

A Fishing Party

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An annual June fishing trip to Scotland attempting to catch increasingly elusive salmon and sea trout on the River Avon (pronounced A'an), the main tributary of the River Spey, is always a most enjoyable week. Unfortunately the 2008 visit started badly with an American friend and his wife, who had recently flown in from Dallas, being involved in a fatal crash between Ballater and Tomintoul which resulted in the death of a 63-year-old biker.

A fatal accident

My friend Don had slowed his hired Vauxhall Vectra almost to a halt after observing a group of six bikers coming down a hill towards him at high speed. Unfortunately the third in the group sat up, did not lean into the bend and lost control. He came off his bike which miraculously hit Don's car low down on the front passenger wing and tyre. The biker himself was not so lucky as he hit a cement-embedded snow pole and broke his neck. An ambulance with a doctor on board was called but after two minutes CPR and one shock, he was pronounced dead; which he had already been for the past 45 minutes. Also in attendance was a street pastor from Aberdeen who administered the last rites to the biker and comforted both my American friends and the other bikers. He said he had been overtaken by the group at speeds approaching 80mph.

Two hours after the accident when my wife and I arrived to transport our friends to the fishing hotel the dead man was still lying uncovered where he had fallen, awaiting the arrival of the coroner (fig 1).

Fig 1. Fatal accident scene



The police said that such accidents involving what they referred to as 'born again bikers' were not uncommon. The leader of the bikers kindly said in front of us all that Don, was in no way responsible for the accident.

On the bank

Now at last for some fishing. The twelve 'rods' during the week caught five salmon, one grilse and five sea trout. Fishing is such a great sport as it requires intense concentration as one anticipates either the electrifying take of a sea trout or the slower solid pull of a salmon. Neither the future nor the past seem to matter as one tries to place a fly with utmost accuracy in a part of the river which one hopes will maximise the chance of a 'take.'

Bruce's salmon triumph was definitely not textbook. It was hooked in the dark at midnight on a trout fly and rod in the 'wrong' part of the pool (fig 2).



Fig 2. Casting action

John (fig 3) caught his first salmon, a four pound grilse, in a pool called 'Firepump' in which no one can remember anyone ever catching anything before!



Fig 3. Concentration

The author lost two salmon (swear!) but did catch a sea trout (fig 4) on each of the last three days, all at approximately 6.30 pm in different pools.



Fig 4. Sea trout

For Don the trauma of the accident a few days before was definitely counteracted by catching his second ever Scottish salmon (ten and a half pounds) (fig 5) in the prolific Polly pool but then his second low point of the week was when he drove me to the river one night in his slippers and after opening and closing a gate stepped in something unmentionable. Unaware he got back into the car which was then permeated by what he referred to as 'eau de vache!'

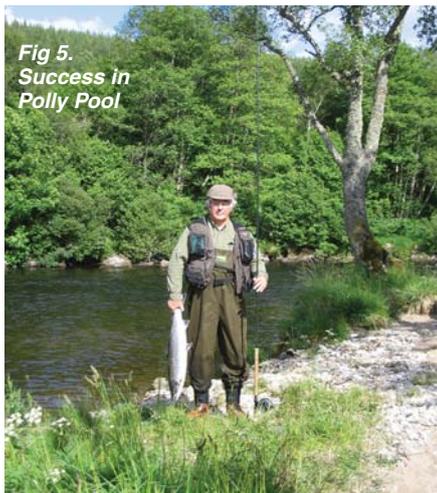


Fig 5. Success in Polly Pool

My own significant problem of the week was after removing Don's rod from the special clips on my car roof I forgot to re-attach my own two rods and 300 yards down the road I observed them in the rear mirror flying onto the road. Luckily I was able to stop in a nearby garage forecourt and rush back to rescue the rods which were lying across both carriageways of the busy road. One of the reels had broken off but there was virtually no damage to either of them which was lucky as one belonged to Alan, the ghillie.

It was encouraging to have three fishermen staying in the hotel who were all over the age of seventy,

one of whom caught a salmon on the first morning. Hopefully my friends and I will be fit enough in another 10 years to still enjoy our sport.

The lunch and dinner time banter among friends with a common, though perhaps to some, murderous aim was great fun. The Delnasheugh Hotel at Ballindalloch under the new manager Craig and his charming wife served us well. The accommodation and food was as good as it has always been and a new addition was free wireless internet.

In summary

Fishing is such an excellent past time as when the weather is good it is a pleasure to be in the Highlands of Scotland enjoying superb scenery and observing both wild (fig 6) and farm animals.



Fig 6. Red squirrel



Fig 7. Friendly lambs

The latter may (fig 7) or may not prove friendly (fig 8)!



Fig 8. Heed the warning?

If the weather is bad, a rise in the water level (fig 9) encourages more fish to migrate up the river, usually resulting in better sport.



Fig 9. In spate

Epilogue

Three months later I returned to the River Avon. En route I passed the snow pole bedecked with two fadin wreaths beside the road where the biker had died (fig 10). Somehow it was good to feel that he was not forgotten.



Fig 10. In memoriam

I enjoyed one of my best fishing weeks ever catching, on remarkably small flies, four grilse on the Avon averaging 4lb (fig 11) and two salmon in one day on the Spey at Wester Elchies.



Fig 11. One for the pot!

The latter success was made possible both by my new found distance-casting skill as a result of buying a 'Rio Speycaster' shooting head line and also some good advice from Sam, the ghillie.

Fishing for Scottish salmon is the most unpredictable of sport, a microcosm perhaps of life itself, you never know what the next day may bring – what triumphs and tragedies and stories to be told lie in wait?

