

PAMPERED ON THE USK

Wynn Davies and friends enjoy great fishing and regal hospitality
on one of Wales's best rivers

PHOTOGRAPHS: STEVE THORNTON

The majestic
sweep of the Usk
at Penmyarth.



The tower on the bridge at Penmyarth.

IF YOU WERE to sit someone down and explain why you love to go fishing, what would you say? For me it is mainly about good company in beautiful surroundings. Although catching fish is secondary it is still important, so when everything comes together you will experience days whose memory will stay with you for the rest of your life.

I was recently invited to Glanusk Park, near Brecon, by Harry and Iona Legge-Bourke, to fish the River Usk. The Legge-Bourke family have been at Glanusk since 1826 and have close connections with the Royal family. Harry was a page of honour to the Queen for three years, his mother is lady-in-waiting to the Princess Royal and his sister, Tiggy, was the young princes' nanny. Glanusk Estate is still intact and consists of 400 acres of private parkland, 800 acres of forestry, 3,500 acres of lowland and hill farms, the Park and forestry, 20,000 acres of common land hills and, of far greater importance to me, five miles of the River Usk. The house at Glanusk was demolished in 1952 after serious fire damage during the war so the family now live in the Dower House, Penmyarth.

The Legge-Bourkes are passionate country people with a deep love of all things rural. Harry and his sisters were taught to fish by their mother: their father, who died recently, had a distinguished career in finance and spent much

A hefty Usk brown caught by Harry Legge-Bourke.



Wading at Glanusk is easy on a gravel bed.

“We started on the upper beat, working upstream through Quarry, Hornet Oak, Church Falls to the Garden pool”

of his time in London. Harry, having left the Welsh Guards in 2002 after ten years' service, now runs a security company and with Iona and his mother is responsible for the day-to-day management of the estate. An accomplished fisher, he has guided in Argentina on the Rio Grande and outside Ushuaia in Tierra Del Fuego.

The prospect of fishing the Usk was thrilling and I had the added pleasure of inviting some friends to join me – and, believe me, for this sort of adventure I knew nobody would refuse. Driving through the parkland, which is renowned for its trees, and looking

at the river from the bridge with its wonderful tower, I sensed that this was going to be something out of the ordinary. Penmyarth is a beautiful house in a superb setting overlooking the parkland. It was here that we tackled up and talked tactics while being served coffee on the lawn.

It is well known that the famous hatches of March browns the Usk once enjoyed are no longer prolific, but species such as turkey browns, various olives, grannom and sedges are still there. It was time to seek some experienced local advice.

Stuart Jarvis has been the gillie

for Glanusk Estate since 1972 and knows the river intimately. As he explained, the hatches start in March with dark olives, which are then joined by grannom, medium olives and turkey browns in April. May sees the appearance of blue-winged olives and black gnats followed by light olives and sedges in June and July with the dark olives returning in September. Trout fishing – the dog days of summer apart – is good throughout the season but the best months are May and June. Trout average ¾ lb -1 lb, with the best so far this season 2 lb 14 oz, and there is trickle-stocking of brown trout to reduce pressure on the wild fish.

The Usk is a good salmon river, too, and, given water, it can produce memorable sport from June to October. The biggest salmon recorded from the Glanusk water weighed 38 lb, while Stuart's son had a 29-pounder in 2002. Recommended flies for salmon are Shrimp Fly, Usk Grub and Silver Stoa and, for trout, Klinkhamer, Hare's Ear, Pheasant Tail, Sawyer's Grey Goose, Tup's Indispensable (highly recommended) and Sherry Spinner.

One fly, however, grabbed my attention – the legendary but reclusive Usk Naylor. This pattern has been misnamed and

misdressed for so long that to see the real fly was a revelation. It was invented by a Mr P. Naylor of Worcester Cottage, Llangynidr. Worcester Cottage was the old Duke of Beaufort's fishing lodge on the Usk, and the fly was first tied in the 1950s by Gordon Price, then gillie on the beat. It has a great reputation as an early-season fly.

There are two beats, divided by the bridge, and access to the water is very good. With well-maintained banks and some croys from which to fish, it is ideal for the less able-bodied fisherman. Wading is necessary in places and is relatively easy on the gravel riverbed, though there are some bedrock sections towards the upper end of the fishery that are a little trickier. We started fishing the upper beat, working upstream through Quarry, Hornet Oak, Church Falls to the Garden pool until we reached the island, where the river splits in two and becomes more like a rain-fed river, with fast runs and deep holes. Above the island is the famous Gliffaes Hotel water.

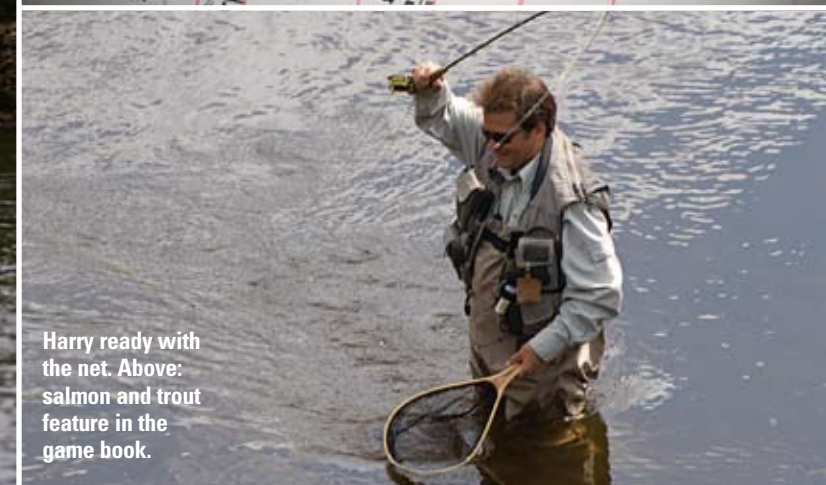
Fishing a Klinkhamer as a top dropper, with two size 16 Copper-bead nymphs underneath we caught fish to 1¼ lb. With olives coming off the water, Spider patterns were very effective, too.

The river was a delightful mixture of runs, eddies and glides. Although some pools were clearly better for salmon, there was still more than enough water to satisfy the most energetic trout-fisher, and Stuart has produced a map showing all the named pools and what you might expect to catch.

The river is fly-only for trout and the season runs from March 3 to September 30. Fishing is fly only for salmon until June 1, with fly and spinning allowed thereafter until October 17. The main fishing is for trout, however, and it would be interesting to see how the river would respond to some



Harry ready with the net. Above: salmon and trout feature in the game book.



Usk Naylor

Hook Size 12-14 **Thread** Purple **Tail** Bronze mallard **Tag** Purple thread **Body** Bronze mallard **Rib** Fine embossed gold **Hackle** Dark Andalusian hen (use a lighter shade later in the season)



PAMPERED ON THE USK CONTINUED

Harry into an energetic brown trout at Glanusk.

concentrated salmon fishing as the trout catch is around 900 while the salmon season tally is 32. Given that the total annual catch on the Usk is over 1,000 salmon, Glanusk's total could surely be improved.

Lunch arrived and we settled down to eat by the river, Stuart explaining that this was a temporary arrangement as they

“We caught more than 20 trout – and this was supposed to be the quiet time...”

were in the process of converting the room in the tower on the bridge to a fishing hut. In future anglers may enjoy their lunch in comfort with a commanding view of the river. Now, I have seen a few fishing huts in my time, but I cannot recall any coming even close to this splendid location.

One of the Glanusk trout is returned to cool waters.

After lunch we went to the lower beat, fishing a delightful variety of water, from a smooth

glide below the bridge, via a deep gully with a great reputation for big trout, then down to the Nantyffyn stream, a cracking bit of trout water. We ended the day having caught more than 20 trout to 1½ lb, and this was supposed to be the quiet time in between the feast of April hatches and the beginning of the May bonanza.

As we packed up for the day we were greeted by Harry and Iona bearing much-appreciated cold beers. Harry took us on a tour of the house and recounted his fascinating family history, which is tied firmly to the industry and community of South Wales. A sumptuous dinner was served in the dining room and, as invariably is the case when fishermen get together, there was only one topic of conversation.

The whole package is very special, from the beautiful estate and river to the exceptional comfort and hospitality of Penmyarth. The experience had turned out to be the epitome of what fishing means to me – and yes, I did catch fish, too.



Factfile

Wynn Davies and friends stayed at Penmyarth and fished the Usk as part of the Glanusk Estate's exclusive fishing package at £699 per person. The price includes two nights' accommodation, all meals (including elevenses, lunch and tea by the river), wine, fishing and the services of estate gillie Stuart Jarvis. The estate also does bespoke packages for parties of up to 14, while day tickets are available at £35 for trout and £50 for salmon. Visit www.glanuskestate.com, e-mail Debbie@glanuskestate.com or phone the estate office on 01873 810 414 for more details.



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