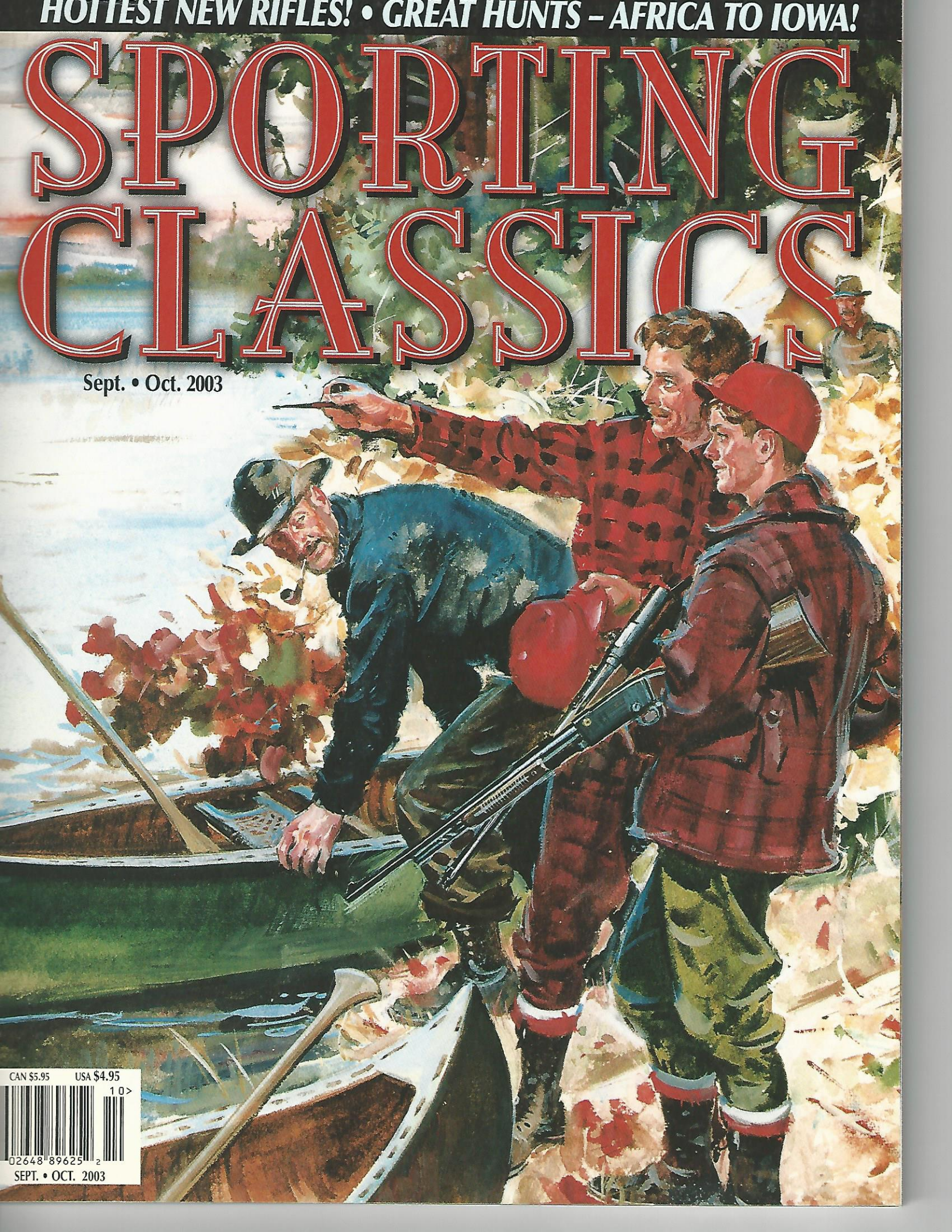


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The author enjoys his own version of the 'Tour de France' – fly fishing for trout and salmon on some of Brittany's most storied streams.

Brittany thrusts into the Atlantic like the nose of Charles de Gaulle. Settled by the Celts, this land with its core of granites holds more in common with Wales and Ireland than it does with the France of the Franks

and Gauls. The land rises and falls in steep swells, the way the ocean does after the passing of a heavy storm.

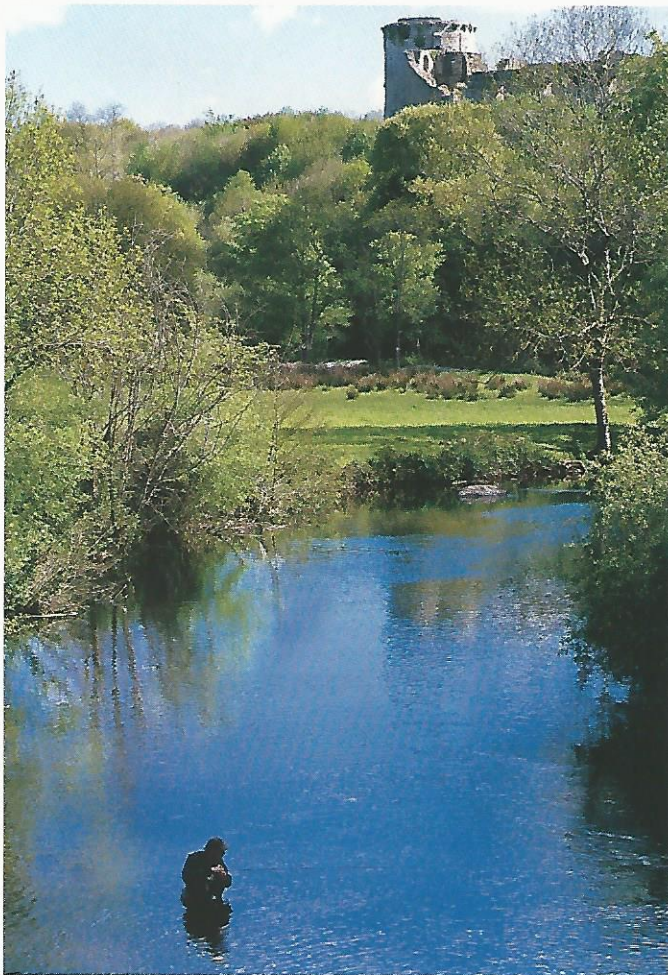
Among the better known of its shallow rivers is the Léguer, which enters salt at Lannion, a port city of 30,000 directly across the Channel from Plymouth, England. Salmon and sea trout run from April through June and later in September and October if ample rain has fallen. When there is no rain, one must make do with native browns.

Just before ducking under Route Nationale 12, the main highway from Paris to Brest, the Léguer skirts the eastern fringe of the village of Belle-Isle-en-Terre and captures the waters of the Guic. The Guic is impounded well upstream and thus flows steadily to the Léguer even in times of drought. As it is in many unions, the greater contribution may come from the member whose name is not taken

by the couple. Though the Léguer is the river of reputation, it is the Guic that fills its bed.

I had met the Léguer in May with Philippe Dolivet, editor of *Plaisir de LaPêche*, France's excellent flyfishing magazine, and watched him catch native browns by short-casting tiny nymphs beside a stone house heavily draped with lush wisteria. He had advised me to return in September, when the spates of fall would usher in two months of superb trout and salmon. How could I refuse?

Our plan was to meet at the *Le Relais de L'Argoat*, a small



Left: Norman castles tower above the fly fishing only run on the Léguer, Brittany's finest trout and salmon river. Above: The anglers cast to native browns feeding on cress bugs beneath a mill dam built in the 1500s.

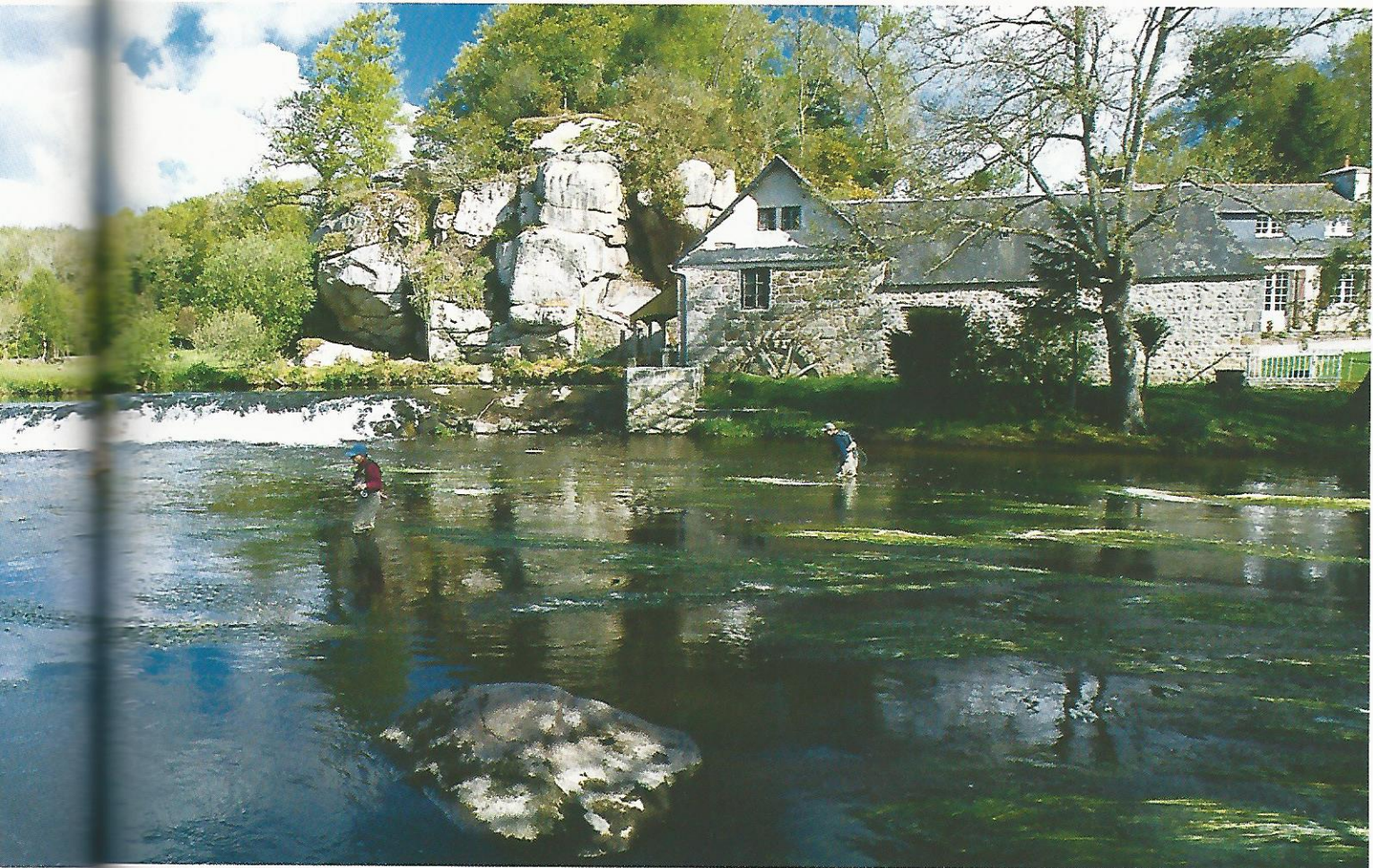
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hotel in Belle-Isle en Terre that caters to anglers. My wife, Katie, and I parked beneath the hotel's fresco of the region's namesake spaniel flushing a woodcock. Having seen a bridge spanning the Guic, I strode down the

kilometers of the Léguer had been designated for fishing only with the fly. The stretch runs from the bridge beneath the castle at Tonquédec to the bridge at Lossa. That is where we would fish. After parking, we set off on a path

nymphs of sizes 18 and smaller. He uses tippets of 7X and 8X, often dropping the nymph a foot but no more beneath a dry fly of some light and visible color. He does not expect the fish to take the dry. His casts – seldom more than 20 feet –



BOTH JOHN ROSS

street, turned the corner and crossed to the middle of the short span.

Stone walls lined the water, draped here and there by vines trailing in the flow. As I watched, a dimple formed on the surface in the corner formed by a low dam and the mouth of the race to a mill long gone. Two minutes later, another rise broke the surface, this one closer to the end of the dam under a tree. Another came right away in the same spot, and then another boiled hard along the wall halfway between me and the bridge. Philippe found me mesmerized.

We loaded my gear into Philippe's battered Peugeot wagon and took the road that climbed out of the village. Half a dozen years ago, he told me, four

marked by a deeply weathered stone cross ringed with fresh flowers. In olden times, devout travelers stopped and prayed. I would come to learn that anglers should too. The trail sunk into dark woods, wound along a wall of boulders, cut through a glade, and dropped down a sharp slope to the stream.

The water had shrunk away from each brushy bank by a meter. Though obviously low, topaz riffles still filled pools as heavily brown and inviting as good French coffee. Undercut banks provided lies that were deep and shaded enough to hide what would be considered great browns in any place in the world except, maybe, Patagonia.

It is Philippe's wont to sight-fish with

were fast and sharp as if fired by a semi-automatic pistol. One step, three casts; another step, three more, each placing the nymph just above a pocket where a trout might hold.

Up the stream he worked, stooping to cast under this branch, kneeling to fire his flies archer-like into the mouth of each run undercutting the bank. He drifted each pool with a mother's care, but to absolutely no avail. When we reached a dam and an open field, his face was as cloudy as the late afternoon sky was utterly fair.

"It is September," he told me. "We should have had rain – two, three days of storms – there is no water in the river."

The stream above the dam was as



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glassy as melted chocolate. Beneath a bank-side maple rose a fish. A grilse broke water across the way. I longed to tie on an Undertaker of size six or so and have a go at the salmon. Or I'd have picked a muskrat or other nymphish streamer and worked upstream for the browns. That was, however, not the way Philippe preferred to fish.

My agony was not sweet. "These fish are very spooky by the low water. Casting a fly of such size will startle them. It is better if I fish with my small nymphs." Thus admonished, I withdrew my counsel. Yet, not long following, a brown of dark back and golden flank inhaled Philippe's nymph, which had been cast to the base of an oak. We saw the fish and groaned as it dived beneath the root. It broke us off.

For two days, under a scowling sun, we fished the gorgeous streams of Brittany, but always in Philippe's manner. Finally, duties at the magazine called him away late one afternoon, and I made haste to the mill dam in Belle-Isle-en-Terre. I had no more than an hour. My black ants failed to attract trout rising steadily in the shade of the tree by the dam. Three trout rose repeatedly in the sunny mid-stream. What the hell, I thought, bending on an ugly American woolly bugger. Two trout came to net.

That night Katie and I put up at Café L'Air du Temps, a short ways up the Guic in Loc Envel. The inn of tan stone sits across from a church built by friars in the seventh century. Below runs the river looking much like the Letort.

As we entered the inn, proprietress Eve Herman was hanging the last of the oils of Fanch Vidament, a painter whose bold and faceless couples conveyed the sense of tender anomie so ingrained in the warm, self-effacing people of Bretagne.

"Here are the real things in life," she said. "Everything is true."

Duke Ellington and Dave Brubeck accompanied the dinner of duck, salad and good Côte du Rhône. One does not come to Brittany just for the fishing. 🦋

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