

# Where to find fishing heaven

From the Tamar to the Tweed via  
the 'Blagdon Boil', **David Profumo**  
names his top 10 fly-fishing beats



Previous pages Perfect peace at the Junction pool of the Towy and Cothi at Abercothi. Above Cast in the wake of the greats on the hallowed River Itchen. Facing page Even in a Bristol Water reservoir, there can be excellent fishing from boat and bank

**T**O hear some anglers talk about their plans for the coming season, you would think their most essential item of tackle was a passport. But here in the UK, we still have many world-class sporting opportunities, and this is my personal selection of our *crème de la crème*. (Any proprietors feeling aggrieved at being left out are welcome to invite me along for a visit...)

#### ↑ Best Welsh river

##### Cothi, Comarthen

Night fishing can be both thrilling and scary, but ever since I saw a 10lb sea trout netted on my first trip to the Cothi, in Comarthen, the outstanding potential of such specialised nocturnal sport has impressed me. Highly recommended by aficionados is the Abercothi Fishery (01494 524411), which has a mile of the Cothi and three of the Towy (probably the most productive water in the country for sea trout—or *sewin* as they're known hereabouts). Five rods have the run of 40 pools, including the well-known Junction, with tuition and bankside farmhouse accommodation available.

The *sewin* is our loveliest migrant,

hard-fighting and delicious on the plate; big fish arrive around May, and respond to everything from surface lures to sunk tubes—although, on a good night, nothing beats small flies on floating lines.

#### ↑ Best chalk stream

##### Itchen

Probably my favourite of all our waters is the hallowed Itchen, which flows gently through Hampshire and is regarded by many as our premier trout stream. Unlike the Test, which is disappointingly murky and overstocked in many stretches, the upper and middle reaches are intimate, tranquil and clear, with a head of wild brown trout in places. It's also deeply historic: Skues had a rod at Abbots Barton for half a century, and Lord Grey of Falloden used to take catch the Waterloo train down to his little tin cottage to catch the evening rise. He began his dry-fly career as a pupil at Winchester, and the college still retains its own private water—unless your son is enrolled there, you should try for a day ticket from Famous Fishing (William Daniel: 01722 716210) or Hotchkiss Fly Fishing (John Hotchkiss: 01980 630717). Worth every penny.

#### Best large Scottish river

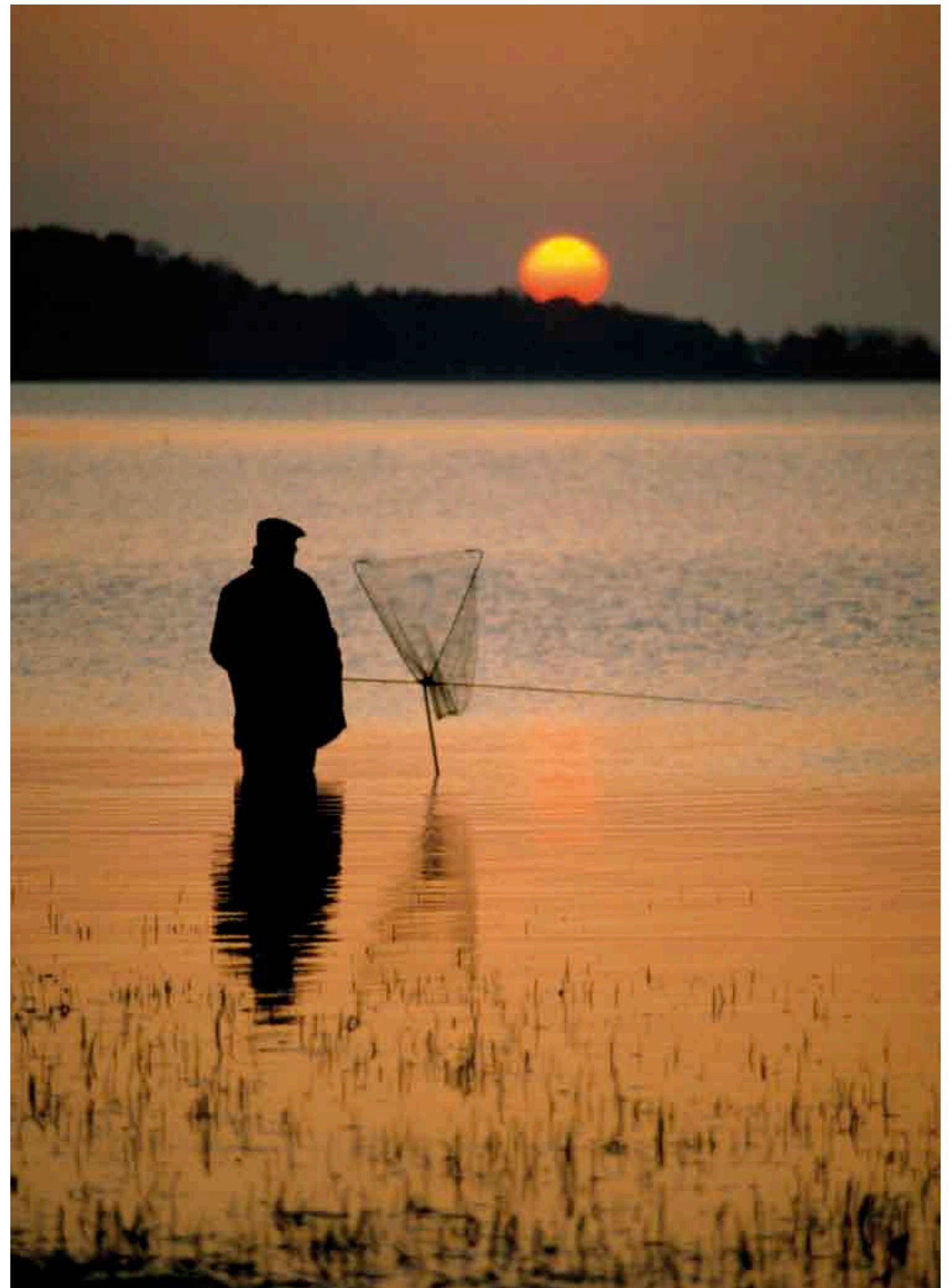
##### Sprouston, River Tweed

Just below Kelso in the Scottish Borders lies Sprouston, one of the finest beats on the River Tweed. A popular venue for captains of industry and sporting stars, this two-mile stretch is limited to two rods, and, last season, accounted for a phenomenal 633 salmon. Here it was that Canon Greenwell invented his immortal trout fly, and James Wright created the 'Garry Dog' with hair from the local minister's pet. The famous Dub pool was once a favourite for 'leistering' (spearing fish by torchlight); these days, it's a case of Dead Mens' Waders—but you might try Mark Merison (Strutt & Parker 01635 576905) to get on a waiting list.

#### → Best English lake

##### Blagdon Lake, Mendips

Although it's a reservoir run by Bristol Water, nothing could be further from the typical 'concrete bowl' experience than Blagdon Lake, set in the rolling Mendips next to a bucolic village and with an Elizabethan-style fishery lodge. First opened for fishing back in 1904, it has had a reputation for large trout practically ever since and is





Salmon have been known to charge flies at the Grimersta estate on the Isle of Lewis

sometimes called 'the birthplace of stillwater trout fishing'—a description most Scottish loch anglers would dispute, although many techniques were pioneered here, especially midge fishing during the evening rise known as the 'Blagdon Boil'. At 440 acres, it has good access to indented shorelines for bank anglers, and boats are available (I'd bring an electric outboard). My favourite drifts are across Butcombe Bay, and along Ash Tree in a westerly breeze, when you can expect good surface sport to sedges and hoppers (Woodford Lodge: 01275 332339).

### ↑ Best salmon loch Grimersta estate

The Grimersta estate on Lewis in the Western Isles is a chain of four spectacular lochs with a short main river, and is run by a syndicate.

I first fished here in the 1970s, and have seen some bays so full of salmon that the surface was thorny with dorsal fins. Boat fishing predominates, and the sight of a grilse charging at your bob fly (the Muddler and Elver are preferred) isn't easily forgotten. In 1888, A. M. Naylor famously bagged 54 fish to his own rod in one day, not starting until noon. After that trip, he never fished again. The lodge has an agreeable old-school ambience; guest rods are occasionally available from the estate office (01851 621358).

### Best trout lochs Scourie, Sutherland

Traditional sporting hotels are increasingly hard to find, but at Scourie on the west coast of Sutherland is a long established coaching inn that has been a haven

for anglers in search of wild and affordable fishing for wild brownies for years. Guests caught 11,000 of them last year, and a daily roster system ensures a fair choice of venues on literally hundreds of hill lochs, plus nearby Stack (for the chance of a sea trout). Vast cased fish peer balefully down from the walls, and the hotel has won plenty of Real Ale awards. Excellent hill walking, and boat trips to Handa, the bird island—an ideal holiday base, with reasonable tariffs (Patrick and Judy Price: 01971 502396).

### Best Ulster river Snaa, Baronscourt

Baronscourt near Newtonstewart in Co Tyrone is a fine working estate, for four centuries home to the Dukes of Abercorn. Available to those staying in its cottages are two rods on the Mourne, part of the complex Foyle system that embraces both the province and the republic and sees prolific runs of fish from June onwards, given water. Four beats offer 24 pools, including the celebrated Snaa (where, trying to retrieve my fly, I once fell out of a tree into the water); last season was good, with 140 fish taken by guest and syndicate rods. It's a challenging river, but a switch cast with 14-footer and the popular Golden Shrimp will put you over many desirable residences. There's a rare chance in Ireland to secure your own fly-only beat, at prices below many Scottish equivalents (Abercorn Estates: 02881 661683).

### Best small stillwater Avington, Hampshire

In the past 30 years, the pursuit of specially reared specimen trout from small lakes has gained huge popularity, and it was Hampshire's Avington that largely led the way. The three clearwater lakes here are regularly stocked with browns and rainbows up to double figures (I landed a brace totalling 31lb on my last visit), and sight-fishing (or 'stalking') with nymphs and leaded bugs is often the order of the day.

Some similar venues are overfished and down at heel, but Avington (near Itchen Abbas) is nicely landscaped and well maintained, with plenty of elbow room, good facilities, and every chance of that truttaceous trophy (Fishery Office: 01962 779312).

### Best West Country river Tamar, Devon

The Arundell Arms in Devon (01566 784666) is a delightful hotel to the west of Dartmoor, for years presided over by the indefatigable Anne Voss-Bark, and still run by her family. It's a model of the upmarket but friendly inn, with exceptional food, and is perfect for the non-angling companion (even Mrs Reel Life likes it). There is reasonably priced fishing for salmon and sea trout (here called peal)



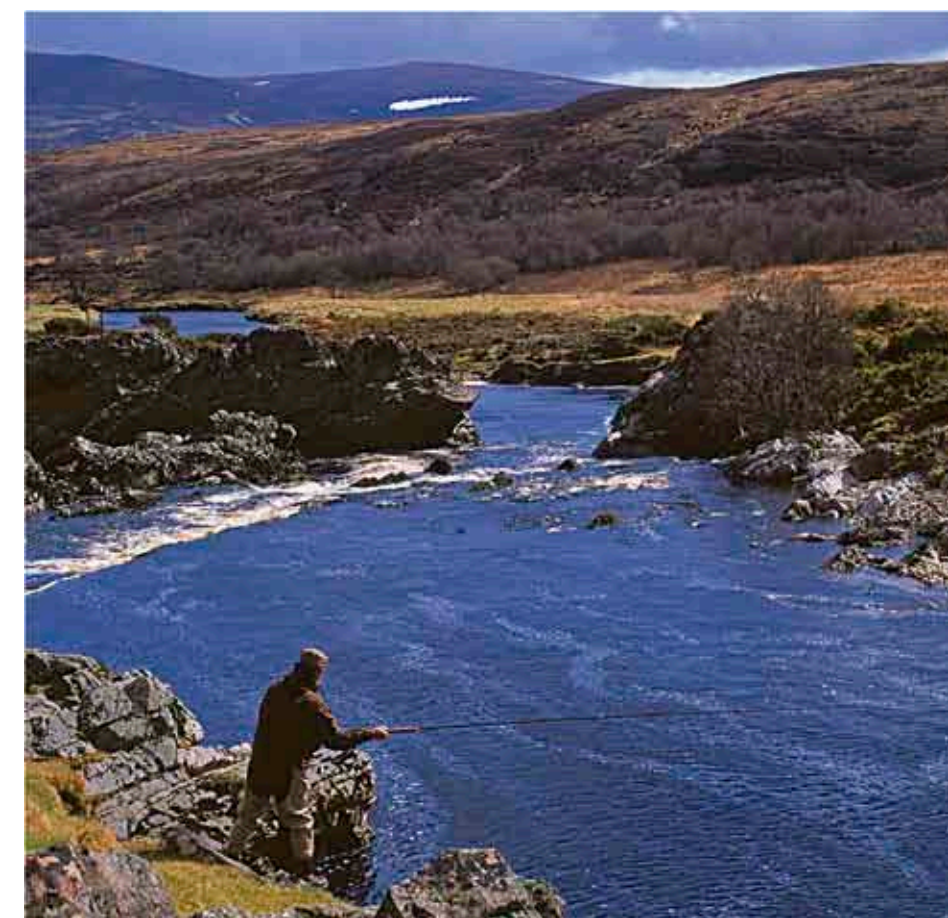
Take your pick: the renowned Arundell Arms in Devon has access to fishing on the Rivers Tamar, Lyd, Wolf, Thrushel and Carey

on the Tamar and the Lyd from mid-summer onwards, and good daytime fun to be had on the smaller Wolf, Thrushel and Carey, with sparkling little brownies that come well to dry flies. Expert in-house tuition from David Pilkington and his team, and a rod room in a converted cock-pit are added attractions.

The Tamar is named after Tamara, a local water sprite, making it the original 'It River'. In season, there is even guided sea-bass fishing if the rivers are out of order.

### Best medium Scottish river Helmsdale, Sutherland

Arguably the most stylish of the Highland streams—an Aston Martin among rivers—the Helmsdale flows down a picturesque Sutherland Strath with moorland, birch groves and bracken. Once renowned as a spring river, it enjoys prodigious summer runs of grilse, but the fishing is closely preserved by six riparian estates. Twelve rods fish in rotation, each pair having one beat above and below Kildonan Falls daily. Classic pools include Kilphedir, and Salzraggie, which offer a nice variety of sharps and flats—pots and gravel runs. Take one of the lodge owners to lunch at Wiltons, or, for information about limited day tickets on the lower Town Water, telephone the Helmsdale Company (01431 821372).



'An Aston Martin among rivers': time on the Highland Helmsdale is a fisherman's dream