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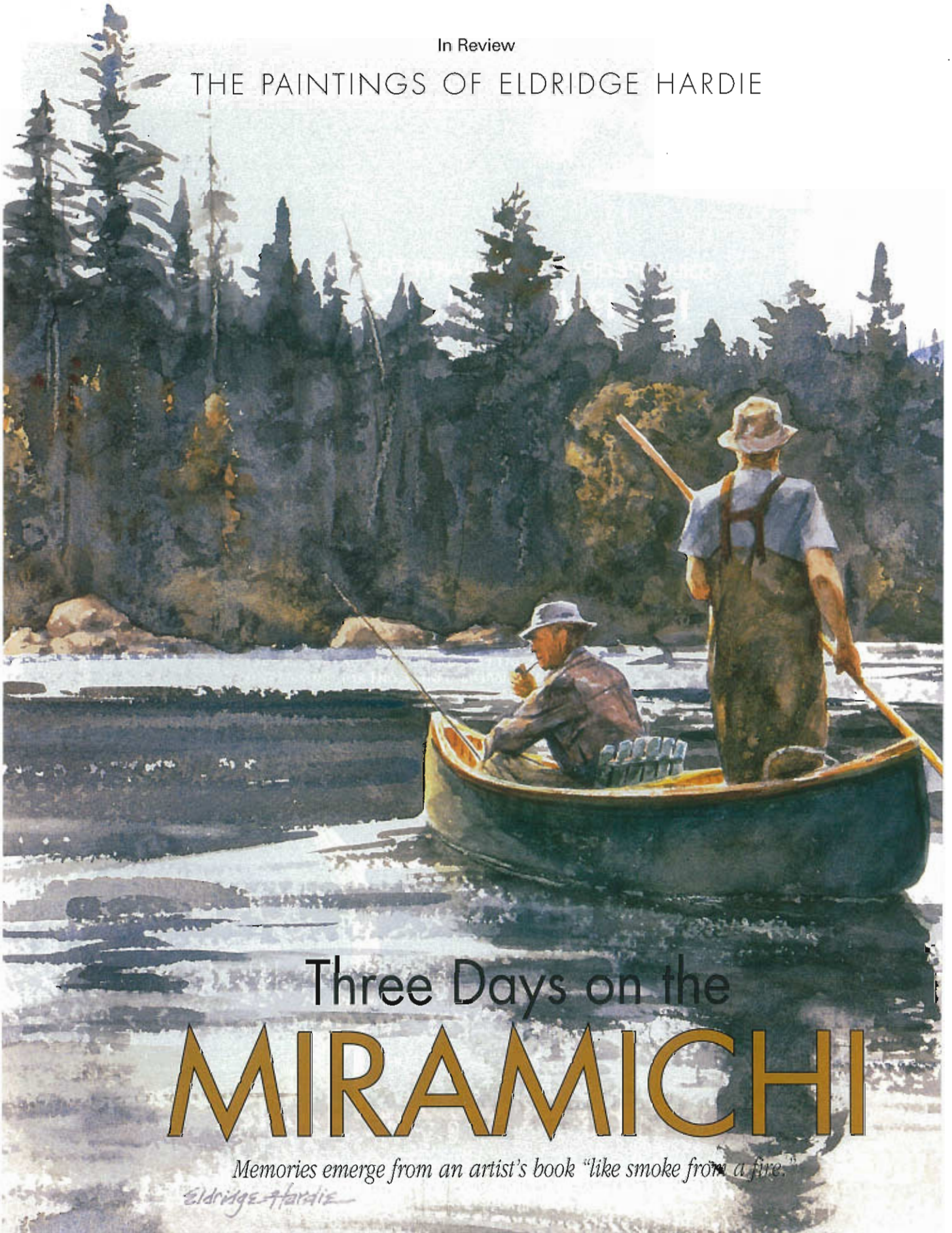
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In Review

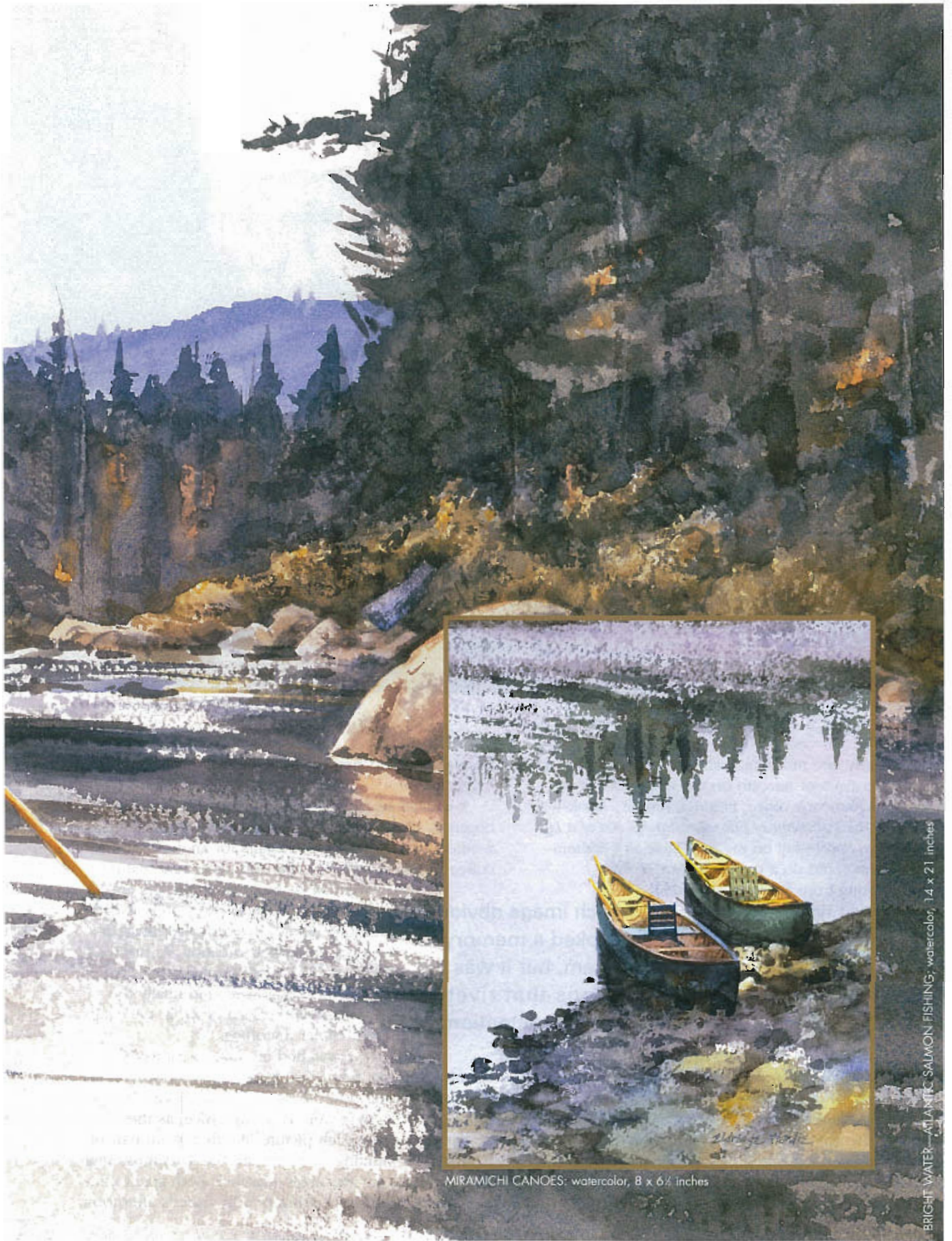
THE PAINTINGS OF ELDRIDGE HARDIE



Three Days on the
MIRAMICHI

Memories emerge from an artist's book "like smoke from a fire."

Eldridge Hardie



MIRAMICHI CANOES: watercolor, 8 x 6 1/4 inches

BRIGHT WATER—ATLANTIC SALMON FISHING: watercolor, 14 x 21 inches



WYOMING SEPTEMBER: oil, 20 x 30 inches

Early one morning, with the rain drumming a consistent staccato on the wood roof of our Chamcook office, Eldridge Hardie's book—*The Paintings of Eldridge Hardie, Art of a Life in Sport*—lay on my light table as I contemplated who could do a proper review of this latest offering from Stackpole Books. I wanted to do Eldridge justice, not only because his stature in the nature art community is so high, but also because I have always considered him a good friend and someone who is always eager to help the salmon conservation movement.

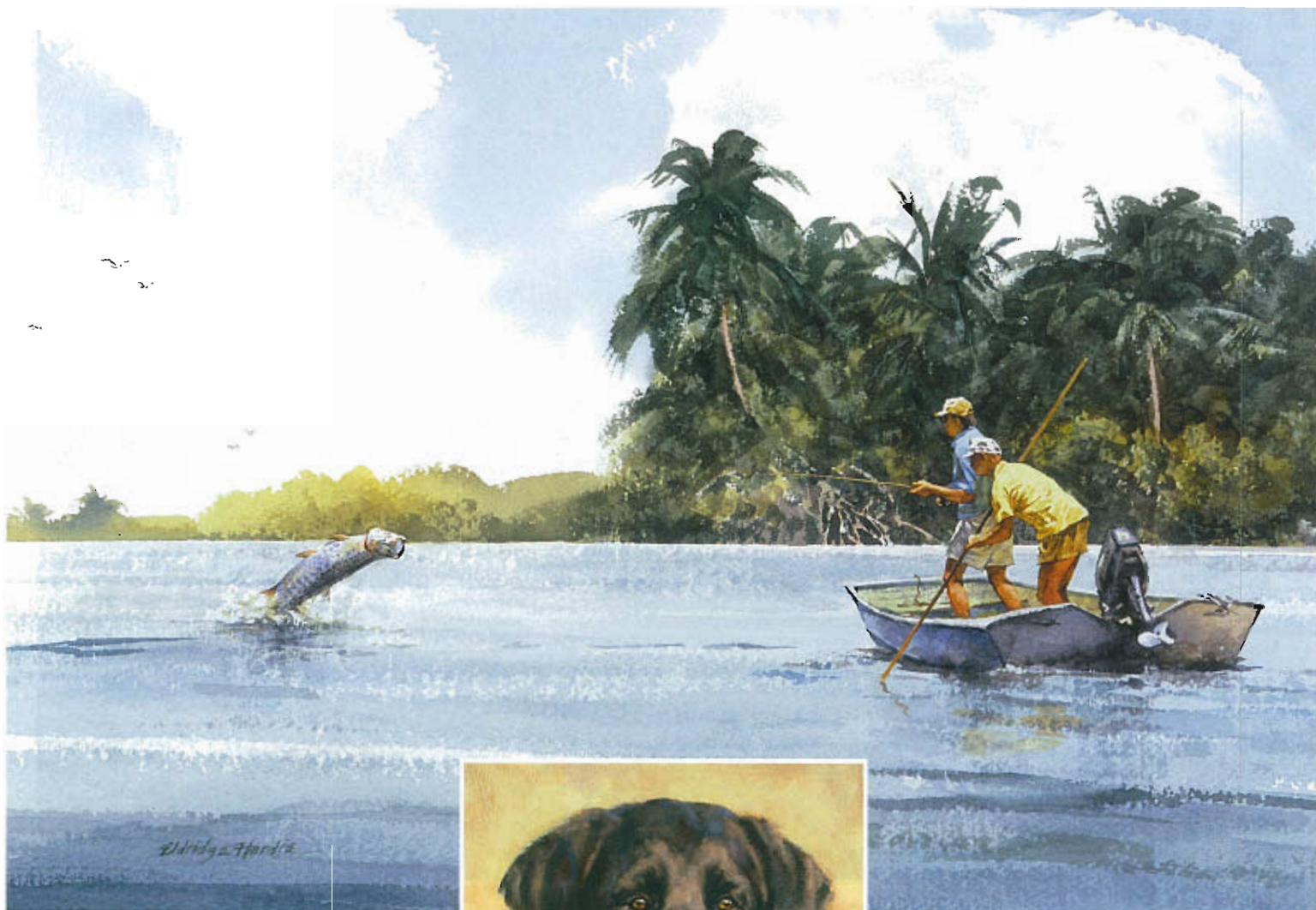
I won't even pretend that the book is not a major development in the art world in general and somewhat of a "happening" among anglers and hunters, as Hardie is one of the foremost sporting artists in the world. These are not hollow superlatives and if Hardie is renowned in sport art circles and respected as a serious artist, among Atlantic salmon enthusiasts he is also considered one of us. That's

Each image obviously evoked a memory for them, but it was the dogs that riveted their attention.

because Hardie I suspect, is first and foremost a salmon lover.

It wasn't long before the handsome coffee table edition began to attract attention. First a couple of maintenance workers came up from downstairs for an early cup of coffee and to dry off. Hunters and fishers and nature lovers all, as most rural dwellers are, the book's stunning cover of fly fishers drifting down a western river immediately caught their attention. At first they just shuffle-looked through, then the page turning slowed, and finally the two wet workers sat down in the chairs that clutter my office.

I watched in amazement as they seemed to forget that I was there (and obviously a little peeved at the water dripping on my floor). Well in a way, I guess, they weren't in my office, as they began to identify each picture like they were part of it. "Ah, dove hunting," one cooed, "Look at those mallards winging in," the other whistled. Both spent minutes ogling a bright painting of a fly fisher's afternoon.



SALTWATER KING: watercolor, 14 x 21 inches



LABRADOR RETRIEVER: oil, 10 1/2 x 8 inches

Each image obviously evoked a memory for them, but it was the dogs that riveted their attention. I had to admit as I peered over their shoulders to see what the fuss was about, that there was something—what I couldn't explain—special about Hardie's dogs. Reluctantly my visitors pulled themselves out of the book and filed back to work, the pools of water from their oilskins collecting under the light table as if they had dripped from Hardie's tome itself.

Well, there is a positive review, I thought, as I mopped up the floor with an old sweater. I was still struggling to put words to what was so special about those dogs when Danny Bird, ASF's regional director for New Brunswick, walked by. His eye caught the page that the hatchery workers had left open. It was an oil of a Labrador Retriever. "Look at Hardie's dogs," he

told me. "The intensity, they're alive, on fire." Tom Davis of *Wildlife Art News* could not have said it any better!

Danny began glancing through the book. He told me how Hardie is one of the nicest people he knows, so talented but down to earth and modest. Before I could ask how he knows this, Danny was already ensconced in the book. A few pages in from the beginning he spotted two Miramichi Chestnut

poling canoes. I had passed over this painting because it looked so plain, a watercolour, with no anglers and no fish, just two canoes parked at the rivers edge. But Danny was mesmerized, certain the painting had been made during a trip on which he had accompanied Eldridge, Bill Kent and Bill's son Harlon, down the Miramichi.

Although he couldn't quite remember the year,



JANUARY MALLARDS: watercolor, 20 x 28 inches

The paintings evoke adventure, fun, outdoor sport, friendship and provide insight into the mysteries of the natural world.

Danny was certain that he was right there with Eldridge. I tried to point out that the book contained numerous paintings of the Miramichi painted over a number of years but Danny kept on talking as if in a trance. It was in the fall, he remembered, in 1994, or was it '92 or '90? The fishing conditions weren't the best but Eldridge was great company. They had put in at McKeil's Brook, fishing their way down through to Camp Moosecall.

The rain outside the office window came down harder as Danny closed his eyes and relived those three days on the upper stretches of the Miramichi. I looked at Hardie's painting again. With Danny's descriptive, it seemed to come alive. I could sense the wilderness, smell the smoke from the camp's fire, hear the laughter of anglers taking a warming sip at day's end. Sheesh, I could practically taste the scotch.

After Danny left I picked up the book. I had wondered about why the canoe painting was opposite Nick Lyons' Foreword, obviously a place of great

importance. Now as I read on, each painting took on a deeper meaning. I realized each one had a story behind it not that different from Danny's. A story that jumped from the page just like it had for the hatchery workers and for Danny. The paintings evoke adventure, fun, outdoor sport, friendship and provide insight into the mysteries of the natural world. Hardie's book transported me far from the office on this rainy day. It walked me out to the Bear River Marsh near Utah's Wasatch Range where a retriever splashes in with a mallard. It shipped me to the shores of the Bahamas where a weather change promises good bonefishing. But most of all it brought me back to rivers like the Miramichi, the Restigouche and other salmon waters where memories float from Hardie's paintings like smoke from a fire.

In one section near the back of the book—"The Art"—Eldridge offers a detailed look at how he paints. He has included early sketches, or a scene of a river before the angler has been included. Many of the sketches include his colour notes: CO for cadmium orange, UB for ultramarine blue, TWt for titanium white. This section contains some of Hardie's prose, which is also scattered throughout the book in little



EARLY RISERS: watercolor, 10 x 14 inches

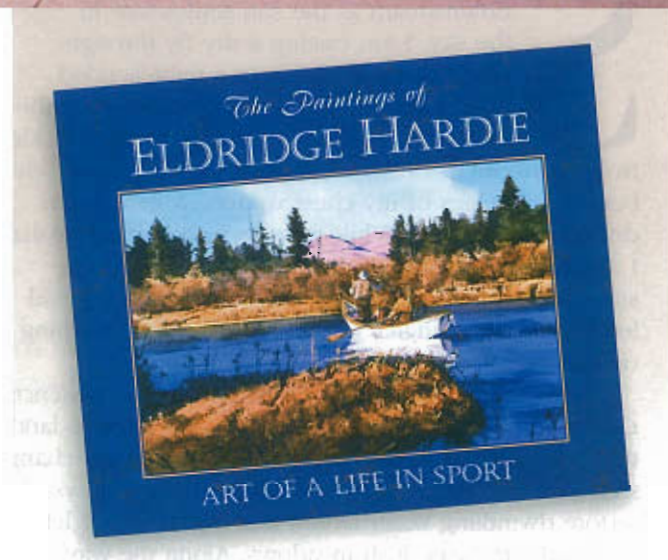
bits and pieces. Each short tale is like a small treasure where the artist reveals a powerful talent for the written word.

It's a coffee table book for sure, with the large, impressive pictures that will awe all who pick it up. But you'll find that it reads like a novel, an all-encompassing epic complete with tales of love, life, death and happiness. My suspicions of Hardie's true motivation were confirmed near the end of the book, on one of the pages complete with preliminary sketches where he has included what, I believe, is a self portrait on Mercury Island in the Miramichi River.

"They had fished here as husband and wife for thirty-two years," he writes beneath the tranquil painting. "Their little cabin overlooked the pool that takes its name from the poison ivy covered bar at the head of the island. After awhile, she came down to join us and asked, 'How's our guest doing?' 'Oh he's a fisherman,' was his answer, most appreciated by me."

As is your book by us, Eldridge . . . artist, nature lover, friend . . . fisherman.

Martin Silverstone is the Editor of the Atlantic Salmon Journal. 🐟



The Paintings of Eldridge Hardie

Art of a Life in Sport

By Eldridge Hardie

Stackpole Books 2002, Hardcover
133 pages, \$60.00 U.S.