

Travel

By John Ross

Over the years St. John's in Newfoundland and Labrador has become a favorite way station of mine. It was the jumping off point for a weeklong foray in pursuit of woodland caribou. Hunting from Barb Genge's Tuckamore Lodge near St. Anthony, we hiked the lovely 30-mile long valley of meadows and lakes where streams gush down into limestone sinks.

On the fourth day, after taking a good bull caribou, I drove a bit north to L'Anse aux Meadows and prowled the cold and lonely stone and sod long-houses where Leif Ericson

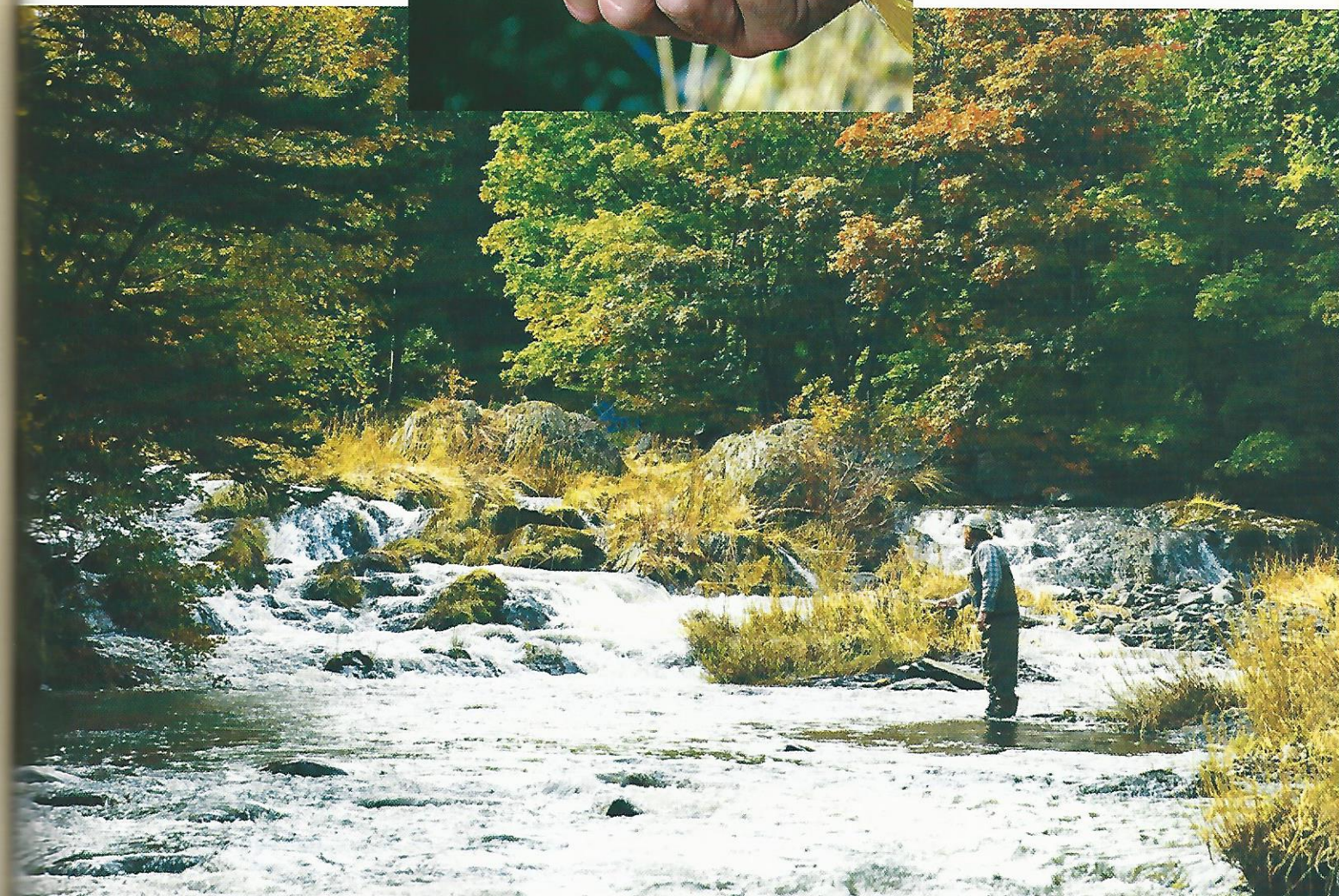
St. John's is a great jumping off point for fishing some of the best trout and salmon streams in Newfoundland and Labrador.



founded the first European outpost in North America in 1003 A.D.

When headed to Labrador to fish for salmon, I'll book an afternoon flight into St. John's, overnight in Sheraton's Hotel Newfoundland where my room overlooks the harbor. The left channel is anchored by Signal Hill where Marconi received the first trans-Atlantic wireless transmission in 1901. (For a gripping description of the station and its role in nailing a felon fleeing England, read *Thunderstruck* by Erik Larson.)

Emptying into the head of the harbor is a marvelous trout river called the Waterford. Flowing



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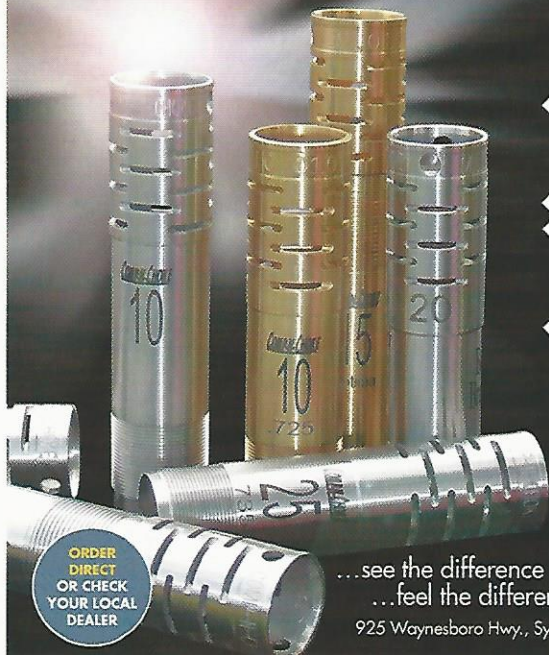
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almost due north for about eight miles, the Waterford is never much wider than 50 feet as it cascades down rocky chutes, swirls through deep pools and bounces over riffles tailing out in smooth slicks.

Flanked by city streets that wind through well-tended Victorian neighborhoods – and some not so charming as well – the river is very accessible. Throughout the year, brown trout teem in its waters, and they're easy to catch on small nymphs beneath strike indicators. The size of the river suggests light tackle, a 7-foot 3-weight being my preference.

But don't be deceived. Paul Smith, a friend from nearby Spaniards Bay, won't approach the Waterford with anything less than a 6-weight with a stout butt. Why not? Spring and fall spates trigger runs of silvery sea trout, some in excess of five pounds. They've come into the river to spawn, and high waters make it challenging for anglers to present weighted nymphs and streamers that will sink deep enough to catch the eye of these non-too-aggressive browns.

When the river is not brawling its way toward the harbor and minding its manners within its channel, you'll notice yard after yard of grassy undercut banks. Two ways to fish this best, I think: wade upstream throwing small Adams or ants against the shore or skate heavily greased elk hair caddis trailing a weighted #12 to #16 dropper down and across. In summer and early fall, these stretches of the Waterford fish like spring creeks.

Rennies River, with its fascinating Fluvarium, an interpretive center boasting a submerged glass wall giving visitors an eye-ball-to-eye-ball view of fish, is equally as accessible as the Waterford, thanks to a streamside biking and walking trail. A much smaller stream than the Waterford, the Rennies carries a good load of rainbows with sea-run browns in spring. Dead-drifting weighted nymphs and streamers like bead-headed woolly buggers and Harry Murray's strymphs will produce results when the browns have come up. Again, leave your 3-weight at home.

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or the Waterford, you'll want a rental car to cover the 20 miles from downtown west to Manuels River and its linear park. Rising on the same glaciated highland ridge as the Waterford but flowing in the opposite direction toward Concepcion Bay and interdicted in spots by hydroelectric diversions, the Manuels has to be one of the most convenient wild trout rivers in North America. It's paralleled for almost its full length by a graded and crushed gravel trail.

The river is fraught with low flows in summer, but spring and fall present a vibrant fishery. Below the falls at its head, schooling browns are ready takers for almost any dark dropper nymph fished below a high-floating attractor dry, such as a stimulator or parachute Adams. When spring or fall rains swell the flow, the Manuels draws its share of sea-run browns as well.

Should you opt to fish these three streams or others within striking distance of St. John's, remember that brown trout season typically closes on October 7 – earlier for waters further inland. Check the Newfoundland and Labrador Angler's Guide, available online for opening and closing dates.

While guides are generally not required unless you're pursuing salmon, local knowledge can steer you to fish you might not otherwise find. The Blue Charm fly shop (bluecharm.ca) and Specialty Flies (newfoundlandwaterfowlers.ning.com/group/specialtyflies) in St. John's can provide guides, flies and tackle.

Whether hunting or fishing, when I head for Newfoundland or Labrador, I plan my route through St. John's and set aside two or three days to fish. A traveling 6-weight with matching reel, waders and boots, and a box or two of flies adds little to my baggage. And the bevy of excellent restaurants overlooking St. John's harbor provides just the right transition from the rugged wilds of the provinces to civilization.

For more information about fishing and accommodations in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador go to the province's official tourism website: www.newfoundlandlabrador.com.