

INCORPORATING
trout
FISHERMAN

TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

Just the ticket

First-rate sport on a famous chalkstream

FRESH OFF THE TIDE

Summer salmon from the sparkling Spey

6

**DRY-FLY
GAMBITS FOR
STILLWATERS**

**Trout before
breakfast**

Outwitting the early risers

AUGUST 2020 £4.50 ON SALE JUNE 25-JULY 22

08 >



9 770041 337212



NYMPH AND TUCK

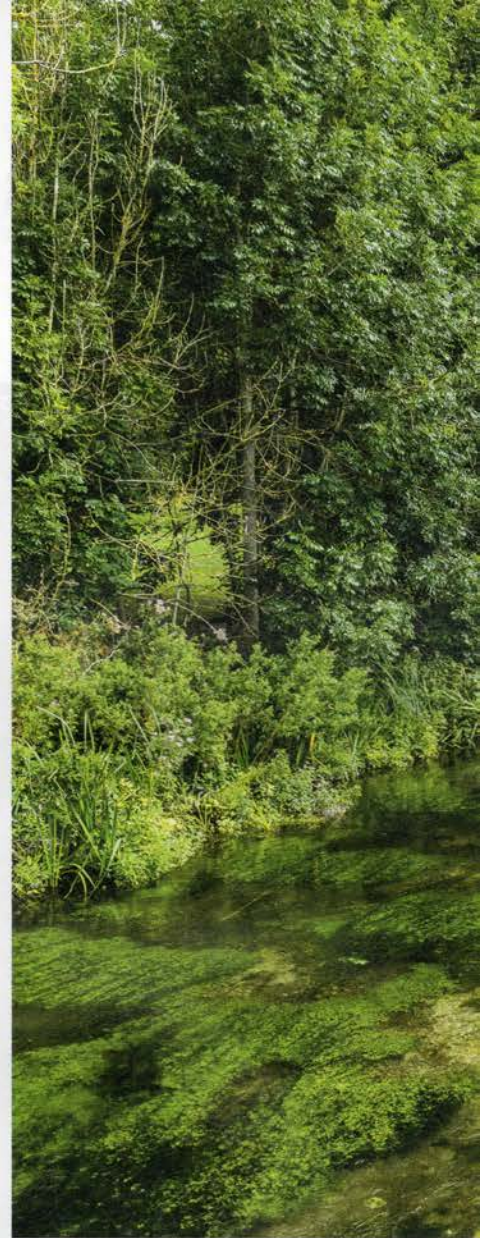
Style of fly and type of cast are paramount to tempt the River Test's handsome chalkstream trout, writes Don Stazicker



THE RIVER TEST AT Wherwell regularly features in my fly-fishing dreams, a perfect chalk stream in the classic sense. Lying three miles south-east of Andover, the Wherwell Priory estate nestles between

two carrier streams and is about as scenic as it gets. The white facade of the 19th-century house overlooks manicured paddocks, home to magnificent horses, while walking through Wherwell village with its many thatched, timbered properties seems like time travel to a bygone age.

Water clarity is excellent, polarising glasses reveal the tremendous head of fish these beats hold. The carefully managed, luxuriant weed beds and beautifully mown riverbanks, with sensible border strips left high to provide cover for the angler are a tribute to the knowledge and care of the keeper, Michael Taplin. There are two beats available, Park and Priory, their combined length is 1½ miles. Each beat can accommodate three anglers and has an excellent fishing hut with a gas barbecue. You can combine the two beats for larger parties. During short periods in June, July and August, when weed cutting is underway, you can book two days for two or four rods and a night of camping by the river in your own tent. Fishing is from dawn to dusk and while the middle of the day may be tricky because



Flies of varying weights to cover changes in depth and current.



A pristine wild brown tempted by a tan Klinkhamer on the first drift.



What more could you want? Thoughtfully cut weed beds, marginal vegetation to hide behind and a clear back cast.

of cut weed, fishing early and late to fish feeding actively on nymphs dislodged by the weed cutting can be excellent. This option is worth considering as it offers a way to fish this fabulous beat at less than half price.

The White Lion, a 17th-century coaching inn with accommodation, is close to the river and a great place for a pie and a pint.

I fished the Park beat in mid-August on a sunny day interrupted by brief showers. It has a variety of water, the broad and shallow downstream end offers easy casting, there is a deep fast-flowing mill pool in the middle and the beat becomes narrower and swifter under tree cover at its upstream extent. The mature trees shading the upper reach are high and do not inhibit casting. My 9ft four-weight rod worked beautifully and was well-suited to fishing at distance on the broader, shallower downstream reach.

The beat is fished from the bank with three short



DON STAZICKER is a highly experienced trout fisherman, fly-tyer and instructor. He co-authored the groundbreaking e-book on trout behaviour *Trout and Flies - Getting Closer*, and is the river conservancy officer for Cressbrook and Litton Flyfishers in Derbyshire.

wading sections including one where access passes through a private garden and bank fishing is not permitted. The majority of the fishing is accessible from the bank, so leave the chest waders at home, thigh boots or wellingtons are fine, but don't forget a long-handled landing net to reach over the bankside vegetation. Fishery rules are simple, fishing from 9.30am to dusk, dry-fly only until the end of June, dry-fly and nymph from then to the end of the season.

Fishing in bright sunshine at midday, nymphing offered the best chance of success. Getting the fly down to the fish, achieving a proper drift and detecting the take are crucial to successful nymph fishing. Sight nymphing was effective in the clear water although the restrictions on wading complicated depth and drift control.

Modern nymphing with the rod held high, keeping the line and leader off the water to ➤



“It’s a bit of a shock when the advantages of wading are not available to you”

maintain tight contact with the nymph, is most effective when you can wade.

The waters I regularly fish allow wading and I have become so used to wading tactically to optimise cast length, drift and drag control that it’s a bit of a shock when the advantages of wading are not available to you.

It is possible to fish the high-stick Euro nymph technique at short and medium distances without wading, but when the fish are on the far side of a broad river it becomes much harder to use the technique effectively. Nymphing at distance requires techniques such as the tuck cast to get the fly down quickly to the fish before drag acting on the fly-line can ruin the drift. Using a nymph heavy enough to reach the trout also assists the tuck cast in providing a fly-first delivery with slack tippet landing next to the nymph.

Heavier flies are often larger, which is not what we want. We need to vary the weight while maintaining the same size. With the advent of tungsten beads, we are using brass beads less. This is a mistake. Tungsten is 2.3 times as dense as brass, by tying flies with beads of both materials we can create flies of the same size with very different weights. I prefer to use flies that are as light as possible, relying on the cast to deliver the fly vertically into the water rather than using heavy flies to overcome the increased resistance of a leader that drops horizontally on to the surface. Lighter flies cause less fish-spooking splash and are more mobile and lifelike in the current.

Smooth flies are less water resistant than fuzzy flies and sink quicker. Part of the genius behind Sawyer’s Pheasant Tail Nymph was its lack of legs, left out because the natural holds its legs tight against the thorax while swimming. Omitting the legs also ensured the nymphs sank quickly, despite being only moderately weighted.

Smooth flies are also less wind resistant and turn over well with tuck casts.

We need flies with differing weights and the ability to make casts to get our flies down to the fish, but it’s all wasted unless you can work out how deep the fish are lying. ➤



Thin tippet allows nymphs to sink quickly.



Picture perfect: Wherwell High Street.



The well-appointed hut and barbecue area.

Trout were easily spotted in the exceptionally clear water.

Lush marginal vegetation makes a long-handled landing net essential.

Refraction, the bending of light rays as they enter or leave the water, makes it difficult to decide exactly where the fish is lying. The fish is always closer to you and deeper than it appears. This is further complicated because the effect of refraction changes with the height of the viewer's eyes above the water. Viewed from a bridge directly above a trout, the position of the fish will be true whereas a distant fish viewed by an angler crouching low on the bank appears to be in a position far from its true holding lie. There is a danger of both lining the fish and failing to get the fly to its depth.

The combination of depth, distance and angle makes it impossible to give a hard and fast rule for where fish really lie, but that doesn't mean that all is lost.

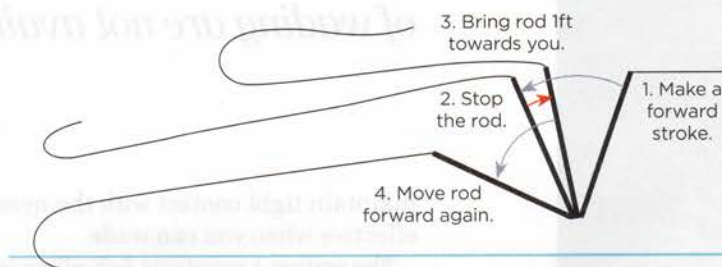
Using a fly with a white bead head or fluorescent hotspot that is easily spotted underwater, I can see my fly drift relative to weed beds and the bottom. Practising in fishless areas I can gauge current velocity and water depth at varying distances allowing me to judge how to present the fly to my target fish.

It's essential to take time to do this because presenting the fly at the wrong depth, nearly always too shallow, is the most common reason for a lack of takes when nymphing.

I parked by the fishing hut and as I walked upstream a good brown trout rose several times in an area shaded by mature trees. It lifted through the clear water without hesitation to take a small tan Klinkhamer – a brilliant start to the day.

In the bright sunshine there wasn't much surface

THE TUCK CAST



This cast requires a fast, slightly overpowered stroke and a very definite sharp stop. Bringing the rod tip back a short distance immediately after the stop enhances the tuck action.

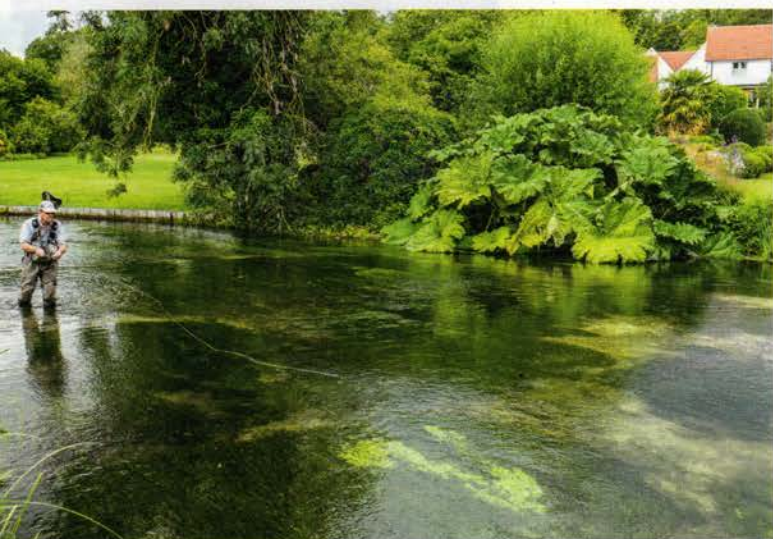
activity, so I switched to a 9ft 4X (6lb) tapered leader knotted to 6ft of 5X (4.75lb) tippet. Attached to a floating line with a short front taper, the thick butt of the tapered leader helped a tuck cast to deliver the fly directly under the tippet with loose coils of thin tippet material allowing the nymph to sink quickly. It was easy to see the takes, visible in the bright sunlight, when the fish separated from their shadows on the riverbed as they elevated to take the fly or the white flash as they opened their mouths to suck in the nymph. Presenting the nymph to your side of the fish makes it easier to see the mouth opening than if you cast beyond it. Sometimes the white bead head just vanished as the fish took the fly.

Wire-bodied bead-head baetis nymphs succeeded in the shallow areas, with heavier shrimp and larval patterns needed for the deeper, faster water. Some beautiful grayling and wild brown trout came from the faster water while larger stocked browns in excellent condition were abundant along the entire beat.

I thoroughly enjoyed a day spent sight fishing for superb fish amid gorgeous scenery. Exactly like in my dreams.

Although the weather dictated that nymph fishing was the successful method on the day, under more favourable conditions the dry-fly fishing is excellent and there is a spectacular mayfly hatch. Few waters are better for sight fishing than this beat. If you want to learn this method, Fishing Breaks has experienced guides who can show you the ropes. I can't think of a better or more beautiful water on which to learn. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD FAULKS



It is possible to wade on the wider downstream section.



Factfile

WHERE AND HOW Wherwell Priory, High Street, Wherwell, Hampshire, SP11 7JH. Two beats. One to three rods per beat. 9.30am-dusk. Bank fishing with limited wading. Barbless or de-barbed hooks only.



SEASON April 20-June 30: upstream dry-fly only. July 1-October 13: upstream dry-fly and nymph.

BOOKING Fishing Breaks. Tel: 01264 781988. Web: fishingbreaks.co.uk
April 20-May 12: £296/rod. May 13-June 7: £397/rod (minimum booking three rods). June 8-July 31: £296/rod. August 1-October 13: £253/rod.
Fish Camp (using own tent). Ring for dates in June/July/August. £475 two days/one night for two rods. £885 two days/one night for four rods

ACCOMMODATION White Lion Inn, Winchester Road, Wherwell SP11 7JF.
Tel: 01264 860 317.
Web: thewhitelionwherwell.co.uk