

THE FIELD[®]

MAY 2006 £3.60

GREEN WITH ENVY

Meet the men with the best jobs in Britain and seethe at their horribly happy lifestyles



MOROCCO FOR PARTRIDGES

Discover stunning birds, great food and slick service

BUY A CHALKSTREAM DAY

Where to book a day in paradise this season for less than the price of four *vin ordinaire* pheasants



Four birds buys a lot of fishing

A day on the Test costs the same as four pheasants. At that price, you can spoil yourself and repay some of those shooting days, says Charles Rangeley-Wilson

THERE IS a clichéd perception so persistent, so confidently expressed that it hardly gets questioned – that season rods on chalkstreams are like “dead men’s shoes”; that when rods very occasionally become available they are taken seamlessly and immediately by someone well connected, who has spent years waiting patiently for his turn and years before that dedicating himself to understanding the black art of getting on the waiting list in the first place. It is one of three chalkstream myths, the other two being that there are no wild trout south of Watford and east of Taunton, and that the incredibly limited fishing available there is ridiculously expensive.

I hear all of this so often, read it peddled around on internet fishing-chat forums or written in magazines, that I doubt the truth of the matter will ever get a fair hearing. Maybe that’s a good thing – at least it means that there is great fishing out there for those willing to look for it.

One or other of those clichés might occasionally be true of a given fishery, but I can’t think of one where all three would coincide: full of stockies and impossible to get access to would be a strange economic stance for any estate to take. But I can think of many chalkstream fisheries where none of them applies: where the fish are wild, where access is open and where the cost is low.

Expense is relative. I’ve found season rods in some surprising places – the Upper Itchen or the Test systems for example, where there is no stocking and an abundance of fussy wild trout. There, at the top end of the scale, fishing works out at about £100 per day. It might

be 10 or 20 times the price of a day on Dartmoor, but it is not a lot more than a day on Grafham reservoir when the boat, engine, permit and a distractive pass of the tackle shop are all taken into account.

But what about the Lyde, the Glaven or the Salisbury and District Angling Club? That fishing is as inexpensive as any. Set the cost against another fieldsport such as shooting and the comparisons are off the scale. A hundred quid buys you four pheasants. A 100-pheasant day for 10 guns would cost in the order of £250 per gun. That is as inexpensive as pheasant-shooting gets; £1,500 per gun on corporate days is not an unusual figure.

But I like to make the comparison from a different point of view. I’m primarily a fisherman but I enjoy shooting. I get asked a few times a year by generous friends to shoot on their farms and I have no real way to reciprocate – other than to invite them fishing for a day. A season rod gives you plenty of enjoyable fishing and the option of sharing it occasionally with friends.

In a few hours on the phone and internet I unearthed this list of fisheries offering season rods. On many of them wild trout are abundant. Some are stocked to a greater or lesser degree. Take your pick from what you prefer. All of them offer good-value sport, and the quality of that sport is not always related to the price. You’re a lucky man when you get to the top of the Dorchester or Salisbury and District Club waiting lists. ►

Right Wherwell Priory; a full rod on this beat of the Test fishes one day a week for £2,270

