

Well that's us into November! Hopefully one or two of our club members have returned home with heavy game bags containing quality wild geese. Tay, Eden, and Loch Leven all seem to have had their fair share of pinks with the numbers still building up before most of them rest prior to heading further south. I've had a few blank days that included my latest afternoon after salmon and sea trout. A nuisance of a cold has also kept me away from the tides edge. Because of these missed days I will take you on a fishing adventure back in 1986, on the search for the king of fish on one of the Tay's main tributaries - the river Earn.

### A Day to Remember

Andy my father in law was born in Ireland and had fished most of his life, even though retired and in his vintage years he thought nothing of taking the bus up to Bridge of Earn, walking east below the bridge and eventually down to the river's edge fishing pools that he had learned over the years. Many a bus journey home included a bag full of flounders, trout, sea trout and the odd grilse and salmon - The river was tidal hence the varied selection of fish.

Although I worked away a lot I did take him up whenever I could and during this time I met a few of his angling friends - all fine retired chaps with great tales to tell and plenty of humour. When just arriving to fish and whilst passing Andy they would always take time to say hello and ask how many flounders and eels he had caught laughing light-heartedly as they moved on to their favourite spot. It was a cold late September morning back in 1986 and we arrived at the farm track leading to the river just as first light was coming in. It's always nice being first there but the main reason was to catch a falling tide. We walked down to the first pool and began setting up our rods.

The tide had indeed turned and we could see the first fall of leaves slowly floating past on their way out to sea. Just as I was heading up river we heard an almighty splash on the far bank - we never seen the fish but we did the second time when it jumped again only this time right out of the water and on to a flat muddy area straight across from us! Looking at one another it seemed only a matter of time before it flipped and wriggled back into the water, but after a few slight movements it lay still much to our astonishment - I think we both froze along with the fish!

The sun was only just thinking about popping up and the breeze was easterly which meant cold! The only bridge was 3 miles upstream and no other anglers had arrived in the small car park so we knew were still on our own. The river was approximately 10 metres wide and the depth was unknown as it was a type of salmon pool - let's just say deep! I for one could not get the fish out of my mind however I knew what I wanted to do. Andy tried his best to put me off - advising that the water would be freezing however I slowly persuaded him to let me give it a try. We always carried a large towel for keeping any large fish fresh and this was a huge positive in pleading my case! Quick as a flash I was down to my boxers with my clothes laid out carefully for my return. Breast stroke was the favoured method of swimming as this kept my head and glasses dry. Many an otter would have looked on in awe as I made it to the

opposite side. As planned, Andy cast over his line and large toby which I attached securely then helped the fish out to mid-stream before releasing it and swimming back over. Would the 20lb breaking strain line handle the dead weight or would it be too much for him to reel in?

Andy was no fool - he let the flow take it down stream and slowly into the edge. The towel was just heaven and in no time at all I was fully dressed - the shivering stopped eventually! As I was pulling on my waders I will never forget seeing Andy's face as he strolled towards me with a fine hen salmon 3ft in length, it looked huge seeing it for the first time out of the water - my scales recorded 22lb.



Looking towards the small car park it was nice to see that we were still the only people fishing - time to have some fun with Andy's friends once they arrived! We wrapped the salmon in the wet towel and layed it just a couple of metres from where Andy was fishing, making up a wee story was easy with me running down and tailing the mighty fish! I moved 50 metres up river knowing what hopefully was about to happen. Sure enough the first car arrived - it was Eddie, a chap Andy knew quite well. I watched from afar as he greeted Andy...

"Morning Andrew. How many flounders have you caught this fine morning?"

"Morning Eddie. Nah, nae flounders the day Eddie, I've got a salmon though!"

"A salmon?" Eddie replied. "Are you sure it's no a grilse?"

"Oh, it's a salmon alright" answered Andy.

"Where is it then?" Eddie asked.

“Oh, doon there under that towel on the bank.”

Eddie walked over and unfolded the towel...

“Jesus Christ! What a fish!”

“Aye, 22lb” Andy replied, cool as a cucumber.

All sorts of questions followed, what the salmon was caught on, how long it had taken to reel in... The part of the story where I ran down to tail it out of the water was somewhat far from the truth at this point.

Whilst Andy was going through these questions I was laughing away to myself feeling well chuffed for my father-in-law. Eddie came up to me and I played my part of the story, telling him how the fish jumped all over the river before I ran down to tail it for him. About an hour later, angler number two came along and the identical story was re-told. It was hilarious and all great fun.

The drive home was all fun and laughter, and it was not until many years later that we told the family the truth about the fish. The fish was so big we decided to sell it to a local hotel. After showing our permits the chef couldn't wait to take the fish into the kitchen - his scales recorded 20.5 lb - we agreed on £42 which we split evenly between us.

Would I do it again? Of course I would! Only next time a wet suit, swimming cap, and life jacket might be a good idea! Also saving the fish and returning it to the river - after all it was a hen fish and the Earn could well be a category 3 in seasons to come.

Now that the rods and reels have been cleaned and packed away its back to wildfowling and game shooting. Take care out there.

JM