

Fish Wild

Free Fishing Magazine

In This Issue

Alan Goodwin discusses Clyde style fly fishing

Richard Maurins takes an in depth look at float fishing set ups

Alex Laurie visits the Crowsnest Pass Alberta

David Walker checks out a great boat seat

and much more.

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Front Cover Photo

"Reel in, there's a storm coming"

Fred Carrie



First Cast



Welcome to issue one of the new Fish Wild free online fishing magazine.

The original Fish Wild was a free online fishing magazine first published monthly in the mid 2000s. The content was almost 100% Scottish based fly fishing for wild fish and was very popular with anglers, home and overseas.

Times change, but this re-born Fish Wild is still free. It features articles, mainly from Scotland, but also from abroad and not just about fly fishing. Wild fishing often involves long tramps over hill and through glen, so there may be articles that reflect that as well as fishing.

The target is to publish quarterly to start with, but that will depend on the material available. Fish Wild is published in pdf format and can be viewed on the website or downloaded to your computer, phone or tablet for reading offline.

The aim is to publish work by new as well as established writers. Remember that even the well known, established names, were new at one time!

Get your name out there. Contributions do not have to be huge, articles of all sizes are welcome. Please remember however that Fish Wild is a free magazine, not for profit, and is financed by ordinary anglers. It is just a labour of love and we cannot offer payment for articles.

If you would like to be a Fish Wild author, please get in touch by using Contact Us in the menu at www.fishwild.org.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you, all contributions are welcome!

This first edition features a few long lost excellent articles from the original Fish Wild that most readers will never have seen. I hope you enjoy them. In the older articles some of the images may be lower resolution.

We are also experimenting with different layout styles and coping with the vagaries of new publishing software, some mistakes are inevitable so please bear with us!

If you would like to email your comments on any aspect of Fish Wild, angling, the great outdoors or conservation please get in touch by using Contact Us in the menu at www.fishwild.org.uk. Any suitable emails will be published in a future Letters Page.

Fred Carrie
Editor

The Clyde Style

[Alan Goodwin discusses a traditional River Clyde fly fishing technique.](#)

"The trout within yon wimpling burn, glides swift- a silver dart. And safe beneath the shady thorn, defies the anglers art"....Robert Burns

The River Clyde tumbles westward from above Elvanfoot skirting the market towns of Lanark and Hamilton before emptying into the Firth of Clyde at Greenock. The Clyde in past times was more famous for its shipbuilding; here the great Cunard Queens were built, Elizabeth and Mary.

Clyde built meant quality. Sadly with the demise of its heavy engineering the Clyde shipyards are fading into obscurity But it is not of shipbuilding we talk here; it is the fly fishing, the men, tactics and most important of all its flies. The Clyde Style.

The flies in the photo show the typical Clyde Style. Hooks are light wired, body length no more than half the shank, hackle of hen or upland game bird - 2 to 3 turns only. Wings are tied upright and at a "jaunty wee angle". Lightness of construction is the keyword and hooking properties are good.

These steel men of reaches of the river. and R here, this was undersized fish were were big enough to be pressure increased they



Lanark haunted the upper Trout were hard to catch; no C fishing for the pot. Only returned and then only till they caught again. As fishing soon realised

that only a lighter dressed fly would give them any guarantee of success and so The Clyde Style evolved. Using locally procured fur and feathers, they fashioned these wets often "sans vice". Thankfully, fishing trends have changed and people are becoming more aware of the need to conserve fish stocks - if not through out and out C and R, at least in bag limits. The old flies are gradually being replaced by today's modern patterns, but a hard core of knowing fly fishers still adhere to the old timers.

Tackle involves a longish soft action rod coupled with a single action reel and floating line, although a sink tip is useful for deeper water. Travelling light is paramount in this style of fishing. To keep weight down to a minimum I find myself carrying braided leaders in varying densities, a useful addition, thus saving the need to carry spare spools and line My trusty Brady bag, a few spools of nylon, flies, sandwiches, a flask of coffee and a few bits and bobs complete the essentials.

A three fly set-up is normal, mounted on a 10ft tippet with 6" blood knotted droppers. Surprisingly, this is relatively tangle free if one can change from the modern idiom of fast and slick and adopt a more open loop style of casting. The old timers used up to 6 flies at a time and tangles were not a problem unless strong winds were present. Flies set up this way, are called a "cast" or a "team" and are fished on a short line down and across, searching out likely trout holding spots. A lot of water can be covered in a day's fishing

hence keeping weight to a minimum is desirable. After all, you "have" to leave room for a few trout for breakfast.

All in all a most interesting way to fish and trout can be steadily taken in this style given the right conditions. Blending in with your background is the key.

Approach cautiously and flick your flies on marginal water first, before wading, as trout can lie in surprisingly thin water.

Lengthen your cast and fish across and down, mending as conditions require.

Move down a pace or two between casts, always with the emphasis on stealth and no clumsy wading or you will scare every trout in the stream; shuffle rather than step. Allow flies to swing below, lift the rod tip slowly and recast. Always anticipate a trout even at this late stage; having shown interest and followed the flies around, one may still snatch as you prepare to recast. Many are lost at this point due to the difficulty of hooking directly below and downstream. Most takes come as the flies begin to quicken up as they swing across and down. Try this technique in spring/early summer in fast to medium flows.

Tight Lines



Alan Goodwin lives in Erskine Renfrewshire, married with two children and two grandchildren. A long time devoted traditional fly fisher for brown trout. Alan also specializes in tying Clyde style flies for this unique form of fly fishing

Float Fishing Part 1

The first of a two articles where Richard Maurins covers the ins and out of float fishing, a method popular in Scotland with winter grayling anglers.

Prompted by a recent visit to the lower Isla, on a damp and possibly dour fishing day, I noted the locals were interested in the tackle and methods I was using. At one point I had an audience on the bank of nearly double figures watching every move. “Maggots are the way then” inquired one, “but I’ve been using them” replied another. Inspection of their tackle showed some of the answer but also the method of using it showed even more of the problem.

My background was of course fishing in rivers that were only just recovering from years of industrial pollution; game fish did not exist until quite recently. Like many I started as a four year old, fishing under supervision, mostly from my grandmother, who showed the patience that my grandfather, the only other fisher in our family lacked. Fishing stayed with me as all my mates also fished and over the years, with good fortune to work with an international match fishermen, I was taught the finer points of weeding out fish when others might struggle.

This is not meant as a “how to catch” article more as a “have a think and apply your own version of ” type of discussion.

So as not to get bogged down in technicalities I just thought I’d explain what I use and why, like most things in life it may suit some on certain situations.

TACKLE

I believe that a lot of rubbish is written about what is or isn’t a good rod, reel or line. We are all physically different and our styles vary, but I was taught something early on that remains true, the key point is to start with the fish and work backwards. I’ll explain.....we probably do this

anyway but...look at the quarry, then what size of bait/fly/lure do we think is suitable. Next how do we get it there, i.e. what line/method, then what type of rod and reel do I need to best present the method most successfully.

Now if you’ve ever seen a course fishing match the first thing you will notice is the array of different rods and reels they carry in their “holdalls”, each with a different presentation in mind. Now I’m not advocating “You need five or six rods to catch a Grayling or a Trout”, just sowing the seeds of thought to get a mind set as to why I ended up with what I now consider to be a fine tuned outfit.

My rod is made of carbon, this is because it is light and allows me to stand and fish for several hours without stopping, some times a requirement to get the fish feeding . I use a thirteen foot rod as this gives me the ability to lift and control the line with out it being too unwieldy on smaller

rivers.



The Author With A Nice Grayling

The reel I prefer is of the centre pin type, though as it’s a modern copy fitted with ball bearings, the purist would say it’s not a “pin” at all. The reason for this choice is what is more important, presentation of the bait. A fly reel is of little consequence really to presentation; it is just a means of holding the line. Often a fish is landed from the line and the reel isn’t touched at all, very different when “trotting” a float. Many anglers use a fixed spool reel with great effect and the closed face reel that were designed as a compromise are also very effective, but for subtle variations of each cast and presentation, I think the skill of using a centre pin is both enjoyable and

effective. I guess that most vital of fishing ingredient, confidence comes in to it here.

Lines vary greatly and many an angler has their favourite manufacturer, the key thing when using a stick float, connected with two float rings, top and bottom, is that the line should float. When using a waggler type float, connected to the bottom of the float only, then it can be a line that does sink.

So far all of the float fishing I've done on fast moving water has been done with the stick float method, I prefer the waggler for slow moving or still water only. It's down to control and that word I seem to be using a lot "presentation".

I use line of 4 pound breaking strain for all my float fishing, with, when the method and conditions dictate, a finer hook link, this can be as low as one pound breaking strain. The reason for the choice is not personal preference but what size hook I'm using to induce a take. When using hooks as small as size 20, you cannot get 4 pound line to present the bait in a natural manner (it won't tie a small enough knot either). Study to be quite, said Izaak Walton in the first fishing book ever published, he should have added study the way your hook behaves as well. We all know a "skating " dry looks horrible and fails to impress a large trout, well the same applies under the water as well.

Terminal tackle is a bit like flies, we all have more than we will ever need and a lot seems to be designed to catch anglers rather than their quarry (I well remember the spinner for sale that was like a Devon minnow but had a naked lady for the body).

Floats should vary in size and material solely so you can vary the amount of weight to get the presentation right .The pretty colours and shapes are more for our eyes (helps if you can see the thing) than for the ability to deceive a fish. Weights should be lead free and in a variety of sizes to aid...(the dreaded "p" word). Finally hooks are to be in a variety of

sizes and wire thickness to suit the bait that is to be impaled on them and most importantly, has nothing to do with the size of fish we hope to catch.

There is one more ingredient that I wouldn't be without and that's a bait apron, why?, it aids mobility if one spot is not performing, but most of all I usually stand in the river and it holds everything I need so I don't have to move if I need a new hook or want to change a float.

Bait goes under the rain flap at the bottom, pockets for floats and hooks and things. The orange "stick" on a bit of heavy line is a disgorging and it's water repellent if it rains.

If you are up to more "presentation", I'll ramble on about the methods I choose and why another time.

Richard "Burnie" Maurins , born in Leicestershire and raised on the banks of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal, (well at the time they seemed exotic!), Richard has fished for everything with fins from minnow to marlin and has had letters and articles published in the Angling Times and The National Association of Specialist Anglers magazine. A former "specimen hunter", member of N.A.S.A. and the Tench-fishers group; Richard started fly fishing in Ireland and took a liking to it, mostly on the big southern reservoirs, but has always preferred moving water. He now lives in Inverkeilor, near Arbroath in Scotland with wife Mandy.

Float Fishing Part 2

The second of a two articles. Richard Maurins covers the ins and out of float fishing, a method popular in Scotland with winter grayling anglers.



There are many books written on the art of fishing with a float and it's fair to say I guess to "game" anglers they are of little or no interest, I'll assume that most of you haven't read them avidly from cover to cover, but you have an understanding of the course fishers dark art.

I'll carry on from where I left it in the first article with presentation and the reasons why I came to my decision. You will have to modify this to suit the variables in your fishing. Strength of river current and depth of swim obviously affect how you present, along with wind speed and direction. Colour of the water, how bright a day is it? familiar, it should be as it's exactly what we all do prior to casting a fly.

Bait

What you choose is often out of personal preference, how easy is it to obtain is often the key. Old books talk of macaroni and rice, real flies and big black slugs as bait, when did you last catch a live daddy long legs and use it for bait?. You should at least think about it, fishing on mixed species rivers I've caught trout and grayling float fishing for chub and barbel with large slugs and lumps of luncheon meat that would choke a donkey (alright the grayling didn't like the slugs).

Hooks

I always choose the hook to use after I've decided on the bait and there are bewildering ones to choose from. Again personal choice - confidence is the key, if you are comfortable with a given type, stick with it. I like forged hooks that are flattened, as an engineer I understand the added strength this gives to the wire, not fussed with chemical sharpening as I often

change hooks during the course of the day and don't re-use hooks.

The size of hook you choose is governed by the bait and not the size of fish, we as fly anglers know this, a low water salmon hook is hopefully going to deceive just as large a salmon as is a huge treble on a toby.

As a general rule of thumb the bait should weigh more than the hook, so a small worm or maggot is presented on nothing larger than size 16 and so on. In smaller sizes I use spade end patterns just because the whip knot is tidier. Plenty of good



ones already tied if you want them.

The photo shows a typical selection of hooks for a days fishing with bait.

Line

Even more bewildering choices, personally I keep away from the ultra thin "stretched" lines as they tend to be brittle. For float fishing I like it to float be it winter or summer purely because of personal preference. 4 pound breaking strain for my reel line is standard and down to 1.5lbs for the hook length.

Floats

I have never seen so many "bubble" floats in my life as I've seen in the past year in and around Scotland, they are extinct everywhere else. I cannot think of one instance where these would be my choice of "weapon".

A float's purpose is to present the bait and

give a visual indication of a “bite”, it should be offering as little in the way of resistance to a feeding fish as is possible and should be able to be controlled to give the bait the best chance of deceiving the



This photo shows stick floats, the ones on the left are shouldered types for stret pegging or larger baits in heavier water. The ones on the right are for trotting, note the 2 end ones are made of different materials, the lower section of heavy wood like lignum, which both reduces the number of weights required and the way the float “swims” the water.

Rod and Reel

A nice tip action rod to act as a shock absorber to the light line is required, I suggested that carbon fibre or something similar is probably desirable as they are so much lighter than glass or cane. I do have a cane rod but it’s now more of an ornament than a working tool these days, same applies to my first fly rod also of cane construction.

I prefer a centrepin type reel and the following will demonstrate why.

Method

I prefer to use the “stick” float method rather than “waggler” style on moving water, some will argue against, but I like to have the closer control that the stick offers. Two basic methods are used, trotting and stret pegging. Both use identical equipment except for the positioning of the float and shot.

Stick float method is trotting through at basically the same pace as the flow of the river, whereas stret pegging is holding the tackle back against the flow. Stick float fishing is normally set up so that the hook and bait just “trip” along the bottom, lifting tantalisingly when you slow the travel by just slowing down the flow of line (easier with a centrepin). This is improved by placing the split shot on the line in what is described as “shirt button” style, i.e. equally spaced out from the bottom of the float to the start of the hook link, ideal method when using maggots, small worms and naturals like water shrimps, caddis larvae etc. It even works with buzzer patterns and leaded nymphs.

Stret pegging is where the float is set slightly deeper than the water with the hook link on the bottom. To aid this the shot are bunched together just above the hook link, here you hold the float back with the bait stopping for a while and then released a bit further down the river.

Both of these methods are better done standing at the waters edge or if needed in the water, this both aids float control and feeding the swim with “loose feed”. For me both methods are done with the line tight to the float from the tip of the rod, only touching the water if on a long trot, which is why I find the centrepin easier than an open fronted “spinning type reel, it’s personal preference.

So now we have the basics, you arrive at the swim, with the cunning of years of water craft you pick a likely spot. Well off the sky line you set up the tackle and creep into place, trot the gear through without any bait to check the depth and then bait up and start fishing, throwing in loose offerings of your hook bait and proceed to empty the river.....well we can dream.



In this photo: the top example is “shirt button” shot pattern for trotting the stream and the lower is “bunched” for stret peg style. Note that I use rubber bands “top and bottom”, don’t pass the line through the ring at the bottom , if one is fitted. If you wish to change float with this method you



don’t have to break the line to get the float off.
The floats in this photo are “wagglers” fished bottom end only and to be honest would be better used in Scotland on Lochs.



A Centrepin Reel. The fly reel on the right is for scale.

Richard "Burnie" Maurins, born in Leicestershire and raised on the banks of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal, (well at the time they seemed exotic!), Richard has fished for everything with fins from minnow to marlin and has had letters and articles published in the Angling Times and The National Association of Specialist Anglers magazine. A former "specimen hunter", member of N.A.S.A. and the Tench-fishers group; Richard started fly fishing in Ireland and took a liking to it, mostly on the big southern reservoirs, but has always preferred moving water. He now lives in Inverkeilor, near Arbroath in Scotland with wife Mandy.

Crowsnest Pass Alberta

[Alex Laurie shares the experience of a great fly fishing trip to Canada.](#)

John and I arrived in Calgary on 2nd August for our second trip to the Crowsnest Pass area on the SW Alberta border with British Columbia. The Crowsnest is the most southerly of Canada's roads through the Rockies and is only about 30 miles or so north of Montana in the States.

We picked up our 4x4 hire car from Hertz at the airport and drove south to the Crowsnest. The journey takes around 2 ½ hours and we checked in at the Highwood Motel in Blairmore for 14 nights.



A Nice Fish

Just the night before leaving, I had learned that the Albertan government had banned all public access to their forests due to a critical fire risk. This was to say the least, a bit of a blow and knocked on the head all our plans to fish the upper Oldman River system, which is where we had planned to do the bulk of our fishing. Still, there was still the middle Oldman, the lower Castle and the Crowsnest rivers to fish, as well as a couple of alternatives over in B.C.

We checked the weather forecast, praying for rain, but there was no prospect of any. We therefore decided to get wet on the inside and went to the pub.

The Greenhills Hotel is one of the shabbiest places I've been in (and I've been in a few). The lobby has ancient carpeting on the walls and ceiling and the place is generally run down. It is however the best pub of the three in town and the natives were pretty friendly towards us, despite the fact that the place looks like the big house in Psycho. We drank in there most nights.



Crowsnest Pass

First day of the 12 that we were to fish on was on a stretch of the Oldman that we had fished before. There were a few gophers or prairie dogs darting about when we parked up. The river looked a lot lower and clearer than when we had last fished it and we could hardly wait to wet a line.

We waded wet, as it was around 30c and I used my new Sage Z-Axis #4 which I got for \$700 Canadian from the local tackle shop— about 300 quid less than the price in the UK. It is a nice rod, but a very different animal to the fast XP which John was using.

There were very few fish rising and we stuck with smallish parachute olives, elk hair caddis and Adams. We had 15 fish between us on the first day, a mixture of cutthroat trout and rainbows. Most fish were around the pound mark with the best a rainbow at 1lb 6oz. These wild river rainbows are absolutely electric and the cutthroats are no slouches either in the fighting stakes. The cutts love cover and you'll find the bigger fish in deep holes alongside rocks or lying beneath tree roots etc.

Next day was to be a treat for us....a float trip down the upper section of the Elk River in BC.

We met our guide Gary at the local tackle shop, the Crowsnest Angler. Gary asked what flies we had and patterns called Mojos that had picked a few up, paid our licence the river about 11 miles or so we would drift back down for the



tackle shop, the Crowsnest Angler. recommended a few big hopper been working well lately so we fees etc. and set off in his car to upstream of Sparwood, to where "take-out".

We set up with #6 lines loaded on #5 rods as it would be mainly short casting from the inflatable raft, which was kitted out with all sorts of compartments, anglers swivel seats etc. Leaders were kept short at around 10 feet and we started with big, visible flies. We



hopped in and were off. John was up front in the boat, while I was in the back seat.

The day started slowly, with few fish rising. We weren't overly worried as cutthroats seem to be sun worshippers and really turn on as the sun strengthens in the sky. We soon had the first typically chunky Elk cutthroat in the net, followed by several others.

During the course of the trip, we landed and fished "walk and wade" as the Canadians say. I did better during these periods than I did from the raft and it was during one of these that we each had our biggest fish of the rafting trip. Mine was around 2lb 4oz, while John's fish was a monster at over 4lb.

Unfortunately I don't have a photo of John's fish as I was fishing downstream and thought it was "just" another of his 2 pounders, of which he caught lots.

During the morning period, we did well with my parachute olives with Krystalflash tails whilst there was a brief hatch of Western Green Drakes on. Gary was impressed that we were doing so well with these and cadged a few off me to copy.

In the afternoon, sport slackened off for me, but John just kept on catching on Mojo hopper patterns. I tried the same patterns and would rise fish and miss them, or would lose the fish, whilst John seemed to land everything and many of these were fish of 2lb plus. John had his Mojo workin'.

Our wee log book shows that I ended up with 10 cutts, while John had around 25 fish, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was a lot more. A great trip and we saw some bald eagles to cap it off.



Last fish of the trip and my biggest



John with a castle river rainbow

I won't give a day by day account from here on, but suffice to say that we had lots of fish some days and not so many on others. Neither of us blanked, although we each had a good try at it. John's cutthroat at 4lb plus was the biggest he had and my best was also my last fish on the last day at 2lb 12oz. Biggest rainbow was 1lb 14oz.



Lip Hooked

We had some whitefish on nymphs as well as some cuttbows (hybrids). The log book says we had 444 fish in 13 days, if my mental addition is correct. One Elk tributary in particular gave us 242 mostly very good sized fish in just 4 days of fishing. All but half a dozen came to dry fly.

The fish came to a variety of flies, but the big hopper patterns really worked well when the going was tough, bringing fish up as if by magic. No wonder, there were grasshoppers everywhere in some areas. Thousands and thousands of them. Added to that there were crickets several inches long too. It is easy to see why the fish are of such good quality, especially when you look at the shucks of the big golden stoneflies littering the rocks on the rivers.



Oldman river rainbow

There are thousands of these, which dwarf our own big stonefly in the U.K..

Only one drawback and that is that the rivers were busy. Montana had already restricted angling on most of their rivers due to the drought which was affecting the whole vast area, so there were more U.S. anglers in Alberta. This added to the fact that the forestry remained closed throughout our trip (it never rained once in Alberta) meant that there was even more pressure on those parts of rivers which were readily accessible. It wasn't crowded, it was just that it wasn't empty, which is of course what everyone wants.

Despite the forestry being closed, we saw deer everywhere on certain rivers. Mule deer and Whitetails. We also saw garter snakes, chipmunks, gophers or prairie dogs, bald eagles, ospreys, owls. We saw some bear tracks, but no bears.

Alex Laurie , now in his 60s, has been fishing since the tender age of 12. He used to do a lot of coarse fishing and, until the mid 2000s, held the Scottish bream record with a 10lb 4oz fish. Alex has fished all over the world, including Alberta Canada and has cast a fly in New Zealand for more years than is good for anyone. He prefers rivers, but loves our wild highland lochs too.

Alex , now retired, says he is a frustrated blues guitarist and lives with his very understanding wife Linda in Glasgow.

Casting On Grass

Fred Carrie shares a unique fly fishing experience in New Zealand

Sorry to mislead all you sad casting geeks out there, but this article is not about what you think.

Yeah, like most serious fly fishers I used to do a bit of practice casting on grass myself, in our own private field I hasten to add, as this avoids the chants and jibes of normal people down at the park wondering what the hell you are doing.

"Have ye caught onythin' " or "Yee'll no' catch much there mister", being two of their favourite humiliation strategies.

If you want to improve your fly casting, practice is essential and grass is hard to beat. For a start you don't need a permit although for many anglers I know this would be, at best, a moot point.

However, as I said, this article is not about what you think, so enough of that casting stuff.

I recall reading, several years ago, an article by Paul Arden about fishing in New Zealand. Paul talked a lot about rain, having to climb trees to escape floods and stuff like that. It rains a bit there and I can endorse that. I've visited a few places over the years, North America, The European Alps, The Himalayas a few times at the tail end of the monsoon, even Glencoe and boy that's wet, but the intensity of rain on New Zealand South Island's west coast really does take a bit of beating.

We all know it rains a lot here in Scotland, in fact some of us constantly complain it seldom does anything else. The wettest places here are around the hills at the head of Loch Quoich and

in the hills around Kinlochewe where they get a mere 5 meters. Some parts of New Zealand South Island's west coast enjoy up to 8 meters annually.

If I were to claim that on this visit we experienced most of that over 3 days it would be a slight exaggeration, but for sheer bloody mindedness, that rain really did take a bit of beating.

At least it was warm.

My pal Alex and myself were heading down the west coast to the small settlement of Hari Hari, having enjoyed some great fishing and fine weather further north. There are some nice spring creeks around there where Alex had some great fishing the previous year. My wading boots had disintegrated, so we stopped off at a tackle shop in Greymouth so I could buy a new pair.

"So where are you feellas headed?" asked the friendly assistant having just relieved me of a 120 quid for a pair of new boots.

We told him.

"Weell, you guys are really gonna struggle there I can teell ya, the fish in theem creeks are deed spooky at this time of year and bloody hard to catch."

That sounded encouraging. Where the hell are you taking me Alex?

I wasn't really worried though, I'm used to catching sod all on a frequent basis. My local river back then was the Aberdeenshire Don, home of the dourest, most bloody minded trout in the Northern Hemisphere. After years fishing there I'm blank-hardened. Dour, dispiriting rivers? These Kiwis don't know the half of it.

Anyway, on arrival in Hari Hari it was all looking very encouraging. We checked into a comfortable and not overly expensive chalet at the Flaxbush Motel, had a bite to eat then headed down to La Fontaine Stream a well known, even quite famous South Island spring creek that holds good numbers of brown trout averaging about 3 lb.

Nzfishing.com says: "Regarded as one of the finest fly fishing rivers on the South Island the La Fontaine is a river to challenge the experienced angler."

I put that quote in because we caught a few fish, if we hadn't I'd probably have left it out.



The First Evening

That was a great evening; we had several fish between 2 and 3 ¾ lbs on small dry flies. Classic 'chalk stream' fly fishing. However, on the way back to the motel, the car radio was warning of some pretty severe weather with prolonged and very heavy rain heading our way.

It rained overnight, but was dryish next morning. We foolishly thought we had missed the worst of it. We headed off down to the estuary of another local river to try our hand at fishing for Kahawai a hard fighting sea fish that enters rivers at high tide and has a reputation for ripping fly fisher's arms out of their sockets. The tide was wrong and we caught nothing.

I won't tell you what Nzfishing.com has to say about it.

As the day wore on the skies darkened and eventually the real rain arrived. We

had a half hearted attempt back on La Fontaine that evening, but it was just too miserable. We soon gave up and headed back for beer. By this time the rain was torrential.

Next day we had a look at the creek and not surprisingly it was in flood and still rising. By now the rain was the worst I have ever seen. No way I was going out in that, the pub was calling. Alex is made of sterner stuff though and suggested we drive down the coast to Whataroa, past which lies Lake Whahapo, it just might be clear enough to fish.

It wasn't.

We had a half hearted attempt in a hydro canal at the outflow of the lake and Alex, who was studying for his SGAIC fishing instructor qualification, tried his coaching routine out on me before I fled to the car blaming a sudden and ferocious increase in the intensity of the storm and an approaching massive swarm of sandflies with extraordinarily sharp teeth.

That's what friends are for after all.



Hiding In The Car From The Casting Instructor

We drove back to Whataroa, had some lunch and bought some fresh supplies. The shop sold two of NZ's premier sporting publications "Pig Hunter" and "Hooked on Boars". That helped lighten the mood.

Hooked on Boars – how bizarre is that? I forgot to buy a copy as a souvenir. Must remember to get one next time.

We drove back to Hari Hari wondering when or even if we were going to get out fishing again. It did not look promising. Before hitting the pub to drown our sorrows (it was only about 4.00 PM) we thought we'd check the creek again just to assess the damage. It had stopped raining for now, so nothing lost.

La Fontaine was a bit coloured, very, very high and running in the fields. Alex noticed a fish rise in the field.

It was time to cast on the grass. We got changed and tackled up.



First Fish Hooked On The Grass

I cast onto the grass and caught the riser on a Klinkhamer. A fish of about 2lb. I had it landed before it even realised it was hooked. After playing 5, 6 and 7 pounders fish of 2 lb are landed quickly. I also knew if I did not get it out quickly I was bound to lose it in the submerged gorse bushes, willows, thistles and other former terrestrial hazards. Alex was killing himself laughing and shouting "you're gonnae break yer rod ye eejit!".

The fish had left the main channel of the river taking refuge in the various backwaters and lagoons the flood had created. They were taking full advantage of the new food supply, feeding furiously, throwing their normal caution to the flood. It was unbelievable. It was also amazing just how quickly we forgot about the rain.



A Nice Fish Of 3lb To The Wire Nymph

We saw lots of fish. We didn't catch them all of course, but we did get a few. I got another of about 3lb on a small wire nymph, Alex had 3 from 2 ½ to 4lb, two on the nymph and one at the death on a woolly bugger. The fishing that evening was superb. To see big trout feeding on what was a footpath the day before was bizarre. It was exhilarating fishing.



Last Fish Of The Day

By next morning the creek had fallen massively, but was still very high. We met an ex. Brit now living in Invercargill called Alan who was staying at the motel with his wife. A coarse fisher before he left England and now keen on game fishing. He had been mainly fishing for kahawai in the sea at the river estuaries and having heard our stories fancied a crack at the trout. We took him down to La Fontaine to show him the ropes. Sadly all the lagoons were drying out and the fish were back in the main channel of the river. This made them very hard to catch in the

high water, they were probably tucked well under the banks.



It Rained A Lot

There was only one thing to do; a bit of woolly bugging. At one point Alex was fishing huge, heavy nymphs under a fish pimp as I woolly bugged about. He commented, “here’s us fishing a pristine ‘chalk stream’, you’re spinning and I’m float fishing”. That about summed it up really. We both had a few hits to the buggers, but as so often happens with these lures, no hook ups.



Standing on The Spot I Hooked A Fish In
The Flood

Walking the banks that day it was odd to think we were standing in places where we had caught fish the night before.

Yes, we were on the grass again, but that day ended up no more productive than a practice casting session down at the local park.

At least no one was taunting us with cries of “Yee’ll no’ catch much there mister”.

Well perhaps not that day, but we now know better than to just write things off as impossible and we will be ready next time!

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Fred runs the successful Wild Fishing Forum and enjoys the hike up to the wild hill lochs as much as the fishing itself. The more uncharitable members of his family and friends say that is perhaps just as well.

Fred now lives back in his native Angus, fishing the modest waters of his boyhood one of which flows a mere 10 minute walk from home.

Gallery

Fishing, nature and outdoor images sent in by readers



Little Egret Fishing In The South Esk Estuary, Angus, Scotland
Photo by F. Carrie

If you would like your fishing, nature or outdoor images published here please get in touch via the Contact Us page on www.fishwild.org.uk



Sunrise Over The Abandoned Salmon Net Anchor Posts At Lunan Bay, Angus, Scotland
Photo by F. Carrie



Female Kingfisher Fishing In The South Esk Estuary, Angus, Scotland
Photo by F. Carrie



Loch Lee, Angus, Scotland. Home of Arctic Char, Brown Trout and Atlantic Salmon
Photo by F. Carrie



Glen Mark, Angus, Scotland. A Strictly Preserved Salmon Spawning River. No Fishing!
Photo by F. Carrie



“Corsican Dave” Felce With A 14KG Fly Caught Carp On Gran Canaria
Photo courtesy of Dave Felce



“Corsican Dave” Felce Stalking Carp In Spain
Photo courtesy of Dave Felce



Glen Quoich, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. A Spawning Tributary Of The River Dee
Photo by F. Carrie

If you would like your fishing, nature or outdoor images published here please get in touch
via the Contact Us page on
www.fishwild.org.uk

What Have You Tied Today?

Flies tied by readers and Wild Fishing Forum Members



These superb traditional soft hackle spiders were tied by Wild Fishing Forum member Allan Hutton who's winter tying regime has already started and who is looking forward to next season on the river. Allan consistently produces excellent and very neat flies.



Four beauties tied by Wild Fishing Forum member Robert MacDonald-Lewis. Two traditional, two more modern. All are effective and neatly tied.

I especially like the hackled hopper style fly and the bumble and can imagine both working well on some summer highland loch.

Early Spring At The Lochan

Fred Carrie guides you on a trip to a very special place.

The storm died during the night and morning mist and frost now grip the glen.

It's early April and after one of the longest and coldest winters for many years March brought a succession of gales and rain. Front followed front, crossing the country from the south west; not pleasant, but at least it was mild and rolled back most of the blanket of snow that had covered the hills for months.

A huge area of high pressure is now sitting right over Scotland.

As you climb steeply out of the gloomy glen the vista opens and on distant high moors curling blue smoke rises from newly kindled heather fires into the still air. Cock red grouse with brilliant red eye combs crow lustily from boulders and mounds; they fly off as you approach, speeding low across the heather, or hidden, they explode at your feet breaking the silence with an ear splitting alarm call frightening the life out you!

Spring has most definitely arrived in the Scottish Highlands and it's good to be alive!

You have done this for as long as you can remember, not always fishing, often just walking or climbing, and you really don't know how you would cope with the pressures of modern life if you could not escape them from time to time. You don't do this every day, but you must do it some days. Distracting yourself from the effort of the stiff climb you ponder this; if your health were to fail, your fitness was lost, your legs were to buckle, your quality of life would be gravely diminished. These mental distractions seem to make the climb easier.



Now the lochan is high, not outrageously so, but high enough and far enough from any road to ensure it does not suffer from the attentions of many visitors. Not just anglers either, even walkers rarely pass this way. Truth is it's not a really serious hike; a couple of hours just about covers it, but you amuse yourself with the thought that if you were the sort of person who considers nipping down to the shops for a packet of fags, going for a pint then buying a fish supper on the way home a triathlon, then you probably wouldn't be enjoying this much.

More self amusing distractions from the task in hand.

The beginning of April is far too early of course, for the fishing up here anyway, but you knew that before you set off. The water will be far too cold and the fish inactive. You can see that the higher hills to the west still hold a lot of snow, the corries and gullies are packed with it. Melt water from that snow will keep the high lochans cold for many weeks to come.

Now mountain hares scatter before you. They are still largely in their white winter coats and very conspicuous against the dark heather. Looking up you just catch a glimpse of a very large dark bird with long broad wings as it vanishes behind a ridge. It may be an eagle, but it could be a buzzard. Sometimes it's hard to tell if you don't get a really good look. Once more you distract yourself painting mental pictures of fleeing hares and swooping eagles.

You are following the course of the steep stream that drains the lochan. It's really pretty up here in summer where a fine spray from the many small waterfalls quench the thirst of flowering stream side alpine plants. These always provide a good excuse to stop for a rest and get a photo or two. Today there is not much to see, not even the early purple saxifrage is showing off its flowers yet.

You stop for a short rest anyway then press on.

You now have a choice of routes. To the left is a wide open heather slope; the angle is easy but the going is hard in the clawing heather. To the right is a steep craggy bluff that you have often scrambled up, picking your way along, up and over rocky terraces; it's like a giant step ladder. Today however you continue to follow the stream which now enters a narrowing gully. It's the most direct route. In summer the gully can be loose and wet, but today the wettest sections still hold deep snow drifts. The snow is very hard and you have to kick steps up the steepest sections. Safe enough if you take your time. You quickly gain height and before you know it the terrain opens up and you find yourself in a morass of peat hags with bleached skeletal roots of ancient Scots pines sticking up through the ground here and there. There are no trees at this altitude in Scotland now, but it's obvious that a forest once stood here.

The peat hangs are hard going. Experience tells you to stay on the crests, too many times in the past you have sunk up to your knees in slimy wet peat when taking attractive looking short-cuts. Better to stick to the crests and work your way through the maze. On and on you go, eyes fixed on the task when



suddenly you look up and the lochan lies before you.

The scene is startling.



The sun shines powerfully from a cloudless blue sky reflecting with dazzling brilliance from the calm surface while mist billows up out of adjoining valleys partly obscuring the steep hills on the far side of the water. Here and there around the lochan deep snow drifts run right down into the water itself.

A slight breeze picks up momentarily rippling the surface and shifting the mist from the lochan to reveal higher snow flecked hills beyond. It is breathtaking in its beauty. You are happy just to be here.

Finding a comfortable spot to sit in the short dry heather by the waterside you have a well deserved rest and take in the view. You scan the water for any rising

fish but see none. You are not surprised by this. The truth is it's far too early in the year to expect to catch fish on such a high loch, but that's not the point, it's enough just to be here.

Rummaging in your rucksack you find your Trangia mini stove. It's a great bit of

kit; lightweight, safe and easy to use.

In a matter of minutes you have it set up, the meths burner lit and a small pot of loch water is heating up. This setting deserves more than a Thermos flask of stale tea or coffee, the brew has to be as fresh as the scenery.

Refreshed your mind turns back to fishing. You set up your trusty 9 foot 5 weight fly rod, string it up with a floating line, a long leader and tie on a small black dry fly. You know you would probably have a better chance of success were you to fish subsurface, but with the flat calm you really don't want to be casting randomly and causing disturbance. The truth is you really don't enjoy fishing like that anyway



and in any case with the fish most likely

still in torpor you know you have little chance no matter what you do. You are going to scan the lochan for any rise, wander right round it and only cast if you see a fish move. You convince yourself that to fail elegantly is more satisfying.

You leave the rucksack and it takes you about half an hour to walk round the lochan. You do not make a single cast.

Back at the rucksack you start another brew. By now the sun has burnt off all of the mist and it feels warm. It's great to be alive. Lying back in the heather with your rucksack as pillow you soak up the spring sunshine. You even dose off to sleep a few times, just for a few minutes, but it feels great.

Staring up at the sky from your heather bed a very large dark bird with broad wings comes into view. It's an eagle, probably the same bird you saw earlier. You try to track it as it spirals higher and higher before being lost to sight. Oddly it's the only bird you have noticed since arriving at the lochan. It has been strangely silent. The grouse and other hill birds it seems are still on the lower slopes.

Looking across to where the nearest snow



drift runs down into the water you spot a single rise!

How big the fish is you cannot tell, but a fish is a fish. You approach as close as you dare. You tell yourself that in the flat calm it's better to keep the cast as short as possible and the length of line on the water to a minimum. Carefully you extend the line and lightly land the small black dry fly at the spot where you believe the fish rose. Of course the rings of the rise have long dispersed, so you have no visible target and are working from marks on a mental picture. The fish does not put in another appearance and it's the only fish you see all day.

Time for another brew!

It's late afternoon now and as the sun drops lower in the sky, its warmth lessens. It's a sign to go. You snip off the small black dry fly, wind in the line and put the rod back into its tube.

Setting off back down the hill you are sorry to be leaving, but at the same time happy you are not camping. There will be a hard frost tonight and at this time of year the nights are still long, the clocks were only set to summertime hours last weekend.

It was a great day and you ask yourself who needs fish anyway? You are happy and satisfied and already planning your next trip to the lochan.

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A Paean To Loch Thom

Ian Cramman

Here is a wee quiz for the pub-quiz ‘kings’ amongst you. Prizes of imaginary Blue Peter badges for anyone who can tell me which of these is the odd one out and why:-

- - infamous real life ‘Pirate of the Caribbean’, Captain William Kidd,
- a venerable football club, founded in 1874, which counts Sir Stanley Mathews, Joe Jordan, Jimmy Cowan and Tommy Lawton among its ex players,
- Victor Meldrew (well, Richard Wilson anyway),
- Lockerbie Bomber Abdel Bassett al-Meghrabi,
- the late, great, Chic Murray,
- the poet WS Graham (often labelled ‘Scotland’s Dylan Thomas’),
- Polar explorer ‘Birdie’ Bowers (who perished along with Captain Scott); and
- pioneering inventor and engineer James Watt

Got it anyone? Easy really, the odd one out is Mr al-Meghrabi because, while all the rest hail from the town of Greenock, he was the only reluctant inhabitant held there ‘at Her Majesty’s Pleasure’. For a relatively small Scottish Industrial town I think you will agree that this is quite a roll call of genius, comedy and the ‘mad bad and dangerous to know’ (to quote the famous description of Byron).

Founded somewhere around 1592, Greenock’s name has nothing to do with any “Green Oaks” - despite local legend and popular song. In fact, my research (amazing how posh a Google search can sound) reveals that it comes from the Gaelic for ‘sun’ (grian), perhaps grian-aig (sunny bay) or grian-cnoc (sunny hill). This, as anyone who has ever been there



Loch Thom Looking West To Dunrod

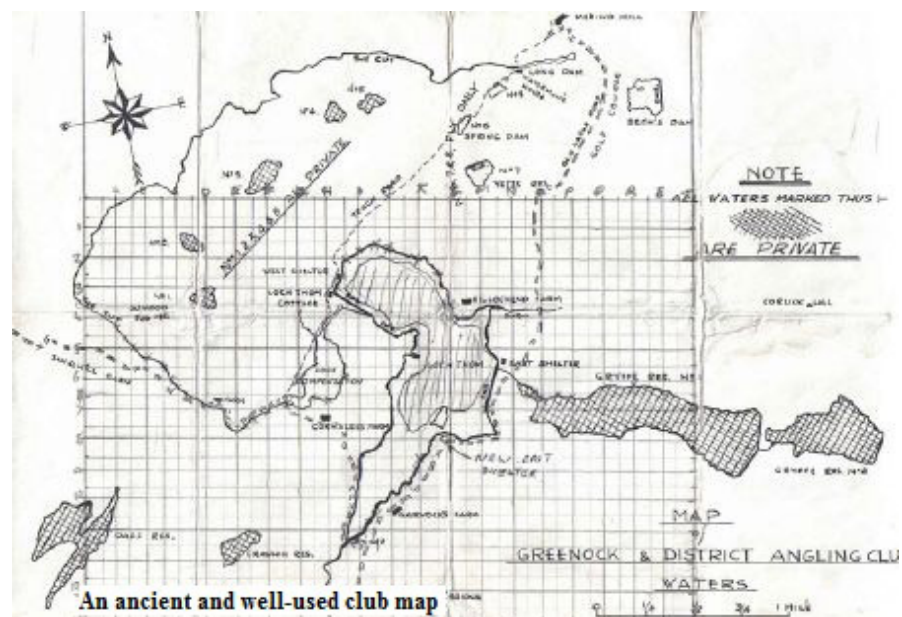
outside of the maximum allocated 3 sunny days a year will testify, is quite incomprehensible! A final Greenock ‘factoid’ is that the town was the port of departure for the ships that made up the disastrous second Darien expedition to Panama in 1699. This empire-building fiasco bankrupted the Scottish Government and major landowners of the day and directly led to the Act of Union with England eight years later – sorry guys!

At this point, I am sure, some of you are wondering if you have clicked on “The Online Gazetteer of Scottish Post Industrial Towns – this week the letter G!” by mistake, but bear with me! What I am getting at here is that Greenock is known for many things, but not particularly its wild trout fishing. However, this isn’t a broonie desert by any means. Yes the area has a ‘healthy’ population of small stocked ‘bow waters, but above the town are extensive moors liberally sprinkled with long established reservoirs, big and small, that are chock full of native piscine gold. Chief amongst these waters has to be Loch Thom, where many moons ago my delinquent mates and I would head to on days 'skived off' from school. There we taught ourselves the basics of the ‘noble art’ and got hooked on the simple pleasure of hunting trout with an avrtificial fly.

Loch Thom has been Greenock’s water supply since the early nineteenth century. It was named after engineer Robert Thom (a Rothesay lad from ‘doon the water’) who designed the scheme which created the reservoir from the pre-existing Shaws Water and delivered water and power to the once numerous local mills via a long aqueduct known as The Cut. The Shaws Water Joint Stock Company was incorporated on 10 June 1825 with capital of £30,000 and the scheme was officially opened on 16 April 1827. The loch is about 2.4 km from north to south and lies at an elevation of nearly 200m. Along with the later Gryffe Reservoirs and a further thirteen smaller reservoirs nearby, these waters provide almost 650,000,000 cubic feet of water supply.

While Greenock has an attractive outlook over the Clyde towards Argyll, Ben Lomond and the Arrochar Alps, it has to be admitted that the town itself won’t win many beauty prizes. The former

shipbuilding town, which grew as a major port and industrial centre in Victorian times, has a tough, gritty edge not much blunted by the re-development and regeneration schemes of recent years. However, just a couple of miles away over the other side of Shiel and Dunrod Hills where these waters lie, you



could be millions of miles away from any urban conurbation. Just remember not to dally when crossing notorious Dunrod Hill - In the mid 1600s the last of the Lindsay family of Dunrod Castle, at the foot of the hill of that name, was reputedly a warlock in league with the devil and a regular consort of the many local witches. A verse still in local folk memory goes;

“In Auld Kirk the witches ride thick
And in Dunrod they dwell;
But the greatest loon among them a’
Is Auld Dunrod himsel.”

But, I'm straying again. The point is, these lochs are a valuable and well-loved facility for the local angler and on any given day, there will always be a quiet corner or bay in which to lose your cares for a while. The Greenock and District Angling Club runs Loch Thom and the scatter of smaller waters immediately to the North, with other Clubs controlling the Gryffe and remaining waters. The G&D stock Loch Thom each year over the winter with a supplementary one-off batch of broonies, so the fish are a mixture of wild and introduced. The satellite waters have been only sporadically stocked over the years and so the fish in these are predominantly wild. The average Loch Thom fish is a standard Scottish half-pounder, with regular three quarters fish, and the occasional one of a pound or more. Occasionally though a real 'lunker' is caught and I remember a trout of over six pounds coming from the main Loch in 1986. Some of the smaller waters can also produce a surprise and no. 7 (Yetts) Reservoir has always had the reputation of holding some big but dour beasts. Catch it on the right day though and you never know..... I once had a three-fish bag of nearly five pounds there one summer afternoon during a fall of beetles, when a small, twitched black foam beetle was bringing up some of the big boys – pure magic.



Yetts reservoir From The South

My own favourite patterns for the Loch are predominantly traditional. I like a sparse Blae and Black with a slim wing and soft starling hackle when black buzzers are about early on, and a similar style Greenwell's when olives are on the water. A Blue Zulu is always worth having on the top dropper in a blow. There can be good sedge hatches on summer evenings and locally there's a long tradition amongst the old boys of fishing well into darkness with big fussy 'moth' (sedge) patterns - often

taking good baskets of the better than average troots. Lying amongst well watered (despite the town's name) heather and grass moorlands these waters see a lot of daddies come the back-end which can lead to some exciting top of the water sport.

As to good spots – well the beauty is in finding your own hot-spots. I have personally never done well in the area of the main dam and the steep rocky North-West end of the loch but otherwise I'd say try wherever takes your fancy. The East shoreline from Routen Burn bridge north up to and past the island is always popular with its bays and points but it's not hard to find a quiet spot anywhere away from the road.

For permits, hints and tips on flees and tactics, a good selection of gear and info on other waters nearby, the best advice is to see Brian in the Fishing Shop, 24 Union Street, Greenock, 01475 888085 - who'll see you right.



Loch Thom North From Routen Burn Bridge

The celebrated Greenock poet WS Graham also clearly appreciated Loch Thom and its surroundings and one of his most famous poems was written about and named for the water:-

.....

And almost I am back again
Wading the heather down to the edge
To sit. The minnows go by in shoals
Like iron filings in the shallows.

.....

(From 'Loch Thom')

So, the next time you are in the Greenock area with a few hours on your hands, don't forget that rod in the back of your car. Head over the hills for a few hours peace and quiet on the moors – just keep a 'weather eye' out for witches and pirates!

I'll leave the last word to the poet of this moor who seems to best catch the mood and stark simple beauty of the area:-

.....

And there we lay halfway
Your body and my body
Over the high moor. Without
A word then we went
Our ways. I heard the moor
Curling its cries far
Across the still loch.

.....

(From 'Letter VI' by WS Graham 1918-1986)

Ian Cramman's interest in fly fishing started as a child living in Kyle and shows little signs of diminishing some forty years later. Happiest in the hills, tackle in rucsac and heading out to explore a new bit of blue on the map, he tries to get back to the North West Highlands and Islands as often as he can.

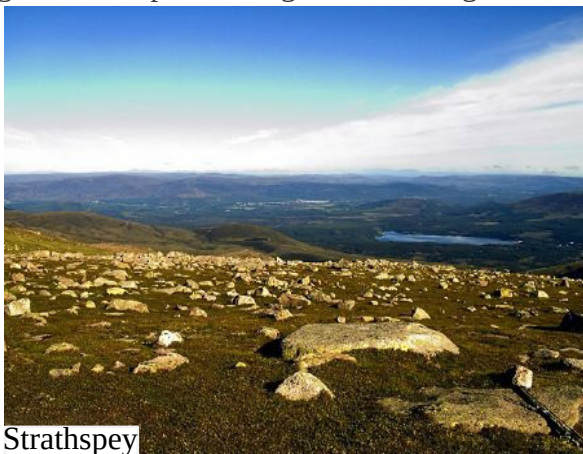
Etchachan a Loch Too Far

A Cast In The Cairngorms With Sandy Birrell

I knew it was going to be one of those trips as soon as I got into my daughter's car and turned on the satnav. It didn't matter how often I told the young lady that I wasn't going that way she still insisted I do a 'U' turn or turn right instead of left. I stayed polite and eventually she decided I was right and kept quiet.

The trip up to Aviemore passed quickly. George was with me after a long layoff and it was good to have him along. My wife and daughter were there too but they were going to stay in the Coylumbridge Hotel for the two nights as a treat, my daughters' man was at home dog sitting. We arrived at the ski centre car park at nine o'clock and the views were fantastic with the sun just setting above the hills over Aviemore. We got our gear from the back of the car, heaved it on our backs and waved goodbye to civilisation as it drove down the hill and out of sight. I turned and looked up following the track of the railway as it disappeared into the clouds at the top, what had I let myself in for?

We followed the road up to the Ptarmigan Restaurant, 2½ miles doesn't sound far but it is straight up and we hadn't realised how unfit we were, it took us 2½ hours. We eventually got to the top of Cairngorm at midnight. It was cold, the cloud was down and visibility

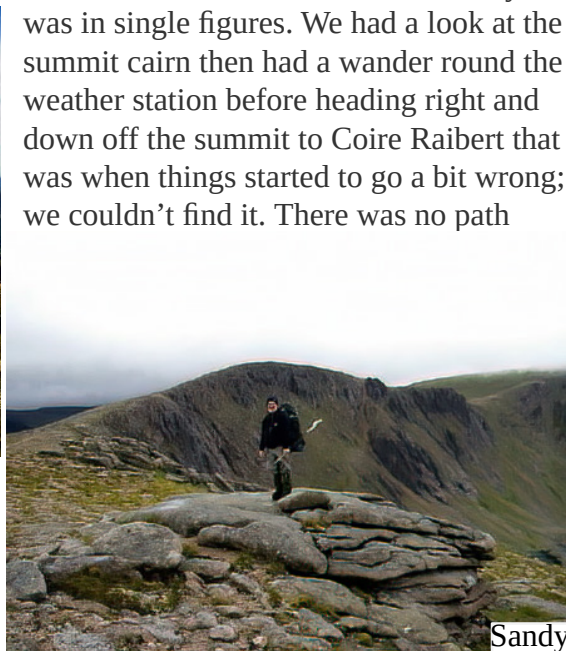


Strathspey

was in single figures. We had a look at the summit cairn then had a wander round the weather station before heading right and down off the summit to Coire Raibert that was when things started to go a bit wrong; we couldn't find it. There was no path

where it was supposed to be and we just kept going down instead of getting to a flat bit. We checked the GPS and the map and compass but because of tiredness and fatigue we refused to believe them and continued on. It

got steeper. I slipped twice because of sloppy footing due to tiredness and the steepness of the incline. It flattened a little and we made the decision to stop and camp till the sun came up and we could get our bearings again. It was the proper decision or I might not be writing this now and would perhaps be just another statistic in the papers. The lesson learned, believe your navigation instruments no matter how right you think your instincts are.



Sandy

The next morning the sky was clear and the sun was shining. We were camped in Corrie Cas and could see the road we had climbed up the night before. Our wandering last night had taken us in a loop and nearly back on to it. After a quick breakfast we packed the tents and climbed up the 600ft to the corrie rim and there was the path we couldn't find in the mist and dark. Following this into Coire Raibert we found a stream that just seemed to come straight out of the rocks. It was very welcome as our water supplies were very low



George

not having had them refilled since the night before.

The first part of the walk down Coire Raibert was a pleasant stroll with a view of Loch Etchachan in the distance and the snow on Ben Macdui reflecting the sun towering above. The last mile though is, more or less, straight down. It follows the cleft cut by the burn in which we had filled our bottles at the start. It is not for the faint hearted with loose stones, flat rocks at

precarious angles and parts where you have to scramble using two hands, one of which was holding a fishing rod. Scary stuff but we made it in one piece. From this path you get some great views down on Loch Avon, or A'an as it is usually called, with its' golden beaches and green tinged water. We could also see the path up to Loch Etchachan, goat country I said to George. Our legs were tired and sore with the unaccustomed exercise so a joint decision was made to leave Loch Etchachan for another day and camp at A'an to fish it.



Corrie Raibert

We found a spot at the west end of the loch beside the river that was flowing down from the melting snow in the corrie high on Ben Macdui. After a hot meal we gathered the fishing gear and set off. We fished the north shore back the way we had come. The loch was ruffled by a strong breeze with the occasional strong gust; it was sunny with the odd



Loch Avon Trout

cloud covering the sun. The fly life wasn't abundant but there were small fish rising in the shallows and on the first few casts I had a rise to the dry fly and a tug on one of the wets but no hook ups. I carried on round the shore casting here and there till I finally caught my first brownie of about 6oz.

It was a lovely silvery green in the sunlight. I unhooked and returned it. From this same spot I eventually caught and returned twelve of its' identical brothers and sisters on all three flies on the cast. My #14 Dry Fly on the top dropper, #12 Iron Blue Dun on the middle and a

#12 HillLoch Nymph on the tail. George was also having some response and had five fish and numerous missed offers, his best fly being an Olive Daddy Longlegs on the top dropper. With tiredness setting in again, it was only five o'clock but we had been up since six that morning, we retired to the tents for a lie down. It wasn't long after that we heard the first spots of rain on the canvas; the wind had been getting steadily stronger and now it was gusting strong enough to rattle the tent. I must have dosed off and when I woke it was seven o'clock and the rain was still on. I got out of the tent to answer a call of nature and could hear the steady snoring from the other tent; George wasn't doing anymore fishing tonight. I got back in my tent, had a bite to eat and settled down for the night. I woke a few times to the sound of battering rain and howling wind so not getting out and fishing didn't seem so bad.

We woke early next morning; no rain; no wind just midges, the first we had felt this trip. I remarked to George over breakfast that the rain hadn't been too bad during the night; he said that it had been torrential for at least four hours with really strong gusts of wind at one point. After hearing that I was glad we had decent tents and had picked a good camp site that hadn't flooded. We packed the tents away, heaved the rucksacks on our backs and carried them to the mouth of the burn at Raibert. We had here east along the rising in the flat calm. touches but no fish and back out was always at which tended to dull



At midday, after having rods down, shouldered

Loch Avon

lunch, we broke the the packs and set off

up the 'Khyber Pass', seven hundred feet in one mile . It was actually easier going up than it was coming down although we still had to use both hands and climb at some points. It wasn't long before we were filling the water bottles at the spring at the top of Coire Raibert; from here it was all downhill. We stopped to take some photographs looking down into Coire an t-Sneachda and seeing people like ants on the path below gave us a sense of the scale of the place. Eventually we headed down the path on Fiacaill a' Coire Chais which took us down to the road and then eventually to the car park at the ski centre where the car was waiting to pick us up. Just as we reached the road the rain came on with a vengeance so for the next half hour we got a right soaking. We had to retire to the public toilets and change into dry clothes before my daughter would let us into her car.

Both George and I had found the going tough, but we had done it. It had taken three and three-quarter hours to walk out from Loch A'an to the ski centre, three and a half miles,



The Way Down

which we felt was reasonable considering we had stopped for water, picture taking and the condition we were in. One lesson we both learned, if both your navigation aids are telling you the same thing believe them, what you think could be your last thought. Don't take chances wild fishing it isn't worth it. Remember you are there to enjoy yourself.

Till next time, tight lines.

Alexander Birrell has been fly fishing for over forty years, concentrating more on the wild side over the past twenty, which he says he will continue to do as long as he can climb the hills. After that he'll start on the more accessible roadside waters! Sandy ties and fishes only his own flies getting more satisfaction from doing that than with shop bought or flies tied by others. He enjoys reading old books about fishing. Sandy is also an occasional salmon and grayling angler and fishes both loch and stream.



A brief account by Fred
Carrie of a grand day out
at the Loch Of The Weary
Legs

Rocky Mountain High

Scotland I'm afraid, not Colorado, but make no mistake these mountains are most definitely rocky and the venue is high. At 2653 feet the loch I am writing about is probably the highest trout water in Scotland, certainly one of the highest to reliably hold decent sized trout.

I really can hardly believe the events in this brief account took place 10 years ago, back in 2011, when I was younger and a hell of a lot fitter, but even back then it had been 30 years since I had last been up there.

So let's jump back to 2011 and see what I can remember.

My previous visits had all been back in those care free, youthful days when all that mattered was where your next trout and next pint were coming from. In fact these important things were often connected as our local publican, in Arbroath, enjoyed getting the odd fish from us and we were often rewarded for this courtesy by way of a pint or a dram or two.



I had been meaning to fish here again for years, but it is a long, hard, day - quite arduous – a 10 mile round trip with 1500 feet of ascent and descent - and I could never find anyone daft enough to accompany me.

Enter Joe.

Now all who know Joe will confirm he's a hell of a nice guy. Keen as mustard, fit as a fiddle, fishing mad, up for most things, but above all daft enough to jump at the chance of joining such a perfectly reckless fishing trip.

We had first planned to go up to the loch on Sunday, but as Joe was booked to fish Dunalastair that day, so we simply swapped days. Loch of The Weary Legs today, Dunalastair on Sunday when boats were available. Perfect.

We left the car park at 8.00AM

The first part of the trek goes through native pine forest, quite bonny and lots of excuses to stop for rests and photos. The track is good and much of it, other than the last few miles, is drivable with a 4X4 but vehicle access is strictly prohibited. Just as well really; the best defence a loch can have against overfishing is the need for many long, hard miles of self propulsion and buckets of blood, sweat and tears.

The accent up through the forest seems to take your mind off the relentless climb, but eventually the track ends and the open pathless hill and bog have to be tackled. Some of these huge pines are 100s of years old and shelter lots of wildlife from massive wood ant mounds to capercaillie, red deer and golden eagle.



A Bleak Retrospect



Arrival

We made very good time. Using Naithsmith's Rule I calculated it would take between 2 ¼ and 2 ½ hours. It took 2 hours and 20 minutes. I was pleased with that considering we were carrying fishing gear in addition to just walking gear and food.

I had forgotten the utter magnificence of the setting. This at least equals anything, anywhere in Scotland. We had the place to ourselves.

It was warm, still and humid when we arrived and fish were rising. It was looking good. Quickly we tackled up. The rising fish were in a picky mood would not look at the dries we placed over them. We did not have time to experiment. This is Scotland – suddenly a strengthening breeze got up, shifted into the north, it turned very cold and the loch died. If only we had been here an hour earlier. Sod's law!

It was too cold to sit around, so we headed for the lee-shore in the hope of finding some



We changed to wets, but still with no success. Joe started catching a few on a Peter Ross. Luckily I had no Peter Rosses and thus was delivered from any temptation to use my jinx fly! I tied on the far more acceptable Butcher on a size 10. I started getting a few fish too although I had a heck of a job keeping them on for very long. They did come though and you would have hardly believed some of them were high loch fish. Light colours, well proportioned. These looked more like trout from a lowland river. Most puzzling.



To be fair some of the bigger ones were a bit lean, but this is a high loch after all where winter is king for 8 months of the year. They also fought in an odd manner – all of them. No deep diving runs; these trout splashed and twirled. We fished for about 6 hours. It was hard to stop looking at the magnificent surroundings. This is high mountain country on a small scale. There is another loch nearby, on or around the 3000 foot contour. It is reputedly fishless, I wonder if it is?

Might it hold charr? That however is another question – a loch for another and much warmer day.

At last it was time to head for home and by the time we got back to the car it was 7.00PM. I for one was exhausted. A memorable fish supper rounded off a pretty damn good day!

Thanks for being as daft as I am Joe!



Fred Carrie started fishing in the mid 1960's, hillwalking in the 1970's and has been combining the two on and off ever since.

Fred runs the successful Wild Fishing Forum and enjoys the hike up to the wild hill lochs as much as the fishing itself. The more uncharitable members of his family and friends say that is perhaps just as well.

Fred now lives back in his native Angus, fishing the modest waters of his boyhood one of which flows a mere 10 minute walk from home.



[Dave Felce Takes A Tongue-In-Cheek Look at Scottish Salmon Fishing](#)

John Gierach once wrote

“.... how often do you have a chance to get skunked while casting a fourteen-foot spey rod in the shadow of a castle built two hundred years before the American Revolution?”

You’ll be thinking that I quite like John Gierach. Well, I think I do. I like his writing and his attitude in his writing; and I get the feeling that I’d kinda like to meet the guy and share a beer with him. Although I’m rather afraid we’d discover that we’re both grumpy old buzzards with not very much to say to each other. A bit like going down the pub with your best mate, but without the comforting warmth of familiarity to fill the silence.

But to return to his quote, for me the answer is well, every feckin’ day to be honest. And frankly, after a while it becomes rather tedious getting skunked, eaten half to death by ravenous midges and invariably ending up “drookit”, to use the Scottish term. This last being a rather onomatopoeic description of one’s status after a classic spring or autumn day exposed to the vicissitudes of our local climate. Of course it’s not always as bad as this. The summers can be even worse.

Having said all this, it is actually possible to catch a salmon, once in a while. I know this because I’ve caught one. Just the one, mind. And therein lies the rub. You can wait an awfully long time for a salmon, even if you live on the banks of one of the most hallowed salmon rivers in the world.

Our local newspaper, which labours under the somewhat grandiose title of the Strathspey

& Badenoch Herald, carries a not-so-weekly fishing column which tells you pretty much everything you need to know on this score; provided you know how to read the signs. Firstly, there is very little comment or even any sense of passion from the columnist, and this is your first clue. It's as if a lifetime of recording, and presumably experiencing, essentially quite mediocre catches has stripped the author of any enthusiasm he may have once held for his subject. That's assuming that you even manage to spot it due to either its complete absence (a very bad sign), or its brevity; in which case you'd be forgiven for confusing it with the local camanachd or bridge club scores. If you don't know what camanachd is, by the way, do look it up. It's far more interesting than the fishing report although maybe not quite as enlightening.

It's been reduced over the years to a (very short) list of the barest facts and figures:

"12/5/18 Mr Brown (visiting angler) 9 ½ lb grilse, Tarric Mor on a spinner. Returned."

This in itself is pretty telling, but it's on the rare occasions that some sort of detail is recorded that you get a real feeling for just how truly depressing this whole salmon fishing business can be. A fairly typical report would read as follows:

"The Smith party took their usual week and landed a fine cock fish of 15lb"

Read that again, in case you missed it. Yep, one measly (okay, pretty decent) fish for a whole week of effort. For the entire party!

If you thought that was bad, reading further would be enough for even the most patient fisherman to question the sanity of the enterprise:

"This was X's first salmon, having been returning to the area for 23 years"

And I can assure you that this is by no means an exaggeration.

However, each to their own, and as John Gierach cheerfully points out, it's not every day you get to blank in such glorious surroundings, steeped in history. Unless you happen to be a local of course, in which case as I've stated earlier, it sucks.

The only decent salmon I've ever caught came about by, as I now know it, sheer good fortune and the ignorant bliss of the neophyte. I'd got this classic cane rod, paired up with a nice Youngs Beaudex and an equally classic double taper line. I'd been frequenting a little pool on the Dulnain, not far from home, casting various white concoctions in the hope of fooling a sea-trout. On the evening in question I'd bullied a few parr who should've known better (and certainly did afterwards) not much bigger than my fly, and had let my last cast drift on the dangle towards the near bank. Bang! A thumping great weight caused the rod to arch over and tore off upstream. It was a merry tussle, not the least because the fish then decided to return downstream, causing me to have to pass the rod around two intervening bushes. It was all very exciting and, to use a hackneyed phrase, the tackle was tested to its limits. I don't think the rod ever recovered, to be honest. Anyways, eventually I had banked a beautiful, fresh run fish of around 7 or 8 pounds. Not bad going, especially on antique tackle with a 4lb tippet. As I said, I can't claim any real expertise on my part; I was convinced I'd landed a sea trout and proudly displayed the photos to anyone and everyone I could accost. One of my mates finally broke the spell:

"That's a nice grilse". "What's a grilse?", I said.....



I've still to hook a sea-trout from the Dulnain, incidentally

At this point you're probably thinking you've done a hell of a lot of reading for just one fish story. Hey! Welcome to the world of the salmon fisher, bozo! You could maybe console yourself with the thought that you've invested far less time in reading this than you might have to for a salmon of your own. You might even come to the conclusion that, for all the pomp & mystique that surrounds it, this

salmon fishing malarkey isn't all it's cracked up to be. Well, that's not for me to say.

"Never knock another man's hobbies", is one of my mottos and, as J.G. suggests, where else can you wet a line.....?

I would suggest Spain, for a start.....

Dave Felce, aka "Corsican Dave", has been fishing since childhood; now a very, very long time ago. Cutting his teeth on the canals & clay pits of Milton Keynes, he first picked up a fly rod around 40 years ago. He promptly attached his trusty spinning reel & wondered why it didn't work very well...

Things have moved on a bit since then & Dave has been actively pushing the boundaries of fly-fishing for many years with wide experience in SWFF, kayak fishing, pike on fly and, most importantly, carp. Living in the carp desert of the Scottish highlands he has mostly concentrated his efforts in the wilds of Spain, primarily using imitations of natural food items & basing his approach on observation & experimentation.

Brimming over with passion & enthusiasm for his subject he has set up the popular "Carp Champions" group on Facebook which has attracted active participation by successful exponents of fly fishing for carp from around the world. He has been published in a number of magazines and online media, and is currently compiling a history of fly fishing for carp; which he has presented as a lecture at the prestigious British Fly Fair International

An Applied Biologist (somewhat lapsed) and a qualified outdoors instructor, he has said some very rude things about the UK's carp scene and claims to have never visited a commercial carp fishery in his life.

He is the Brand Ambassador for Gouldfish Custom Rods, a member of IGFA and the American Carp Society, and an enthusiastic patron of the Wild Carp Trust.

Tackle Reviews

Fishing Gear - Real Word Trials and Tests



Vision Glass Trout 7' 6" #5 Weight

This is not going to be a standard review where I drone on about loop tightness, cork quality, ring alignment and stuff like that. Well it might be a bit, but in the main it's about why I bought this rod, how I found it and if I made a wise purchase.

Being an angler of a 'certain vintage' I grew up with glass rods in the 1960s and 1970s. Carbon, ubiquitous as it now is, was a super-expensive material way back then and found mainly in the nose cones of rockets, lunar modules and super expensive fly rods that the likes of me could only dream about.

I owned a variety of glass rods made by Shakespeare, Milbro and the like, plus a few I built myself. I loved them all and still have one or two of them, though sadly many of them ended up shredded in the spokes of the front wheel of my bike as I carelessly cycled to and from my local river.

Anyway, like most, I now use carbon rods and my go-to small stream weapon is an old Sage ZXL 9 foot #4 weight. A delightful rod in every way. My local stream, the one I grew up on and where I learned to fly fish, is very overgrown mostly requiring only very short casts and a lot of weaving in and out of tree lined banks and dense vegetation. A short rod would be great for this and the toughness and self loading characteristics of glass would be an advantage for the hazards of machete-jungle-bashing and the mainly short distance casting involved. That was the idea anyway so I parted with the £259.99 and bought one.

The rod, as you can see in the above photo is yellow. Not the brightest of yellows, more of a shiny, orange-yellow, or as we say in Scotland, “plook yellah”. Unflattering but accurate. The colour is my 2nd least favourite thing about the rod, the 1st being its lack of a fly keeper ring. We have come to take keeper rings so much for granted I didn’t even notice it was missing until I started fishing. I found this so irritating I whipped one on as soon as I got home. This lack is not a show stopper but it is such a cheapskate omission I am just baffled why Vision would leave it off? Yeah I know you can just hook the fly onto the first ring, but why leave it off a £260 rod?

The rod build quality is very high as you would expect from Vision but at 107g for a 7 ½ foot rod it’s no lightweight. My Sage ZXL is a foot and a half longer and weighs only 87g.

One other thing I have to mention is the rod is 2 piece thus the glass fibre protective tube is 4 foot long and seems a tad unwieldy to transport when you are used to 4 piece carbon rods.

So that’s the gripes out of the way.

It’s a really nice rod and a delight to cast as long as you have a following wind or no wind at all, great at short range. As you might expect all that “self loading” comes at a price and it lacks the speed to punch a fly into a headwind. I found that in order to get decent turnover into a downstream wind involved a bit of hauling on the forward cast to get the line speed up. So why not just use a faster rod, you know like the ones I already own?

Make no mistake, these new generation glass rods are a big step up from the old rods of the 60s and 70s and to prove that to myself I fished the same stream next day with my old 1960s 8 ½ foot Milbro Truefly. The less said about that the better – it was horrible.

So, yeah it’s a nice rod and certainly one to consider but I guess the most telling question would be would I buy it now knowing what I now know? Hard to say; all I can say is the after buying the rod I still fished most of the season with my Sage ZXL. The extra length and higher line speed just made the rod more versatile and to be honest over-lining the Sage for shorter distance casting works just as well as using the “self loading” glass rod.

So if you are after a shorter rod for overgrown streams it might be a good choice, but if like me you already own top notch rods that feel like an extension of your arm you might end up just a little disappointed. Just bear in mind though that these are only the musings of one old guy who already owns far too many fly rods. You might love it!

You can see me fishing with this rod in these videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pHx5JXqiwM>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLdCDIjtNHI>



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Wychwood Boat Seat

David Walker Checks Out This Comfy Piece Of Kit



Let me be clear from the outset that I am firmly, I repeat, firmly in the camp of you get what you pay for. Usually but not always, the more you spend, the better the product and I subscribe to the old saying... 'if you buy cheap, you buy twice'.

This has stood me and my fishing in good stead and I have been more than comfortable with being labelled as a bit of a tart when it comes to kit.

My gear inventory ranges from products mainly from the stables of

Simms, Sage, Rio and Lamson to pieces of bespoke kit like boat boxes by Peli with precision laser cut foam that had a three month build time.

My gear is something that is very important to me – a lesson I learned a long time ago when climbing one of the gullies on Ben Nevis. I was leading a pitch during weather that was more suitable to staying in the house but with the inexperience that youth brings, it can also build a resilience and character.

This particular day brought lessons that poor kit in inclement weather can ruin an otherwise great day on the hill. Vivid memories of placing my ice axe into some decent ice but spindrift flowing down my arms as the jacket I was wearing was in the cheap and cheerful category of mountaineering wear. I came off that route soaked through and verging on hypothermia. My mate was the manager of TISO in town and the following day he had me suited up with the latest all singing, all dancing number from Arcteryx. Laminated zips and storm-proof cuffs ensured a level of comfort that made such climbs that bit easier.

From that day onwards, I have never wanted to worry that the kit I use would fail or hold me back. I believe that said kit should never hinder performance and by this, would never be a factor when trying to be successful be it reaching the top of a difficult route on a mountain or trying to extract fish from water. I enjoy the feel and finesse of high-end gear but unfortunately most of that comes with a high-end price tag. The nature of the beast I suppose.

I have been boat fishing for almost all of my fishing life. Some seasons see more days afloat than walking the banks of a river or lochs but each season sees regular boat sessions from late summer onwards with the usual pilgrimage south to the large reservoirs in Cambridgeshire in search of fry-feeders come October time.

It was here that I had first seen the Wychwood boat seat via YouTube when searching for fry-feeders. My first boat seat was from Airflo but it was heavy, cumbersome, difficult to

erect and took up quite a bit of room in the car. I moved onto to the more familiar Rutland boat seat that was approx. three times the price but this brought a far lighter weight, much easier to erect but comfort suffered as the padding wasn't as generous. After a day afloat, your backside certainly felt it. A week on the boat with said seat was certainly an experience and needed the close season to recover!

The Wychwood boat seat promised all of the positives of the others but with none of the negatives. It is very light, easy to carry and takes up very little space in the car. When folded, it fits neatly in the foot well behind the front seat. Its aluminium construction affords strength and lightness with a mesh that makes up the seat and back rest and is very comfortable not only for one day afloat but after a whole week. This mesh design doesn't hold water and therefore is quick-drying.

Fitting is easy; it comes with a small rubber pad that is placed on top of either a thwart board if the boat doesn't have space under its seats or directly on the seats of the Coulam boats that I normally fish in. The ratchet straps the seat comes with can fit underneath very easily and it's a doddle to fit these straps through and worked tight to secure.

Once fitted, the seat offers a complete 360 degrees of rotation which is most helpful when fish run around the back of the boat! The height of the seat is similar to that afforded by the more common Rutland seat. When removing, the ratchets have a quick release lever that allows the straps to be pulled off enabling the seat to be lifted off.

The seat retails for around £125 and should be considered as an essential piece of kit when spending a day afloat with comfort and ease of use featuring highly in its performance.

David Walker has been fishing since a small boy on the lochs of his local hills and further afield on the banks of Loch Shin and Merkland when visiting family. This fishing education has led to international recognition for Scotland at both World and European Championships. Equally at home drifting afloat, on the river and hill lochs, his passion is casting at rising fish which helps rebalance the stress levels the role of a senior scientist within the NHS entails.



So that's it for the first edition of the new Fish Wild. Hope you enjoyed it!

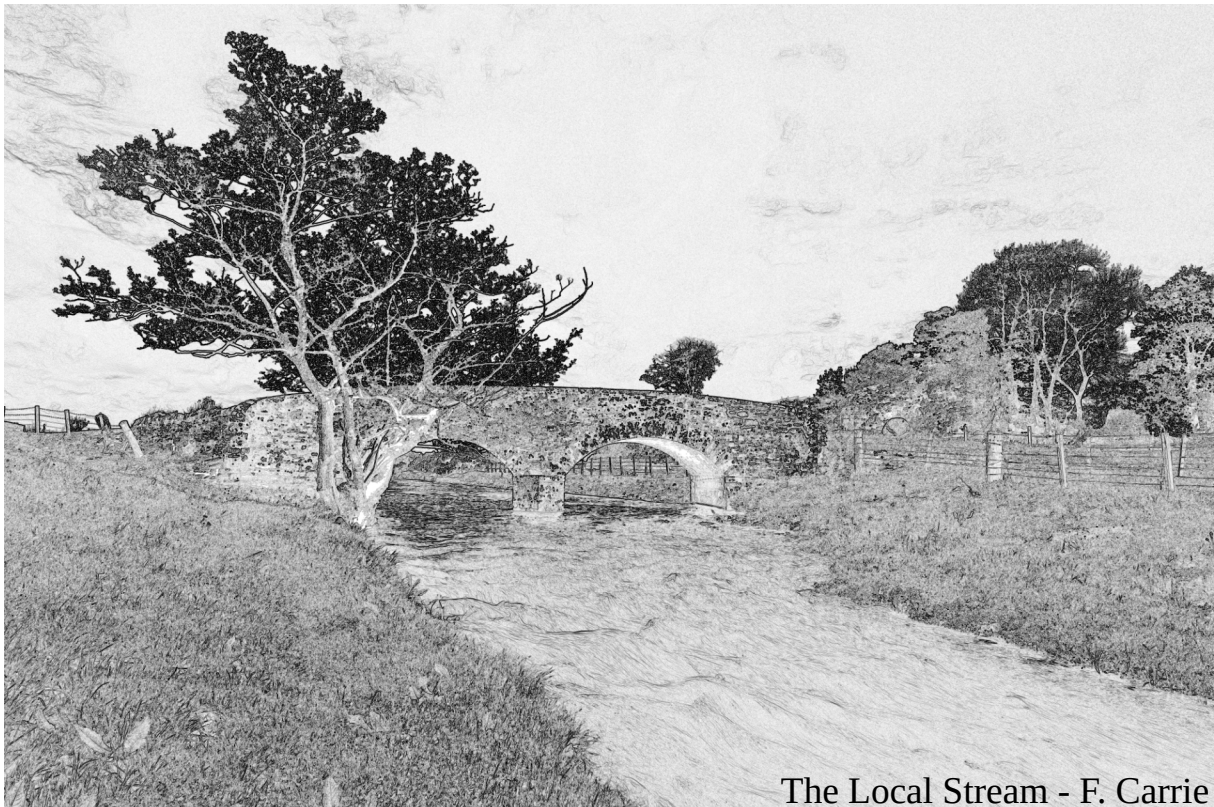
As was said at the off we are still experimenting with layouts etc, so nothing has been set in stone.

We might end up with a more 'magazine-like' facing page layout that would enable larger images to be printed across two facing pages, as well as being better should anyone wish to print a hard copy.

We shall see, but if you have any suggestions please get in touch using the Contact Us menu on the Fish Wild website and please remember contributions of articles, photos etc are always welcome.

<https://www.fishwild.org.uk/contact-us/>

Tight Lines!



The Local Stream - F. Carrie