

Water~Lines

News from the Haddon Estate Fisheries Issue No.2

Summer 2004

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Lord Edward Manners: Hoping you enjoy your "Wild Times"!

What began as a tentative experiment, to see if you would like an occasional newsletter, has resulted in a very gratifying experience for us all at Haddon. No sooner had the first thousand Water~Lines come hot off the presses and they had all gone! All in all, after a second run, you needed four thousand and could have done with more. Thank you! There is no greater pleasure than that which comes from being appreciated.

In this, our second issue, you will gain some insights into how we always do our best by the rivers we are responsible for. It's a lucky coincidence our policy of "The rivers and their inhabitants come first!" is actually best for anglers too, now and into the future.

Angling fashions come and go. Many fisheries appear on the scene, or adapt themselves, to keep up with these fashions. For example, today there are fisheries offering record sized fish and plenty of new stocking throughout the season. Some anglers prefer that kind of fishing. Here we cater for anglers, like you, who have shown over the years that you really enjoy fishing for wild fish that were born naturally in the rivers and their little feeder streams and winterbournes. The Haddon Fisheries pledge is to maintain this tradition and to improve on it.

Here's wishing you a wonderfully wild time through the remainder of the season!



Derbyshire Fly Box – July, August and September

The season is underway “properly”, now that the festivities with the drake have drawn to a dignified close. Tactics for the second half of the season are more subtle. We will be using generally smaller flies to attempt representations of the Blue Winged Olive (B.W.O.) and the other smaller olives such as the Pale Watery and (if we are lucky) the Iron Blue Dun. Watch out though, because there are still late summer opportunities with quite large flies: the sedges, crane flies and the August Dun (this puts in an appearance during the dog days of summer and is about twice the size of the B.W.O.). On some very hot days you sometimes find that no ephemerals are active and yet there are fish rising in the runs (usually these fish are exquisite wild bred rainbows). What are they taking? To answer this, have a look in the air around you. Check for blooms of aphids migrating. Perhaps you are having to swat little black flies away from your eyes and forehead. It is always worth trying a “terrestrial” when you see these rises but there is no perceivable hatch of waterborne flies going on. The variety of fly sizes means that we will be changing the tippet up and down from thin to thick and back again. Make sure you have a good supply of your favourite tippet material. Remember to use a heavier tippet if you do decide on a larger fly...

Blue Winged Olive

The bread and butter fly of the Wye and her tributaries. B.W.O turns up reliably on just about every day throughout the summer and on nearly every evening its female spinner, known as the Sherry Spinner, returns in hordes to start the whole process again. The little cruciform corpses of the spent flies give the trout and grayling a vital feast that on some nights goes right through to after dawn.

In the Spring Issue of Water-Lines traditionals like Orange Quill and Kite's Imperial were praised. Do try some of the later dressings. The Peacock carries some “moderns” that give you something to ring the changes with if you suspect a fish has seen too many of the well known patterns.

Sherry Spinner

Traditionals like Lunn's Particular do work but the moderns do have the edge when faking the real spinners. This is almost certainly because the modern artificials sit flatter to the surface film than the older, fully hackled flies. You can trim the hackle fibres away under the hook of a traditional fly to get the fly to settle right down but one of the modern dressings designed from the outset to sit flat would probably be better. Spring's recommendation for Rusty Spinner is still a good one. So that you have alternatives, take along some other spinner patterns with outspread wings and splayed tails.

Sedge

There are dozens of different sedge species on Derbyshire rivers but anatomically they can all be represented in the same way. The elk, deer and hare's ear sedges will all work well here.

Pale Watery

There are two flies that come under the name of Pale Watery but for our purposes they can be treated as one. They are small flies and artificials are usually dressed on a size 16 hook.

Tup's Indispensable, Grey Duster, Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear (sometimes with a hackle) are all good old standby patterns for the dun. Spinners of the Pale Watery are to be found on the surface and the fish do eat them. The body colour of the spinner is a very

bright red/orange. Choose a Rusty Spinner or similar – again make sure your fly sits flat on the surface.

Daddy Long Legs

On blustery days these are unmistakable casualties that crash land on the water's surface. You won't need prompting which pattern to put on. Patterns with delta wings twist the leader less than those with outstretched wings.

August Dun

You will not miss this fly when it puts in an appearance. It is a large olive and often sits on the water with its wings slightly open in a dyhedral pose. Being about twice the size of the B.W.O. it is easily recognised. The flies you used for the Large Dark Olive in Spring will be fine but you may find a lighter colour works best. Grey Duster, Greenwell's Glory, Kite's Imperial are all good they just need to be a bit bigger size 12 is about right.

Terrestrials

Throughout Summer you will see many species suffer accidents that mean they end up on the water. Individual big flies and beetles are taken by opportunists among the trout. Tiny flies like aphids if available in thousands become the subject of preoccupation. If the trout decide they want aphids then you had better make sure you have some tiny representatives with you on that day!

As we come to the end of September the year turns and it is time for us to turn to some of the flies we used right back at the start of the season – the Large Dark Olive makes its return. The trout are happy to eat these. If its grayling you are after look at the little smuts and midges – the Sturdy's Fancy really comes into its own at this time.

All the above are simply suggestions and starting points. Variations during the season will make some of these ideas invalid on the day. In the Peacock you can refer to the keeper's current list of effective flies based on what he has observed recently. You cannot beat having a good look yourself and experimenting.

Mrs Cressy from Chesterfield asks:

“I have fished the Wye for about five years since my husband and I moved to the area from Newbury. We enjoy the river so much and take every opportunity to come over the moor to fish. Please tell me though, why have we got to give up the Kinkhamer? We use it in all sizes and colours and although it probably doesn't mean the difference between life and death, it does come in handy some times. I can see it on the surface so it must be a dry fly... When is a fly emerging and when is it dry?”

The Klinkhamer was invented as a hatching sedge pattern. It is an emerger. These are great flies to use when wet flies and nymphs are allowed but as most of the fly sits below the water, it is not a dry fly. Try dropping a Klink' into a glass of water and you will be amazed just how wet it does sit; in fact the only part that stays dry is the wing post. The body is wet and the hackle is in the film. Our rivers have been dry fly only for generations, giving trout and grayling sanctuary below the surface. This is a management and fishing practise that certainly works well.

Recent advancements in tactics and materials have given the fly dresser many more tricks to use on trout and grayling feeding on or below the surface. These have included the Klinkhamer, the Shuttlecock and Suspender Buzzer. You have been quick to appreciate that the lines between dry and wet are now unclear. A dry fly fishery, of over 100 years standing, must keep those lines separated or else lose its identity.

You all know that you could easily fish a dry fly swept across and pulled back under water. None of you do this because you appreciate the idea of catching fish on top and to go below the surface would only fool yourselves. Dry fly is a tactic, not a chance to split hairs. It means clearly floating surface flies, both modern and traditional, that do not hang below the surface and are fished by the angler to stay on the surface.

Our request this year to use only dry flies on the main Haddon rivers and not emergers has been well received. I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to you all for your co-operation.

Warren

The Bakewell Ghosts

Wild Rainbow Trout of the Derbyshire Wye
by Warren Slaney

One summer's afternoon, ten years before the start of the Great War a Welshman, living locally in Youlgrave did what we all do from time to time, tried to spot fish from the main river bridge in Bakewell. He was lucky enough to see fish so light coloured he likened them to live prawns. These fish that drifted in and out of vision amongst the river bed and weed were the ancestors of our native wild rainbows, his name was Walter Gallichan and they were his 'Bakewell Ghosts'.

In his book, 'Fishing in Derbyshire & Around', published in 1905, Gallichan explains that the 'Ghosts' were spread throughout the length of the Wye below the market town but significantly he remarks that Rainbows still inhabited their adopted home of Ashford Lake, above Bakewell. They came to the Ashford as fry in the mid to late 1890's and the Lake provided a very suitable home for on growing in water very similar to that which flowed through their native streams in the Coastal Ranges of Northern California. Around the turn of the century some of the fish were liberated by flood and found their way into the Wye. They loved it here and proved to be perfect bed partners for our native Brown Trout.

During the hottest days of summer and on the coldest spring afternoon, wild rainbows rise freely to surface insects and provide prospects for dry fly fishing on each day of the season (bar flood). They are spring spawning fish who prefer to lay their tiny eggs in the deeper gravelly runs rather than the tails of the pool preferred by the local brown trout. Research tells us that they are a different strain of trout and quite unlike every other type of rainbow in this country. Look out for the strange markings on the belly of the fish which resemble parr marks and although you will know you have hooked something special from the way these fish fight, conformation will come in the white tips to the pelvic and anal fins and the russet tip to the dorsal. Although there is occasional breeding from rainbow trout elsewhere in the UK, these populations soon die out so as far as we are aware the Wye Rainbows are unique.

WGMS

Not Such Silly Old Buffers

Regular Rod meets up with the new keeper

New keeper Gareth Pedley, who joined the Estate in Spring, was asked, "Of the Haddon Fisheries policy for habitat management, to ensure sustainable wild trout fishing, what did he find that, in his view, was the most significant aspect."

"Haddon's Buffer Strips" came the reply.

This was intriguing because certainly areas of bank have been kept free of livestock for a while now and new fences appearing around the Estate's rivers have been noticed. But it is a long time since we used to be worried about bulls! ARE they the "most significant"? DO we really need them? Why?

Gareth explained buffer strips to us:

So what does a buffer strip do?

"It restricts the marginal access for grazing stock, so eliminates poaching of the river margins and bank and prevents over grazing of the lush marginal vegetation."

Why is marginal vegetation important?

"Marginal vegetation provides cover. Cover for fry, cover for water voles, cover for fishermen and as well as cover, it protects and consolidates the river bank."

"Consolidates" the riverbank? What for?

"Well consolidation greatly reduces erosion from winter floods. It promotes the reclamation of riverbank in over-wide channel sections through natural encroachment, producing a naturally narrower river channel, saving the time and money that man-made narrowing would need with minimal, if any, detrimental effects on the inhabiting wildlife."

What is better about having a narrower channel section?

"A narrower channel produces increased flow velocity and secondary flow characteristics, such as eddies and boils, which often become food lanes and feeding stations for rising fish."

Increased flow velocity?

"Increased flow velocity improves holding habitat for fish, giving greater cover. It aids the establishment and proliferation of invaluable ranunculus (water crowfoot) communities creating more habitat for fish and their primary food source (aquatic invertebrates). The higher flow velocity leads to reduced silt deposition on gravels and encourages natural gravel cleaning."

Reduced silt deposition and gravel cleaning?

"Yes. This really is important because it creates and improves habitat for many of the crucial up-winged fly species. It provides vital spawning areas to aid natural fish recruitment."

"Natural" fish recruitment?

"Of course! That's how Haddon intends to provide a sustainable wild trout fishery! It is done by creating a healthy ecosystem."

Thanks Gareth...

It would seem that there's a lot more to those fences and fallow banks than first meets the eye. A length of the Lathkill comes to mind that three years ago had one resident trout and about four or five more "just passing through". There was clearly only room for one to live there and the others only paused on their way elsewhere. Warren put the Haddon husbandry into action last year with living fences and other in-stream structures. Ten months later instead of one trout it was possible to see and count thirty resident trout and a couple of grayling!

Here's to the next time we "Hit the Buffers!"

RR

Any Luck? – The Long and the Short of It

Experiments with the Macedonian Manner of Taking Fish
by Richard Ward

Forgotten your rod? Just broken it? Tackle shop closed? Budget concerns about hiring or buying a replacement? You've only just got here having driven many miles, now what are you to do? Sometimes if it wasn't for bad luck you'd have no luck at all!

Or perhaps you have brought a friend who expressed a keen interest in coming along, so far so good. However, on seeing the friend's first attempts it becomes very clear that he has no idea about casting. You don't want to abandon him to his fate but it is clear that if he is to have any success this day you will need to look after him. What is the best way to save the day for both of you?

Maybe you have been a fisher for a good few years and already you have come to agree with the maxim of the Fly Fishers Club that "There is more to fishing than catching fish!" You may have wondered about the origins of our Noble Sport. Have you ever asked yourself just what was it like to be a fly fisher 2,000 years ago?

The answers to all these questions can be found by some experimental investigations of "Fishing in the Manner of the Macedonians"!

Nearly two thousand years ago a Roman writer, Ælian, described (second-hand) how the Macedonian anglers wrapped wool about their hooks, adding the wax coloured wattles from a capon and used this artificial fly to catch spotted fishes in a fast flowing river near Thessalonica. The rod was six feet long and the line was the same length, one assumes of knotted horsehair. This meant the Macedonian fly fisher was limited to a cast of from six to fourteen feet maximum if the arm was used at full stretch.

That the Sport has survived to today implies that two, very reasonable, conclusions may be drawn about the nature of this early form of the Art. Two thousand years ago the preoccupation with obtaining food was more urgent than today. The method must have been effective. Nets, traps and spears were available but some chose to angle. It must have been fun too.

What worked two thousand years ago will work today. We can do the same thing. If you have no rod then carefully cut yourself one of willow or hazel about six feet long as thick as your thumb at the fat end and about pencil thickness at the thin end. Strip off the leaves and any twigs but leave on the bark, you will need this natural camouflage later. On the thin end use a nail knot to whip on a foot or so of thick nylon. To this attach your leader of about another nine feet. Using a strong tippet, (about five pounds breaking strain is good) attach the dry fly of your choice. Use your usual landing net, floatant, flies, Polaroids, broad brimmed drab hat, over trousers, wellies and so on. Go fishing! That's it!

In the case of the friend with rod but insufficient casting ability then simply use the rod and miss out the willow or hazel manufacturing process. In his case use the reel and just have the leader about the length of the rod and fish with a foot or two of fly line out of the top ring. Take him fishing! Again, that's it! Well maybe not entirely...

Watch anglers on the Wye and you will see most of them throw a longish line to their chosen quarry. This is not an option for you as a Macedonian! You (and your friend) will have to get much closer to the fish to have a chance.

This is where your clothing and a willingness to creep and crawl will have a major bearing on your success. A great advantage of our Sport is that it is not a spectator sport, so you need not worry about looking undignified as you crawl (in homage?) towards your prey.

So you have been prepared to go along with these proposals thus far, now you are, quite reasonably, asking, "Whereabouts on the Peacock water can I use this short rod, short line, Macedonian method?"

I once counted up fifty-three different spots on the day ticket water where a Macedonian would have a good chance of catching a fish. Now I'm not about to tell you ALL of them... But here are a few to get you started. Once you have experienced this toe-to-toe style of fly-fishing you will soon begin to identify other places for yourself.

Starting down near the Peacock behind Caudwell's Mill go through the gate from the car park and head upstream to where the electricity cables pass over the river. Just upstream of here the river runs round the bole of an alder and there is a strong feed lane two yards from the true left bank. Below the tree is a lower part of the bank that has a coarse grass growing on it. Crawl onto this grassy spot and from there you can side cast from left to right up onto the edge of the feed lane. Drag is not a problem because you are close enough to raise the "rod" and keep most of the line off the water.

Let's move upstream. Cross over the millrace. Walk up to Wye Farm and cross the foot bridges to the Wye's right bank. Go down river past the weir pool down to the head of the rapids. Sit down by the last tree before the rapids. You have a pool in front of you somewhat bigger than a bathtub. Cast the fly to the edge of the fast water and trot it down to the very edge of the pool. It usually gets eaten in the last foot of the drift but can be snatched as soon as it lands on the water. Both browns and wild rainbows live here...

Wandering up stream to above the weir a row of coppiced alder bushes signals another, close in, fish holding station. Creep up to just above the furthest upstream alder bush. (Watch out for very large cow pats when sliding into position here!) Looking upstream you can see the feed lanes and one comes right under your bank. Wait and watch awhile. When you see the rises near you, select which one you want to catch and cast to it. You will catch either a trout (browns and rainbows are here) or a grayling.

Is this becoming clearer now? You can probably imagine many other locations worth a try at close quarters. Now let me see – fifty-three places, allowing for fumbles and only catching one in every four attempted, that's a baker's dozen! Not a bad day for one that might have started with a disaster.

Fun and laughter are part and parcel of a good day's fishing. The Macedonian method can abound in this vital ingredient. There you are crawling around and you are spotted by another rod. He comes over just as you are slipping the net under a splendid two pounder (my best for a willow wand is two pounds ten ounces on a Red Hackle that I think was taken as a Soldier Beetle). You clamber out of the fishing station. You remove the fly. Momentarily you both admire the fish's beauty before releasing her safely. You gather your tackle together. The other rod was about to ask what fly you had caught her on but his eye has fallen upon your "rod"... His mouth opens, no sound comes out. His eyes are popping. You smile and ask, "Any luck?"

Richard