



SIX MONTHS IN SCOTLAND

BY SYLVESTER NEMES





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AN AMERICAN VIEW
OF ITS SALMON FISHING

BY
SYLVESTER NEMES

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This is the unique and dramatic landscape of the Scottish Highlands which is so jagged on the western coast that 250 miles of it, as the crow flies, is equal to more than 2,000 miles in actual measuring of the outline. We get an idea of how this happened in *The West Highlands of Scotland*, by W. H. Murray, Collins, London, 1968. "Around thirty million years ago 'Scotland', then a nearly sea level plain, rose up as a high plateau, a solid block free of folding. The land mass then extended westward far beyond the present Hebrides. But the natural forces had barely begun their work. Water and ice eroded the plateau into a complicated mountain-land, in which 543 tops stand today clear above 3000 feet. The western half of the land then took a seaward dip. In this huge subsidence the old coast-line was submerged. The sea flooded into the long, westward-running glens, filled the rift valley of the Minch [the sea] to isolate the farther hills as the Hebrides, and gave Scotland her five hundred off shore islands and that wildly serrated coastline, where the fiords [or sea lochs] run twenty, thirty, and forty miles into the mountains. Together they form a sea-and land-scape which, in beauty and variety over so long a stretch of the coast, is without parallel in Europe."

Undoubtedly, that geological phenomenon is the reason for the rain, mist, clouds and blinks of sunshine. Each of those five hundred mountain tops and sea lochs around them have created their own weather platforms, with 120 inches of rain annually here and as little as 60 inches there. Overall, the west highlands are notoriously wet. Water, tainted brown by the indigenous peat, comes out of hillsides and tumbles down, then gets lost, then reappears further down the hillside, until finally it can be seen running into a loch a mile or so down the hill. There always seems to be some kind of mist hanging in the sky like a giant, moveable curtain. The curtain clashes





with clouds and sun, turns the lochs into sheets of silver, and disappears faster than one can stop the car to get a picture.

Crossing river after river, the visitor might also swear they are all running west to the nearby salt lochs. But the Scotland continental divide, if there is one, is so zigzagged that unbelievably, the Oykel River and other rivers which begin only eight or ten miles west of Loch Inver, run in the opposite direction, picking up the Einig and Cassley rivers before emptying into the Kyle straits at Bonar Bridge, on the southeast side of the country.

OYKEL RIVER

Oykel, which means Rising River in Gaelic, has a piercing sound when pronounced by a native. No matter how hard an American tries, he can never get the necessary rip into the word, nor can he ever pronounce the throat wrenching sound of many other Scottish words.

The Oykel was also described as an expensive river. I heard one fishing was sold in perpetuity, a few years ago, to an American newspaper publisher for a million dollars.

The Inver Lodge Hotel has the two top beats, the upper and lower, on the Oykel, a total distance of around two miles. The fishing is about ten miles, southeast, from Loch Inver. There are twenty five named pools in the two beats and the fishing is for four anglers. The hotel publishes fishing guides of the the rivers under its jurisdiction, and from them we have the descriptions of some of the pools and what might be expected from them. The "(top) beat is the most productive on the whole of the Upper River Oykel, mainly because the pools are small, easy to fish, closely grouped together, and within easy distance of the road . . . Flies used on this beat tend to be small and dark, particularly in the months when the water is fairly



Oykel, the proprietors have placed keep nets, in which anglers can deposit their salmon live, for use later in artificial hatchery programs.

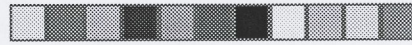
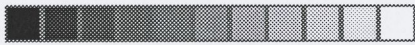
These are generous limits for American anglers who rarely kill a trout or salmon. But most Scottish and British anglers will kill all the salmon permitted them, and some have given up salmon fishing because of catch and release programs like the one on the Oykel. Editorials in *Trout and Salmon*, and other British magazines, promote the end to commercial netting on Scottish rivers, but the Gallery or photo section of the Angling reports in *Trout and Salmon* include colored photographs of anglers holding dead salmon and trout on rivers, and in anglers' yards and kitchens, from whose freezers, the dead salmon have been pulled for the photographs. This helps to sell magazines but causes commercial netters to wonder why they should give up killing salmon while anglers in the rivers continue to kill theirs.

In an article, "When should the killing stop?", in the August, 1996 issue about the upper Oykel (I am not sure it was Inver lodge water), the author, his wife and son, and another gentleman angler landed sixty-six salmon in a week's fishing during the fall of 1995 and killed only seventeen.

KIRKAIG RIVER

The mouth of the River Kirkaig is only two miles from the hotel, which has the whole two and one half miles of the river up to the Falls of Kirkaig, past which there can be no fishing, because of the fifty foot height of the falls. There are three beats on the whole river with a total of thirty named pools. The first three pools below the falls are called Big Fall Pool, Upper Smash Pool and Lower Smash Pool. The name, Smash is not without reason. From the hotel's guide, "The big Falls pool

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should not be fished unless accompanied by another person, as it requires two people to land a fish To gaff a fish one slides down to the right hand side of the fishing stance, and onto a ledge. There is a rope attached to the rock as a hand-hold. . . . When gaffed the gaff and fish are handed up to the angler who must take care not to let the fish off the gaff and drop on the head of his ghillie Tackle used must be strong, and a cast of never less than twelve lbs. breaking strain is recommended as fish very often rub the cast on rocks when hooked."

I did not see any of the two top beats, but I walked quite a bit of the lower beat and photographed some of the pools which were enticing, indeed. I talked with a lady who was walking the two miles that afternoon to the top beat. The guide describes the lower beat as, "Very accessible as many pools are beside the road. A good beat in medium to high water, but suffers in low water from tourists, picknicking and splashing about."

The road is a single lane paved road with passing places, like many in the area. From a current highway map and from a one-half-inch-to-the-mile Bartholomew map of the 1960s, the road is shown quite prominently, but nowhere on either map does it say it is only one lane. Even so, this road is quite safe and offers travelers one of the most scenic and spectacular trips through the heart of the Scottish Highlands, and brings one out at Ullapool, about 30 miles away, which is also a tourist's delight.

Since 1990, hotel guests have averaged 161 salmon per year on the Kirkaig. It is also quite a productive sea trout river.



INVER RIVER

Of the three rivers under the hotel's management, I fished the upper Inver, which is as much a shallow loch as a stream, in fact, Grimble, in *The Salmon Rivers of Scotland*, said, "In this stretch, the river frequently opens up into small lakelets."

He also gave the dressings for some special salmon flies he used on the river. "Tag: Silver Twist; yellow floss silk.

Tail: Golden pheasant topping and blue chatterer.

Body: Dark blue floss silk, claret hackle, and gold tinsel with wide spirals, jay at shoulder wing, mallard and two strands of blue and yellow macaw." Quite by accident Grimble received a batch of these flies from his fly dresser without the blue chatterer tail, and you guessed it, they would not work.

In Grimble's day, there were many bag nets along the coast and in the estuary of the Inver. He gave their takes for 1890: "1,677 salmon, averaging 12 lb. each; 8,031 grilse of nearly 6 lb. each, and 531 sea trout." In 1996 only 19 salmon were caught by rod, the lowest recorded since 1981. The best recent year was 1992 when 64 fish were caught.

I did not fish for salmon on my day on the Inver, although I could have. It looked more like trout water to me, and later in the evening I began to see some mayfly spinners on the water, and then some trout noses sticking up here and there. I fished my size fourteen orange-bodied spinner, the *Heptagenia solitaria*, a fall fly here in Montana, and hooked two and landed one, a brown of perhaps fourteen inches.

The Inver comes out of Loch Assynt which is a famous trout and salmon loch. It is about a half mile wide and six miles long, and quite deep. It is typical of so many salmon waters in the region where a deep loch shallows out at one end (the end towards the sea) and becomes the river or carrier to it. Loch Assynt also holds Ferox, which is a brown trout gone to seed.





He is so big, mere mayflies, stoneflies, minnows and other trout food appeal not at all to him. The common way to fish for him is by trolling a ten inch trout tied to a gang of hooks and weighted to get down deep. One of the hotel guide books suggests not using monofilament line, "as it stretches a great deal and makes the hooking of a ferox more difficult." The loch also used to hold Gillaroo trout whose stomach contained a gizzard which helped the fish crush the shells of mollusks, so he could eat them.

The hotel records for the Inver River show an average of thirty three salmon per year since 1990.

INVER LODGE HOTEL

Even before one enters the hotel, he knows it is a place for anglers because some cars in the parking lot will be carrying joined salmon rods. I have never seen this kind of carrier. By some sort of vacuum principle, the top part is stuck to the roof of the car just over the windshield (windscreen) and the bottom to the front of the hood (bonnet) on the passenger side (our driver side). Up to four joined rods with reels can be carried without having to remove the flies tied on the leaders. The rods ride at a fairly low angled trajectory so one doesn't have to worry about losing the tip top under a low bridge.

I found out from Nicholas Gorton, that one third of the guests are fly fishers, who come from England, Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium, Norway, New Zealand and the United States to fish the three salmon rivers and many trout lochs in the vicinity. There is a spacious fishing and gun room with freezers (the hotel also arranges stag shooting) at the side of the hotel which can be entered without going through the lobby. The rooms are large and luxurious, equipped with small refrigerators which contain beers, wines, spirits and snacks. This



is truly a continental idea and a very convenient feature we don't find much in the United States. At first, one thinks what a nice gesture on the part of the management, until one sees the price list on top of the box.

If you were a *gastronomique* as well as a fly fisher you would be in a kind of double heaven here at the Inver Lodge Hotel. Being close to the sea, it features local fresh and smoked salmon, fresh lobsters, prawns, and many shallow water flat fishes, such as halibut, plaice and sole.


Fishing prices per day for 1998 (in United States dollars at \$1.60 to the British pound) are the Inver: \$40 until June 20, \$112 through October 15; Kirkaig: \$40 until June 20, \$112 through October 15; Oykel: June 22 to September 30; Top beat, \$112; lower beat, \$56.00. A standard room is \$104, per person and includes breakfast.

CAPE WRATH HOTEL

Cape Wrath Hotel is less than fifty miles from Loch Inver. It is a beautiful drive with the three thousand foot mountain tops continuing for a short while, then starting to shorten and spread out. The misty curtains begin to disappear, and the sky opens up and becomes brightly one-colored. There is more uncrowded space with big and small lochs. It's like moving toward the brink of a stage, when suddenly it's before you, the north western end of Scotland. The road now parallels the Dionard, of which the Cape Wrath Hotel has some of the salmon fishing. The road drops down with the river into the Kyle of Durness, which is three times as broad as the river. There are no more islands in the sea, just a vast expanse of water stretching thousands of miles to the North Pole.

The hotel is a rambling two-story building, and Jack Watson, the owner, says it is situated for protection rather than





view. The hotel was built two hundred years ago as a tax collection agency for the Duke of Sutherland. Then the Keoldale family had it as a hotel with fishing and hunting and their name and location are shown on my 1960, one half inch-to-the-mile-map. Jack Watson and his wife, have owned it since 1983 and were the first resident proprietors. There are nineteen rooms with private baths, a dining room, where Mrs. Watson is the master chef, a bar and pub. To go with their good cooking, the Watsons stock a fine selection of wines at reasonable prices, among which is a Croze Hermitage, a very well-known red Rhone for \$12 per bottle. Rooms range from \$35 to \$50. Cape Wrath Hotel is more famous for its brown trout fishing on four limestone lochs than it is for its salmon fishing on the Dionard. Bruce Sandison thought Loch Lanish is one of the best fishing lochs in Scotland. The loch is almost totally enclosed by the Durness Golf Club and one walks to it through several of the early holes. On one of the holes, the players actually drive across an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean!

Lanish water is like gin. The shallow, limestone bottom is almost pure white, and the trout look like ghosts. The other three lochs are the Caladail, Croispol, and Borralie, the last of which the angler can walk to from the hotel. The four lochs have row boats that are included with the price of around \$20 per day. There is no catch and release, except for small trout under one pound. Watson suggests the Soldier Palmer, Black Buzzer, Kehe, Silver Invicta, Bibio, Zulu, Dry Daddy, and Olive Bumble. Some of these patterns are at least ninety years old, but they are typical of the classic patterns that are still being used throughout Scotland for fishing in lochs.

According to Watson, the best month for the salmon fishing on the Dionard is July, when up to 20 fish are caught in a week. The salmon fishing is approximately \$50 per day. I saw only a small portion of the river along the road, but here is

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a description from *The Directory of Scottish Salmon Waters, 1995*
“The water moves at a fast/medium pace, with rapids dividing the pools. The banks are not steep, so that casting is not hindered. The water is in a National Nature Reserve, which is an outstandingly beautiful district and the area is generally windy with high rainfall.”

Cape Wrath, the actual point of land projecting into the sea at the northwest corner of Scotland, is still no easy place to reach. It is nine or ten miles from the village of Durness, and to get there one must cross the kyle by small boat, then take a minibus across the uninhabited moor of Parph, on a road built just to reach the lighthouse on the Cape.

Hazel took the trip, while I chased trout shadows on Loch Lanish. Her rewards as usual were better than mine.





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court H. Scrymgeour Wedderburn and others for fishing salmon "by means of certain descriptions of nets called toot nets, stage and tent nets, alleged to be of the nature of stake nets and similar machinery, which had been found illegal in the former cases regarding the Tay fishings." The court granted an interdict against fishing "by any other mode of fishing than the ordinary way of net and coble [or rowboat]."

On July 9, 1823, J. & M. Pool took their neighbor, Mrs. Dirom and husband to court to determine who owned a new island which had gradually risen between their adjoining properties in the river Annan where they both had salmon fishings. The court said that "neither party have shewn any written right or title to the island or sandbed in dispute, and that the same belongs to the parties, ex adverso of their respective properties."

In November 1825, W. Blair, having the right of salmon fishing on the River Garnock, sued A. Miller for building a stone wall on his property along the river to prevent Blair from driving his cart and horse with nets and rowboat to a pool on the river. Miller felt he had the right to prevent Blair from using the road because Blair had been using the road on the other side of the river to get to the same pool. The court found Blair could use any and all roads to get to his fishings, and that Miller would have to make "a proper opening in the wall or must put a swing-gate thereon, or, if a locked gate, must furnish Blair or his fishermen with a key thereof."

Not much has changed in the law of salmon fishing in Scotland since these cases were heard. And the few listed here illustrate how petty it all seems to be. One wants to put "once upon a time" in front of every paragraph of the lengthy set of laws and bylaws. The M'Lords' concurrences are all gobble-dygook and remind the reader of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Trial by Jury."

But it is all for real and deadly for the future of the At-




goes not into Loch Dionard but into the Kyle of Durness.

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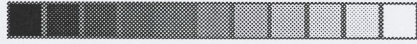




deprived of their properties.” from the *View of the Salmon Fishery of Scotland*, by Murdo Mackenzie, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, 1860. Then, “No animals are so easily destroyed as salmon, because none are brought, by their habits and instincts so much within our power, in returning to the rivers; and hence there is a corresponding danger that destruction may be carried further than the generative powers of nature can replace.”

Once inside the estuary where the water changed from salt to sweet, the salmon still faced the net and coble, one of the oldest and most respected salmon netting systems in Scotland. It is undoubtedly the most strenuous form of catching salmon. The net, nearly twice the width and as deep as the estuary, is paid out by a tacksman at the back of the boat while another rows the boat across the river and brings it back to the side it started from, encircling the salmon and pulling them up the shore, where the fish meet the priests in the hands of the low paid tacksmen. The floors of the estuaries were smooth as pavement and kept that way by the tacksmen, who might have to dive into the estuary every now and then to remove any obstruction which might catch and slow down the movement of the net, or damage it.

“The essential element during the whole operation is that the net is hauled continuously through the water. It must never be allowed to remain stationary or to drift with the tide. The rope may be held by the fisherman on the bank or shore or may be operated from a winch. The principle is that the fish are guided by the movement of the net towards the shore landing ground and are not simply enmeshed in the net,” from *The Law of Game, Salmon and Freshwater Fishing in Scotland*. Net and cobbles were also worked upstream some miles on the bigger rivers such as the Spey, bringing what seemed like enormous profits to the Duke of Richmond, who held the rights,



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GRIMBLE & CALDERWOOD

earlier

Salmon fishing in Scotland, by rod as a sport and by net as a business, at the turn of the century was at its double zenith. Train travel, already tuned and fine-tuned for nearly fifty years, made it possible for a salmon angler to leave London one morning and be fishing in the Thurso river at the top eastern tip of Scotland, the next! The train service, and fast sailing sloops made it possible for a salmon to be caught in one of the Hogarth Company's fixed engine stake nets at the mouth of the Dee or the Don near Aberdeen one morning and to be exhibited for two shillings, six pence per pound on a bed of crushed ice at the Billingsgate Fish Market in London, the next.

space?

Salmon fishing and salmon eating were in popular demand. And there was still plenty of both to go around to those who could afford it. Gillies in Scotland, for example, were paid less for a day's work than the pound of salmon brought in the London market.

spacing

The sport of fishing with the rod, and particularly with the fly, was being refined, too. It was becoming, more and more, the right kind of thing to do. Retired British army officers took to it with aplomb. The two-pound spliced greenheart was giving way to the one-pound American built cane rod. Salmon



flies were getting smaller and thinner and less exotic. Wading trousers, worn with tie, vest, and jacket, let one enter the water dressed like a gentleman. Women were trying the sport more and more, usually beating the pants off their male companions.

Fishing hotels in obscure places grew famous with names only the salmon angler could love: Altnahara, Inchnadamph, Culag, Oykel Bridge, Braal Castle, Cape Wrath, Loch Inver, Potarch, Udney Arms, Lovat Arms, Gordon Arms. Many hotels took the names of the dukes, earls, or lords who owned the rivers and lochs, which perhaps helped the anglers feel more secure. In many cases, the hotel was actually owned by the person who owned the fishing rights. It was an obvious necessity. You just had to have someplace for the angler to stay out there in the heathered boonies. You couldn't put him up in the castle.

Two books came out about this time that tried to capitalize on the movement, and which could be called the first of the "where to go and how to do it books." They were "*The Salmon Rivers of Scotland*," by Augustus Grimble, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co. LTD. London. And "*The Salmon Rivers and Lochs of Scotland*," by W. L. Calderwood. Edward Arnold, London.

First published is Grimble's book in a massive and exhaustive four-volume edition in 1899, followed by the single volume, second and third editions in 1902 and 1913. Calderwood's book was published in 1909. I probably would never have heard of the magnificent Grimble first edition if it hadn't been for Vernon and Joan Gallup, who shared their copy with me before I left for Scotland in July 1996.

Both books, are interesting and humorous and worth reading for the intimate look they give of salmon fly fishing in Scotland one hundred years ago. Both books also deserve to be praised and written about even today because of their bold,



brave, although sometimes hidden, warnings on the demise of the Atlantic salmon in Scotland.


The two writers had to walk a narrow line. To get their information on the numbers and sizes of fish caught, the most deadly flies, the names of the successful anglers and most successful pools, the best times for fishing the rivers, and the costs of fishing, they had to deal directly with the owners of the fishings, or their factors. And very often the rod fishing and the netting, which the writers were opposed to, were owned by the same person.

One of the writers, Grimble, also seemed to enjoy a cast or two in some of the better pools through the courtesy of the owner of the water. So it would be a bit thorny for him to yank a couple of twenty pounders out of a certain beat, and write that the owner's netting business was killing a thousand fish a week at the mouth of the river, or that their nets were seen operating illegally on a Sunday during the close time, prescribed by ancient law.

Even now, a hundred years later and several newer books on the subject, a newcomer to Scotland could use the books to decide what rivers he might want to try to fish, although dams have been built, beats and whole rivers have changed hands, much water has been bought in perpetuity and will never be available for fishing again, and, most sadly, there is only a tiny fraction of salmon left to fish for in those once great rivers and lochs of Scotland.

Volume one of Grimble's limited edition deals with the life history of the salmon, and we find quite surprisingly that many private salmon hatcheries were already operating on Scottish streams. In the United States, the duty and responsibility of building and operating hatcheries, lies with the government while in Scotland, it lies with the owners of the rivers, grouped together in salmon fishery districts.





Grimble was obviously for more government aid and control than is available in the feudal salmon fishing system, which still prevails in Scotland. He quotes a letter from a professor of a Washington state university to the commissioner of fisheries for Canada. "In the Sacramento River we are certain of our ground, having brought up the supply of salmon to more than its pristine condition of abundance by planting about two million of young fish every year. The catch there has increased in five years from five million to fifteen million pounds, and in 1881 there was more fish than could be utilized in all the canning establishments on the river." Then Grimble writes, "I believe, however, that there are not the enormous numbers of bag nets on the American coasts as there are on those of Scotland."

Volume two is on "*Netting, Legal and Illegal, Obstructions and Pollutions.*" Grimble is mad and the words jump off the pages. "The bag and stake nets that fish around the Scotch coasts have been so numerous increased, and so improved in construction, that unless some limit is placed by law on their numbers, they must slowly but surely exhaust the supply of sea trout and salmon; for, notwithstanding that the number of the nets has been doubled during the last twenty years, the close time has remained the same!"

Stake and bag nets along the shores of Scotland were not fished at all until the early nineteenth century. Fixed engine nets are actually anchored to the sea shore, with the capturing and collecting parts, ironically named salmon courts, within wading distance at low tide. Salmon are enticed into the net parts with headers (Their natural inclination would be to turn towards shore), which can reach out three or four hundred yards into the sea.

Fish are collected every two or three days, depending on the traffic and the season, by a tacksman who runs up and



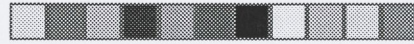
down the shore line in a farm tractor, (horse drawn before the turn of the century). He walks or wades out to the net, usually at low tide, carrying a landing net on his shoulder and the ubiquitous priest hanging from his arm on a leather thong. He's been taught exactly how to use the priest: "a quick, light rap on the head, enough to kill him, but not enough to leave a mark."

The ideal shore line for fixed engines is relatively straight. The east side of Scotland facing the North Sea has many such beaches, interspersed every ten or fifteen miles by a famous salmon river emptying into it. There were very few fixed engine type nets on the west side of Scotland because of the irregular coast line.

The Dee and the Don, only two miles apart at their mouths, are in the middle of that kind of beach. Grimble writes, "The extent of the Dee District coast is eighteen miles, on which in 1882 there were 102 bag- and stake nets; in 1894 these had been increased to nearly 200, and in all probability at the present moment there are still more. In 1836 there were but four stake- and bag nets on the mile of sandy shore between the mouths of the Don and the Dee. In 1882 these had grown to eleven bag-nets and six stake-nets, and at the present their numbers have been again increased by the system of 'outrigging.'"

When Grimble's and Calderwood's two books came out, close time had two meanings; close time weekend, from Saturday noon to Monday noon and seasonal close time consisting of 168 days over winter and early spring, when it was felt salmon did not enter rivers to spawn and when weather and incessant storms made it difficult to work the nets. Both close times have been observed for centuries and the word, slap is also used as a synonym.

Grimble growls frequently at the fixed engine nets in the first and later editions, but rarely says anything nasty about net and coble, which is the older and more traditional method



of capturing salmon and grilse in rivers.

Grilse, as many anglers know, is the young salmon with only one winter spent at sea, usually weighing from four to seven pounds. To the Scot angler or tacksman, the grilse is counted separately from a salmon (with more than one winter spent at sea) in its own table or group. The wholesale and retail price per pound of salmon will be higher than they are for grilse.

To Grimble, the grilse was a baby, and because of the late close times were being slaughtered indiscriminately on the Awe, which is a west coast river emanating from Loch Awe. "If the nets ceased on the 15th of August and the rods on the 15th of October, or even on the 30th of September, it would be far better for the ultimate interests of all concerned for the amount of babies in the shape of grilse that are massacred between the 15th and 20th of August is enormous.

"The Awe is one of the few rivers in which nets and cobbles are ceaselessly plied at a distance of several hundred yards above the mouth, so that hardly a fish can escape them when the water is in good order! But baby slaughter is not exactly the best way to increase a population, and if the nets came off on the 15th of August and the rods on the 30th of September, the increased breeding stock thereby left would speedily tell on the future numbers of the splendid fish of this magnificent river."

Nothing is done to change the close times, and Grimble quotes a fitting adage, "The 'man at the mouth' pockets the money, the man at the source can 'grin and bear it,'" *period*

In volume four of the limited edition, Grimble makes a suggestion which surely must have made every tacksman in Scotland laugh out loud. He calls himself a "cheeky chap" for even offering it, but continues, nonetheless, in a chapter called "Rivers Capable of Improvement." He wants the owners of the fishings on the Awe, as an example, to stop all stake and bag nets, "working all the coast on either side of its mouth," and



move all of the netting four miles upstream. Six rod anglers, including Grimble, would then rent the four miles for £240 (\$1,200 United States turn of the century exchange) from the March fifteenth to April thirtieth. Even with the salmon Grimble and the other 5 companions would catch and kill, "those that fall victims to the bunches of feathers offered them on their way up stream, that just as many fish could be netted there as at the mouth."


spell out

In theory, this was a splendid idea because it was not a buyoff; but merely an extension of the capture and killing of the salmon. Grimble, himself, gives the reason why the tacksmen would never go for it, "they [the salmon] perhaps would not fetch quite such a high price as sea-caught fish, depending on how far from the salt water they were taken; but up to four miles I do not think the price would be affected, or that either fishmonger or consumer could tell they were not sea-caught fish."

No. The Awe continued as it had always done, netting at the mouth, and Grimble never found a taker for his idea from any proprietor of salmon fishing in any river in Scotland.

Train travel at the turn of the century was about as fast as it was ever going to get. Practical automobiles (if one could call autos driven on the left-hand side of the road practical.) were still eight or ten years away, however, and moving up and down the bigger rivers like the Spey, Tweed or Dee, for example, or from one river to another, particularly across the uninhabited reaches of northern Scotland, must have been slow and expensive when these two books were published.

Grimble narrates some of the problems. "Hitherto my travel in these northern regions had been done by posting from place to place at the usual rate of 1s. 3d. a mile, plus three pence per mile more for the driver. Sometimes, the jehu was charged for in the hotel bill, some-



time he was not, and before I became aware of this difference in custom, on several occasions I paid the driver his mileage twice over, greatly to his joy and much to my astonishment at his very profuse thanks; it is therefor just as well to ascertain before starting if his fee has been included in the hire bill.”


Anglers and angling writers also traveled by dogcart, a two-wheeled vehicle drawn by a horse and accomodating two persons seated back to back. One could also travel by “her Majesty’s mailcart” in which Grimble had, “a cheap and comfortable ride of some twenty six miles for six shillings, with a tip of half a crown to the well-mannered driver. The same journey in a dogcart would have cost thirty-nine shillings.”

Apparently the mailcart could carry quite a few passengers, but there were times when you wouldn’t want to be traveling in one. “A crowded mailcart on a wet day is horrid, and whatever the weather, it is still more horrid when it carries natives who have taken too much whisky, and who when started produce bottles of it from their pockets and suck at them until they are incapable.”

It was on the Thurso where Grimble reported perhaps one of the greatest hauls of salmon ever made with just one sweep of a net in a river. A certificate still exists vouching for the truth, dated Thurso, 23rd August 1792. “Mr. George Pater-son, now Baillie of Thurso: George Swanson, shoemaker there; and Donald Fin-layson, senior fisher there, do hereby certify and declare that upon the 23rd day of July, old style, we think in the year 1743 or 1744, there were caught at one haul in the Cruive pool upon the water above the town of Thurso, 2,560 salmon.”


Eighteen or twenty men carried the net down the river to where the fish could be removed in smaller nets and “each man got a fish and some whisky for his trouble.”

One other bit of writing, a limerick, not about fishing,




however, should also be included in this little homage to Grimble. It has to do with the clearances of 1810-1820 when Scottish lairds evicted several thousand crofters from their homes to make way for the raising of sheep. One of the Dukes of Sutherland apparently emigrated many of his crofters at his own expense, and had a monument erected on Golspie Hill overlooking the Fleet River near Golspie. Grimble writes, "After putting up of the monument some wag scribbled on its base the following lines,

*There was once a great Duke of Sutherland,
Whose crofters were fond of their motherland;
But to each one he said, Your passage is paid,
And off you must go to some other land.*



Calderwood is less vociferous than Grimble in his treatment of the Scottish salmon lairds and tacksmen. But Calderwood was Inspector of Salmon Fisheries for Scotland from 1898 to 1930, a position with definite political overtones. Grimble thanks Calderwood for a photograph he's borrowed from his 1898 *Fishery Board Report*. Grimble quotes the inspector on illegal fishing on the Laxford mouth, "Between 6 p.m. on Saturday evening and 6 a.m. on the Monday morning following they reported visiting 340 bagnets, of which no less than 147 were fishing illegally during the weekly close time." *span*

And perhaps because of his fisheries position, Calderwood may have been able to secure salmon fishing records which were not available to outsiders like Grimble. This is on the Tay, "the premier river of Scotland." "In the old days the whole estuary was netted by toot and haul, hang net, and the sweep net, and the last-named style was carried on right up the river, and even in the upper tributaries where the water was suitable. It is of some interest to know what was then netted in the Tay, *l*



and through the kindness of the Honorable Morton Stewart Gray, who has a detailed return of catches at Kinfauns Castle for the period between 1830 and 1846, I am able to give the following totals, representing the produce of thirty-four netted fisheries from the mouth of the estuary up to well above Dunkeld, thus including all the important waters of the river."

The five year average from 1830 to 1834 was 73,030 salmon and grilse per year. From 1835 to 1839 the average was 62,243 salmon and grilse per year, and from 1840 to 1844 the average was 71,095 salmon and grilse per year. These are tremendous hauls of fish for just one river, but by 1900, those forms of fishing were declared illegal. *→ page*

Much has been written about the falls found on so many Scottish salmon rivers. Even today they draw tourists who hope to get a glimpse of a leaping salmon. The pools below the falls have been treasured netting places. And Calderwood writes of the Falls of Tummel on the Tay river. "Only strong fish can overcome the difficulties, but in favourable seasons a considerable number of fish at times manage to succeed in these attempts. A number fail in the first leap, either through not springing high enough or springing in the wrong direction, and in old days this was taken advantage of for the capture of many a plucky fish. A wide-mouthed basket was hung by a chain from the rock close to where the leap is made, and the unsuccessful fish as often as not fell into the basket, and so suffered the last penalty. One or two other falls in Scotland were also fished in this curious manner, the acme being reached in the case of a basket hung at the fall of the Arkaig, close to Achnacarry House, where, it is reported, matters were so arranged that the salmon not only fell into the basket, but in doing so rang a bell in the kitchen to announce its arrival, and, as it were, advise the cook to put the water on to boil."

Calderwood's chapter on the North Esk has more than



routine interest for me because I visited the river a few times during the six months I was there. I fished it once and witnessed a net and coble operation near the mouth. The Morphie Fishings, a famous stretch of water on the river, also became available for salmon fishing on a twenty five year lease, reflecting the perpetuity trend of salmon fishing leases or sales which is becoming more and more common in Scotland. Whether this is due to the uncertain state of the salmon in Scotland is debatable, but it certainly didn't exist when Grimble and Calderwood were published and became popular more recently when the stocks of salmon in Scottish rivers started their downward trends.


redo

Calderwood and Grimble both thought the North Esk was a tremendous salmon river. Here's Grimble: "For its size this river is the most prolific of all the Scotch streams, and Messrs. Johnston, the Montrose tacksmen, have had as many as 2000 fish on the opening day in the few miles of water between Mary Kirk and the sea, while in 1874 the catch of the whole district was 30,000 fish

"The seacoasts of the North and South Esks, which fall into the sea but five miles apart, are very severely netted, as will be seen when it can be stated that in 1882 there were in this five miles no less than 120 bag and stake-nets, or 14 in every mile."

Here's Calderwood: "It will be gathered that owing to the netting of the lower reaches, rod fishing in spring and summer is here not thought of. I have no doubt, however, that if the netting was stopped, a most valuable spring rod fishing would grow into being, and the experience of, say, the Dee, and of other rivers I could name, goes to show that from the point of view of mere profit to the proprietor, rod fishing pays better than netting."

Both books and much literature since then and the Scot-

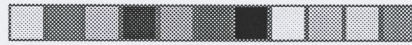


tish Tourist Bureau say the same thing—that rod-caught salmon are worth a lot more to an economy than net-caught ones. Remember Grimble's plan to take the netting up stream four miles? And both writers wondered why netting rights were offered at times to commercial tacksmen for so little rent. The writers' suggestions were falling on feudal, deaf ears. Salmon lairds knew they could make more money selling their salmon to rich angler strangers. But, that was a lowly, subservient position the owners didn't want to be in. They were making enough money anyway, without having to do anything for it. No. Salmon netting, being a tacksman, was more respectable, more business like. ~~I'm surprised Grimble and Calderwood could not understand that.~~

Catch and release fishing for Atlantic salmon or for other game fish was not practiced during Grimble's time and Calderwood's, not even thought of, and even today is not a popular subject among British anglers.

There was a lot of complaining about over netting in *The Salmon Rivers of Scotland*, and *Salmon Rivers and Lochs of Scotland*, but the authors seemed to be quite happy to list the killings of the rod-caught salmon, as if there were a difference. A salmon dead of netting, is the same as a salmon dead of eating a classic salmon fly. No salmon angler ever stopped the taking and killing when both were good. And Grimble frequently included himself in the records when he had a good day or week. "I have often had days of four and five, and my best catches in a week have been eighteen in 1898 and seventeen in 1899. I have usually fished it [the Shiel river] from the middle of June to the end of July. My take to my own rod was forty-nine in seven weeks fishing in 1898, weights from 24 lb. to 6 lb.; and in 1900 in the same time it was fifty-seven, ranging from 22 lb. to 5 lb."

Calderwood did not talk about his own fishing in his



book, which makes the reader wonder if he fished at all. Nor does he talk salmon fly dressings the way Grimble did throughout his. Calderwood may have been too busy to be fishing. He was fisheries advisor to North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, Naturalist on the staff of Fishery Board for Scotland, as well as Inspector of Salmon Fisheries for Scotland.

Both men lived long, full lives, Grimble dying in 1925 and Calderwood in 1950.





ANDREW CARNEGIE...SALMON ANGLER?

In 1898, well on his way toward being the richest man alive, Andrew Carnegie returned to Scotland where he was born, and bought a castle and some ground to go with it on the Kyle of Sutherland. This narrow salt water strait, not too far north of Inverness, receives the Carron, the Oykel, the Cassley and the Shin, among the finest salmon rivers in Scotland, and perhaps at that time, among the finest in the world.

✓ Carnegie insisted on certain essentials when he began looking for the family's new home. It had to have plenty of land, a location bordering on the sea for the mooring of his yacht, *Seabreeze*, a waterfall, golf links, and, of course, trout and salmon fishing. After twenty years of marriage to an American woman, a daughter was born and Carnegie felt quite deeply, *spring* that a home in the heather was owing to her.


The Duke of Sutherland who owned a large part of northern Scotland, (a reputed total of 1,200,000 acres of land in Scotland and England, including much of the salmon fishing), showed the property to Carnegie and his wife, Louise. There were 32,000 acres, covering a width of around 20 miles, bordered on the east by the smallish Evelix River and on the west by the Shin River. There was Skibo Castle, for several centu-

ries the home of catholic bishops, but when Carnegie first saw it, badly needing repair or rebuilding. There were golf links and there was salmon and trout fishing to be had, but no water fall.

Carnegie purchased the land and the castle for a reputed £85,000 (\$408,000 United States, 1898), and set out to bring the run down castle up to American standards. From the *The Life of Andrew Carnegie*, by Burton J. Hendrick, William Heinemann LTD, 1933, "Of the old-time castle, however, nothing remains. The present baronial structure has certain ancient characters—castellated towers, bartizans, terraces and the rest—yet it is a castle with American trimmings. Carnegie loved romance, and he liked his modern comforts too. The pinkish-white stone came from the nearby Evelix quarry, but there is also plenty of hidden steel, rolled in Pittsburgh. Tradition claims its own in lochs, golf-courses and grouse moors, but modernity is represented by a swimming pool with sliding roof, the water, drawn from the North Sea, heated to an agreeable warm temperature. Dynamos installed by the Westinghouse company furnish power for electric light, elevators and other appurtenances of the machine age."

All this, but no waterfall and only a little salmon fishing on the Evelix. But even though Carnegie's property bordered on the Shin, which had a series of cascades and a waterfall, complete with jumping salmon, feudal law did not include the fishing in the original purchase which was still owned by the Duke. Carnegie is supposed to have cried, "Where's my waterfall." He probably also cried, "Where's my salmon fishing?" Carnegie made several approaches to the Duke to sell him both, and finally, was able to buy around five miles (nearly all of it), including the falls and the salmon fishing.

The purchase, of course caused considerable worrying among some of the regulars on the river, some of whom had



been fishing the river through the Duke for thirty or forty years. "What's this rich American going to do to our fishing?" they probably asked. Augustus Grimble explains what happened in *The Salmon Rivers of Scotland*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1899. "In 1898 the Duke of Sutherland sold to Mr. Andrew Carnegie of Skibo Castle the angling rights on the Shin from Gruid's Mill to the Kyle, a purchase which created a great flutter of excitement amongst the old rod-holders, all of them expecting to get notice to quit. A pleasant surprise, however, awaited them, and in reply to an inquiry of mine, Mr. Carnegie instructed his secretary to write as follows: 'Mr. Carnegie desires me to say that he is not rash enough to make any changes in the Shin. Some of the renters have had it for thirty years, and if they were deprived of fishing the Shin, Mr. Carnegie is so enthusiastic a brother of the angle himself as to know that serious consequences might ensue, and he does not wish to have the collapse of any of these gentlemen on his guilty conscience.'"

About ten years later, W. L. Calderwood, in *The Salmon Rivers and Lochs of Scotland*, Edward Arnold, 1909, London, describes the area, "The outstanding feature of the district, as its name implies, is the kyle, or narrow channel of tidal water. This forms the natural estuary of all four rivers, and, in its lower or eastern section, forms the Dornoch Firth. From the statutory limits of the estuary the firth winds inland between Tain and Dornoch, past Skibo Castle and the mouth of the little Evelix river, which holds salmon and sea trout in the autumn, and is now converted by Mr. Carnegie into a loch at its mouth."

Later, Calderwood indicates there was commercial netting of salmon at Skibo, which would have been at the mouth of Loch Evelix. The Shin Falls that Carnegie supposedly cried for, Calderwood wrote, "are objects of beauty and interest to all who visit the district, although the lower Cassley falls at Rosehall are in many respects finer. In the case of the Shin the river



makes one plunge in a contracted rocky chasm. The height is, however, not great, and the crest of the fall is considerably sloped, so that although the actual difference of level may be 11 or 12 feet, salmon are able to ascend when the water is fairly low by a leap of about five feet into the slope, succeeded by a strong swim upwards. Any June or July evening, if the river is low, fish may be watched making the ascent, and fish generally move about freely in the pool below."

How much of a salmon fisher Carnegie really was is difficult to say. We know from Calderwood and Grimble that he owned the rights, but checking records and biographies does not show him landing many salmon. From Hendrick's biography, "To be a laird was one thing; but to be Laird of the Shin added a distinction that only the Scottish sportsman can understand. Carnegie's sense of ownership in land was not strong, but he did take pride in this sparkling river, loved to wander along its banks, and to ascend the hills and survey the most charming reaches. It was the scenic phases that made the chief appeal. Carnegie was a skillful trout fisherman, but the more arduous casting for salmon, wading the raging stream and picking his slippery way from rock to rock, was not so much to his liking; occasionally he would fish the Shin from the water's edge, but for the most part the river represented for him a thing of beauty and romance."

Around October 20, 1996, during our six months stay in Scotland, we visited Skibo Castle for the first time, and were warmly welcomed by the Carnegie Club, who bought the castle and 7,500 acres in 1990. Heirs of the Carnegie family, including, I believe, their daughter, Margaret, managed to hold on to the estate until 1981, which shows, perhaps, that Carnegie did not give away all his money, but did leave a little something behind for future generations of his own blood.


Skibo, the castle, is beautifully stunning and romantic.





It is at least as wide as a football field, but maybe not quite as long. It rises four stories, but looks higher because of the castellations on the roof. A strange looking flag hangs from a post near the front driveway and later you find one side is the United States flag and the other British; showing Carnegie's allegiance to the country of his birth and to the one of his adopted citizenship. King Edward visited the Carnegies at Skibo, kissed Margaret, the three-year-old daughter, and also authorized the Carnegies to fly the double flag. The inside is a study in opulence. The entrance hall is covered with varnished, exotic woods and painted portraits. An ornate, carved staircase leads to the elevators and the floors above, where there are at least twenty four bedrooms. On the left is a towering pipe organ. Carnegie apparently loved the sound of the pipe organ, even though it's doubtful if he could play one. He liked the music of Haydn, Bach and Wagner. One of his funds established just before he died in 1919 was for the grant of libraries, organs, and colleges, by which time, the fund had already donated 7689 organs (\$6,248,309) to churches in the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and other English held countries. Churches were asked to pay half the cost. From *A Manual of the Public Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie*, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 1919, "Andrew Carnegie was always sensitive to the influence of music and often quoted the Oriental sage—'O Music, sacred tongue of God, I hear thee call, and I come.' To such an extent did organ music affect him that he has testified that listening to an organ was to him a devotional experience. He has been perfectly candid in saying that, while he would not be responsible for what the preacher might say, he would be responsible for the influence of music in a church."


Golf is perhaps the main feature of the Carnegie Club at Skibo now and we were met by Alan Grant, historian and



golf secretary, who showed me the ground floor of the castle including Carnegie's library, which is surprisingly intact as he left it in 1914, the last year he was there. He was a voluminous writer with a dozen books including an autobiography, a best selling *Triumphant Democracy; An American Four-In-Hand in Britain*, about traveling from the south of England to Scotland in a horse-drawn carriage, and more than sixty articles including "The Gospel of Wealth;" in which he said he didn't want to die rich, and British taunting stuff like "Do Americans Hate England," "British Pessimism," and "The cost of Living in Britain compared with the United States." (The writer who lives in the country with the lower cost of living always instigates such an article.) Many of the articles lying about in the library had been printed and bound with dark red covers.

We were looking for any fishing record books pertaining to Carnegie, but could not find any in the Castle. Later, Alan suggested I visit Margaret Thomson, Carnegie's great granddaughter, who farms two thousand acres just down the road from Skibo castle, on the way to the Shin. After I called her, I was reminded again how generous the Scots (I never did find out if she was a Scot or a United States citizen) are when you need help and put yourself in their hands. Yes, she had plenty of record books. She had a framed map showing all the fishing pools on the river and their names. Somewhere there was even a huge salmon caught by Carnegie and stuffed and mounted on a plaque which hung for years in the castle. My wife and I could visit her anytime and she would be glad to show us the record books and the salmon if she could find it.

We visited Margaret around the turn of the year and passed the castle on the way. It's a very quiet and peaceful section of Scotland, which is generally not the case in the bottom and central part of the country anymore. The road is lined with tall trees, many of them said to be planted by Carnegie.



There is expansive greenery through the trees and now and then silver stretches of the Kyle of Sutherland. It's easy to imagine how Mr. Carnegie must have felt when he first saw it one hundred years ago.

"The silence, the softness of the air, the mingling of land and sea, were in keeping with the varied and genial quality of the whole estate . . . Carnegie, looking about and drinking in the grateful atmosphere, never wearied of repeating the lines of his favorite poet: 'This castle hath a pleasant scent; the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses.'" From the Hendrick biography.

Margaret's house was off the road and in a little cluster of other small stone cottages and farm buildings. She was a small woman in her fifties with a nice smile and the Carnegie countenance. She wore farmer's overalls with the top shoulder parts pulled down and tied around her waist, and served us wonderful soup and homemade bread and a tray of various cheeses. We found out she was a real farmer, staying awake in a small hut during lambing time so she could help save a lamb if she could during a botched delivery.

An impressive chandelier hung down over the dining table and on the backboard of a cupboard were many framed photographs of various members of the family. A portrait of her father, a handsome man in naval officer's uniform, dominated the room. There was also a fine, oil portrait of Andrew, his white beard neatly trimmed and shaped, in the formal living room.

After lunch, Margaret brought out the record books and a long, framed map of the Shin showing all the curves and pools and the famous Shin Falls with the names of each pool printed at the side. For so valuable a quarry as the Atlantic salmon, the Scots left meticulous records of their catches wherever they were lucky enough to find them. The books were

also necessary in a rental or sale transaction and could often be the basis for the price of the rental or purchase of the water. I had already looked at three or four sets of records of famous fishing hotels and they were pretty much the same.

The remarks made interesting and historical reading and were often of a personal nature; weather, water levels, times of the takes, sea lice (the appearance of sea lice, resembling small tadpoles towards the fish's tail was a welcome omen signifying the salmon was not long from the sea) "Very lucky, very tired, stopped at 5:30, Jolly good day's sport." "Last day." "Only offer." "Hook must have slipped." "Lost heavy fish." "The lady of the party made the males feel very small." "A low river all the month, but a steady run of good fish, no blank days." "War declared." "Landed 7 pound, 3 ounce baby boy." "All the month water temperature low 34 degrees and many fish coming short, quite a number lost." "Played a big fish in Ferntree pool—the old tree lying on the bank hindered my movements. I feel it was principally due to this that I lost my fish." There were tallies, mostly at the end of the season, giving best flies, best days, biggest fish, and totals and average size of the salmon. Some of the figures are quite staggering, but there haven't been catches like this on the Shin or other Scottish salmon rivers for fifty or sixty years.

The records Margaret showed us bore the name, Inveran Hotel, whose connection to Carnegie is unclear. There is a village with the same name on the Shin near the river's approach to the kyle, and close to the edge of or even included in the Skibo property. The records begin in 1889, at least ten years before Carnegie first saw Skibo. For an average of three or four months fishing, 1,319 salmon were caught totalling 17,547 pounds over a combined period of nine years, an average of 146 salmon per year; an average of 1,949 pounds of salmon per year.

With four different, but major salmon rivers coming into the Kyle of Sutherland and with many different owners or leasees of the rivers or parts of them, there was considerable battling over fishing with rod and net. In the record book Margaret showed us is the following notation. "This table shows at a glance the steady improvement that has taken place since the abolition of the Invershin net fishings a few years ago by the late Duke of Sutherland."

The same record book describes the fishings and names the pools. "The river contains 34 named salmon pools besides a number of minor casts in consecutive order from the Kyle." The pool names are typical: "Garden pool." "Hector's land." "Parson's Pool." "Boat pool" (Many Scottish salmon rivers had 'boat pools', which usually required a boat to fish the pool properly.) "Big Falls Pool." "Grief (for the sharp edge of rocks at the tail of the pool)." "Ladies Pool." And Macpherson's pool."

Angus Macpherson was the name of Carnegie's private piper who woke him and his guests at Skibo Castle, 8 a.m. sharp. Miss Blossom Gow, a friend of Margaret, said Macpherson owned the Inveran Hotel until it burned down sometime in the 1930s and that she, as a child, remembered watching the piper running through one of the top floors of the burning hotel throwing furniture, utensils, crockery, linens and towels through the windows trying to save whatever he could.

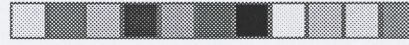
Miss Gow sent me some copied pages from a book written about salmon fishing on the Shin by the piper, Macpherson. It was entitled, *A Highlander Looks Back*, n.d., published by Oban Times Limited, Oban, Argyll." Apparently, the Carnegies liked to serve lunch at the Shin Falls and thought it would be nice to entertain their guests by having Mr. Macpherson play his bagpipe while the guests and Carnegies had lunch. MacPherson wrote, "At the Falls of Shin there is a

grassy platform cut out from the steep embankment; future generations may wonder why and how it got there. It was constructed by order of Mrs. Andrew Carnegie of Skibo for me to play my bagpipe on when large parties went from Skibo Castle to luncheon at the Falls, as otherwise, from the steep nature of the ground, I could not play with any degree of comfort."

It's quite possible Carnegie funded the hotel for his piper during the time he had the Shin from around 1900 to 1914 as it would have been typical of him to put his private piper in a nice business like that. Carnegie might also have had fishing guests who didn't warrant a room in the castle, but who might have been put up at the hotel. Also, a line in Gow's letter says, "Angus was piper to Mr & Mrs. Carnegie and in 1914 was given the tenancy of the Interan Hotel on the River Shin."

The first of the Inveran record books also listed the best salmon flies on the Shin: Jock Scott, Black Jay, Black Doctor, Childers, Blue Doctor, Thunder and Lightning, ~~Wasp~~ *and* For summer and autumn, the Butcher, Durham Ranger, Silver Doctor and Popham were also listed. There was also a salmon fly named the Carnegie in George Kelson's, *The Salmon Fly*, but I can't say if it was named after the subject of this writing.

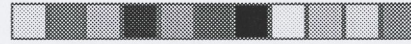
But what about Carnegie? Maybe Hendrick was right, Carnegie didn't like salmon fishing or his name would have been plastered in the record books. There are entries which read, "The Carnegie Party," but only two which list his name, A. Carnegie, and that was on the 26 and 27 of September, 1913. He got a thirty three pound fish (probably the one that was put up and hung in the castle) in the Rocky pool and a fourteen pound fish in the Meadow pool on September 26. Then another *GP* (thirteen) pounder in the Meadow and one of twelve pounds in the Long pool, the next day. In the remarks for the same year, we see that 1913 was, at least for May, "a low river all the month, but, a steady run of good fish—no blank days."



The total for the year was 315 salmon and 56 grilse.

Carnegie did not have too much time left to catch salmon on the Shin because of the coming of World War I. His annual six and seven month trips to Scotland and to his beloved Skibo ended the next year, 1914. The family and the servants sailed from Liverpool on the *Mauretania* in September. It would be Carnegie's sixty fifth crossing, the first being made in 1848, when he, his younger brother, Tom and his mother and father sailed down the Clyde from Glasgow for America on the *Wiscasset* once a whaling schooner, but by then square rigged for the booming merchant service to North America.





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11Carnegie

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THE SCOTTISH GILLIE

The gillie is a necessary part of the feudal salmon fishing system which still exists in Scotland today. The gillie was born to gillieing, or serving just as his master, the salmon laird, was born to ruling and ordering. It is surprising that the gillie has survived, (one guessed there are still 2000 working in Scotland), not because he doesn't earn much money, but, because he doesn't earn much respect. From the fishing rules and regulations of certain salmon rivers, for example, we find that paying anglers are asked not to give whisky to the gillie. On some rivers, he has his own private bothie, smaller and not nearly as comfortable as his client's, where he eats his lunch alone. If there were only one bothie, you could be quite sure the gillie would have his lunch outside, unless it were raining or snowing.

The Scottish gillie is not generally relied on for information on which flies to use or where and how to fish in certain pools of the client's water. The American western guide, on the other hand, is hired mainly for those reasons alone, or for his handling of the guide boat over certain sections of various rivers. There is no equivalent in Scotland of our western, Mckenzie river guide boat, due perhaps, to the fact that there



are many proprietors on most Scottish salmon rivers. On the Tay and the Spey, two of the largest salmon rivers in Scotland, however, there is an old salmon fishing sport called harling, in which one or two oarsmen row a boat pretty much in place, usually over unwadeable pools, and slightly from side to side, trailing lures and salmon flies for the angler or anglers sitting in the stern with rods in their hands, waiting for a salmon to take the lure or fly. A similar sport is practiced on some western steelhead rivers, although the boat is held in the current by outboards or inboards, which could have also, by now, replaced the oars on the Tay or Spey.

So why are there gillies in Scotland, and what do they do to earn their meagre \$50 per day average pay? I hate to say this, but their primary purpose seems to be to gaff salmon and to carry them from the river to the client's car or carriage. Just as late as twenty or thirty years ago, it was quite possible for an angler to catch four or five grilse and or salmon per day on many of the better rivers in Scotland. If the fish averaged just seven pounds apiece, their total weight could be well over thirty pounds, which together with rods and reels, boxes of flies, wading staffs, rain gear, gaffs and landing nets, lunches, beer and whisky, could have easily totaled fifty or sixty pounds. Many older British books on salmon fishing published in the 1800s, showed photographs of the author or friend admiring a day's catch of nine or ten grilse and salmon neatly tied by their tails to a stout fence or bothie wall. Who do you think carried them from the river for the photographs and then to transportation for the ride home?

Gaffing a salmon by the angler, himself, is a very difficult and physical maneuver ~~for an angler to accomplish by himself~~. The rod is thirteen to fifteen feet long and there must be constant pressure on the fish to bring him to the bank. The fish must be gaffed by the angler's strong hand, which, most likely,





is his right hand. So, he has to move the rod to his left hand, grab the gaff with his right (the gaff could be slung across his shoulder on a strap or lying on the bank near him. The point is very sharp and is usually covered with a cap to prevent accidental injury and to keep it sharp, so the cap has to be removed before gaffing the fish) and pull the point of the gaff through the body, preferably the back, of the thrashing salmon and hoist him ashore. One writer, or his gillie, took great pains not to gaff the salmon on his side or belly because this left a visible, nasty scar or hole, which his wife objected to when serving the cooked salmon to friends.

Gaffing with a gillie, of course, is a lot easier, quicker and surer. The angler just reels the salmon in close to the bank, and the trusty, sober gillie who has been carrying the gaff, pulls it through the back of the fish and lifts him ashore. A famous angler on the Dee whose small flies and tactics were embodied in a book, *Greased Line Fishing For Salmon*, believed the presence of a gillie close to the water, scared the salmon and made him stronger and more difficult to land. So the famous angler's gaff was lengthened to ten feet and the gillie ordered to stay back and to stay low until the last possible moment. The angler killed more than three thousand salmon in his life on his famous, small flies, but his gillie, who outlived him, told friends and other gillies that his boss really fished with three inch long "Jock Scotts" and "Thunder and Lightnings."

Salmon fishing literature has been unkind to the gillie. Augustus Grimble in *The Salmon Rivers of Scotland*, 1913, in a chapter on the Oykel, wrote, "from the foregoing remarks it will be seen that in the upper beat there is a long tramp from 'Junction' to 'Scorabie,' and on the lower one a still longer journey from 'The Cemetery' to 'The Blue.' For this reason it is best to start out for the day's work in shoes or boots, except there be deep snow, and let the ghillie carry the waders, and



then shift them off and on as occasion requires; indeed, on all rivers where trousers are necessary, and the pools some distance apart, it is far more healthy and comfortable to do the walking in shoes, and have the waders carried."

In *Shooting and Salmon Fishing*, 1892, by the same author, "There is no more annoying way of losing a fish than to do so when it is fairly beaten and has once been brought within reach of the gaff. The inexperienced gillie has had two tries and missed it each time; and then, by running wildly up and down the bank in pursuit, has repeatedly scared the captive back to the stream and deep water, till at last, just as it is again towed to the bank, the long-enduring hold breaks, and he is gone! Numbers of fish are thus lost each season, and this is a matter to be easily avoided by the fisherman taking absolute command of a nervous or ignorant gaffer.

"Over and over again, we have seen a nervous gillie prolong a struggle fully ten minutes more than needful."

In *Salmon Fishing*, 1935, by Eric Tavener, the novice angler is instructed, when tying a fly on to his leader, "to make a point of doing it for himself, even at the risk of mortally offending the ghillie."

John James Hardy, in his *Salmon Fishing*, 1907, says, "Gaffing or netting a fish, is generally performed by the ghillie, who requires no incentive to do his best, and may be trusted." That's really not too bad, almost a compliment, but under the photograph of a priest, used to kill the salmon by rapping it smartly on the head, "It is easily carried in the bag, and does its work in a neater fashion than the stone which ghillies employ, and with which they generally smash the fly as well as the fish."

The Floating Line For Salmon and Sea-Trout, 1939 by Anthony Crossley, makes the reader wonder why the angler puts up with a gillie at all, "Of course the greatest enemy of the floating line has always been the gillie. The gillie is so often an






intolerant, bigoted tyrant. Very few of them know anything about the method of fishing with a floating line. They like to arrange the tackle. They like to choose the fly. They judge you as a fisherman by your ability to cast far and straight at an angle of 45 degrees. Whether the line is greased or not, they are perfectly satisfied if you employ the same stereotyped method. In Scotland they are usually taciturn; in Ireland invariably voluble. They like to see a big rod and a strong cast. If you can't catch a fish like that, there is a bottle of Golden Sprats and a box of Devons ready. Worse still, especially on hotel waters, there is a jar of prawns in the hut. 'I think we'll try him with the red chap,' they say, and it needs some courage to refuse."

These were all slurs against the gillie, suggesting he would rather fish with bait and artificial wooden minnows than with the artificial fly. Crossley then bad mouths the gillie through the voice of a fishing friend, "I have never considered myself much of a fisherman, but perhaps I am a thinker. Of course, the gillies are the trouble. Their life is naturally a narrow one."

In Norway the gillie is called a gaffer, which I suggested earlier is one of the two tasks the Scottish gillie is really called to do. *In I go A-Fishing*, 1928, by J. Brunton Blaikie, the author compares the Norwegian gaffer to the British gillie. "The gaffers are not, I think, as expert in netting or gaffing fish as is the British ghillie, but as a rule they are full of enthusiasm." The author also laments the departure of many young Norwegian males to the United States in search of better jobs and more money. The book was written in 1928, perhaps a period of concentrated emigration. "The inhabitants of these lonely valleys have a toilsome life, working hard from dawn till dark, but they are cheerful and seem contented. I fear, however, that America is doing a great deal of harm to the Norwegian. A great many lads from Norway go to America. There they work



industriously and return to their native land a few years later with a little money, a dislike of the strenuous, sedate life of their countrymen, and a taste for the flashy amusements and the vices of a city life. They breed discontent, and are not nearly so pleasant to deal with as are their untravelled kinsfolk."

The more modern view of the Scottish gillie is not so harsh and more credit is given to him by Hugh Falkus in, *Salmon Fishing*, published in 1984 and still in print. "Gillies usually go for their tea at about five-thirty. And this is when so many anglers pack up. Have a break by all means. Like the gillies, go and eat a high tea. But come out again—and fish into the darkening. It is not by chance that, according to the terms of lease, the gillies themselves so often fish in the evening for their estates. This is when they catch many of their salmon. Go and do likewise." And, "But when it comes to learning about *water*, and all that goes with it, a week with a first-class gillie is worth a ton of books."

Fishing, himself, for salmon for the estate is probably what makes a gillie a gillie. Born on the wrong side of the royal line, he never would be able to afford fishing for salmon in Scotland, and he feels if he can just put up with the gaffing, the carrying of the clients' salmon and equipment (there is not much gaffing and carrying of salmon away from Scottish rivers these days, and some rivers are moving to catch and release.) and the slurs he receives, he can still play the fishing gentleman and fish far more often and catch many more salmon than most of the fishing gentlemen he gillies for.

Even in 1996, when I fished the Beaully on the last two days of the season, Hugh Matheson, head fisherman, a position above gillie, told me he had caught seventeen salmon that season for the estate, (now the Beaully Fishing Company) and was, with my permission, during the last few moments of the season, still trying to take another one. He told me quite ada-



✓ mantly that being a gillie “was in my blood.” His father and his grandfather were gillies and now his son and grand-son are gillies for the same company. In that company, only one other young gillie doesn’t have the same last name. “What else could I do?” Hugh shrugged.

Hugh also told me the laird or plebian owner of a large estate which had salmon fishing and deer stalking was always eager for their gillies and their wives to have boys, not girls. On large estates, especially where the owner didn’t have netting rights, the gillies, after working all day with paying anglers, took rods and reels to the river and fished well into darkening for the laird, of course. Until only recently, or since the advent of Atlantic salmon fish farming in Scotland around twenty years ago, Atlantic salmon was still a very expensive food in Scotland and England, and even a five or six pound grilse could fetch several pounds sterling.

Jimmy Oswald, fifty five, lifetime gillie for the Glen Tanar estate on the Scottish Dee told me, “when we fished for the estate in the old days, we were permitted only five fish per evening because together with nets and gaffs, and rods and waders, you could easily be looking at more than 100 pounds that we’d have to carry home on our bicycles.”

Scottish gillies know far more about salmon fishing in their rivers than they let on, and they probably decide as soon as they meet their clients just how much help and information they’re going to give them. Stuffy ones won’t get much. Friendly ones will get more than their money’s worth. The temporary, day long fishing union is probably similar to the other more famous, and shorter lasting one, in which only one of the partners has all the fun. Tips will always be bigger when the enjoyment is great.

During tea at his comfortable estate-owned farmhouse, with his wife and mine present, Jimmy opened up even more



about the fishing on his royal river. "The last great fishing on the Dee was in the sixties, and started falling off probably as late as 1965. Any angler, no matter how good he was, could get six or eight fish a day during these times. One of my best caught and killed sixteen fish, around two hundred pounds of salmon.

"We used to like to rest a section of the Dee at around 5 p.m. in the evening and finish the day at some other pool, because there was always a fish that was ready to take at that time. If some other party came and fished the pool that evening, they would take the fish and this would mean no taking fish in the same pool the next morning.

"There could be a couple hundred fish in a pool and there was always one or two that wanted to take your fly. This happens because fish move at night. Fish will take a fly during the first display of lightning and thunder, but will not take the fly after that or while the thunder and lightning continue. The fishing will be better one half hour after the lightning stops. And you can always find a certain sized fish in the same spot in a pool time after time after time.

"As you know, the Dee had the best springer salmon fishing in Scotland, probably the world. We opened in February and even by that time salmon would be as high as Balmoral. There'd be thousands of them. These were all springers, two or three sea winter salmon, no grilse. Fishing was so popular we didn't have enough gillies. That's because being a gillie was a family thing, grandfathers, fathers, brothers, cousins and friends. It was a closed shop and hard to get into on a full time basis.

"We'd get gillies from the western shores of Scotland, work here for one or two months if they could find it and then return to their rivers and shores, where they would pick winkles and mussels and stay drunk until next February.

"Poaching was quite a problem, and if a pool didn't have





many rocks or boulders in it, the poachers could sweep it very easily with a net. Part of my work with other gillies was to set concrete blocks into the quieter pools to try to thwart the poachers nets."

Mrs. Oswald poured tea. How many times had she heard her Jimmy tell these stories?

"But I've got to tell you about Billie Blair. He was a Dee gillie who invented a spoon which he cut from a sheet of aluminum or copper and pounded it with a bean hammer to get certain indentations in it. It was then mounted with a treble hook on one end and a swivel on the other, and tossed out and fished on a spinning rod. The damn lure wobbled and flashed and was so effective that the angler using the spoon would always get a salmon, and he'd have to pay Billie Blair 7 shillings, 6 pence for the rental of the spoon. It was special for some reason, but nobody really new why.

"An angler would lose the magic spoon every now and then and us gillies would have to wade in the water looking for it. Five times we found it, but on the sixth time it was lost forever. Well that's what we thought and that's what Old Billie wanted us to think. The old codger was making the spoons at home, but he wanted the gentlemen to think there was only one, so he could charge the high rent. Old Billie gave up gillieing and started manufacturing the magic spoon in an old garage where we all thought he made more money than he ever did at gillieing."

All of the eight or ten gillies I met while I was in Scotland were handsome, clean shaven, fit and well built men. They obviously liked to dress up a bit in their work, too, and I wouldn't doubt some had their suits tailormade for them. Jimmy, for example, looked splendid, the first day I saw him in a dark gray woolen plaid suit, the coat fitted with a zipper instead of buttons, and the breeches (breeks in Scotland) of the same material





and heavy woolen socks with a little garter around the cuff of the pants at the knees. His shoes were the classic, heavy wing tips, with a flap over the ties. He also wore a checked shirt with button down collar, and a dark blue, patterned tie. By the water, later, he put on knee length wellies, but I couldn't tell if he removed the garter or not. In the old black-and-white photographs of the gillie and the gentlemen admiring their catch of the ten or twelve salmon of the day, it's always easy to pick the gentleman.

Much of what the gillie really thought about his gentlemen is captured in a book, *The Sporting Gentleman's Gentleman*, by Bruce Sandison, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1986. While I was in Scotland, Bruce gave me a lot of information by phone about fishing in Scotland and, I was able to read his weekly fishing column in *The Scotsman*, one of the few gillie free daily newspapers in the country. The book, for the first time, gave the gillie the opportunity to talk back, and here are a few choice things he said:

"What's a gillie for if it isn't to send his gentleman off smiling.

"Whisky, and the love of it, has become part of the mythology of being a gillie.

"George Sutherland has fished the Helmsdale for the past thirty years, and in April, 1984, he landed his ten thousandth salmon. The Helmsdale is probably the finest salmon river in the north.

"... there were times on the Helmsdale when you could throw your cap into the river and a salmon would rise to it.

"In these days, gentlemen expected two gillies; one to carry rod and tackle, the other to carry the fish caught. Short piers stood out into the pools, and the gillie with the rod had to be standing ready, line out, fly in the water, waiting to hand it to the gentleman when he arrived. Unfortunately, it was con-



sidered ill-mannered of a gillie to walk ahead of the gentleman, so there was always a last minute scramble to be in the right place at the right time. Nor was it any easier for the second gillie. He would be struggling along the bank, lumping a sack which might contain anything up to one hundred pounds of salmon."

A gillie in the book, named MacAskill "was changing flies after almost every cast, and the general [his client for the day] was becoming more and more bad tempered. He had a large selection of flies, all beautifully dressed, in a mahogany box. Eventually, he turned to Mr. MacAskill and snapped: 'Pack up. I have to go. But leave the fly-box out.'

"When everything was neatly away, the General took the fly-box, walked to the end of a pier, opened the box and threw its contents into the river.

"There you are, you damned brutes!" he shouted. "Take your bloody choice." For days afterwards, the gillies were picking up salmon flies from the river, and at nearly a pound a time, they were some consolation for all the trouble the General had given them."

✓ "Most of the gillies to whom I have talked have had but a poor opinion of spinning and bait fishing for salmon, and have considered modern flies—Waddingtons, tube-flies and the likes—to be little better: When they have to resort to raking about the bottom with lumps of iron to catch salmon, then I want nothing to do with it."

✓ Gillies working for larger, mixed sporting estates, also had to work as keepers in the shooting of stags, grouse, and pheasants. Willie Drysdale, in *The Sporting Gentleman's Gentleman*, "reared between 12,000 and 15,000 pheasant each year. Willie was fond of his charges and went to endless trouble to keep them safe and prepare them properly for their short lives on release. One of the most disturbing aspects of a day's shoot

was when it was over and he had to go round the woods, looking for winged birds.

"I've seen hundreds of birds shot in a day, 800 once to six double guns. I needed a cart to bring them all home. Next day I went round the woods and picked up more than fifty wounded birds."

"The laird's word was final, absolute and law. People did what they were told, with no questions asked, or they soon found themselves in trouble." The author remembered a keeper named John McKay, a keeper at Aboyne, losing his job for supposed insolence: "Lord Dalhousie had arrived, and when John went over in the morning, His Lordship asked, 'What have you done to the weather, MacKay? Could you not have managed to make a better day of it than this?'"

McKay replied, "Och, it was fine yesterday. Are you sure you didn't bring with you, My lord?"

Next morning he was called to the factors office and given his notice."



SIX MONTHS IN SCOTLAND

BY SYLVESTER NEMES





SIX MONTHS
IN
SCOTLAND

AN AMERICAN VIEW
OF ITS SALMON FISHING

BY
SYLVESTER NEMES

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INTRODUCTION

I belong to no Scottish clan, but I wish I did. It's not that my own American heritage didn't leave me with much, but my wife and I were in Scotland for six months, and I'm afraid I will want to be a Scot, or try to act like one, for the rest of my life. Yes, I wish I had my own tartan and could play the bag pipe and speak liltingly and poetically. And I have begun to think I could easily spend six months in Scotland every year and attend the highland games along the Royal Dee, where one can see enough kilts and hear enough bagpipes in one day to last six months. And fish salmon on the beautiful Dee and Don. And even with more difficulty and improbability learn the right way to say, "och", "nae", "wee" and "Bye. Bye. Just Now."

My wife, Hazel and I went there, exchanging houses with Allan and Evie Hamilton, starting in August, 1996 and coming back the first of February, 1997. Alan's reason for coming to Bozeman was to work at Montana State University in microbiology, in which he has a PH.D. from the University of Aberdeen. The Hamiltons are outdoor people. They sail. They both ski and hike, and he is an avid angler, with salmon fishing rights on the Don and the North Esk. Apparently, he knew I, too, was an angler, and he left me these fishings, for which I



want to thank him.

Someone told me one must fish for an average of two hundred hours to catch a salmon in Scotland. I think my average was a little better than that, but it might not be worth writing a book about. This modest work, however, is not entirely about salmon fishing in Scotland. It is also about the law of salmon fishing which some readers may find even more interesting than the fishing itself. I didn't learn about this ancient feudal system fishing the Don, Dee or Beaully, I learned about it in the Taylor Law Library of the University of Aberdeen. I couldn't believe what I was reading. The Crown (king or queen of England) owns or owned all of the salmon fishing in Scotland until he or she sold it, rented it or gave it away, including every foot of sea shore around Scotland where it was discovered in the early 19th century, salmon swam up and down the shore trying to smell their natal rivers.

The law is difficult to understand, and I apologize if I have taken wrong meanings. Today's owners, many of them titled, are losing their salmon at an alarming rate. It is not entirely their fault, because the fish do travel to other continents. But at home, in Scotland, there are too many owners and they don't seem able to get together and take the necessary steps to save their salmon. There are now sixty two salmon fishery districts, all privately owned. They seem generally to agree only on open and closed seasons. Salmon are still netted on some shores and estuarial pools, and the weekly and annual close times are observed. But there are no limits, and never have been. Wardens or bailiffs are hired by districts. If a district thinks it needs a hatchery or work on its rivers, it must fund the project itself. Salmon fishing in Scotland is a divided and fractured system of the dark ages. Salmon (obviously headed north for Scotland) are still being drift-netted off the northeast coast of England, but drift-netting is illegal off Scottish shores,

✓
Spanner



yet Scottish tacksmen and North-East drift-netters supposedly live and work under the eyes of the same government.

In the house exchange with the Hamiltons, we included cars, and we were to pay for our own respective utilities in the exchanged houses: electricity, gas, telephone, and water. Scots still enjoy sitting in front of a coal-burning fireplace while watching the “tele”, also a British pastime, and we quickly got into the evening habit of burning the hard, anthracite coal, many bags of which, Alan left us in the circular, summer house.

Hamilton’s house is of typical Aberdeen granite construction and was one of three dwellings spun off a large, three-hundred-year-old mansion, set in the middle of a forest, near the village of Blackburn, around ten or twelve miles west of Aberdeen. The area is called Kinellar, and our house address was Kinellar House East. The British and the Scots prefer names to mere numbers on their houses. One of the largest granite quarries in Europe operated for many years on the edge of Aberdeen. In the typical house, the end walls are built of thick granite blocks, with mortar in between, and laid on top of one another in rows, each succeeding row being two blocks shorter (one on each end) than the one below it. The design is called ‘crow stepping’ which is the architectural trademark of Scottish house design. Many old, uninhabited Scottish castles have walls like this and even when most of the materials are wasted away after centuries of exposure, the ‘crow step’ walls remain, strong as the day they were built.

Kinellar House East was ‘L’ shaped with a large kitchen in the corner of the ‘L’, equipped with an Aga stove. The main feature of the Aga is instant use of the two top burner plates and of the varying-degree ovens below. The other important feature is a constant source of heat, nicely suited to the damp climate of Aberdeen, which, by the way, is in the same latitude as Skagway, Alaska.





There were two bedrooms and two baths upstairs in the base of the L. We used the south facing bedroom because it had more windows. The sink in the bathroom was equipped with two faucets, one very hot and the other very cold, which is typical of modern British and Scottish bathroom technology. It was difficult to find single, mix temperature faucets, even in the John Lewis Partnership department store in downtown Aberdeen.

Watching the British and Scottish 'tele' was a little bit different than watching TV in the US. The Hamiltons did not have cable, but had BBC 1, which is the national commercial free station in Britain and Scotland. There were also three other commercial stations with a lot of American stuff and British standup men and women comedians. I was surprised to learn that every house in Britain and Scotland, if it has a TV set in it, has to pay the British government £97.50 (around \$150.00) for a year's license. The license was cheaper if the set were black and white and £1.25 cheaper if it were owned by a registered blind person. One of the conditions of the license is that representatives of the licensing authority may inspect an owner's license and his 'television receiving equipment' 'at any reasonable time', 'but you do not have to let them enter your home without a search warrant.' I was told that vans operated by 'TV Licensing' and equipped with television sensing devices, tour the country side trying to detect TV sets in use in homes where the licenses have not been paid.

We also got acquainted with the country's newspapers, and it's sad to say the once great newspapers of Britain like the *Manchester Guardian* (*The Guardian*) and the *London Times* have succumbed to the four color girls business on their front pages. The competition to sell the papers is also so stiff that on certain days the Times, on news stands, will be specially priced at only 10P, or around 16 US cents. The front page of the paper on




January 6, 1997, included a nude young lady in color, positioned right next to the 10P special price, and over the headline: GAY SEX CLAIMS OVERSHADOW TORY ELECTION CAMPAIGN LAUNCH. No wonder they lost!

The two cars left us by the Hamiltons were a late model Landrover called Discovery and a Nissan Sunny, with a glass sun roof. We found the Sunny comfortable, economical and responsive. We used the Discovery for sight seeing because of its high clearance, and better view of the countryside.

I tried to find out why driving in the UK was on the left hand side of the road and from an automobile club I got the following. One idea is that in medieval times, people on horseback drove on the left so they could carry their sword, lance, or whatever fighting instrument they were using in their right arms. Then, "It is known that in 1300 Pope Boniface VIII decreed that people should pass right to right at the Papal Jubilee, and this seems to have set the rule for Europe." Napoleon also vouchsafed for the right hand side. American driving is supposed to be on the right because we drove our wagon trains on the right. Many countries in the British Commonwealth, of course, also drive on the left hand side of the road.

Driving in England or Scotland on the left hand side of the road is only a minor irritation. It requires some mental reminding and it was a while before I felt confident enough to travel at night from a river or a dinner out. There are many good roads in Scotland, but none in the class of our Interstates, or freeways, which are known as Motorways in the UK. Presently these come up from England and end in the southern part of Scotland at Perth, and I was surprised to find many one-lane roads with passing palaces near our residence in Kinellar and to a larger degree in the more northern parts of the country. Beginning drivers in Scotland and Britain carry rather large tags with the letter "L", (for learners) on their automo-



biles and Hazel kept threatening to put one on the Sunny. However, we found Scottish drivers alert and courteous with good eye contact and much greater use of their headlights as warnings. I am also in favor of the 'roundabouts' at intersections which let the driver continue straight, turn left or right, or return in the opposite direction without stopping. Scottish highway police have also instigated strict drunk-driving regulations and it's a good idea to come home in a cab if you've been partying.

The other thing about driving in Scotland or anywhere in the UK is the high cost of gasoline, actually, around twice the cost in the US, which has to be due to taxes. Currently the most obvious consumer tax is VAT, (Value Added Tax), which is 17.50%, and it is applied to just about everything consumerish including fuel and alcoholic beverages, (which makes Scotch whisky purchased in Scotland far more expensive there than here in Montana.) Average gasoline tank fillup cost for the Sunny was around \$25.00, while the average fillup cost for the Discovery was around \$50. (Diesel fuel is priced higher than gasoline. Unleaded or diesel, you don't get free window washing fluid nor the use of a squeegee to clean your windshield.)

Alan Hamilton warned me we would spend more money to live in Scotland. And I appreciated his candor. We did not keep track of our spending perhaps because we were having such a good time. However, I found the *US Department of State Indexes of Living Costs Abroad*. With the index for Washington, D.C. at 100 (during the six months we were there), the index for Gatwick, (closest to Aberdeen) was 144!

I am not a world traveler, but I thought Scotland was distinctly beautiful. There is nothing to compare it with in the United States, and nothing here in Montana. Much of the whole northern half of the country, Sutherland and Caithness counties, is sparsely populated with few major roads and few inhab-



itants. Water is everywhere; in the famous salmon rivers like the Oykel, Helmsdale, Brora, Shin, Cassley and Thurso; and in the thousands of lochs, some large and deep with trolling for brown trout and salmon; and others, mere puddles in the treeless moors, with fly fishing for small trout averaging three or four to the pound. Besides the rod and reel, all one needs is a reliable compass. The ocean, too, is never far away and cuts deeply and repeatedly into the land. There are hundreds of smoky islands stretching as far as the eye can see. A small number are inhabited by only a few individuals, and many islands with no inhabitants except seals, and birds.

Here, too, in Kinellar there were sights I wasn't used to. (Is that what makes them memorable and interesting?) I walked a couple of miles every morning. There was quite a large, thick forest around the three 'crow stepped' houses and a gravel driveway leading out of it. During one of the reconstruction periods of the scaling down of the mansion, the daughter of an owner fell a few stories to her death and her ghost was supposed to be haunting one of the three houses. I never did see her in ours, but ghosts are indigenous to the Scots and they wouldn't live anywhere without at least one or two flying around the stone work of the houses they live in.

In August, when we arrived, there were many rabbits hip hopping quite tamely along the estate road. I saw my first Eurasian wood pigeons, shuffling in the abundant piles of leaves for food. They were easy to identify with their white bands on the wings and were very shy and very fast. One of my Scottish angler friends told me later, wood pigeons provided great shotgunning sport because of their noise and speed and when one got tired of eating them, one could still shoot them and sell them to the French across the channel for 35p's a bird.

I was instantly attracted to the colors of the Kinellar countryside. There were fields of intense green, usually the



✓ — pastures for sheep and cattle, and fields of shimmering gold, where barley was grown. I found out why so much 'gold' when a friend told me barley was the chief ingredient in Scotch whisky and it is also used in the making beer and ale. The fields along the road were marked off by the ubiquitous and ancient ivy and moss covered stone walls, called dykes. There must be a million miles of these walls in all of Scotland. Many fields had sheep, of course, and different breeds in one field or another. One morning, I watched a black and white sheep dog herd thirty or forty sheep into an adjoining field, while his master, several hundred feet from him, told him with just a whistle, how to do it.

✓ — And I passed a field which had a Pict standing stone in the center of it. It could have been there from the eight or ninth century. The location of this and similar stones all over Scotland are well known and recorded by archaeologists, and shown on the famous 'Inch Ordnance' maps (one-inch-to-a-mile-scale) of Scotland and England. The maps give one the feeling of how really small this whole island is. Most of the stones are covered with simple line drawings which resemble those on modern pins which say, "Have a Nice Day." That's about the only message construable from any of the many similar stones in the country, because not one written word of the Pict language, if there ever was one, has survived.

Sometimes I would walk clear to the Kinellar church yard. From there, the land falls away towards the Don River, where I had salmon fishing rights. At a certain point, beyond the church yard, I could see the shining river meander in the valley upstream towards Inverurie, at least 5 or 6 miles away. There were many views like that under Scottish silver skies and I will remember.

Hazel and I want to thank Allan and Evie Hamilton for the house trade, and for giving us such wonderful neigh-



bors as Gordon and Myra Williamson on one side and David Miller and Lynn Bentley on the other. They had a running battle to see who could spoil us the most. Both families won.

AYE SCOTLAND!







THE DON AND SALAR'S NEMESIS

✓ The Don was my Scottish home river and the fishing on it was given to me, perhaps as a welcome to Scotland gift by Allan Hamilton. The Don is a 'late' salmon river, so I was there during the better time for salmon, but I would have liked to see how my water fished for trout earlier in the year, because the Don had a wide-ranging reputation of being one of the best trout streams in Europe. *spacing*

"My water" (I'd like to be able to say that about a mile or two of the Henry's Fork in Idaho) means I was a member of the Kinellar, Torryburn and Balbithan Fishings, one of the many angling associations along the last fifteen miles or so of the Don River. The three names of the fishings were the names of small communities on both sides of the river, and Hamilton's house was in Kinellar.

The term association means salmon water and fishing for the average residents of a particular village or area on or near a salmon river. The right to the fishing is explained in *The Law of Game, Salmon & Freshwater Fishing in Scotland*, Stanley Scott Robinson, Butterworths, Edinburgh, 1990. "Many Scottish burghs holding royal charters establishing exclusive rights of market and trading also hold by express grant in the charter,



the right of salmon fishing in the rivers and tidal waters adjacent to the burgh lands.”

Mouths of rivers were natural and ideal locations for villages and cities. The smaller villages are quaint and romantic. Businesses were set up to deal in the nettings, the boats, the shipping, the stores, etc., that attracted numbers of men and women and families to work at the jobs that were offered.

In the hearts of many of the men was the strong desire to fish for the salmon they were seeing going up and down the river, bright and silvery and muscular one way in, dark red, deformed, and lanky on the way out. These would-be salmon fishers could not afford the beats of the lairds in the river above. And the gentlemen who could afford them, would never want to fish in the estuarial pools where they could be watched by gawking townspeople. This was so, even though many of Scotland's estuaries offered quite good salmon fishing, The Ythan estuary north of Aberdeen was world famous for fly fishing for salmon and sea trout, most of which was in the hands of an association. It was also believed that the closer to the sea a salmon was caught on the way coming in, the better was its taste, color and texture.

The laird knew of the average Scotsman's desire to fish for salmon. He hired bailiffs and watchers to keep them out of the paying gentlemen's pools. One of them thought of a better way: “we'll give the estuarial pools to the locals and that should help keep them from poaching on the gentlemen's pools above.”

That's my view of the origin of the association, and there are many of them throughout Scotland. There are associations on the Thurso, Ness, Beauly, Alness, Conon, Farrar, Glass, Nairn and many others. People can even fish the Spey through an association in Grantown on Spey, if they stay at one of the hotels or bed and breakfasts in town, and book the fish-



ing at a low rate at one of the tackle shops in town.

Associations have become more prevalent during the last twenty or thirty years, due perhaps, to the decline of the numbers of salmon coming into Scottish rivers. Some original rights owners may have thought their fishings were not profitable enough to continue operating as they had, and might be inclined to offer them to associations either free or at a very low cost. Books on salmon fishing written at the turn of the century speak of no association waters at all on the Don. Now, practically 90 percent of the Don from Inverurie to the sea, fifteen or twenty miles, is under the jurisdiction of one association or another. J. J. Watson, ironmongers in Inverurie on the Don, is the agent for many of them and will sell day tickets to visitors for £15 per day. The visitors receive a badly copied sheet of paper showing the pools and parking places, which will take the stranger hours to find if there are no other anglers fishing the pools. The post office in Kintore, on the Don, is operated by a pleasant, little lady, who I was surprised to learn, also sold fishing permits to the Kintore fishings for £6.50 per day for salmon and only £4.50 for sea trout.

My association water ended downstream on the Don, at Bridge of Fintray, which was the beginning of the Aberdeen and District Angling Association, (ADAA) which is, perhaps, Scotland's largest organization of its kind. It was founded in 1946, and I was told it has a thousand members, with a long waiting list of anglers who want to join. There is an initiation fee of £200 and an annual fee of £80. The club has fishing rights on the Don, the Dee, the Ythan, the Feugh and other rivers nearby with a 'ratable' value of more than a million pounds. The club is so large and powerful, it buys rights and fish for stocking, runs a salmon hatchery, and tries to stop pollution. I photographed some of the ADAA water on the Don and thought some of it looked highly fishable with streamy runs

and nice, holding pools. I meant to take a day on the Upper and Lower Parkill water, (two separate beats) before the season was over, but found myself fishing my own stretch of the river.

The ADAA cost of fishing for visitors is £15 per day for salmon, from its opening in February until September 1, when the rate goes to £20 per day for the rest of September and October, mirroring the Don's late river tradition.

Spainie I was happy to learn about ADAA, because to my mind, it is the closest thing in Scotland to our fishing here in the United States. | The club's annual fee for their members is relatively low, every member abides by the same rules including taking a step downstream between casts in a salmon pool the same way we fish some of the water in Montana. The ADAA seeks to do everything our fish and game departments do to make the sport more lasting and enjoyable, even policing the waters for poachers.

I visited the club's bothie or fishing hut in Duthie Park, in downtown Aberdeen. The two-room club rooms face the estuarial portion of the Dee where oldtimers meet nearly everyday. They leave the door open, while they have their cookies and coffee, and watch the lovely Dee go by with an occasional salmon jumping for all to see. One chap told me there were six known seals in the Dee, just in front of the bothie, and one member saw one of them with a salmon in its mouth. The association has an annual dance and fund raiser which is also attended by the bailiffs or watchers. At this time, the chap continued, the poachers, donned in modern, comfortable wet suits, raid the pools for salmon.

✓ Getting into my water on the Don was not that easy and Allan, who with his wife didn't leave Kinellar until the day after we arrived, showed me where to park on the narrow, one lane road and what farm gate to use to get to the river. We went through a feeble, lopsided gate, pushed some cows to the

Spainie



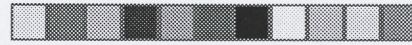
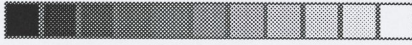
side and walked right through the farmer's field several hundred yards to the river. By an ancient right, farmers who own land on salmon rivers, must permit anglers with salmon fishing rights to trespass on their land to reach his water, even by car or horse cart if necessary as in the case of commercial netters, but the farmers however, cannot fish for salmon without obtaining the rights.

The one and a half miles of association water ran quite deep and slow and fairly straight with relatively high banks and without much broken water, making the pools, if there were any, difficult to locate. The Don was not so deep, however, that it couldn't be crossed here and there, carefully, I must say, and the bottom was good, solid fine gravel.

When I was with Allan on the river earlier, I had noticed a shelving gravel bar, and it was here that I returned the first couple of times I fished the Don. One evening, two young boys about eight or nine years old were slashing away with fly rods on the gravel bar and a day or so later they were there again with their father, John Petrie. He seemed a bit suspicious and could tell immediately I wasn't one of them. He really wanted to know if I was on the river legally. I didn't have my ticket with me, which the rules say must be carried at all times. I explained that Mr. Hamilton, whom he knew, had taken care of that, and I had the paper work at the house. I think he was pulling my leg because I'm sure everyone in Kinellar knew the Americans were coming. Then the hazing stopped. He smiled and we shook hands, and we started talking about rods and equipment and flies and salmon, a sure sign the friendship was growing. And he showed me where to fish.

We passed yards and yards of the river where he said, "Y'all nae catch a salmon in that water." I had already learned that 'nae' was one of the most positive words in the Scottish language, and I followed Petrie up and down the river, ear-

spaine



marking the riffles and pools, which he said might contain salmon during the coming last weeks of the season. He chose parts of the river which were usually shallower, even though the bottom was difficult to see and moved and curled surprisingly. Later, when I return to one of his pools by myself, I noticed the fly moved more rapidly and animatedly downstream, and I began to feel I was fishing the fly not just casting it with my thirteen foot Winston.

I was hoping to catch a sea trout, because I had read so much about them and also because we don't have the critter in the United States. Scientifically, it is a brown trout with the nomadic tendencies of a salmon, perhaps closely allied to our western steelhead. I have not read of sea trout actually swimming across oceans, but they are caught in salmon nets in salt water, or used to be, and have been described as being "salmon-like." Their young are called finnock, while the salmon young, of course, are called parr until they start downstream towards the ocean when they are called smolt.

The Don was rich in insect life. There were numerous caddis and I saw many different mayfly duns on the water during the day times, which turned into spinners during the evening rise. There was a lot of surface activity, but the rings and noses were quite small. Using a size sixteen spinner from my book, *Spinners*, I hooked and landed quite a few salmon parr and small brown trout. Despite their size, they were beautiful. The parr markings are quite distinguished, resembling finger prints on the sides and bellies. Salmon remain in this stage of their lives for two or three years. In the river parr eat everything trout eat and rise freely to every kind of morsel. On another portion of the Don, I watched three or four parr in the shallow tail of a riffle. They moved constantly from one side of the river to the other, and up and down, never swimming out of their established territories, examining any living thing and all



manner of river vegetation which came down the river. Parrs' constant hunger or curiosity make it easy prey to Scottish salmon anglers' smaller trebles, tube flies (at the end of which is a treble), Waddington shank flies (again with a small treble), and salmon flies tied on doubles. On the Don, higher up, I fished with a fellow who had to kill at least four parr because he couldn't extricate his small fly tied on a treble from parrs' mouths. If used as an example, and then multiplied by the large number of salmon anglers in Scotland using these flies, it's easy to see that many two-and three-year -old salmon, as parr, are killed before they even go to sea. Most salmon anglers in Scotland, however, do not intend to release salmon and they have come to believe, that with so few salmon around anymore, they should use only trebles, which definitely reduce the risk of losing fish.

Frequently, I went to the Don of an evening with both a single-handed rod for trout and with the two-handed Winston for salmon. One evening, fishing the two handed rod, I tied on a Peter Ross, which I purchased from Sloan's shop in Inverurie. This is a very old, fancy pattern with golden pheasant tippet for tail, silver tinsel body, pale blue hackle, and a wing made from teal feathers sloping back. I hooked quite a large fish, maybe a sea trout, which broke me on the take, due perhaps to the inaction I was used to on the river. There was something out there.

About this time I came across *The Lives of Salmon* by Alan Youngson and David Hay, published by Swan Hill Press, 101 Longden Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 9EB, England. I recommend the book because it helps to clarify today's confusing salmon scene. I also met the two authors at a program they put on at Aberdeen University, where one of the authors told me, that as a youth, he used to run salmon stake nets along the shores of the North Sea near Aberdeen. The book is based on their research work at Girnock Burn facility off the Dee.

In the book are colored photographs of a salmon fly and an arthropod. The caption reads, "A shrimp-like crustacean obtained from the stomach of a salmon captured in the ocean feeding grounds and a salmon fly. The fly was tied by Rick Connolly of Fochabers [Scotland] as an imitation. The fly has been given the name Trigger, in the expectations that it will stimulate half remembered feeding responses from salmon lying in rivers. The fly is tied on a size twelve double, and it is still unproven."

Connolly's fly is of simple design: "gold tinsel body with golden pheasant tippets for a pair of short wings and a clump of the same material for a tail." What impressed me, however, was the photograph of the crustacean. It was all see-through and orangy-luminous with a severely downward curved and segmented tail.

I saw the same kind of bodies, pointing upwards, not downwards, on hundreds of mayfly spinners in the United States, when I was researching *Spinners*. To get that look in my imitations, I coated the tying thread bodies with nail polish. And I used the same coating on my own version of a salmon fly based on that photograph. Here's how to tie it on either an eight, ten or twelve single salmon hook. The tail is made from several fibres of golden pheasant rooster tippet, which are tied well back on the hook and curved severely downwards. The body can be made with Pearsall's orange tying thread or orange floss. Add a narrow gold flat tinsel for a rib, and coat the body with fast-drying, clear nail polish. Let dry and coat again. The fly is finished with orange seal or synthetic fur for a thin, loose thorax, two wraps of a dyed orange hackle or of a golden pheasant body feather, pulled back and either two small jungle cock eyes, or jungle cock eye substitutes.


During the first part of September, I started to see a few salmon rolling or jumping in the river, and Petrie told me



he was seeing a few, as well. This was, indeed, heartening after seeing only parr and small trout for so long. One of the pools he showed me was a little further down the river. From my bank (the right bank looking downstream), the pool curved slightly to the right and was lined with a high bank, a low sloping water-level gravel bank and another high bank. Fishing from either of the high banks, I felt, was not the right way to fish the pool, although I tried them both. It was possible that a salmon in the pool could see the fisherman, perched on top either bank, violently waving a long tapered object back and forth.

No, the best location to fish the pool had to be from the low, sloping gravel bank. It stood to reason, too, that an angler could get a better, and more natural drift with the fly at the lower level than he could on top either bank. So, it was in this pool and from the lower, gravel bank that on September 21, I hooked the first salmon from my gift river in Scotland, and I did it with the Salar's Nemesis. The fish made one leap, high enough and what seemed long enough, that I was able to see the fly hanging from its mouth. I saw no kype, and decided the fish, from ten to fifteen pounds, was a female, not that silvery, but not that dark, either. She started pulling line off the old Perfect and I was happy to let her go. She stopped. Now it was my turn, and I started cranking her in when the line went dead. I saw some weeds floating downstream in her vicinity and remembered I had pinched the barb down on the fly as I usually did in all my fishing back home. The weeds followed the line down to the fly and without the barb, came out easily when the weeds reached it.

I was so elated to have a nice salmon take the Nemesis on the Don, my home salmon river, that I built a little cairn (nice Scottish word) on the spot from some boulders I found on the river bank. A Scot angler seeing this in years to come may think it was put up by some Picts to commemorate a mysteri-



ous ritual.

Four days later on the Edzell Middle Beat of the North Esk, also left to me by Allan, I had number two. I had fished this water three or four times previously on a one-day-a-week, rotation system. It ran through a deep ravine with considerable bed rock for a floor, but with some nice riffles and pools. One long, narrow, deep piece of water was called the Holding Pool, and it was at the head of it that I hooked and landed a smallish cockfish of about eight pounds with a huge kype. The water here has the reddish tinge of peat, but I could see my fly a foot or so below the surface when the fish charged it from below. He was dark and lank and not very strong and came in easily. I landed him and released him quickly.


We had a bothie, too, on the Kinellar, Torryburn and Balbithan fishings. It was located at the opposite end of the water from where I fished, and a half mile walk from where I parked the car.

Petrie told me our bothie contained a record book which I wanted to see, and he gave me the secret number of the combination lock on the door.

Inside, there were four plastic chairs and a pedestal that looked like it came out of a train or bus station. A scale up to forty pounds also hung in the hut.

I found the record book in a biscuit tin on the pedestal. The book started with the catch for 1989 when twenty seven fish, the biggest at nine pounds was recorded. One of the club members listed the birth of a son at seven pounds, two ounces, which might make one wonder how many human births are recorded in the hundreds of books on rivers in Scotland, because I'm sure I saw a similar listing in a record book on the Shin.

In 1990 the catching was spread out: one in March, one in April, one in June, one in July, one in August, one in



✓ September and one in October. The biggest was eighteen pounds. In 1991 only five fish were listed. In 1992, thirty six fish were shown, the biggest at thirty two pounds. In 1993, thirty two were listed, biggest at eighteen pounds. In 1994, fifty six fish were listed, biggest at eighteen pounds. And in 1995, fifty nine salmon were listed, biggest at twenty pounds. In 1994, there was for the first time, a column for wild and farmed salmon, although no farmed fish were recorded.

The records, of course, included the names of the anglers who caught the fish and in the productive years, four men took most of the fish. The association is not fly only, and the many of the fish were taken on shrimp and worm. Some fish were taken spinning. The flies listed were Greenwell's Glory, Butcher, Toucan, Wickham, and Hairy Mary.

I often wondered how the fishing was for the rest of 97, after I left, and I wrote to John Petrie for information. Petrie's return letter follows:

I am pleased to tell you that the 1997 season was an improvement on the dismal 1996. Our season started with a big kelt for Christopher, 11, caught on a Devon minnow in February. That was it for salmon until August when Bruce, 9, hooked his first salmon on a Gold Toby lure and after a few nervous moments with a weed bank, I tailed a 4 lb. grilse for him. A few days later Christopher followed me down Sand Brae pool and took a 4 1/2 lb. grilse from under my nose. I perserved with the fly rod until September to no avail and to save face resorted to spinning. We ended our season with a total of eleven salmon, six to the 'old man', 5 lbs. to 18 lbs. Three to Christopher, 12 lbs. and one at 4 lbs. Of the total we kept 3 grilse and returned 8 safely.

Most of the syndicate members had a fish or two. The highlight of the 97 season for me happened one night while feeding the mallard ducks on the Don. Bruce came along with his fly rod and within two casts, his fly, a small brown spider, was taken with a real



thump by something that tried to return to the sea. After twice taking out the entire line and a fair portion of the backing, during which I tried several times to take the rod from Bruce only to be told none too nicely to leave it alone, he eventually beached a 3 lb. sea trout.

The trout fishing during 1997 was excellent. May and June were very good with the best bag going to the 'old man'. Eleven to 1 and 3/4 lbs. in one day on a dry March Brown. You will be pleased to hear that during the entire season we returned every brown we caught.

Late September brought the rains. We saw plenty of kelts during the winter and the continued high water should have helped them return to the sea.

*Yours,
John Petrie
Tight lines.*





THE ROYAL DEE

God, being a fly fisher, made the Dee in heaven. It could be the most beautiful and perfect river for Atlantic salmon fishing one could ever wet a line in. One writer thought the Dee flowed out of paradise. Another called it the jewel of Scottish salmon rivers. And another thought there was no river in Scotland that offered so much first-class angling water

✓ The Aberdeenshire Dee (there are other Dees in the British Isles) is only the sixth largest river in Scotland, draining an area of more than eight hundred square miles in the east Cairngorm mountains. They rise to just over four thousand feet, where the Dee is formed by two springs, which drop nearly one thousand feet to the Linn of Dee, or falls where the fishing on the Dee really begins.

From there the river never sleeps or rests, but runs shallow, briskly and bubbly for eighty-seven miles eastwards, at about three and one half miles per hour, to the large metropolis of Aberdeen on the North Sea. In its course the river runs past several castles, through wonderfully green and wooded fields, concisely marked off by ancient walls of moss-covered stones; past famous fishing places, some of them glorified in classic books on angling; through or alongside clean and picturesque





villages and towns with Gaelic and Scottish names like Kirkton of Durris, Crathes, Banchory, Potarch, Aboyne, Ballater, Carlogie, Coilacriech, Braemar, and Kincardine O'Neil, the oldest village of them all, having begun its life along the Dee in 1099.

The architecture is all Aberdeen granite, the squared off, stately, but monotonous building material of the region. The whole region is aptly and quaintly called Deeside and Royal Deeside the closer one gets to Balmoral Castle, where, it is said, the queen mother, in her nineties, still puts on wading trousers and casts a fourteen foot, two handed rod and fly, hoping to catch a fresh salmon for the family dinner.

Near the downtown section of Aberdeen, the Dee slows down and widens out a bit where it runs through a large, well-kept park before emptying into the North Sea, which, before the first war against Germany, was called the German Ocean. The park offers pleasant walkways on both sides of the river, and harbors and frequently shows large, but puppy like, gray seals floating unafraid on the surface. They are quite tame, possibly knowing they are protected from any harm, even though one or more of them might have just devoured a salmon or two, or just playfully ran their teeth over the unlucky fish's body, after deciding against eating it.

There is a strange fascination of rivers that go to sea for people like me who don't live near an ocean. It must be the abrupt change from fresh water to salt; and the mystery of fish, animals, mammals and birds that can live in both worlds with only little or no acclimatizing to make it possible.

There is some salmon fishing in the last three or four pools of the Dee and on the Culter water a couple miles up stream, which rents the fishing by the day for around thirty dollars. I was not surprised to find that quite a few American oil workers stationed in Aberdeen were regulars. They are helicoptered





Sp ✓ 11 — to and from their work platforms in the North Sea for two, three, or even four week stints (without the availability of alcohol I was told) and are usually off for the same length of time, during which they spend a few days fishing for the elusive salmon. I also heard the Americans were well paid for their work, which is not without its share of hazards, so the rent could not possibly be a deterrent. One of the Culter fishing regulations asked anglers to move downstream between casts to permit other anglers behind them to enjoy the sport as well. Most American anglers would be quite familiar with that kind of regulation from fishing on crowded American streams, but it seemed out of place on the beautiful Dee, where, usually, when you pay your fee, the water is yours to fish at any speed.

J — The Dee is the springer river of the salmon fishing world, meaning it offers first class angling for big, adult salmon early in the fishing year. The name springer applies to salmon that have spent at least two winters at sea, and are available for catching by rods in the spring months, usually before May. These fish will be ten pounds and more and are highly prized for their silvery appearance and willingness to take the fly. No other river in Scotland, even those that are bigger and longer than the Dee, offers springer fishing equal to it. Of course, catches have declined drastically. For example the average annual catch of salmon by all methods in the Dee (netting was discontinued in 1987) from January to April from 1960 to 1964, was 15,800, from 1980 to 1984, was 6,500 and from 1990 to 1993, was only 1663. Even so, from 1990 to 1993, the Dee, with 1,663 springers before the end of April, beat the Tay with 1,447, the Tweed with 1,038 and the Spey with 740.

In September 1996, I met with Michael Bruce, owner of the Glen Tanar water on the Dee and a member of The Dee Salmon Fishing Improvement Association, which was formed in 1872, long before other salmon rivers in Scotland thought



about getting together to improve and maintain their rivers' rod salmon fishing. Mr. Bruce recently had been appointed coordinator of a new salmon fish hatchery with a capacity of nearly one-half million eggs on the Glen Tanar Estate. He also talked about the river's new catch and release code. "We're suggesting single hooks, preferably barbless," he told me. "Salmon should not be played too long and landed before complete exhaustion. The fish should be netted and unhooked while in the water. And finally, the salmon should be supported in the water with its head facing the current until it can swim away under its own power."

Mr. Bruce supplied me with copies of two blue books, which are the printed versions of meetings of fishery professionals and members of the Atlantic Salmon Trust and other professional organizations. From a one-day meeting at Glen Tanar House, October 1994, is this excellent description of the Dee by David W. Hay.

"The River Dee is in many ways unique. It is remarkably free from pollution from its source in the Cairngorms, to its mouth in the city of Aberdeen. It is not obstructed by dams or weirs in its lower reaches as are adjacent rivers like the River Don and the North Esk. Indeed salmon swimming upstream have uninterrupted access to the whole river as far as the Linn of Dee above Braemar . . . the Dee is in essence a giant stream. It is shallow for most of its length, and has an even gradient with frequent shallow riffles which are a suitable habitat for juvenile salmon. Thus, unlike some other rivers like the Tay, where the lower reaches are made up predominantly of deeper, slower stretches where mud settles out, the Dee has a shallow stony bed even near its mouth."

Perhaps the single feature which makes the Dee so perfect and beautiful for fly fishing, is the repetition of salmon fishing pools from the beginning of the river, at the Linn of Dee, to






its mouth. There are more than four hundred named pools along its length, plus many unnamed 'bitties', which at certain times of the fishing year prove to be more productive than the known pools. Each pool is practically an image of the other, tacked on in front or behind its twin. The Dee could be likened to a giant necklace, which winds and curves graciously; the pools resembling precious stones attached to it. A typical pool starts with a relatively narrow and shallow, white water riffle, widening out into a deeper and deeper pool, and slower and slower moving pool, rarely over four feet deep. Dee pool design is conducive to fly-fishing because the moving currents help to animate the fly and keep it near the surface where salmon can see it easily. At the tail of a pool, the water picks up speed and shallows out where the river again becomes the headwater riffle of the next downstream pool. Scattered among various pools as well, are big and little boulders near which Atlantic salmon love to lie, and where they wait patiently for even a month or two before moving off to the spawning redds in the small tributaries of the river.

All of the Dee pool features make them easy to read and easy to fish. Deep wading is rarely required, and, in fact, deep wading can take an angler over productive salmon lies disturbing the fish. Sometimes, reading the water will be unnecessary because the salmon will show themselves in classy and spectacular jumps for what appears to be no reason at all. Experts say they could be jumping to rearrange the eggs or milt in their bodies. Or, they're trying to get rid of the sea lice, hanging on to their tails. On the Dee the salmon also take aquatic insects, particularly the larger March Brown Mayfly, as delicately as trout. I say "take" because no one has proved conclusively whether or not the Atlantic salmon eats anything while he's in fresh water.

The Dee is all so charming and ingratiating that once



a salmon angler fishes it he is hooked for life. Some beats or waters have been in the hands of various wealthy anglers for thirty, forty and fifty years. Thus anglers know well where their water begins and ends, and reports of the fishing from day to day are reasonably accurate. Pools are named and grouped under the larger designations of waters. Starting rather high up in the river are Balmoral Water, Invercauld Water, Abergeldie Water, Monaltrie Water, Cambus O'May Water, Glen Tanar Water, and so on.

The waters are then broken down into pools with Names, such as Laundry Pool, Skolpach, Little Broch Roy and Big Broch Roy, Little Ann, Red Brae, Minister's Pool (Scottish clerics must have spent a lot of time salmon fishing because I've seen similarly named pools on other salmon rivers in the country), Big Thorny and Little Thorny, Island Cast, Pleasant Walk, Long Cast, Clay Pot, Grey Mare and Upper, Middle and Lower Fontie of Glen Tanar Water, from the Middle pool of which I caught my lone, Dee salmon.

Dee water, of course, is also of the purest kind. It has amazing transparency which lets one see every stone and boulder in the river. The water is also colored with a faint reddish peat stain, and is so pure, it is abstracted at two places, one high and one low, and contributes to the water supply of Aberdeen and the outlying Grampion region.

Having fished on some expensive and not so expensive water during my six months in Scotland, I found the more money one spent for the salmon fishing, the easier it was to get to the water, the easier it was to fish the water, and the bigger and better were the fishing huts or 'bothies' that went with it. Like anything else, one gets what one pays for.

Most pools on the Dee are easily accessible because there are two good highways running along both sides of the river for much of its course. It's possible to drive to many of the pools



✓ and park almost at the head of them, where the angler could make his first cast. In many pools the water shelves gradually permitting casting and fishing at only ankle or knee depths. Some stream banks, like those on the Cairnton Water for example, look like they were designed by the famous golf course pros with succulent green grass edging right down to the river and benches placed strategically so the angler can plan his attack after he's spotted where the fish are lying. Here, in these famous and once productive pools, one can comfortably fish dry shod and reach most of the holding water from the grassy bank, with a thirteen or fourteen foot double-handed rod, or with a 9 foot single-handed rod with double hauling. Lee Wulff was supposed to have made quite an impression of the power of the single-handed rod on the Dee in the 1960s, and the efficacy of the riffling hitch. From the *The Haig Guide to Salmon Fishing in Scotland*, by Bill "Rogie" Brown, Queen Anne Press, London, 1981, "Lee Wulff was a great exponent of the single handed rod for salmon and the late Alan Sharpe of Aberdeen built him one to order—only 6 and 1/2 feet." The book describes the riffling hitch, "The method is to tie on a fly with a half blood knot and then two half hitches over the head of the fly. The fly will now be unable to swim in the usual horizontal way but sits up like a dry fly and bobs its way across the pool like a small animal." Thanks to Mr. Wulff, the riffling fly is quite standard fishing for steelhead and fishing for salmon in the Maritimes.

2 page

✓ Fishing huts or 'bothies', as they are called on Scottish rivers, are major considerations in the selection of any salmon fishing in Scotland. And the Dee bothies are just as famous as the Dee Springers were. One in particular is called the Gin Palace for obvious reasons, with a wood burning stove, comfortable chairs, a table for the gin or malt whisky, and a large window permitting the inhabitants to watch their friends slug-

ging away in the Waterside Pool of the Glen Tanar Estate. A bothie on the Beaully had running water, a refrigerator, and a gas cooking stove.

Please bear in mind that because the Dee is so reachable and fishable, and productive, and easy to enjoy, it is, perhaps, the most expensive salmon fishing in Scotland. In its heyday, say from the turn of the century to the 1960s when the Danes started netting Scottish and other countries' salmon off west Greenland, it was difficult to get a day, let alone a week or longer on any Dee water. Anglers expected to kill three to five salmon a day, fifteen to twenty salmon a week (six days). Five salmon could easily weigh forty-five or fifty pounds and it was said some anglers hired two gillies, one to carry the fishing paraphernalia and the other to carry the fish! Now, the governing group of proprietors on the Dee has elected to permit just one small fish (grilse) killed during a week's fishing with all others returned unharmed to the river. It might be interesting to know how many British and Scottish salmon anglers have given up the sport on the Dee and other rivers, because they can no longer kill all their catch. Two famous salmon anglers and instructors, one who has killed more than two thousand and the other more than three thousand salmon, said recently they would rather give up salmon fishing than release the salmon they caught.

✓ We Americans have been catching and releasing trout, salmon, and steelhead for years. It's easy for us. If partial catch and release in Scotland has helped to lower the cost of the fishing and make it finally available to many of us, all the better. With the dreadful decline of salmon in all Scottish rivers, right now and through the end of the century is a good time to book a week or more on some very choice beats and waters of the Dee and other salmon rivers in Scotland, because the price is now really quite acceptable and affordable and some water has

*take out
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which
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opened up which would not have been available in years.

I fished the Glen Tanar Water, typical of the finest of Dee salmon fishing, for example, in September, 1996, the last day of the season for thirty five pounds (fifty-six dollars) per day, after the owner, Michael Bruce, was kind enough to give me two free days, the sixteenth and seventeenth, earlier in the month with no fish caught. Between those dates and the last of September, I designed Salar's Nemesis with two salmon hooked and one landed, and was anxious to try it on the Dee before the fishing was over for 1996. Luckily, there was room for just one more angler on the thirtieth, the last day of the season, and also, luckily, I was able to get Jimmy Oswald, the gillie, again, and I figured if the fishing wasn't exciting, his stories of sex and violence on Royal Deeside would be.

We fished the right bank of the Craigendinnie Water, and I loved it from the start, especially when the Dee made a sharp turn to the right revealing Upper Fontie, Middle Fontie, and Lower Fontie. I didn't know the meaning of the name Fontie, although the American Heritage dictionary shows the word, "font" has something to do with a fountain or spring. If there were springs or fonts in this portion of the Dee, the Scots living here could have Gaelicized the name into fonties. The word ending, ie, is one of the most common in the Scottish language. The ending gives a more friendly and romantic sound and meaning to the word, perhaps, like sweetie does for sweetheart.

Jimmy was not overly impressed with the Nemesis, but he suggested a heavier tippet and tied some on for me and also tied the size ten or twelve fly on. A few salmon were plopping and swishing about as I worked my way through the top of Middle Fontie. This was encouraging, the fish were there and one, I thought, would respond to the Nemesis. I was fishing the thirteen foot, two handed Winston, casting seventy or eighty



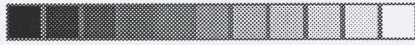
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feet in a single spey which is really a switch cast, and fishing more than half the Middle Fontie. The three and one half mile speed of the Dee and the crystal clear water, I thought should make the Nemesis look tantalizing. Jimmy had sat down on a flat boulder on the bank, thinking, I'm sure, he was facing another day of watching his gentleman' cast, and cast and cast with nary an rise from a Dee salmon.

Not true! A Dee fish took me, quite assuredly and started moving rapidly toward the opposite bank, pulling yards of line off the Hardy reel, at a pretty good clip.

✓ 48
That got Jimmy up. He was at my side immediately. "Shoot me. Shoot me," I yelled to him. He picked up my camera and followed me in and out of the river for several minutes shooting pictures of the landing. We never took her out of the water, which covered almost all of her body. She was in good condition, still showing silver. There was a yellow wire tag at the front of her dorsal fin, indicating a tiny radio transmitter was planted in her. Jimmy took the hook out, guessed her to be fourteen or fifteen pounds, and gave her a little shove upstream toward the middle of the Dee. She swam off strong in Middle Fontie.

Jimmy's knowledge of Craigendinnie and its fonties came out later. "I wanted you to fish the Middle Fontie because number one and three are fished regularly from the other side of the river. But the anglers there cannot fish Middle Fontie from that side." And he was right. A high concrete retaining wall on the other side of the river would prevent any fishing from that spot. Thanks.

Perhaps no other group of proprietors of salmon fishings in Scotland has such agreement and coherence amongst themselves as the group on the Dee. In 1995, the first year of the code, twelve hundred of two thousand springers caught were returned to the river. One hotel owner along the Dee offers his

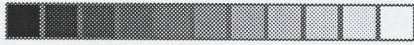


guests a farmed salmon for every wild one they release back into the river. There are hatcheries, and fish counters. There are fish traps on two burns where spawning fish are counted. And the latest, high tech egg-planting equipment is used. Catch and release seems to be working. *The Statistical Bulletin*, annual publication of The Scottish Office, for 1996 shows that 1509 salmon and 154 grilse were caught and released. Having the royal family living in the higher reaches of the river has helped to keep the Dee running free and clear and with reasonable numbers of salmon. The association was formed in 1872, when Queen Victoria, widowed in 1861, was still living and taking her vacations with her large family of kids at Balmoral. One of the girls, Louise, according to Augustus Grimble, *The Salmon Rivers Of Scotland*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co LTD, 1913, was "...our premier fisherwoman, for many are the salmon that have fallen to her rod amidst the wild scenery of the Dee banks above Mar Lodge, and her favorite pool just above the Linn once yielded twelve fish in the day to the keen and well-plied royal rod."

Well, that's the Dee, the salmon river that god made. You should try to see and fish it before he takes it back.



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AHE WOOD AND SHERIFF DALLAS

✓ ✓ Hazel and I were invited to a luncheon at the home of Ken Dallas and his wife, Dionne, January 1996, almost a month before we left Scotland. We had gone to three or four luncheons held during the short daytime hours so the driving would not be too demanding. Ken was a diffident angler, even with the Feugh River, a tributary of the Dee, in sight of his home. After eating, with all of the other guests departed, Ken started talking about his father, Sheriff Dallas, deceased, who was well known in Aberdeenshire and along Deeside as a devout salmon angler. Sheriff Dallas, as he was called, (he was a judge of Aberdeen county, not the kind of sheriff who polices our counties, had caught hundreds of salmon and was a good friend of Mr. AHE Wood with whom he fished for many years on Cairnton Water on the Dee. The sheriff had also kept quite accurate records of his fishing. Would I like to see the record book?

It was getting late and we were the last ones. I had to steal the yes or no glance from Hazel and I thought it was yes. Ken brought the record book out from another room. It was like others I had seen in Scotland, a thick, wide, two-page leather-covered book with columns and printed headings: Date.



✓ copying -

Name. No. Weight. Fly. Size. Bait. Pool. And Remarks.
Photographs were also included on a few pages, one of which I recognized immediately as Mr. Wood.

It was obvious I was not going to be able to look at the whole book in the little time we had left, and I asked Ken if I could take the book home to Kinellar and copy it. He agreed and I returned the book soon after having it copied. I cannot thank Ken enough for the privilege to look at it and to be able to include part of it here in *Six Months In Scotland*. It shows what a tremendous river the Dee was sixty or seventy years ago.

Sheriff Dallas's record book covers his fishing from 1906 to 1941; the early years pertaining to fishing on Loch Ness, River Dee (another Dee in Kirkcudbright, England), River Don, Spey, Connon, Blackwater (Ireland), Naver, Ythan, and the later years on the Aberdeenshire Dee. He was a disciple of Wood's greased-line method and the use of small lightly dressed salmon flies, of which the Blue Charm was his favorite.

Total numbers of salmon caught from 1906-08 to 1941

Season	Number	Average Weight	Season	Number	Average Weight
1906-08	9	9.0	1931	80	9.15
1921	2	10.8	1932	49	11.2
1922	5	14.9	1933	17	11.11
1923	25	11.2	1934	20	10.11
1924	37	12.14	1935	43	10.10
1925	30	10.5	1936	20	11.2
1926	62	8.12	1937	39	9.4
1927	50	12.12	1938	40	12.0
1928	50	11.14	1939	10	11.2
1929	24	10.1	1940	25	11.10
1930	34	9.12	1941	49	11.4
			Totals	690	7527.8

Taken on fly	560	Biggest Days	21 May 1931	13
Taken on bait	130		22 May 1931	12
Heaviest fish	32 lbs.	Five Day	21-26	38
20 lbs. and over	41			
10 lbs. and over	249			
under 10 lbs	400			

Details of lures used successfully during the lifetime of ~~the~~ **JO DALLAS**
 Dallas. Season 1906-08 to 1941

Rating	Spinning Lures	Killed	Rating	Spinning Lures	Killed
1	Eel Tail	37	5	Phantom	12
2	Yellow Sprat	36		(silk fabric)	
3	Prawn	20	6	Gudgeon	8
4	Dace	17			

Rating	Flies	Killed	Rating	Flies	Killed
1	Blue Charm	203	15	Gray Heron	4
2	Brora	81	16	Thunder &	4
3	Silver Blue	37		Lightening	
4	Jock Scott	33	17	Watson's Fancy	3
5	Logie	29	18	Sailor	3
6	Beaully Snow Fly	25	19	Silver Wilkinson	2
7	Silver Grey	25	20	Glen Tanar	1
8	Gordon	20	21	Dallas	1
9	Mar Lodge	16	22	Silver Doctor	1
10	Ackroyd	14	23	Childers	1
11	Dusty Miller	8	24	Shrimp Fly	1
12	Drum	8	25	Alexandra	1
	Lightening (s.p.)		26	March Brown	1
13	Jeannie	5	27	Hare Lug	1
14	Jungle Heron	4	28	Red Torrish	1

Interspersed in the personal hand-written record book of Sheriff Dallas are 8 typed sheets of records made at Cairnton, the water for many years on the Dee of AHE Wood, entitled, CAIRNTON SPRING FISHING., from 1924 to 1933. Each sheet had the same opening day, 11th of February, with different closing dates, all of them in June.

Year	Killed
1924	350
1925	449
1926	459
1927	475
1928	407
1931	753 (Also biggest year in Sheriff's records)
1932	330
1933	214

The sheets include the names of people who fished, flies used and numbers and weights of salmon killed. A Capt. EG Wood, brother of AHE and a Major HL Wood, another close relative, are included frequently, which might account for the large number of other captains, majors and colonels included in all of the lists. John Waller Hills, one of Englands' finest angling writers, was listed with 1 in 1927, 4 in 1928, 4 in 1931 and 6 in 1933. GMB LaBranche, the American angler who touted dry flies for Atlantic salmon, had 10 salmon in 1926 and 1 in 1928. Neville Chamberlin had 2 fish in 1928, 4 in 1924, 5 in 1925, 7 in 1927, and 3 in 1928. Sheriff Dallas had 2 in 1924, 2 in 1925, 3 in 1931, 8 in 1932 and 8 in 1933. In 1933, Mrs. RT Jones and Mrs. C Smith each caught a salmon of 20 lbs.

Total number of salmon for these 8 years at Cairnton was 3437 with 1226, (close to one third) taken by AHE Wood, himself. The largest take in one day was the the 19th of May, 1931, with 23. For the same 8 years, the best fly was Blue Charm with 1241 fish, with Silver blue, March Brown, Mar Lodge and

✓ Jock Scott changing places for second and third ✕

✓ AHE Wood appeared in at least two books on salmon fishing: *The Lonsdale Library. Volume X Salmon Fishing*, London, Seeley Service & Co Limited, and *Greased Line Fishing For Salmon*, by Jock Scott, London, Seeley Service & Co Limited. London, 1935. In the first book, he was the author of the chapter, *Greased Line Fishing*. He got the idea in 1903 on an Irish River, using twelve foot rods fished single-handed. He advocated greasing the line (silk in those days) daily and mending it as a means of keeping the fly close to the surface and appearing naturally, "as a dead leaf". And he preferred small flies with long shanks which are now known as 'low water hooks.' *9 pairs*

✕ The second book is entirely about Wood, his methods and his flies. I don't know if he invented all of them, but they were tied by Hardy Brothers and sold as "Wood Low Water Flies." Here are the dressings of three of the flies:

BLUE CHARM

Tip: Silver wire.

Tail: G.P. crest.

Body: Black floss silk.

Ribs: Silver oval.

Hackle: Light blue.

Wing: Mallard, slip of teal and crest over.

SILVER BLUE

Tip: Silver Wire.

Tail: G.P. crest.

Body: Flat silver.

Ribs: Oval silver.

Hackle: Light blue.

Wing: Pintail.



MARCH BROWN

Tail: Mallard.

Body: Two turns of yellow wool, remainder hare's ear.

Ribs: Gold oval.

Hackle: Dark Partridge.

Wing: Hen Pheasant Tail.





THE NORTH ESK

The large gold or brass plated sign is polished every day. "Joseph Johnston & Sons Limited." Then underneath, in slightly smaller letters, "Salmon Fishers." For a company, particularly a salmon fishing company to put up such a sign at their place of business in Montrose on the banks of the North Esk, can only mean one thing. Pride! And maybe it's deserved. The company has been dealing in salmon since 1828. It was one of the first companies in Scotland to go into salmon farming in the northwest of Scotland, where much of the country's salmon farming is carried on. Johnston & Sons also instigated and won an important suit against a salmon drift netting company in the 1960s which helped to save Scotland from this devastating form of salmon fishing at sea. It is still practiced, however, off the north east coast of England, just 150 miles south of Montrose, with 94,991 salmon taken in 1970, falling to an average of 49,212 taken annually between 1971 and 1994. Drift net fishing was limited to night time use until new nets made from synthetic material were developed. The new nets were invisible to the salmon thereby permitting netting in daylight hours and fishing further offshore than was previously possible. Scottish tacksmen, perhaps even Johnston & Sons,

Spawning

✓

Spawning

are convinced the salmon caught by English tacksmen originated in Scotland because of the established return migratory route, which indicates the salmon are really on their way to the Forth, Tay, North and South Esk rivers, Dee, Don and other salmon rivers further north.

Grimble in *The Salmon Rivers of Scotland* wrote, "For its size this river [the North Esk] is the most prolific of all the Scotch streams, and Messrs, Johnston, the Montrose tacksmen, have had as many as 2000 fish on the opening day in the few miles of water between Mary Kirk and the sea, [4 1/2 miles] while in 1874 the catch of the whole district was 30,000 fish, though the usual average will be about 20,000 . . ." These big numbers, of course, pertain to net-caught fish, not rod caught, which even in Grimble's day would rarely exceed three hundred. A more recent quote, from *Tragedy of The Salmon*, by David Shaw, Hillfield Press, 1995 P.O Box 3, East Grinstead, West Sussex, UK, agrees with Grimble: "For its size, it was probably the world's most productive Atlantic salmon commercial fisher . . . with estimated net catches in 1982 of more than 20,000 native North Esk salmon and grilse, and more than 60,000 fish (principally by stake and bag nets on the North Esk District foreshores) . . . the reported annual rod catch seldom exceeds 250!"

The North Esk is quite a small river, forty-five or fifty miles long, making it only one half the size of the Dee, which empties into the same ocean some thirty five miles north of Montrose. The river is well chronicled in salmon fishing literature. From *The Angler's Companion*, by Thomas Tod Stoddart, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1923, "The North Esk takes its rise in the mountains of Angus. . . Its basin may be estimated at two hundred and thirty square miles. Its mean depth is one and a half foot: and velocity per minute, one hundred and ten feet." The editors of the 1923 edition also

explain the meaning of the word, "Esk" is a generic name for rivers, representing the Old Gaelic *uisg* which means simply "water," and may be recognized in the names of many Scottish and English river--Exe, Usk, Axe, etc. In like manner *uisge-beatha* gives our "whisky," meaning *aqua vitae*, *eau-de-vie*, water of life.

The Dee has not been netted for many years, so the numbers of salmon taken in it are all by rod, while nearly all salmon taken in the North Esk are taken by nets. The Dee has also instigated catch and release, while it has never been suggested on the North Esk. (Commercial netters have never been known to release salmon). All this begs a comparison of numbers of the two rivers which we are able to do through the 1994, 1995, and 1996 *statistical bulletins* of the Scottish Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory, which also happens to be located in Montrose. I must thank Julian Maclean, of the department for showing me the bulletins.

North Esk

	Caught and retained	Caught and released
1994	22,245	273
1995	17,681	218
1996	13,080	263

Dee

1994	16,505	448
1995	12,760	2,591
1996	9,857	1,663

With favorable figures like these, Johnston & Sons has to feel it is managing the North Esk fishery in the best possible way. "We don't see a need for catch and release on our river," said Noel Smart, chief officer, who was kind enough to meet with me on September 6, 1996. "For thirty years since we put in fish counting equipment, we still see the same number of



smolts go to sea.” Mr. Smart also talked about traits and genes of the salmon in his river and indicated it was not a good idea to experiment with salmon, nor to mix fish or their eggs and milt from one river or district with another. Salmon in the North Esk were products of natural selection, and after watching them for 160 years (160 crops of salmon!), the Montrose tacksmen could even predict which parts of the river would produce the grilse, or one year fish, and which parts would produce the multi-sea winter fish.

Myphen

During our brief meeting, I also sensed the same company pride in Mr. Smart’s wood-paneled office that I may have felt from the polished plaque near the main door. Behind him on the wall was a large, dramatic oil painting of a worried tacksman in a storm-tossed coble, fighting tumultuous waves crashing over him. The situation looked ominous, but anyone looking at the painting and knowing something about Johnston & Sons, knew for sure the tacksman would survive.

Before I left Mr. Smart, I booked a fishing on the Canterland beat of the North Esk, the second beat up from the sea, for September 13. The total cost, including tax, was \$66. at \$1.60 to the pound. I paid for the fishing in the sales office of the company, where salmon, wild and farmed, were sold. I asked the clerk what the current prices were for wild and farmed salmon and was not surprised that wild was nearly twice as much as farmed. The price for either was based on the size of the fish: farmed, 2 to 3 kilos, £3.35 per kilo; wild, 2 to 3 kilos, £5 per kilo; farmed, 5 to 6 kilos, £4.30 per kilo; wild, 5 to 6 kilos, £8.40 per kilo, a 10 pound wild fish coming out at around \$67.

I had the whole of the Canterland beat, more than a mile of fishing, all to myself, although the water takes up to four anglers. It was a nice, sunny day with the river at a low, late season level. This was beautiful water with nine named



pools, far more than I could possibly fish in any one day. Each pool was pretty much like the other beginning with a shallow, fast riffle, the water deepening and slowing down somewhere towards the middle, then narrowing again, picking up speed and turning into a riffle again at the tail. The river was fairly straight and could be seen for quite a distance going down in its shallow valley to the sea.

I don't know if I will ever learn to really enjoy myself salmon fishing alone on a river in Scotland, or anywhere for that matter. It seems unnatural; so much water, so few people. Who can I hate or swear at for moving in front of me just when the fish started rising? Who can I admire and envy for some tough, but classy fishing performed by a stranger. Perhaps if an angler started out from his youth fishing the great rivers of the world alone, he could continue into his old age enjoying it that way. Not me! Now, I know I would like to fish the North Esk again, and the Dee and the Don and the Beaully; but, by god, I'm going to take a gang with me.

By the end of the day, I made it down to the seventh pool, called Howes Stream, perhaps the best looking piece of water on the whole beat, and here I saw a good, bright salmon jump twice at the head of the riffle, slightly to the left side, my side, of the riffle. It was easy to pass the fly by the spot, and I did several times without a hookup.

Now I wished I had had time to pass the eight and ninth pool of my beat to get a glimpse of the top of the next beat which is known as the Morphie Fishings, the last fishing by rod (or the first) before the estuary and perhaps one of the most famous fishing beats in Scotland.

The Morphie Fishings begin at the Morphie dyke which is the most productive of the nine pools on the beat. The dyke is the first major hindrance to free and easy passage of the salmon and they wait below the dyke for the right time to continue

(i) ✓ upstream on their spawning run. Grimble and Calderwood suggested that the arrow-shaped dyke be reworked or removed to make it easier for salmon to continue upstream, but it is still there, and I'm sure it was there long before Johnston and Sons became the North Esk tacksmen.

✓ Earlier, I offered statistics that showed the North Esk to be a prolific river for net caught salmon. Now, it appears Johnston and Sons may be trying to change that image by selling the Morphie Fishings to anglers for rod-caught salmon. The offer, announced in British angling magazines in 1996, was for a week's salmon fishing (six days, there is no Sunday fishing) for six rods or anglers, during six late spring weeks on a twenty-five year lease. The specific weeks are from the tenth through the fifteenth weeks of each year, for £17,000 (\$27,200 United States, 1996) for the tenth, eleventh and twelfth weeks; and for £15,000 (\$24,000 United States, 1996) for the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth weeks. Prices do not include VAT tax which is 17.5%. The prices per week for the American angler are really not that bad: \$1,088 per week for any of the first three expensive weeks or \$960 for any of the three, later, cheaper weeks. The catch, of course, is that the angler has to come up with the total amount before he even starts fishing.

✓ From the selling agents, I received a very attractive color brochure with gorgeous photographs of some of the beats including one of Morphie dyke itself. The headline read, "SIX PRIME WEEKS ON ONE OF THE MOST PRODUCTIVE BEATS IN SCOTLAND OFFERING SPRING DOUBLE BANK SALMON FISHING ON THE RENOWNED NORTH ESK."

✓ Let's continue with more details from the brochure. "One mile of double bank fishing with 9 named pools on the River North Esk producing a three year average of 846 salmon/grilse and 44 sea trout per annum. Of the total catch, 124 salmon



✓ and 14 sea trout were caught during the 6 weeks to be leased."

There is no mention in the brochure about how the fish were caught, an important consideration to a fly fisherman, although the following details are included in "Method of Fishing" in the brochure. "Morphie and Pondage provide good fly fishing water although some spinning is allowed in high water conditions."

spinning

British fly fishermen are not as prejudiced against spin fisherman as American fly fishermen. Some British anglers will carry both kinds of fishing gear to the river. But, even among some British spin fishermen there is a nasty distinction between those who use metal, plastic, or wood spinning lures and those who use a once-live shrimp or prawn, boiled until dark red and trussed with a yard of thin wire to a gang of treble hooks. It is said that just one shrimp or prawn, tossed into a pool, will drive the salmon wild and cause them to rush about the pool as though they were insane.

The brochure does admit, "in some weeks quite a high proportion of fish have been taken on shrimp . . . Last season the syndicate restricted its members to two fish caught on shrimp per rod per day and limited fishing with this method to two specific sections of two pools."

With the offer to rod anglers of the Morphie fishings, Johnston & Sons also announced that the netting on Morphie and Pondage, the sixth named pool in the beat, ceased at the end of the 1990 season. The brochure notes however, that "the sellers retain a right to net the Nab, located in the tidal part of the river at Kinnaber. The Netting season extends from 16 February - 31 August."

It was in the Nab that I saw and photographed a net and coble operation in the middle of August, 1996. Again I must thank Julian Maclean for telling me about it and for getting permission for me and my wife to observe this ancient style



of salmon netting in Scotland. Net and coble is not practiced anymore on the Don and the Dee, the two salmon rivers closest to our home near Aberdeen. For centuries it was the only netting system practiced in Scotland, usually in the last or first pool of a river system. It still has an aura of honesty and nobility due perhaps to the hard, physical labor required to perform it.

Here on the Nab, four stout young men started the operation from a shallow gravelly beach on the north side of the river. One man rowed the coble carrying the net which was about as wide as the depth of the pool and slightly longer than the width of it. His helper at the back of the coble paid out the carefully folded net on the seat in the rowboat, as the oarsman pulled slightly upstreem in a half circle. When he reached the south side of the river, the whole width of the net was in the water and one could see that the rowing was getting harder and harder. Supposedly, according to ancient law, the net can never remain still or drift with the tide, although it looked like it wasn't moving at all when all of it was in the water. At this point the net was completely shot, and the helper jumped onto the seat next to the oarsman to help row the boat in the corresponding half circle back to the other side.

The other two men were waiting there, anchoring the original end of the net to the gravelly beach. Now, the men, two on one side and two on the other, started pulling the net, hand over hand, until the whole of it was up on the beach. There was not a single salmon in the net, and this was the second and last sweep of the day.

On the first sweep, the net and coble got two salmon around eight or ten pounds each. They had the equipoise which marks the species and were silvered as if by some rare and unknown metal.

Spain

