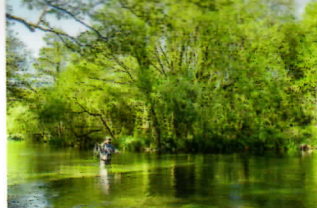


13ft *Salmon rods*
TESTED

The dream ticket.
Mayfly, bent cane
and the Itchen



WIN
A SNOWBEE
G-SX TROUT
ROD

TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

Fifty

**GAME-CHANGING
RESERVOIR TIPS**



TWEED TEMPTATION

Why salmon magic happens at Makerstoun



**PICKING
POCKETS**

High summer trout in a
stunning Eden gorge

TROUT
HOOK
**STRENGTH
TEST**

**TINGLERS
AFTER DARK**

Tie a deadly single-hooked
sea-trout tube



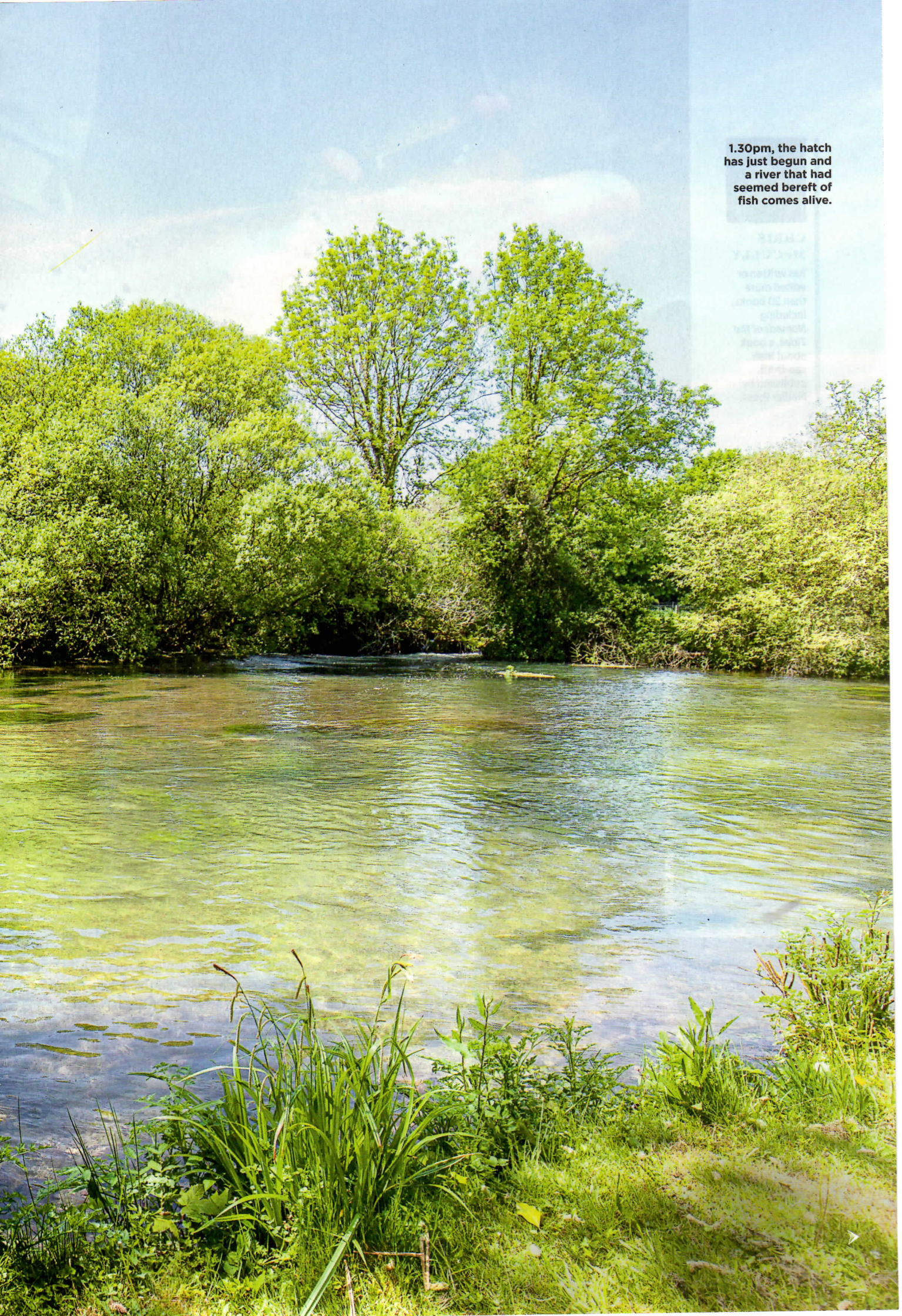
A man in a cap and waders is fly fishing in a river. The water is calm and reflects the surrounding lush green trees and foliage. A swan is visible in the background on the left. The scene is peaceful and scenic.

CHRISTENINGS AT KANARA

*It's a day of firsts for Chris McCully
at mayfly time on the River Itchen*

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD FAULKS

1.30pm, the hatch
has just begun and
a river that had
seemed bereft of
fish comes alive.





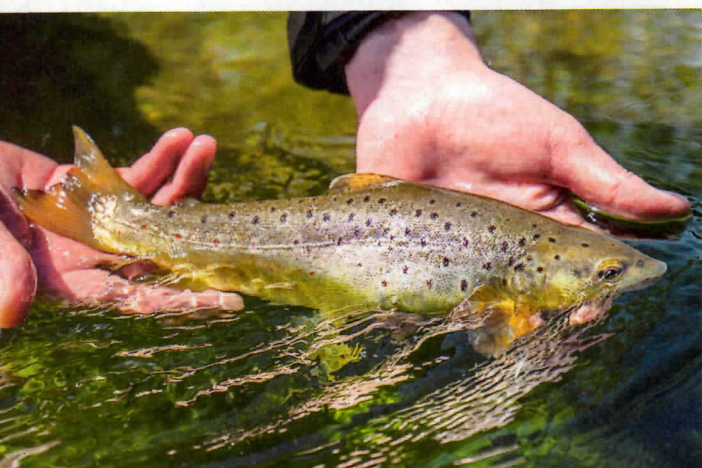
CHRIS McCULLY

has written or edited more than 20 books, including *Nomads of the Tides*, a book about Irish sea-trout, published by Medlar Press.

The first fish, a good 2lb, which rose to a Yellow Humpy.



A newly emerged dun on pristine leaves. The CC de France – 60 years young.



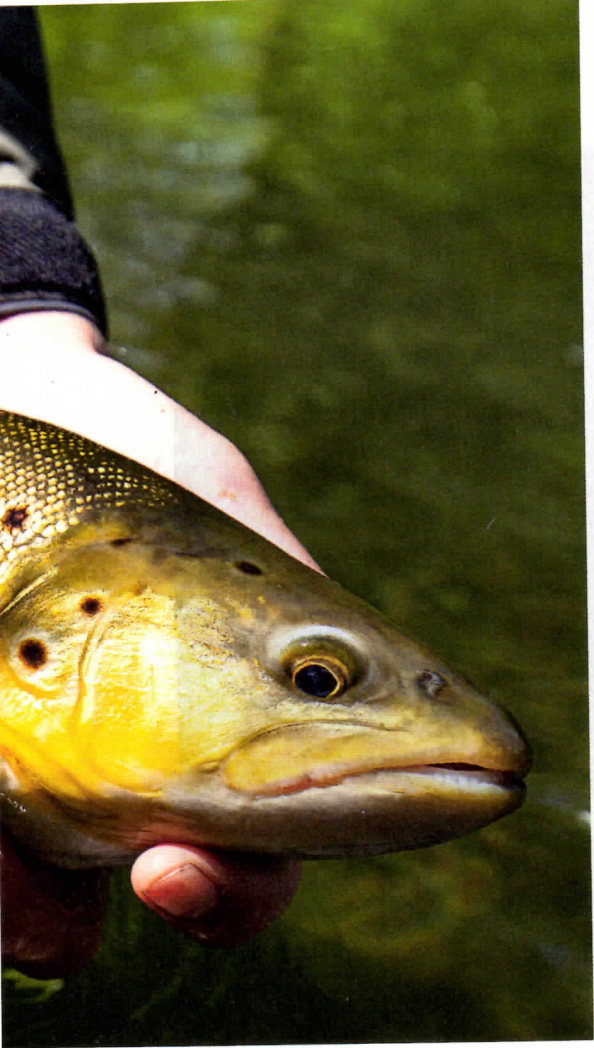
Dazzling colours. Perhaps a wild one.

SUDDENLY IT'S MAY AND THE COW parsley's as high as a man. The rigours of the early season – numbed hands round a Thermos, duns vanishing into snow – are now merely trivial memories. The air's warmer, the wind's swung into a better quarter. Martins shriek in tiers of sky. Wedding cake icing's been flung into the hedgerows and the air's full of hawthorn-fly. And after the hawthorn, bizarrely lovely, come the mayfly.

If you'd told me that one day I'd fish the Itchen at mayfly time with a cane rod and silk line, I'd have eaten your ferrule stoppers. Still, in 2018 I'd been fishing for 50 years, had just turned 60, and after intensive searching had found an 8ft Hardy CC de France that had been made in the same year as I was. Next came the question as to where I could most appropriately christen it. The response arrived in the form of a lucky chance to fish the Itchen below Winchester in mid-May.

It used to be tricky to get a day-ticket for the Itchen. Kanara was an exception to former exclusivity and day lets were offered by "Scrappy" Hay and the Rod Box from the 1960s onwards. Happily, the beat's still available, through Fishing Breaks, and provides ample opportunity for one or two rods to enjoy half a mile of river as varied and challenging as it is lovely.

Kanara was new to me. When I reconnoitred on May 16, I noticed how healthy the stream looked: a wet winter had filled the chalk springs and the water was bank-high and pellucid. The weed, a mix of crowfoot and ranunculus, grew abundantly but wasn't quite in flower. The upper part of the beat was formed by a glide hundreds of yards long. It ran so strongly that here and there it had aspirations to become broken water. The lower part of the beat comprised a broader, slower-flowing reach with the main current – signalled by a



THE FOLLOWING DAY I WAS JOINED BY RICHARD

Faulks and his expert camera lenses. I was gibbering as we walked to the downstream limit of the beat. Mayfly up - CC de France - silk line - Grey Wulff - hatching mayfly - hawthorn tree - bubble-line - pulses of duns....

We reached the hut. Nothing rose. It seemed as if nothing had ever risen. Chalkstreams are like that. Seduced by words like "mayfly" and "Itchen" you imagine that flies hatch, trout are active all day long. They are not. The same applies to the olive hatches of the earlier part of the season: walk along the Test, the Itchen, Driffeld Beck early on a spring morning and you could (almost) swear there are (almost) no trout in the river. Then, in early afternoon, the first olive duns appear and miraculously, every glide and crease holds a rising fish. The natural flies concentrate the trout's attention on an easily available, abundant food source.

Still nothing rose. Temporarily I abandoned thoughts of cane and silk. Cane fly-rods can do many things - tight loops, accuracy, delicacy - but they're not at their best with bulky, weighted flies. I rigged a 9ft five-weight carbon-fibre rod with a Richard Walker Mayfly Nymph, working the pattern through the slower parts of the glides that had hosted so many trout the previous afternoon. Nothing. Another glide - and another nothing. Even when, with the sun beginning to

promising bubble-line - coursing briskly under a magnificent hawthorn tree on the right bank. Everywhere there were trout-holding scours in the gravel. Below the hut the Itchen ran into emerald-dark deeps, which I suspect would be wonderful for grayling in autumn and winter.

Just off the current in the glide-with-aspirations there was a joyous thwack as a very good fish annexed a mayfly. Then another. Under the hawthorn tree on the far bank, tucked in on the far side of the bubble-line, other trout were rising - now a riotous splash, now a quieter circle. It was overcast and cool: mayfly were everywhere. In the broader reaches, even in those emerald-dark deeps, trout rose. These weren't the agitated rises that sometimes greet the first-appeared mayfly duns. Early in the mayfly season trout may nudge or splash at the naturals, even try to drown them, before they realise that the insect is both harmless and edible. This hatch had clearly been underway for days and the trout had become confident enough to take the mayfly steadily. The flies hatched in pulses spanning the afternoon - 20-minute bursts of activity, then a lull, then another burst. I looked out for other natural fly, for late hawthorns and continuing hatches of olives, but the Itchen, its birds and all its trout had forgotten them and were alike becoming obsessed with the rhythms of the mayfly.



A taut line but forgiving rod.

"If you'd told me that one day I'd fish the Itchen at mayfly time with a cane rod and silk line, I'd have eaten your ferrule stoppers"



Casting from the light into the shadows.

burnish the day, I put up a random dry-fly, all I caught was a solitary grayling distinguished only by its greed. By late morning the gibbering had subsided and I was becoming anxious. The day was hot, the sky a brilliantly useless blue. Those conditions may be wonderful for camera work but they're not necessarily good for the appearance of mayfly.

We thought of an early lunch but I've found that early lunches often become extended, even delinquent lunches. Still feeling anxious, I took up the CC de France, threading a silk DT6 line through the rings. There was no fiddling with specialised leaders. For accuracy, an 8ft cane fly-rod needs a short, steeply-tapered leader of no more than 10ft. To turn over a bulky dry-fly and cope with large trout, a 5lb point is about right.

As we were thinking wistfully of delinquent lunches the first mayflies appeared. It was 12.57pm and on the instant, all thought of food was forgotten. A trout rose to that trickle hatch - then another. I put up a Yellow Humpy.

The overhanging greenery cast shadows over the surface so I waded slowly across to the far side of the river, where it would be easier to sight the fish. An oblique cast would also make it more difficult inadvertently to line any moving trout. From my new vantage point in the water I could see a fine trout within casting range - a fish that wasn't yet rising but one certainly on the fin. The Humpy drifted towards a lustrously-spotted olive back. The take, when it came, was extraordinary. The trout sighted the fly, lifted ... then turned away. I was about to curse, silently but thoroughly, when the trout seemed to bethink itself. It raced after the fly - and took with a quiet bulge. That old cane rod was as surprised as I was when, dazed into timeliness, I set the hook.

Kanara holds a mixture of stocked and wild fish. I don't know the Itchen's trout well enough to be definitive, but I'm almost sure the trout that finally graced the net was as wild as the day it was born. Judging from the fish's relationship to the net frame we put the length at 17in-18in and the weight at a good 2lb. The fish was almost entirely golden, with bright crimson spots. It was a grand beginning and the best kind of christening.

About our afternoon at Kanara I can be brief. Despite the fell sunshine, the eggshell skies and the heat, the mayflies hatched. All anxiety was forgotten. The trout began to feed in earnest: rises spread across the lower part of the beat until it seemed that each scour held a fish. Upstream, in the glide-with-aspirations, trout lay just off the current; any natural mayflies floating downstream were in danger of being annexed. As the hatch intensified, fish got into the bubble-line and creases under the right bank, too. Surprised by delight, I waded slowly upstream, sometimes casting speculatively, sometimes to rising fish. I changed to a hatching mayfly pattern that I'd fumbled together several years ago after being beaten by a trout on the Wallop Brook, a fish so epicurean that it would ignore naturals resting inertly on the surface and only take the duns when they were fluttering. The pattern's tied Klinkhåmer-style with a wing-post and

"Witness is an ever-growing part of the happiness I experience when I'm fishing"

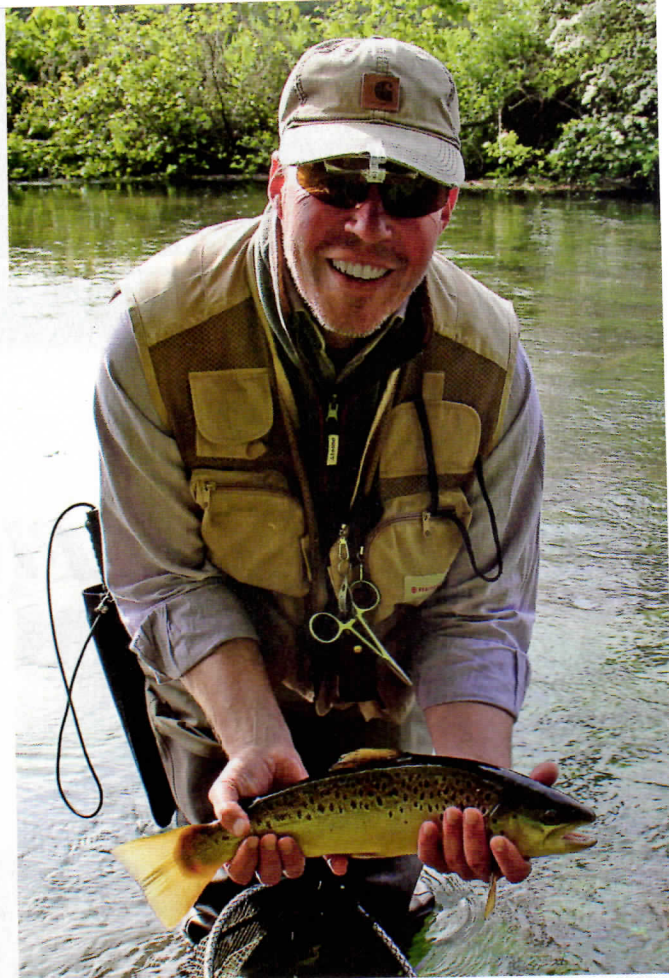
hackle of CDC fibres. This duck's-arse mayfly was such an immediate success with the Kanara trout that they cheered when they saw it coming. Still, those same fish also readily took the Humpy and a small Grey Wulff. Although I'd love to claim credit for inventing a supreme new mayfly pattern I shall here dodge that opportunity.

By tea-time I was satisfied. I'd released four brace of trout, with the first of them the best, and the three largest running 2lb and slightly more. The cane rod, the silk line had been thoroughly (re-)christened. I was thrilled with how well both had functioned. "Function" was the right word: cane is forgiving, silk has no stretch; silk casts and lands lightly, cane offers delicacy combined with toughness. Using such antique tackle was, after all, no mere antiquarian gesture although I was touchingly reminded of how it had been once, all those years ago, when I learnt to cast a fly using a cheap cane rod and a Terylene line. A slower action - let the rod do the work - follow through.... Casting at a handkerchief placed on a school lawn....

The temptations of nostalgia, the illusions of success meant that I was wool-gathering when we realised that there was one further piece of work to do on Kanara. Richard had with patient vigilance coaxed the best out of how the Itchen looked but this was his first angling day on any chalkstream and, accordingly, we wondered whether the Itchen might extend its generosity not only to a belated christening but to another kind of first: Richard's.

He put up a five-weight and a green drake pattern that had a sort of sculpted wing. It looked beautiful. Trout were still rising above and below the hawthorn bush. I picked up a camera, sat gratefully with back to fence and watched Richard cover those trout.

There's something beguiling about watching another angler cast a fly. Just as others' fly-boxes invariably seem more controlled and enviable than one's own, so do others' casting styles and competence. As it was, those trout were rising five yards apart, both tight in to the bank. Trailing hawthorn branches had to be avoided. A downstream wind had sprung up. I would have been scuppered. Richard cast with great subtlety and decisiveness. He needed that skill: the fly would have to float down a channel no more than a foot wide. If you're a spectator, and can see the drift of the other angler's fly, you sit rapt, willing the trout



Photographer Richard's first chalkstream trout.

to take. It's all you can do, not to give voice at the *moment juste*. "Right...there!" you want to say, complete with exclamation mark.

The trout below the hawthorn weighed a good 1½lb. The trout lying five yards upstream did not. It was bigger. It played hard, circumnavigating a wading Richard twice before coming protesting to the net. This fish - another yellow-hued Itchen trout - was the equal of almost anything we'd caught. Richard was smiling as he played that trout and smiling even more broadly as he released it. Looking on gave me just as much pleasure. After five decades I'm coming to realise that *witness* is an ever-growing part of the happiness I experience when I'm fishing.

It was a day of wonderful firsts. The fish were still rising when we left (at 7pm) and as I drove away I thought back to cane and silk and the duck's-arse dun, to the hawthorn bush, the glide, the rising trout, and to Richard's fly drifting so cannily over them. What a way to christen a 60-year old cane rod, I thought, and what a way to start your chalkstream fishing - on the Itchen, during the mayfly, at Kanara, when the cow parsley's as high as a horse. T&S



Left: Chris's duck's-arse dun.
Right: Sharpening the point of a Richard Walker Mayfly Nymph.

Book a day with the mayfly

Fishing on the Itchen at Kanara (and other chalkstream beats) is offered by Fishing Breaks (fishingbreaks.co.uk/chalkstream). The trout season runs from April 16-September 30. Grayling fishing is available from October 1-December 31.

We stayed overnight at a local inn, The Bugle in Twyford (bugleinntwyford.co.uk). This has twin and double rooms (called The Meon, The Test and The Itchen) and offers excellent food and attentive hospitality. Warmly recommended.

