an example I tied myself, puts me in the all-bucktail camp. While no evidence exists of any connection between this fly and the now-ubiquitous and rightly celebrated Bomber and variants, I thought the story interesting enough to tell.

It is frequently impossible to say with certainty who was the first to do anything, particularly when the field is as individualistic as fly fishing. Nevertheless, one's confidence increases when tracing who first recorded the event. What Frank Gray Griswold did commit to paper quite possibly establishes him as the first to catch an Atlantic salmon on a floating all-deer-hair fly.