

A Guide IS BORN

Story and Photographs by P.J. Wall

LEE WULFF'S love of flying was perhaps overshadowed by his passion for Atlantic salmon, yet it was flying sports to the rivers and ponds of Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula in the early 50s that began, for him, a journey into the annals of angling and conservation.

Wulff flew in that remote, intemperate area when the only local weather information came from a tiny combination postal, wireless and weather station operated by amateur meteorologist Ada House from her home at Daniel's Harbour.

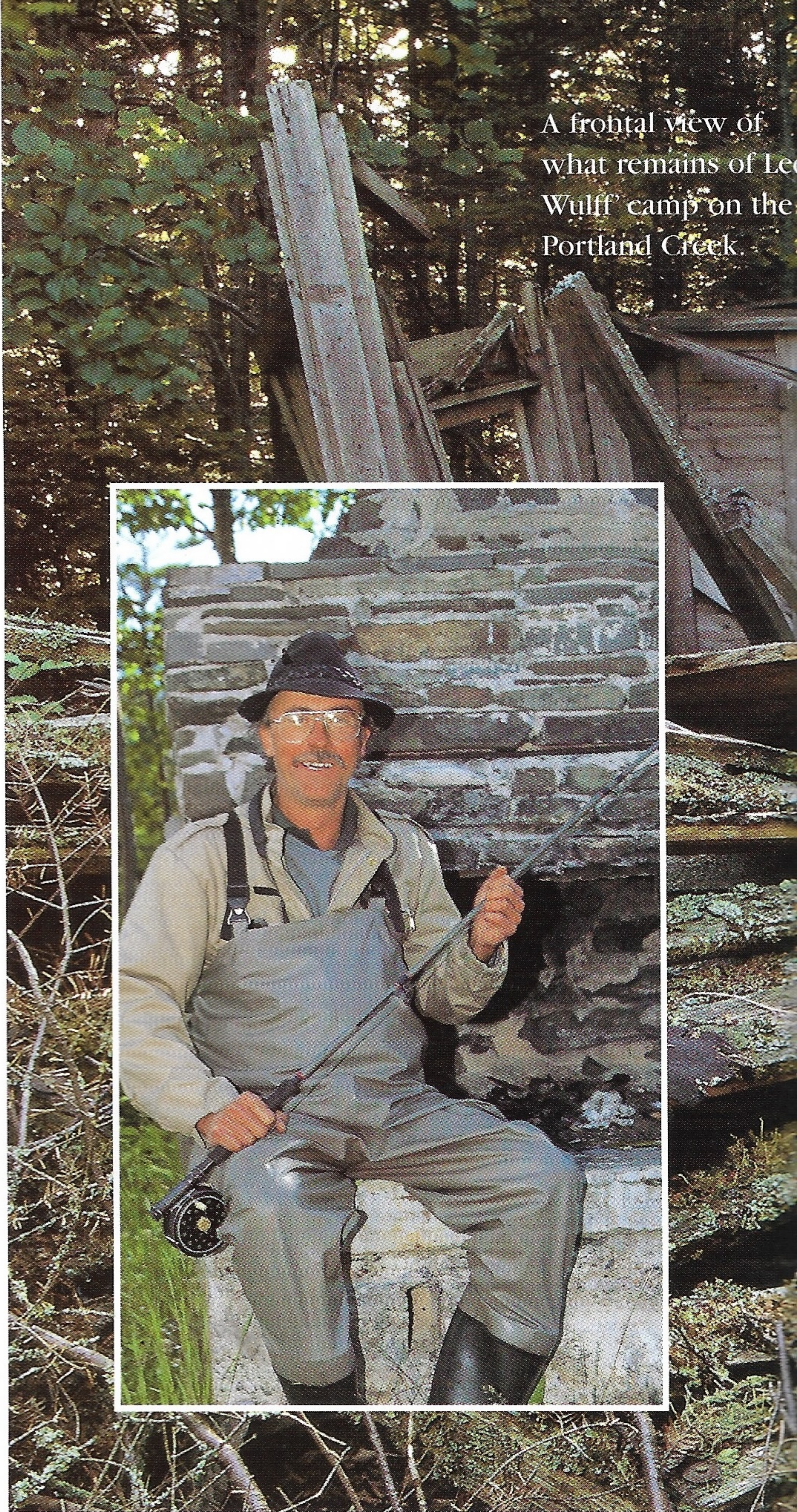
Eventually, this "station" became part of the Department of Transport's weather service and was taken over by Ada's daughter, Olive Wentzell and husband Bill. Olive dropped the postal and wireless part of the business to concentrate on weather forecasting, and it was in this context that she and Lee Wulff became friends. He often visited her home to discuss weather reports and altimeter settings and, since she had the only refrigerator in the community (fuelled by kerosene) she supplied him with ice cubes for his camps. Husband Bill cooked for Lee's guests at Cook House Brook on the Portland Creek and at River of Ponds every July and August.

On August 20th 1955, with her official chores completed for the day, and pregnant with her third child, Olive went berry picking with her sister-in-law, Lila - and promptly went into premature labour in the raspberry patch. With Lila's help she made it home and the outpost nurse was summoned. Nurse Bennett arrived and quickly determined the child was in the breech position and couldn't be delivered at home; a hospital delivery was required - and quickly. Since there were no roads, the trip to Bonne Bay hospital would have taken hours by boat, but not this day. The weather had closed in with gale force winds from the northeast. What to do? Lila, who worked as a maid for Lee Wulff, knew he was in the area; his plane was moored in Winter House Pond. She ran to his cabin and asked if he would fly Olive to hospital. Lee rose to the challenge but insisted only he and Olive could go, because any extra weight would make takeoff from the small pond treacherous. Olive walked to the plane and under severe conditions Lee flew straight up through the cloud cover to the sunny and windy skies above. With little to guide him but instinct Lee circled in the swirling cloud cover searching for a hole to get down on Bonne Bay. Olive related to her family later that what seemed like an eternity ended, when they finally broke through the clouds directly above the Bay. Lee

wrestled the plane onto the white caps and taxied to the government wharf where Olive was helped to the back of a pickup truck and taken to the hospital.

Five hours after arrival in hospital Ralph Wentzell was delivered by caesarean section, six to eight weeks premature, and placed in the hospital's only incubator that was shared with another premature child. The routine was: one baby was removed from the incubator until it turned blue then placed back in and the other removed to repeat the cycle. Olive was not so lucky, she went into cardiac arrest and were it not for the skills of the medical team would not have survived to begin a long recovery. A recovery that enabled her to continue as a weather watcher until she passed away in 1975 some sixteen years before her friend Lee Wulff left us while renewing his pilot's licence.

A frontal view of what remains of Lee Wulff's camp on the Portland Creek.





Guide Ralph Wentzell sits on the stone hearth, the only remaining piece of Lee Wulff's once busy cook house, located at Cook House Brook on the Portland Creek. Ralph's father cooked for Lee's guests here in the early 1950s.

Ralph Wentzell took over the weather service that by then had become a full-fledged Atmospheric Environmental Weather Service employing four people until it was phased out in 1985. He has fond memories of Lee Wulff especially from his early childhood when he says, "der wus lots a big fish den b'y and Mr. Wulff was da best at catchin dey". He remembers his family exchanging letters and postcards with him for many years after he left the area around 1959. Now an experienced hunting and fishing guide himself, Ralph attributes much of what he knows to Lee Wulff, mostly through his writings. "E wus me hidol b'y an e got da economy goin ere in dis part of da cuntry". He pauses; "E wus da first employer ta pay workers in cash, before dat people relied on da barter system dat heavily favored da merchants of da time." In the early 80s the fishery declined and Ralph left to

find fortune on the mainland. Although he was successful there he yearned for the Rock, and finally returned to do what he always wanted: be a good fishing guide. Perhaps sharing an incubator, when young, develops lung capacity, for if you're on Portland Creek or River of Ponds and the salmon are taking, you're likely to hear: "Pullllllllllllllllll... geees ya mist e", as Ralph subtly tells his sport, "ya godda pull quick wen ya fish da itch or dey'll spit e out." He knows a lot about fishing and a thing or two about the weather as well.

Newfoundland native Pat Wall is an ASF member, a long time director of the Margaree Salmon Association, and freelance photographer living in Nova Scotia. 🐟