

# Fly-fishing on New Brunswick's legendary Miramichi

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PHOTOS BY STEPHEN JERMANOK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## The author's catch on his outing on the Miramichi

PORTER COVE — Mention the Miramichi to avid anglers and they are bound to get misty-eyed thinking about the 155-mile river that cuts a diagonal through New Brunswick. Maybe it's the fact that the Miramichi has more Atlantic salmon than any river in North America. According to Mark Hambrook, president of the Miramichi Salmon Association, the number of salmon on both branches of the river doubled from 2010 to 2011, so the chance of hooking one of these toothy, black-spotted specimens is only on the increase.

For the Fenway Faithful, there's the added excitement of following in the waders of Ted Williams to the place where the late Red Sox legend spent a good portion of his retirement. Before he built his own lodge on the Miramichi, Williams would fish out of the legendary fishing lodge, Pond's, which has been guiding sports on the river since 1925. A great admirer of No. 9, I had to make it my choice as well.

Within moments of being picked up at the Fredericton airport, I realized I had made a wise decision. My driver was a man named Floyd Amos, whose great-grandfather came to the shores of this southwesterly flowing river and settled in Doaktown, now the home of the Atlantic Salmon Museum. On the drive over to Pond's, Amos noted that the best time to fish the river is in July. "It didn't matter what type of fly you used, people were hauling in 85 salmon from one pool in a day. You could have used the spoon from your lunch box at the end of the line and it would have worked," he said.

I was here in mid-September, which I learned is when salmon are far more interested in spawning than eating. Amos dodged two moose standing tall in the middle of Route 10, a large fox, and a raccoon before dropping me off at my lodging for the night, a 1920s post-and-beam log cabin.

The next morning I was eager to get out on the river. Waiting to meet my guides for the day, owner Keith Pond and his wife, Marsha, I took a seat in one of the Adirondack chairs outside my cabin and peered at the flowing waters a stone's throw away. It was a crisp morning, with the first hints of fall color on the trees. I spotted a blue heron on the shoreline and a large fish gliding over the water like a porpoise.

“The fish are a-jumping,” said Keith Pond as he arrived with fly rod and waders. Pond is a burly man with a gregarious personality, especially when telling stories about his life on the river. Yet, as I would soon learn, he is serious about his fishing. Pond met Williams numerous times as a boy and he said the player was always accessible to sign a ball or a bat. “He was just happy to be on the river,” said Pond.



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#### **Marsha Pond fly-fishing on the Miramichi.**

We threw our gear into an exquisite cedar-ribbed canoe and motored downstream to our first pool of the day. I was surprised to find no other anglers working the water. Only his guests are allowed on that portion of the river. This stems from an 1894 law in New Brunswick that states that a person who owns the land bordering a river has what are called riparian rights, the exclusive right to own the riverbed up to the midway point and thus the exclusive right to fish on that particular section of river. The result is that there are more privately owned miles of river in New Brunswick than anywhere else in North America.



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#### **One of the 1920s log cabins on the river.**

We motored to the opposite shore to pick up Marsha Pond and then began to fish in earnest. Keith threw out his line with a flip of the wrist and the yellow arc unfurled to form a straight line. Marsha's cast looked even more effortless.

"The river's so clean, you can drink it. There's very little industry," she said.

All around us, salmon were popping out of the water, making a big splash, but few were biting. Marsha switched ties and threw out her line with a "whoosh." Moments later, she said. "I just got a strike, my friends" but came up empty-handed. "That's the reason, they call it fishing, not catching," she added with a chuckle.

We headed upstream past the remnants of a beaver dam and curved around a bend where the river narrows. Stepping out of the canoe onto the rocky shore, Marsha told me to "put something flashy on your line, like the brown bug with the green tail."

I threw on my waders and stood thigh-deep in the swift current. The rhythm of throwing out my fly, retrieving the line, throwing out the fly, listening to the ripples of the water, had a calming effect. I quickly understood why some of Pond's clients have returned year after year for four decades — though he noted that the clientele is changing. Sure, he still books many men's trips, where they simply want to spend the bulk of their time on the river. But he's also getting a surge in families who want to fish, search for moose, and go mountain biking on the many logging roads.



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### **A View of the Miramichi River.**

We jumped in the boat one last time and I switched my fly to an Ally's Shrimp. A flick of the wrist and I felt a bite. I arced the pole high and then gave him some slack, tilted the pole high again and then let the line go, playing this exhilarating back and forth for several minutes. When the dark-colored salmon reached the side of the boat, Marsha scooped him up with a net. We snapped a couple of photos and let the fish loose to continue his journey upstream.

My memorable day was over, having gone through at least a dozen flies before finding the one that worked. As any angler will tell you, that's the only one that matters. Next time I will take Amos's advice and return to the Miramichi in summer . . . with the spoon from my lunch box.