

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

TROUT FISHING AT NIGHT

There is more than a tinge of romance in trout-fishing by night. The sounds of daytime are hushed. Most of the fishing brotherhood have packed up and gone home. A solemn silence holds the air, broken by the tinkle of the stream as it purls and gushes o'er its gravelly bed, and the crunch of the angler's feet as he makes his way over the shallows to the tail of the pool. Occasionally he hears the plunge of a heavy fish, and wonders whether it be pike or trout, and not infrequently he may hear the distant whistle of an otter as it calls to its wandering mate. The bats are overhead and swoop perilously near his head, and after the church clock has boomed the passing hour the owl in the neighboring wood answers with familiar hoot. No voice is heard, no light is seen, yet the angler still makes his casts, and ever and anon he feels the thrill of a fish at the end of his fly and plays him to the bank, where he will have to strike a match to see to take out the hook. This is night fishing for trout, as practised on nearly every river in the north of England, and it has such a fascination that few who have once tried it ever break away from its entrancing spell.

It is full of charm, full of mystery, full of surprises, and rich in results, for it produces the biggest fish of the year and the best-filled baskets. It has the further advantage that it comes at the time of the year when the nights are warm and open, and when day fishing is a waste of time and patience, by reason of blazing suns and drought-dried streams. He that has never gone out at 9 o'clock on a warm July night and fished till the first streak of dawn in the eastern sky has warned him to desist and go home has missed one of the most exhilarating experiences that can fall to the lot of the trout angler.

First let us look at the theory of the thing. To begin with, it fits in with the scheme of Nature. During the hot days of summer the trout are shy and difficult to approach. If the rivers are low and shrunken their ordinary cruising grounds are very much restricted, and they are penned up in pools from the safety of which they behold the angler from afar as he casts his fly upon them.

At night time all this is changed. The trout are emboldened to leave their fastnesses, and they cruise away to forage for food in the shallow runs where it would be madness for them to go in the hours of searching sunshine. Here now they are in quest of something to eat, turning up the stones and feeding on the minute larvae to be found in the million on the stoney gravelly bed of a northern stream. Nor does this quite end the story of the theory of our art. It seems as if Nature itself comes to the aid of the angler.

The least observant wanderer by the water-side will have noticed how, on a warm evening, when the sun is setting and the birds are flying homewards, great white moths emerge from the bushes and dance to and fro in the gloaming. If there be such a bush overhanging the river let the spectator note the course of events. Out they come, these twilight fairies, in scores and hundreds, fluttering and dancing from branch to branch, then whirling and curvetting over the water, until one of them swoops too low, or falls exhausted, to be snapped in a moment by a waiting trout. It is, in its way, a parallel to the May fly season. The trout seem to know what to expect. They congregate in the margins of streams, right beneath the overhanging bush, and there they lie in wait for the feast of moths which instinct and experience has taught them to expect in the twilight hours of the warmest days of midsummer. And just as the angler in the May fly season drops his counterfeit among the fluttering insects as they leap from ripple to ripple in the sunshine, so the night angler throws his artificial bustard exactly where he knows the waiting trout is on the watch for its living counterpart.

All he needs is a stout gut cast, a stock of bustards, or artificial moths, of sea-trout fly size, an intimate knowledge of the bed of the river, and he is ready to tempt fortune. On some rivers, particularly those of Cumberland and Westmorland, which contain sea trout, worming is often practised at dead of night. The angler uses it on pennell tackle, and fishes downstream exactly as if the bait were a fly. Baskets of 20-lb. of fish are no uncommon reward for this kind of fishing. Personally, though I have fished all hours of the night I never once used the worm, and it must be clearly understood that the experiences and hints now given have relation solely to fishing the artificial moth or bustard.

The first consideration to be noticed is choice of a suitable length of river. It must be shallow, free from sudden dips, and contain no treacherous ground of any description. Sunken fences, overhanging trees, hidden boulders, must all be studied in the day time. An angler who steps in to wade a strange river at night time is little better than a madman. "Wade?" the reader may say in surprise. If I have not used the word before it was because I took it for granted that all fishermen would understand that this sort of fishing is only really successful when done from the bed of the river. It is only by that means you can get "on top" of your fish, and have the necessary command of their feeding ground. Wading is an absolute necessity. Hence, the reader will see the vital import-

ance of knowing every foot of the river bed, not only that he can keep a hooked trout from dashing into a snag or bunch of weeds, but to save himself from a false step which would plunge him into a dangerous pool, or bring him within reach of a treacherous rapid.

The place selected should be carefully waded two or three times in the daylight, and if in any particular direction there is anything in the nature of a danger zone the angler must make up his mind to avoid it. In the daytime we often take risks and venture into eddies and rapids just for the "pice of adventure. To do such a thing in the blackness of night is to juggle with life and safety. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon, then, to close this aspect of the question, that the angler must know his ground almost as well as he knows the floor of his bedroom. As to the sort of place likely, it must be open, and shallow, and easily accessible both for man

and fish. I have two or three such places in my mind's eye.

One was a long, open reach, 150 yards long, 30 or 40 wide, and nowhere more than 2 ft. deep. The bed was hard gravel. A ford crossed the river here, and what with the splashing of horses' feet, the clanking of wheels, and the general open and inviting look of the place, we all gave it a wide berth in the daytime. I fished it several times, but never took anything save a few fingerlings. But for night fishing I never wished for a better place. It was as though all the big fish in the neighborhood made to it, and cruised about on the hunt for food. It was my plan to step in the water just when it was so dark that I was unable to tell the time by my watch.

Moslems in the east, where there are no timepieces, tell the moment when day becomes night by their inability to note the difference between a white and a black thread; and similarly I fixed the moment for starting fishing when my watch had ceased to be useful. I stepped into the river and at once began to cast, and after each cast I made a step forward. I gradually worked right across the river and then back again, in diagonals, so slowly that it took me two hours to cover the stretch of 150 yards. I would then get out, walk up the bank to the starting point, and go over the whole ground a second time. Of the scores of times I fished this place I do not remember a single night when I failed to touch a fish. Sometimes I was without an actual catch, but I raised and played a trout or two, and that was something.

But generally I had fish, sometimes one, sometimes two, and many times up to eight or nine, and not a single fish was under half a pound in weight. It was not a river of very big fish, yet I had scores over a pound, and one over 2 lb.; once I took a grilse of 4 lb., several times I had sea-trout of 2 lb. and thereabouts, and once I had a small jack of 1 1/4 lb., which had evidently come out on the same quest for food. In the daytime no part of the river—and every yard of it is strictly preserved—yielded anything like such fine fishing as this I enjoyed at night, and when you add to these results the romantic surroundings and the tinge of mystery inseparable from being out alone at midnight it will be agreed that the experience was one to be enjoyed to the full and to be remembered now with gratitude.

For this kind of fishing you require strong tackle. Your cast should be stout, and it is not necessary that it should be over 6 ft. in length. Two flies are enough, and some only use one. My practice was a white moth as tail fly, on No. 9 limerick hook, and a yellow moth as dropper. For every fish caught by the yellow fly the white one took a dozen, and in the end, as two hooks doubled the danger of getting hung up—a most unwelcome experience in the dark—I discarded the dropper and put the whole of my trust in the white tail fly. Casting is done down stream, and the fly is worked round with the current. The shorter the line the better. As the fish cannot

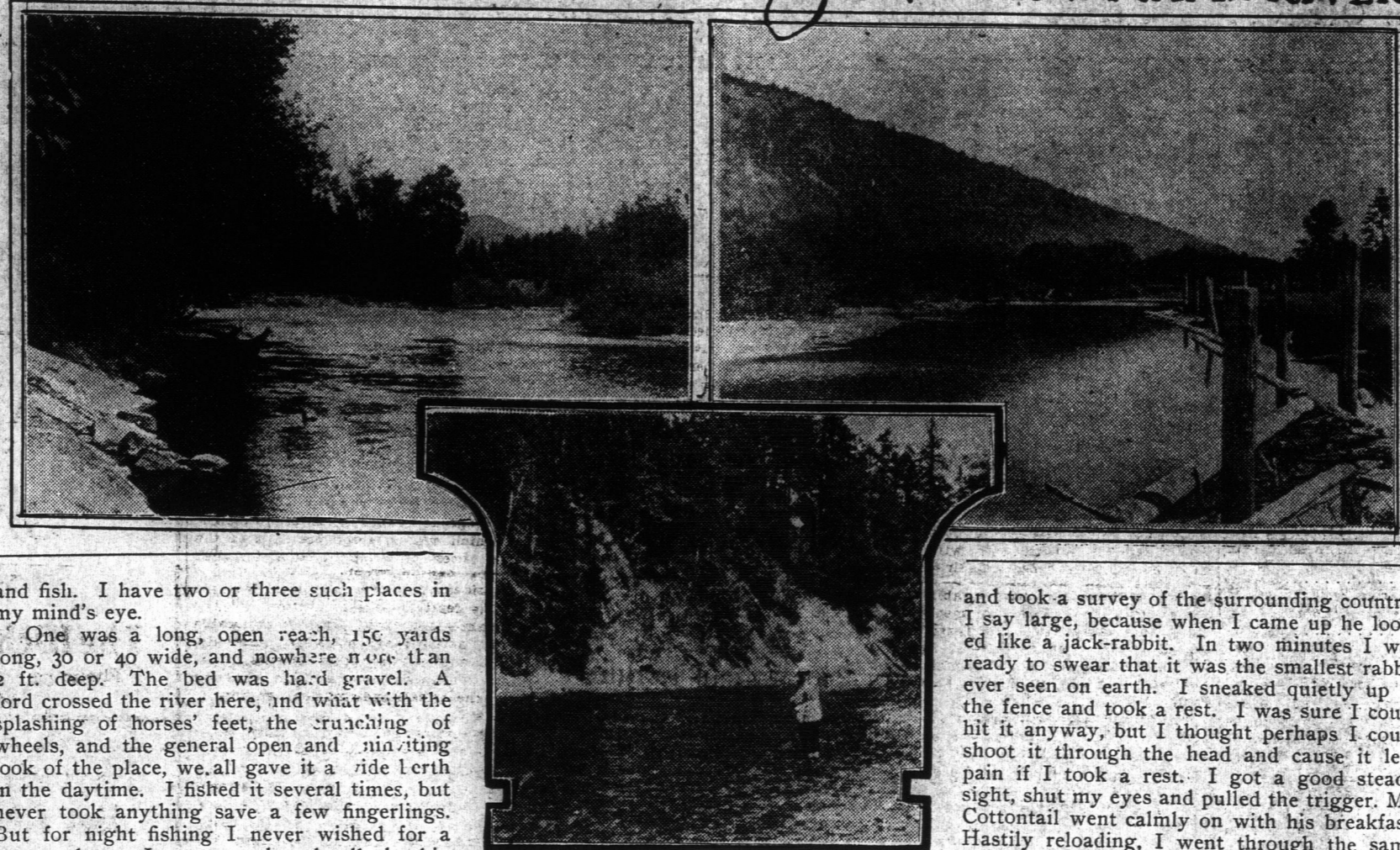
see you there is no need for a long cast, and there is less risk of a "catch" in the air with a short line than a long one.

There need be no hurry in striking. The fish are feeding, and are intent on business, and they take the fly with a boldness which suggests they mean to have it. To merely hold the line taut and put a gentle pressure on when you feel the fly taken is quite sufficient to ensure the hook being driven home. You play the fish leisurely or hurriedly according to temperament. A landing net is no use at all. There are ten chances to one you will foul the line if you use a net. If the tackle is strong, as it should be, wade to shore and beach the fish. If the bank is steep, stay where you are and lift him out of the water by the line and grab him with the right hand. Even if a few fish are lost by this method the gain is still the angler's, for he has been spared the trouble of carrying a net.

much actual enjoyment out of it as they did when they got their first rabbit. Never shall I forget my own experience in this line. One Christmas morning I awoke, to find myself the proud possessor of a Flobert rifle and a box of cartridges. Everyone knows what this will do for a boy of ten years. I immediately pictured myself as a second Daniel Boone, with never failing aim, rescuing beautiful maidens from the clutches of the terrible redskins. But of course I must practice first for that never failing aim. Accordingly I went out back of the house and began on a wagon bed turned on its side, and after using about half of my shell supply I was able to hit with tolerable accuracy inside of a square foot target every time. Then I started after my first rabbit.

My uncle had a cabbage bed a short distance from his house and here I was to perform my first large killing. Sure enough, as I came in sight of the bed, a large rabbit sat up

Haunts of Victoria Anglers—COWICHAN RIVER



and took a survey of the surrounding country. I say large, because when I came up he looked like a jack-rabbit. In two minutes I was ready to swear that it was the smallest rabbit ever seen on earth. I sneaked quietly up to the fence and took a rest. I was sure I could hit it anyway, but I thought perhaps I could shoot it through the head and cause it less pain if I took a rest. I got a good steady sight, shut my eyes and pulled the trigger. Mr. Cottontail went calmly on with his breakfast. Hastily reloading, I went through the same manoeuvres with the same results. When I went to reload after the third shot, a lot of smoke came back in my face. The fact that I could not blow the smoke out caused me to look into the barrel and then I saw the cause of it all. All three bullets had stuck in the gun. Why the barrel didn't burst I have never been able to find out, but it didn't; and so there was nothing for me to do but to return to the house and have the bullets removed.

After this had been accomplished, I started out in another direction, along a creek bed with high banks. When I had traveled some distance along this route, my eye suddenly caught a glimpse of grey fur near a hole along the top of the bank. Looking intently, I made out the head and ears of a rabbit. Now was my chance! I was sure the gun would work all right, for I had just cleaned and oiled it. I took careful aim again and pulled the trigger. The grey fur bounded into the air and then began a series of jumps and somersaults which a dying rabbit invariably performs. With a whoop of delight I dropped my gun and began to climb the hill. Oh, how my head began to swell! I calculated the range to have been about 100 yards, anyway. As I remember now, it was about 50 feet. But I had reached the top of the hill and what a sight met my eyes. My rabbit was fastened in a steel trap. But I figured that I had as much right to it as the owner of the trap; for I had shot it, whereas, he had only caught it. So I stopped to claim my rabbit. Suddenly I heard a voice behind me: "So you're the thief that's been robbing my traps!" Then, before I could look around, I was caught by the seat of my trousers and by my coat collar and hoisted into space. The next thing I was rolling head-over heels down the hill—hitting, I think, every stone, chunk or tree on the way. I picked up my gun, looked up the hill to the irate farmer shaking his fists and then fled.

When I had reached a place of safety, I began to look for another rabbit. I was sure I could kill one now. Presently I espied one sitting under a tuft of grass, some distance off. My first bullet went wild. My next went straight but glanced off of the "rabbit" with a whistle. The rabbit was a rock. So I kept on. I saw several rabbits running, but they were as safe as if they had been miles away, although I would have staked my life that every bullet I sent after them took effect, but in no vital spot. Once I saw one sitting; but, not willing to be fooled by a rock again, I attempted to get nearer and the rabbit disappeared over a neighboring hill. At last my patience

MY FIRST RABBIT

When I read of hunters bringing down moose, bear, etc., I often wonder if they get as



Sportsman's Calendar

MAY

Trout-fishing good this month EVERYWHERE.
Steelheads still running in certain rivers.
A run of small silver salmon or cohoes comes in May.
Geese and Brant may still be shot.

N.B.—At the request of the Game Warden, we remind readers that dogs running loose at this season do an immense amount of damage to nesting game birds.

A HORSE THAT JOKES

A Staten Island physician is the owner of a horse which has a fondness for practical jokes. Recently the doctor drove into the country to answer a sick call. Arriving at the farmhouse, he tied his horse to a post near which hung a rope attached to a large bell used as a dinner signal for employees, and went in to see his patient. Pretty soon the bell rang violently. The doctor and the man of the house looked out, but could see nothing.

This was repeated, and the doctor determined to solve the mystery; so at the third ring, instead of going into the house, he stepped behind a tree in the yard. He kept his eye on the bell-rope, and in about a minute was surprised to see his horse lift up his head and give the rope a hard tug. When the physician sprang out and confronted the horse the animal put on a look of innocence. The same horse the next day was turned loose in the doctor's barnyard, and while there the beast saw a basket hanging on a pole about seven feet from the ground.

In the basket was a pet cat. The horse put his nose up to investigate, and the cat gave the intruder a scratch. The horse turned round, looked back over his shoulder as though to take aim and measure the distance, and kicked at and basket into the air. The equine joker then gave a low whinny of delight and walked away.

CANDID

In addition to having a water-supply second to none Tillicoultry dairymen can congratulate themselves upon upholding the prestige of the place so far as the milk is concerned.—The Devon Valley Tribune. We don't remember having seen it put with such shining candor before.—Punch.

"Cockney Humor" was the subject of a lecture by Mr. Pett Ridge in Huddersfield. He told a story about a bus-conductor who stumbled twice over the foot of a small boy.

Looking back at the mother, the conductor said: "Some people seem to have very awkward children."
"Yes," said the mother: "I was just thinking your mother had one."