

**FRY
TIME**
Hunting big
agdon trout

TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

Autumn glory

A sedge bonanza on wild trout streams

**4,000
salmon and
counting**

A gillie shares
his secrets

**Deadly
moves**

Tie and fish the
dancing daddies

**BROWNIES IN THE
WELSH MOUNTAINS**

OCTOBER 2021 £4.75 ON SALE SEPT 16-OCT 13



AN EVENING ON THE BRUTON STREAM

The unforgettable silver shoals of Uig Sands, Isle of Lewis,
cast a spell over Colin Macleod





Waiting patiently for a cast on the Bruton Stream.

A typical summer grilse from a not so typical setting.

HIGH AMONG FLY-FISHERS' favourite quotes is the doozy, "Salmon don't live in ugly places". I'll not argue. Salmon-fishing truly takes us to our island's most beautiful and remote corners. But I'd add a caveat: "Salmon don't live in ugly places – and there's nowhere more beautiful than the Bruton Stream."

Let me set the scene. You're standing waist deep in turquoise saltwater where the Atlantic Ocean meets the whisky-stained freshwater of the Fhorsa system on the Isle of Lewis amid a highland scene that wouldn't be out of place on a shortbread tin. Donald the gillie calls from the clifftop that a shoal of salmon is heading your way. Hands shaking,

"A black fin breaks the surface, then another, and then another"

you check your knots, take a quick breath and peel line off the reel. A black fin breaks the surface, then another, and then another. The pressure builds, and to make matters worse the rods to your right have all missed their chance.

It's your turn now, and there are no excuses. Picking up the slack, you cast squarely, and your fly miraculously lands delicately on the nose of a bright, fighting-fit grilse. It leaves the shoal and follows your fly, two buddies soon on its tail. They follow your little Cascade across the stream while you try to keep calm. On they come and then you see the white belly of the first fish as it turns but just misses the fly. Your heart's going a bit now.

Second cast and there's a boil. Your nerves are so sharp that you pull the fly too early and miss the take. Foolish but not surprising under the circumstances. You quickly check the cast and mutter a few choice words under your breath. There are more fish now as the shoal slowly moves into position only a few feet away. A short cast, two quick

strips and the line stops again. You feel a strong weight as a fish hammers the Cascade. The salmon wakes, thrashing and flexing its muscles on the surface before turning tail and bolting. It's all so exciting that you realise you've been holding your breath since you cast.

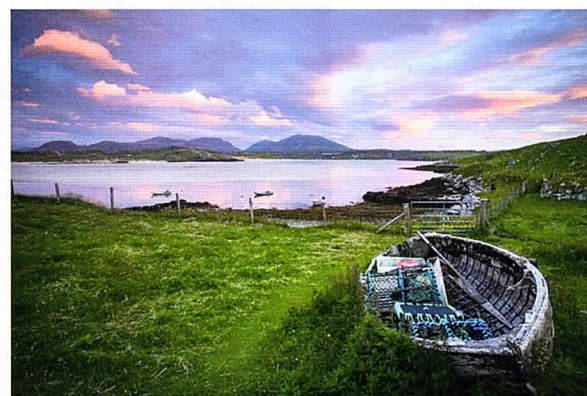
With the unmatched strength of a salmon in the sea, the fish makes a beeline back to Greenland, testing carbon-fibre to its limit and leaving you staring at a blurred reel with a mixture of fear and excitement. After a short fight, the brightest salmon you've ever seen lies in the net. As your buddies pat you on the back, a strange thought creeps into your head: how can I ever go back to fishing for salmon in freshwater?

Have I piqued your interest? This is as rare and exhilarating an experience as you can get in salmon fishing, though success is difficult to achieve. I've had the pleasure of catching several salmon in saltwater and all were incredibly hard won, leaving me shaking like a leaf but smiling from ear to ear for days afterwards. The Bruton Stream is one of

Cascades, Stoat's Tails and Muddlers: flies for any Hebridean occasion.



Gloaming over the Uig Hills.



DONALD MATHESON

few places where you have a chance of hooking a salmon in the salt not accidentally but by genuinely inducing it to take your fly.

The stream is part of the Fhorsa system and lies at the edge of Uig sands on the west coast of Lewis. Here the turquoise Atlantic buffets the low fertile machair and pounds into grey hills of Lewisian gneiss, the oldest rock in Europe. The water could rival the Caribbean for colour and clarity (though it's a few degrees colder). It's no wonder the beaches are regularly voted some of the most beautiful in the world.

The fishing lodge is a dominant feature in the landscape, a shelter for fishers and hunters from wild storms for more than 100 years. Fishing is let one week at a time, giving anglers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the surroundings. By staying at the lodge, you will see why the area is famous for its stunning light. Sharp and clear one minute; dark, ominous, and brooding the next — it has long entranced artists and photographers who discover what's meant by "four seasons in a day".

It's also a place steeped in myth and legend. The Brahan Seer was a 17th-century soothsayer who found a magic stone that, when he looked through it, blinded him but gave him prophetic gifts. He discovered the stone in a graveyard near the lodge. ➤



**COLIN
MACLEOD**
is an acclaimed
singer and
songwriter as
well as a crofter
and gillie on the
Isle of Lewis.



Summer shoals patrolling the coast give anglers a sporting chance at hooking a salmon in the salt.

*“You’re at the mercy of the
push and pull of the moon,
which draws the shoals in
and out twice a day”*

There is a real sense of wilderness. Sea eagles dominate the skies, having made a stunning comeback in the last 40 years. Alongside their smaller but no less impressive cousin, the golden eagle, they’re often seen above the winding road to Uig from Stornoway. Otters hunting at dusk, red deer patrolling the hillsides, oystercatchers piping on the shoreline are all sure signs of summer. However, nothing signals the season more than the arrival of silver tourists in the Bruton Stream.

The stream is found in the centre of the township of Uig where a single-track road winds down to a



Peter sends a long cast across the stream.

small passing place before a dead end. You know you've arrived when you find a gate with a distinctly Hebridean sign: "Warning: Sheep Grazing". One of my favourites, as if you might be caught and eaten by a blackface sheep if you stand still for too long.

The stream winds alongside the road past the lodge, through the village of Timsgarry and out across the sands until it reaches a stretch of cobblestone at the edge of the beach. This is the short shoreline known as the Bruton Stream. The outgoing tide reveals the shape of the river and why the fish congregate. Golden sand slopes gently into a deceptively deep boulder shore where free-flowing rafts of bladderwrack provide protection for salmon as they pass, as well as ambush points for sea-trout. Pollock, coalfish and mackerel also make an appearance alongside, less often, bass.

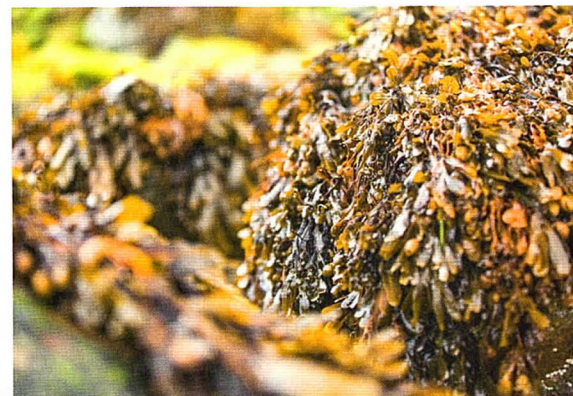
But fly-fishers focus on the rare chance to hook a salmon in the salt. The opportunity comes either side of the tide because the salmon don't lie as they do in fresh water. You're at the mercy of the push and pull of the moon, which draws the shoals in and out twice a day. The bigger the tide, the faster they move, so good timing is essential.

Peter, my long-suffering pal and fishing partner in crime, and I arrived at around 7.30pm on a Monday evening. Our kind host, Archie Green, had told us to arrive early before the tide turned. We found him and his pals watching, beer in hand, from the clifftop perch above the main stream. The grass on the cliff is worn from years of fish-spotting. The aim of the game is to spy the fish and then get in position to intercept them as they pass. Easier said than done. Even in the amazingly clear water, ➤

Lewis sheep can be fierce.



Bladderwrack on the boulder shore.



Sea eagle. Once seen, never forgotten.



SHUTTERSTOCK



BURIED TREASURE

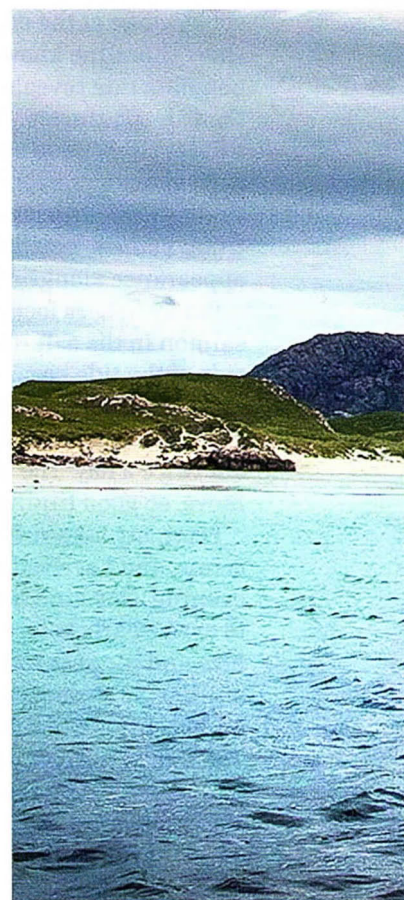
The world-famous Lewis chessmen were found in a dune at Uig in 1831 by a superstitious local, Malcolm Macleod, who thought he'd stumbled upon a fairy community and feared repercussions from the little people. So much so that he ran off and left them in the sand. Luckily, his wife made him see sense and they went back to recover one of the few surviving medieval chess sets in the world. There are 78 chess pieces, mostly made from walrus ivory. They were made in the 12th Century, probably in Norway, which ruled the Outer Hebrides at the time. They are on display at the British Museum, London and National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.



STEVE LINDRIDGE/ALAMY

What a sight!
Three, four, no,
five salmon fin the
surface as they
approach
the stream.

Heart-stopping:
Peter holds on
tight as a good
sea-trout takes
to the air.



salmon and sea-trout are difficult to see, often only betrayed by their shadows on the sand, a glint of white in their mouths or a flash of silver as one in the shoal turns. That's the salmon — the sea-trout are like ghosts. You'll only see them when they want, usually with their backs out of the water chasing down your fly.

Archie thrust beers into our hands and told us the fish would be working their way down with the outgoing tide at any minute. Donald the gillie had seen a decent shoal, one of the first this season, go past with the incoming tide in the afternoon. The fish nose their way upstream with the pushing tide and must decide whether to run the falls or slowly slip back to the sea with the outgoing tide. As the rains hadn't arrived and the river was low we were to fish the outgoing tide and await the shoal's inevitable return.

Archie recommended flies and tactics and then left for his dinner, wishing us good luck. I set up my camera and Peter set up his rod, and we immediately saw fish. At first, they were out in the bay beyond the stream. These were salmon that

had arrived but not taken the final swim away from the safety of the sea into shallow water. But there was something closer. The unmistakable leap of a sea-trout, high and straight up in the air, its tail rattling. The yin to the salmon's lazy, flopping yang. Then came another fish, closer, coming from the sea. A really decent sea-trout, up to 3lb, hefty for the west coast of Lewis. Then another, and another. They seemed to be feeding.

As Archie had instructed, Pete tied a two-fly cast: a Stoa's Tail and small Cascade. He was to fish square and work the flies as they swung round in the current — unless a shoal was in reach, when he was to cast straight at the fish and vary the retrieve until something worked. His set-up was little different from a regular Hebridean salmon-fishing outfit: a 7/8-weight single-hander with a floating line and 12ft leader of 12lb Maxima. There was no need to be delicate (fluorocarbon is not a good idea when fishing among barnacled rocks); however, make sure your reel has plenty of backing and a good drag. These fish are strong; they have an extra gear. Pete waded quietly into the water ➤

“The unmistakable leap of a sea-trout, high and straight up”

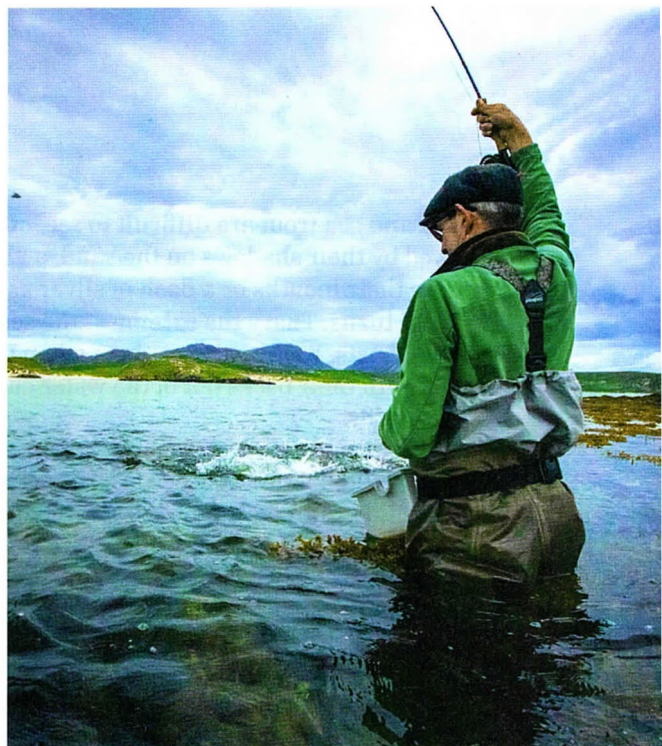


among the floating seaweed as I tried to find a point behind which I could grab my camera between my own casts if something were to happen.

The conditions were perfect with a soft breeze blowing down the stream, just enough to ruffle the surface, and high clouds masking our presence. The fish were comfortable going about the stream and coming closer and closer with each pass. There was that unmistakable feeling that something was going to happen. When you've been fishing for a long time, you just know. It's a wonderful feeling.

A few casts later, I heard a shout and turned to see Pete lifting into a solid weight. Almost simultaneously, a trophy-sized Hebridean sea-trout jumped into the air. I dropped my rod and grabbed my camera just in time to see the fish perform a series of textbook leaps across the Hebridean seascape, my pal holding on to a rod that was bent double. The fish crashed and bashed its way about the pool and into shot with the Uig hills framing him. A classic Hebridean fishing moment. I couldn't have scripted its performance better. It fought a good fight and then came to hand in noisy fashion, battering about the place and refusing to give in even when landed. We stood there for a second in the soft gloaming and shadows, with the mountains all around us, admiring a solid 4lb sea-trout and wondering how we'd got so lucky to catch a fish in a place like this. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY: COLIN MACLEOD



The fish makes a final surge.

Factfile

BOOKING The Bruton Stream is a part of the Fhorsa system and weekly group lets are available. Guests stay in the lodge and have access to the entire system of lochs and rivers. Contact Dickon Green for booking enquires. For more information, visit Uiglodge.co.uk



A beautiful sea-trout, nudging 4lb, wearing the colours of the ocean.

*“Battering about
... and refusing to
give in even
when landed”*

