

A BRIEF GUIDE
TO
FISHING THE AFON
CLWYD



Introduction:

The River Clwyd from Eyarth Bridge Llanfair to St Asaph

Fishing the river will be described in two sections:

- A. The upper river from Pont Clwyd, Llandernog, upstream, including the Afon Clywedog.
- B. The river downstream from Pont Clwyd including all the lower sections.

I have fished the Clwyd from Ruthin to Denbigh since 1963, then after the clubs amalgamated in the 1980's, the mid and lower sections of the river, the upper sections for brown trout, the mid to lower sections for all species. The main river from the sea to Rhewl is also good for flounders, which can be caught on worm, although not many anglers fish for them. I have fished for salmon and sea trout using both spinner and fly, this guide is directed more towards catching fish by using the fly.

1. The upper river from Llanfair to the Clywedog junction.

The river from Pont Eyarth to Pont Telpyn is a typical brown trout stream: stony and swift. From Pont Telpyn downstream the river has more silt and sand and more freshwater shrimps, which, when eaten by the trout, gives their flesh that pink colour.

So from early season to May I will fish a Gold Head, Hare's Ear or Pheasant Tail Nymph, downstream if the water is up and the weather is still cool. As spring progresses, I use wet flies such as Mallard and Claret, size 14 - 12, wet, as these look more like freshwater shrimp. I also have success with March Brown and Partridge and Orange.

Come May, and the river is warmer, with the water near summer levels, try dry fly fishing but keep a low profile and cast upstream. Try flies such as: Grey Duster, Ginger Quill and, if the Hawthorn Fly is out at the end of April or beginning of May, try long legged black flies. It is good advice to look at what is on the water and use the closest copy.

The River Clwyd also has a Mayfly hatch: if you can get the timing right as the peak hatch is not always in May.

Other tips are:

- i) Try not to make too much surface disturbance as you wade.
- ii) Wade only if you have to and do not show yourself to the fish as a silhouette against the skyline.
- iii) Approach the fish with stealth.
- iv) If you spot rising fish as you are walking downstream, take a wide berth walking past the active pool and try to approach the active pool from way downstream if you can, keep your head down and avoid stumbling. On some pools whilst dry fly fishing I approach the pool on my knees, so that my head does not cause a silhouette against the skyline.
- v) Do not spend too much time fishing the same pool in summer time: if you don't get any action after five minutes, or if you have pricked a fish and lost it, you will have blown your cover. Move on! Rest the pool for 30 minutes, then you can approach it again, because by then the trout should have forgotten your previous attempt at catching them.
- vi) The way to succeed in catching wild brown trout in the Clwyd in clear water is to keep yourself out of the trout's sight and cast a fly as gently as possible, this is difficult on some pools in the upper Clwyd.



Figure 1 STOATS TAIL



As for tackle for the upper Clwyd, I use a rod between 7 and 8 feet long, double tapered 4, 5 or 6 weight floating line for any fly or a 6 intermediate line for wet fly.

Although most trout in the river Clwyd are around 9 inches long, you can catch much larger ones, up to 14 inches long or even longer, perhaps surprisingly even around Ruthin. Brown trout of up to three pounds in the mid to lower Clwyd, due to our catch and release policy on wild brown trout: the trout have time to grow, however these large fish do not rise much, are rare and are often taken on larger flies whilst sea trout fishing. Please remember that, although catch and release is not compulsory, we do encourage it, especially with larger fish. Each fish returned will grow to be caught another day.

2. Fishing the River Clwyd from the junction of the Clywedog downstream on Club waters

From this point onwards the river is larger and has sea trout and salmon as well as good brown trout fishing. Some brown trout have been taken up to three pounds on the mid to lower Clwyd, fish of this size are rare and are usually taken on a larger sea trout flies whilst fishing for sea trout. Please consider returning these large fish.

Although some salmon and sea trout will enter the river as early as April, you will be unlikely to catch one before June, depending upon the river height, however I have wasted a lot of time fishing for these early run fish, so now I don't bother to fish for sea trout until after the 21st June, knowing that then, whatever the river conditions, the sea trout will be there.

Salmon usually need a good spate or high water flood, to bring them into the system, so if there is good water in June, the salmon will start to ascend the river with a very few earlier than that, however the most productive period for salmon on the Clwyd starts from August onwards.

How to catch them with a fly? This method applies to both salmon and sea trout, in fact I catch most of my salmon and sea trout on the same fly.

When the river is low, I will use a 6 weight floating line with a small sea trout fly, as the light fades, I will use an intermediate line, or medium sinking line, and a large fly. Unless there has been a spate forget salmon in June and July. Fly patterns that I have used with success are Bloody Butcher, Connemara Black, Editor, Willy Gunn, Silver bodied Stoat's Tail and Irish Mist with smallish sizes in low water.



Figure 2 EDITOR



Fishing for salmon and sea trout in a spate:

If the river is very muddy, don't bother fishing, but after the spate, when the river is starting to clear and ideal for spinning, use a large fly: size 10, 8 or 6 doubles. Remember the Clwyd is murky most of the time and in these conditions the fly I use is a kind of mix of Teal Blue and Silver, Editor, Irish Mist, Stoats Tail: black wing, blue hackle, silver body, fluorescent green tag tail as well as a bit of "twinkle" to attract attention in coloured water. If you tie your own flies, as I do, then anything that is a cross between any of the above, like an Editor, will work. During a spate I use a fast or intermediate sinking line with a leader no lighter than 10 pounds breaking strain, because if you hook a good fish it will bolt for the nearest snags such as tree roots, so you need a strong leader to hold the fish back and stop it from bolting. In coloured water you can fish for salmon or sea trout at any time of day, even if the sun is bright. You may well catch big brown trout at the same time.

Fishing for salmon and sea trout in low water: When the river is low and clear in say late June or July, and the sun is low to the horizon, appearing to be above Kinmel Bay or Abergele, and the sky is cloudless, wait until the sun drops down lower until about 8:30 to 9 pm, depending upon the time of year. Whilst waiting try dry fly fishing for brown trout. When the sun has sunk, then you start to fish for the salmon and sea trout. Start with a small single fly: Black Pennell, Mallard and Claret, Stoa's Tail, Editor or Irish Mist. At around 10:00 pm is the time the big fish "come out to play", so then change up to a bigger fly. You won't go wrong with a size 8 or 10 silver bodied Stoa's Tail.



Figure 3 IRISH MIST



Regardless of my success, good or poor, I go home at 11 pm: if the sky is cloudless, the temperature falls and the fish cease to take interest in my fly. At dusk, you may see a bow wave moving up river, this may be caused by an otter, so before casting towards it make sure it's caused by a moving fish. An otter will move upstream "at a steady speed", not so sea trout. We share the river and the fishing with the otters: treat them with respect.

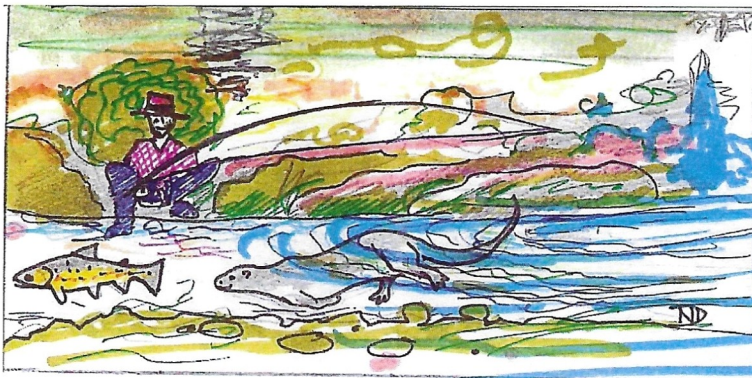


Figure 3 BLACK MIKE



Salmon fishing on the Clwyd is very similar to fishing for sea trout and I use the same flies. However I have caught salmon on a Willy Gunn, also if the water is low, I use a floating line and a size 8 or 10 fly.

If you decide to fish the river on a hot and bright day, try a dry fly for brown trout, but if they are inactive try changing to worming, using a very small weight. Try the larger deeper pools and you may catch a large flounder. When evening comes things may improve on the salmon and sea trout front. In low and clear water fishing for trout, sea trout or salmon requires some stealth. In daylight approach a pool from downstream, casting upstream.

Some of the river banks on the Clwyd are unstable due to erosion and cattle, so always be careful, especially above Glan y Wern Bridge.



A SELECTION OF FLIES FOR THE CLWYD

