

# DEVON ANGLING REVIEW

The Newsletter of the Devon Angling Association

## General Comments on 2023 season:

The 2023 season on the river was once again well supported by members and visitors with good permit sales.

Once again, after a wet winter, the river suffered from a prolonged drought thankfully not as severe as the 2022 season but enough to make the trout fishing a challenge. Thankfully when the rains came in late August, the river came back to life. Once again the most successful trout anglers were using nymphs and dries cast upstream on very light set ups.

The very wet autumn resulted in a number of spates, where the river was all but unfishable, but this did bring Salmon and Sea Trout into the river during the season in better numbers than the last couple of years. In the end 17 salmon (largest at 13lb), 1 grilse and 4 Sea Trout (largest 3.5lb) were caught and returned. When compared to catches at the turn of the century the catch was modest, but showed a significant improvement over the last couple of years. Hopefully this trend will continue and be accelerated by removal of the main barriers in the river in the coming years (see elsewhere)

Glenquey had another reasonable season with trout up to 4lb being caught. The fishing effort was reduced compared to 2022, but this was mainly due to less anglers turning out in March and April when it was relatively cold. Some work has been done this year to review the health of the trout population in the reservoir which has not been stocked for several years [see Glenquey scale samples]

As ever our dedicated team of volunteers in the work parties have been busy all over the catchment undertaking a range of projects including the endless task of cutting paths, removing fallen lumber and repairing bridges/stiles/gates. They have also installed a couple of benches for anglers along the river and supervised repairs/maintenance to the boathouse at Glenquey.

In the early part of the season we endeavored to install with floating decoys with the help of Lee Fisher (Crown Bailiff) to scare away goosanders and mergansers from harvesting smolts, gathering above and below Dollar Weir. Unfortunately due to the very low river flows in the Spring this proved unsuccessful..

## Glenquey Brown Trout scale samples:

In the years following the Association gaining the fishing rights for Glenquey, the reservoir was routinely stocked with Brown Trout originating mostly, but not exclusively, from Howietoun. With the sudden demise of the hatchery at Howietoun the reservoir has not been stocked since 2017.

During August David Mudie caught six trout of the typical size caught (between 20cm and 26cm) and had scale samples taken. These were analyzed by Dr. Jo Girvan at the Forth River Trust who estimated that these were fish of approximately 5 years age and were typical in size/condition for an upland reservoir with limited plant nutrition. It suggests that, at least for the moment, we have a sustainable breeding population with the occasional specimen fish!



**Devon Angling Association website - <https://devonanglingassociation.org.uk/>**

The current Association website came to life a decade ago in December 2013, since then we have had 68,018 individual visits reviewing 265,039 pages. Obviously the vast majority of the visits were from folk in the UK but we have had a significant number of visitors from the Ireland, the rest of the EU, USA, Canada and Australia. From the more obscure parts of the planet we have individual visits from folk in Papua New Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Bolivia and Afghanistan. In response to posts to the website we have had numerous great comments (and a few negative posts), but these pale into insignificance compared to the bombardment of spam posts and emails we receive. In a typical week we receive 20-30 phishing emails and countless comments to the website promoting every unwholesome product in the world. Thankfully the hosting software filters the majority out.

### **The Forth Rivers Trust and the Association:**

You will hear various references to the Forth Rivers Trust in newsletters and on our website, and perhaps wonder who/what are the Forth Rivers Trust?

Essentially they are a standalone charity set up in 2009 to protect, conserve and enhance freshwater fish, primarily salmon and sea trout within the Forth District. As the organisation developed and grew, its focus became more holistic looking at the wider environment, wildlife and communities within river catchments rather than a narrow focus of fish.

They are part funded by a donation from the Forth District Salmon Fisheries Board to provide scientific support to the Board, and from a wide range of external sources. The Association is represented by Keith Broomfield who is a trustee. The staff is made up of a range of project managers, ecologists, scientists and fishery professionals. The extent of their work can be seen on their website here <https://forthriverstrust.org/projects/>

So what have the Trust being doing to support the Association in 2023, beyond the routine electrofishing of the spawning burns and providing scientific advice?

1. **Dollar Weir Removal** – The Trust have completed the initial surveys and studies, funded by The Open Rivers Programme, concluding that the removal is desirable (removing a significant barrier to trout and salmon) and is achievable. Work is ongoing getting the permission of the weir owner, granting of planning permission and SEPA/ NatureScot authorisations. Work is also underway to seek funding for this work.
2. **Invasive Species** - The Association were provided with a grant by Crown Estate Scotland to fund a campaign of eradication of invasive weeds over the entire catchment (for example addressing the huge Japanese Knotweed infestations above Glendevon village and the outbreak of Giant Hogweed in the Tullibody area). We have engaged the Trust staff to complete the surveys and they have begun the process of eradication with the assistance of volunteers from the Association and the wider public.
3. **Taits Tomb livestock control/Cambus Weir Removal** – Two persistent problems are being addressed by the Trust and Crown Estate Scotland. Summer grazing by cattle at Taits Tomb results in significant damage to the banks and the routine presence of cattle in the river. Fencing in the area, is a real challenge due to the routine winter flooding. A plan is being prepared with the land owner to address these challenges. Cambus Weir has been a persistent barrier to migratory fish, particularly at times when river is reliant on compensation flows from the Glendevon reservoirs. The Trust and Crown Estate Scotland are working with Diageo the owners of the weir to prepare a scheme for the removal of the weir. It is intended to develop a scheme addressing both issues during 2024 and deliver at the earliest opportunity

Separate from work with the Association the Trust have been working with the community of Muckhart to deliver their **Natural Devon – Pool of Muckhart NFM project**. The project aims to deliver nature-based solutions to slow the flow of water along an unnamed burn near the village of Muckhart. The project has introduced overflow channels, scrapes and leaky dams to try and help slow the flow during flood events whilst boosting habitats for wildlife via the creation of open water habitats, the sowing of wildflower seeds and the installation of living willow leaky dams.

In light of the proposals to remove the barriers at Cambus and Dollar it is interesting to reflect on a note written by Joseph Napier, Board Superintendent to the Forth District Salmon Fishery Board (dated 25<sup>th</sup> March 1870) and published in the Alloa Advertiser (26<sup>th</sup> August 1871):

*Report on Pollutions of River Devon, Forth District.*

Stirling, 25th March, 1870.

To the Honourable the River Forth Salmon Fishery Board.

GENTLEMEN,—I beg respectfully to submit the following report on the River Devon for your information, and the information of the Commissioners of Salmon Fisheries.

The Devon is a tributary of the Forth, and by nature is one of the best spawning streams in this district. It contains some excellent spawning-beds, extending from Cambus up to the Rumbling Bridge, a distance of nearly twenty miles, embracing a stretch of fine spawning-ground, well adapted for breeding and rearing salmon; but I regret to say that that is far from being realised, owing to the river being so frightfully polluted by the enormous quantities of poisonous and other deleterious matter run into it from the different woollen mills, dye-works, and distilleries aftermentioned, so that, instead of this fine spawning river being, as by nature it has formerly been, and ought still to be, an excellent rearer and supplier of salmon for this district, it is at the present time a mere mass of pollution, and consequently a complete and very serious loss to the success of the salmon fishings in this district. The Devon, which is bright and clear above Tillicoultry, becomes dirty and discoloured afterwards. At Tillicoultry there are eight large woollen manufactories, who daily use large quantities of different dyes, and the spent liquids from those dyes are regularly discharged and run into the river.

Besides those eight manufactories there are other four similar manufactories near the villages of Alva and Menstrie, a few miles farther down the river, where dye stuffs are also extensively used, and where the spent liquids discharged from those works are likewise run daily into the river. Farther down the river there are also two very large distilleries—one at Glenochil and the other at Cambus; both of those distilleries use *Coffey's Patent Still*, and the spent dreg discharged from them is generally run into the river in a very hot state, which invariably proves most deadly and destructive to the young of salmon, more especially in the summer months, when the river is generally low; this was the case last summer, and the young fry were found dying in hundreds, as I can fully testify to; for, on the first day of June last, two river watchers and myself took no less than *sixty-eight dead smolts and small trout* out of the river between Glenochil and Cambus, besides leaving as many more owing to our inability to reach them.

Several of these fish, along with samples of spent dreg taken when running into the river from Glenochil Distillery, were submitted to Dr Macadam in Edinburgh, who afterwards reported on the deadly and destructive qualities of these deleterious liquids on being discharged into rivers containing salmon.

The patent stills have only been put up and used in the aforesaid distilleries within the last twenty years.

There are three artificial obstructions on the Devon. All those have been in existence for more than 100 years, viz. :—

Cambus Dam Dyke,  
Newmill Dam Dyke,  
Dollarfield Dam Dyke.

On neither of those dykes has there been any salmon pass or salmon-ladder erected. In certain stages of the water, however, salmon can pass over the two former dykes, but the latter dyke forms a complete barrier to the passage of fish, which must prove a great loss to the prosperity of the fishings in this district, as it effectually shuts up the river from that point, and consequently prevents any fish from getting forward to about five miles of excellent spawning ground lying between Dollar and the Rumbling Bridge, but no fish can pass beyond this, owing to a large obstruction of natural rock which completely blocks the river at this point.

There can be no doubt, if a salmon-pass were erected on the dyke at Dollarfield, it would benefit the fishings, as it would allow fish a free run up to the fine spawning ground above; but seeing the river is in such a polluted state below, I am afraid it would be perfectly useless, as the young fry would have every chance of being totally destroyed when passing down the river to the sea through such a foetid and reeking mass of disgusting pollutions as the Devon becomes during the summer months, especially below Glenochil and Cambus, where the water is so polluted that the wonder is that any living fish are seen there at all. Seeing, then, that this fine spawning river is so frightfully polluted and fairly lost to this district, permit me to draw the attention of the Board to the desirability of respectfully requesting the Commissioners to visit this river and inspect it during the ensuing summer, in order to see it and judge for themselves of the necessity that now exists for a change in the Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act of 1868 in giving more extensive and surer powers to District Boards to prosecute those who openly and defiantly pollute the river in this and other districts, whereby a large amount of valuable human food is consequently destroyed and lost to the public at large.—I have, &c.,

(Signed) JOSEPH NAPIER, Supt.

Other submissions suggested that the pollution was so severe that the Devon should be boarded to prevent salmon entering the river (permissible under Section 19 of the Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1868)

There are many of our more senior members who will remember the state of the river from waste diverted to the rivers by the mills, collieries and distilleries within their own lifetime. It is amazing that it has taken over a 150 years for serious proposals for the removal of Dollar and Cambus weir. The weir at Newmill was just north of where the Stirling - Alloa railway crosses the Devon and seems to have been removed sometime after the war.

**A photographic miscellany:**

Steve Hodge clearly thrilled with the large brownie caught in September



The work party installing the first of the 'angler's bench' on the south bank near The Haugh



Ally Crawford's 13lb Salmon caught in October