



# On course for salmon

19 enthusiastic anglers joined *FF&FT* for the annual salmon school on a fish-filled Annan. **HUGO FAIRCLOUGH** was amongst them ...

Usually, in the UK at least, autumn seems to be a case of acquiring jumpers, precautionary candles and bargain Christmas presents, and throwing an obligatory fly for a grayling, but those who sensed wisely the impending winter gloom of fisherman's blues made tracks for Annandale, to *FF&FT*'s Salmon School.

Two courses were run, a four-day and a three-day, at Anthony Steel's Kirkwood estate, with the unfailingly charismatic assistance of Glyn Freeman, qualified AAPGAI instructor and guide.

Donning the fishing waistcoat and aviators I swaggered out of the car (I was with the Editor, after all); we headed over to meet the others. The week kicked off on Sunday, October 30 with some fundamental casting tuition from Glyn, starting with work on the single-hander before moving onto the double-hander to perfect the Circle C cast. We all got some good practice in, on and off the water, and each stage was well explained and demonstrated by Glyn, not forgetting the admirable volunteer force that was Dave Price ...

Armed with the basics and a flask of soup, Monday saw us fully mobilised. Overnight the river had dropped slightly and was clearing, although the saturated earth made this process a little slower than we may have hoped.

Nonetheless the Annan salmon were there and, although we failed to connect that day, the pools and runs were bubbling with fish.

With a chunk of sharpened and barbed wire on the other end, there really is an incentive to improve your casting – at least, that's what I decided as I sheepishly removed an Ally's Shrimp from my coat shoulder, under the gaze of an amused Mr Bowler.

But for whatever reason, techniques improved exponentially under the keen eye and gentle hand of Glyn, and some spectacular casting was performed by all.

By Thursday, the end of the four-day course, the Snake Roll, Single Spey, Double Spey and Circle C were all in our repertoire, with the latter two being particularly strong. In accordance with wind directions for the week, the Circle C dominated the Kirkwood bank, while upriver on Jardine Hall the Double Spey was called into action.

The evenings found us in the Kirkwood cottages; fly-tying workshops, talks, discussions – with much quick-witted debate surrounding the elusive pheromone – and a fabulous dinner at the magnificent Kirkwood House.

On Thursday, Mike Cooney's nine pound cock fish was the culmination of the course – caught on a black Stoat's Tail with holographic rib, ten minutes of hard fighting landed this beautiful fish. A well-deserved reward for a fisherman who had excelled that week. Nice one, Mike!

After a locally-sourced, riverbank barbecue, wonderfully prepared by Kirkwood's Ian and Samantha, it was changeover time on Thursday: we bade farewell to a great group, and welcomed the three-day group.

Despite a rising river, our new team were on the ball straightaway, after Glyn had established the fundamentals, and we didn't have to wait long before Martin Lee claimed a six pounder by his wife's beautifully tied Munro Killer variant.

Under the unfaltering expertise of Glyn, Mark and Anthony, of course, the team flourished: the river was still a little unstable but spirits soared. Casting improved quickly. Coming from a varied angling background,

from beginners to experienced coarse and trout fishermen, it was inspiring to see what skills can be acquired using, or transferred to a salmon rod.

Saturday was glorious: after a few days of mixed weather and mixed luck, and a very mixed up river we rose to a spotless sky and clear water. And by now, we were veterans. 'D' loops bellowed, leaders flew, and the sun shone on: the result was a last-minute silver monster for Robert who, while he lost the fish after ten minutes, certainly put up a great fight, but could not prevent the fish, estimated at 20lb plus, from exiting the pool via the 'wrong' side of the island.

Martin's wife's fly performed once more for Anthony Steel, who caught a fish as dusk fell on the river, a fitting end for a brilliant week.

And then the morning after another great dinner at Kirkwood, it was all over. We all went home to our various parts of the world – some to elsewhere in Britain, others to the Netherlands, Holland and even Canada with a small piece of Annandale in our hearts, and an enormous salmon on our minds ...

● *FF&FT fly fishing schools, p22.*



Preparation pays off: a beautiful delivery!

