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NOWHERE BETTER

Simon Cooper shares his favourite lines in angling literature



THESE ARE MY FAVOURITE LINES IN angling literature, taken from Dermot Wilson's book *Fishing the Dry Fly*, published in 1957.

"The gentlemen from the cities who came down for easy Mayfly fishing have climbed into their large cars and driven away. The river valleys have an air of luxurious peace and all through the long warm days, however bad the fishing may be, every fisherman (*sic*) can be buoyed up by the thought that the breathless excitement of the evening rise is still ahead."

It is a shame that this is the only book to Dermot's name; his writing was sublime but he had his demons and a further book eluded him. That said he wrote until nearly his last breath. His now late wife Renée told me that his regular column for this magazine was one of his joys in later life.

Luxurious peace. It is a phrase that has stayed with me in the many decades that have passed since I first read Dermot's words. To me there is nothing more beautiful, more utterly, dumbfoundedly heart-stopping than England in early summer. Whatever mighty hand created our rural paradise, or if you prefer to be more grounded, the happenchance of evolution, it is like nothing else. The sounds. The delicate breeze. The subtle aroma. A heat that is not too hot and not too cold. Even the rain is a pleasure.

Landscapes unfold across your gaze as you drive from home to river. I will aver with Dermot just a little — there is rarely anything as exciting as that first moment you glimpse a chalkstream on a summer's morning. As you journey to your Valhalla, the crops are on the cusp of harvest. Hedgerows are verdant. Nature has given birth to the seasonal offspring that fly, run and flutter in youthful exuberance. Proud parents, their work done, are now languid in their habits.

The river welcomes you like a sated mistress. The deed

was done back in May. Everyone took their fill. Satisfied their lust for lusty fish. The pickings were fun, but when we are truthful with ourselves, we knew it was all too easy. This summer day is the moment for the true test of a fly-fisher. Or so we tell ourselves. Now whether this is an honest truth or rather a bit of expectation management, I will leave you to judge of yourself.

But the absolute truth is that you will, from the moment you step from the car, be enveloped in the beauty of the English countryside, assailed by a cacophony of sounds, smells and sights that exist in aggregate simply nowhere else on our planet. I tell would-be photographers this is the moment to capture the essence of our chalkstreams, though however many millions of pixels they have on their camera or gigabytes on their hard drive the resultant photo will only ever be a teaser for being there.

Yes, you really have to be there because summer on a river represents what is so difficult for us to explain, and for non-fishers to understand, why we do what we do. Yes, we love our fishing. The whole totality of buying the gear, choosing that exact fly from a box of hundreds, and executing the perfect cast to outwit a wily trout.

But in truth, it is where and when you do it that matters. The chance to lie on warm grass, close the eyes to absorb the symphony that accompanies the ever-rolling stream and know that for a few fleeting hours that, whatever ails you or the world, really does not matter. ■

*Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks, the leading chalkstream fishing specialists. He is author of *Life of a Chalkstream* and *The Otters' Tale*. Follow his fortnightly blog on saving our rivers at fishingbreaks.co.uk*