

# Winning the lottery - Restigouche style



Where Matapedia (bottom right) and Restigouche meet

*Roy Arris is told what it's like to own a stretch of  
one of the world's most famous salmon rivers*

WE ARE OFTEN told about the staggering odds against winning the Lottery, I think it was 76 million-to-one when the EuroMillions pot was at £113 (\$180 million approx.) in October 2010. The odds are rather steep, but if you buy a ticket you're always in with a chance. You would probably be given similar odds on becoming the owner of a stretch of fishing on one of the most exclusive salmon rivers in the world, for instance the Restigouche in Canada. Miracles do happen though: the £113 million went to one ticket holder in England, and some three years a group of six fishing friends from New England hit the jackpot on said river.

It all began when they took a gamble by buying a cottage on the banks of the Restigouche. This in itself is a story for the way in which it was done. The group of four friends fished the Restigouche at Red Pine

Lodge for several years and on the way home from one such trip they noticed a for sale sign on a cottage as they drove past. It took but seconds for one of these fly-fishing fanatics to pick up his mobile phone and call the number displayed on the sign and the deal was done while on the move. Although it happened almost three years ago the shock seemed still to be with Keith Vanacore as he recounted the tale. Keith is the fourth member of the original group fishing at Red Pine but had to leave two days earlier than the others due to a prior commitment. The first he heard of the purchase was when he received a phone call in the middle of a family picnic on Father's Day. The interruption didn't go down well but he took the call under the pretence it was a possible work call (insurance claims), only to be told that he'd just bought a quarter share in a property in New Brunswick and that he was



Keith Vanacore with an 18 lb "chromer" taken on the fourth cast on his first visit to the water!

to deal with the paperwork! *(If you don't buy a ticket, you'll never win.)*

An attorney in Campbellton was contacted to take care of all the legal work to do with the purchase. He was intrigued why the four New Englanders wanted to buy a property way up north. Keith explained that they'd been visiting Red Pine and loved the area and by having a permanent base on the river they hoped to make themselves known to camp owners for being conservation-minded, responsible anglers and therefore might find openings to fish various parts of the river. There was also the Matapedia to fish on the public water and the Cascapedia (another river they were familiar with) was only a couple of hours' drive along the coast. The attorney was obviously impressed by their enthusiasm, for not long after that he put the wheels in motion that would change their lives forever. *(Unbeknown to them they'd just bought their ticket, were now in the game, and the odds*

*were about to shorten considerably.)*

It was suggested that they might like to consider buying their own fishing camp on the Restigouche. The owner of the Pointe du Jour camp felt that, now in his 80s, the time had come for him to let go of the camp but wasn't keen to put the fishing on the open market. The gentleman in question was Mr Thomas Head III.

The camp's water begins at the confluence of the Matapedia and Restigouche rivers, and stretches three miles upstream to Grog Island, where the camp established by Joseph Pulitzer is situated. Mr Head is very much of the old school and was concerned that the camp should go to someone who held to the same principles as he concerning the salmon, the river, and the community. On hearing about the newcomers, now neighbours, initial contact was made, discussions over the telephone were held and a verbal deal was



struck. The group were given four months to find additional investors and come up with the money.

During that time Mr Head was hounded by various concerns with more lucrative offers, but he kept his word, went with his heart, and chose to hand over the stewardship of his section of river to the New Englanders. Of greatest concern to the previous owner was the future of the seven members of staff employed at the camp, he wanted any new owner to keep them on. This notion was heartily endorsed by Keith and his friends, unlike some of the more wealthy suitors. They even went a step further, their conservation credentials coming to the fore, and promised that the killing of all grilse would be stopped should the fishing come into their hands. This was obviously music to Mr Head's ears and possibly what clinched the deal. (*Somebody has to win, even at such high odds.*)

The following spring Keith, with some of the other partners, made a trip to the Restigouche, staying at their cottage, to make an inspection of the camp and to meet the staff . . . or so they thought. After the day spent at the camp Keith remarked to the others afterwards that he thought it was they who were being assessed by the staff that day and not the other way round! When he mentioned this to Mr Head after the sale had gone through, the suggestion was met by knowing laughter!



A fresh-run May fish estimated at 30 lb

So, how does it feel to own three miles of one of the most famous salmon rivers in the world? "It's like being in a fairytale" was Keith's response. "It's absolutely fantastic, because most of us are of very modest means and to find ourselves the owners of the only water on the river that's available to the public is just wonderful. I get goose bumps whenever I think about it". After talking to him for a while I got the feeling that this couldn't have happened to a nicer bunch of guys. They really do appreciate what they have. Their new status must be taking some getting used to, and this was confirmed by Keith when he mentioned that it took them a year or so to realize that they were the owners and not just guests anymore when visiting the camp.

And just exactly what have they bought? The camp and fishing is situated on the lower part



Carol-Ann Ward landing a fish in grand style in England

of the Restigouche, on the New Brunswick bank some five miles upstream of Tidehead. The fishing covers both banks and the river in this section is big, often 80 to 100 yards wide and the pools are long, up to 400 yards. There are more intimate stretches found amongst the runs between the islands in the lower part of their water. In all there are seven named pools, with other pots and runs, that provide fishing in all heights of water. Two of the largest pools are big enough to be divided into upper and lower sections. They always hold a good head of fish because they are some of the most important spawning areas on the lower river. The river bed in this stretch of the Restigouche has a number of rock ledges which have helped to stop the siltation problems found in pools on other sections of the river. No matter what the conditions, there is always fishing on this water. Even in 2010, which was a drought year in New Brunswick, the fishing held up

very well thanks to the cold spring influence on some of the major pools.

At the top of their water is England, which is divided into Upper England and Lower England. This pool holds fish throughout the season and will fish in most heights of water. Then comes Scowshed, a pool suited to high to medium water heights and fishes best in May and June. Home Pool sits in front of the camp is about 400 yards

long by 100 yards wide. It is divided into two sections and each section takes a whole session to fish. Fishing is from canoe, the bank or by wading the gravel bars mid-river in lower water.

Ledges pool lies on the Quebec bank, and approaching the confluence with the Matapedia River are the more intimate streams around Mann's Island; the famous Adam's Run; Mann's Pool which fishes best in high water, and Poker Pool. Poker holds three main lies which produce spectacular fishing. Keith maintains that the fish lying here, as well as Ledges Pool, are on a trigger mechanism and always ready to take. All of the pools can be fished from canoe or by wading, it's up to individual preference. Whatever the conditions the fishing rotation is always adjusted to prevailing conditions.



The fishing is consistent throughout the season, which begins on 1 May and runs through to 30 September. There has been a "spring" fishery on the Restigouche and Matapedia for some years which makes use of the fish going back to sea. It's an excuse for people to get out onto the river and get their rod bent, after being cooped up all winter. More importantly it's a valuable extra four weeks' work for the guides. However, an early run of fresh salmon usually enter the river around 10 May and is at its height around 20 May. These very early fish have an average weight of 25 lb and are rarely below 25 to 30 lb, so are a very worthy prize for anglers who are prepared to put in a bit of time to catch them. One of the new owners landed a 37 lb fish from Ledges in May 2009, and at the time there were several other fish in the pool, including a couple of bigger ones - and a grilse, which shocked the angler and his guide! May fishing is definitely an option worth looking into, and the price is right.

The regular salmon season opens on 1 June and it is about three weeks into the season when the next big run occurs and goes through to late July. It begins with big MSW salmon and as it progresses the percentage of grilse increases. At this time of year you can be casting a size 10 fly to a 25-pounder spotted by your guide, only for a lively 6 lb grilse to get to it first! Come August there is a run of smaller summer salmon (15 to 22 lb) and the season winds down with a run of blue backs in early September. By the end of the season most pools are well populated with a mixture of



fresh and older fish.

A note should be made about the dry-fly fishing that can be experienced in the later half of the season. Given clear water conditions, from mid-July right through to the end of September sight fishing with dry-fly produces absolutely magnificent sport. At this time Keith says they are consistently seeing fish of 25 lb and more patrolling the pools and being



very territorial. They can be observed chasing the smaller (15 to 20 lb) fish out of the choice lies. The fish move from the deep water to the shallow bars in the early mornings and late afternoons and this procedure is likened to watching naval manoeuvres as the fish can be seen moving about the likes of Home Pool and England.

Much of the prime fishing in June and July is booked up, although there are still a few rods left in most weeks. They expect this fishing to be taken by 2012. It looks as though most weeks will be held by those in possession of

them for some time, and I predict that within a few years most of the weeks will be filled once word spreads through the riverside telegraph. The syndicate is to be commended for putting aside some weeks to introduce youths from Canada and the USA to the joys of fishing, and for use by serving members of the armed forces from both countries thus allowing them some well earned R&R when home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

So if fishing big rivers for big fish is your thing the best advice would be to get in touch now before it's too late.



Restigouche River Lodge at the Matapedia Junction

*One of the top ten salmon rivers in the world.*

[www.restigouchelodge.com](http://www.restigouchelodge.com) or write to [info@restigouchelodge.com](mailto:info@restigouchelodge.com)

Talk to Kathy Irvine on:

Lodge, May-Sept (001) 506 759 8112. Cell, all year (001) 201 364 3129