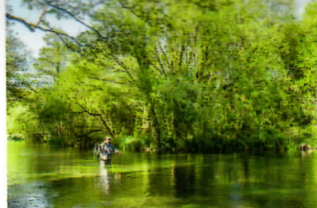


13ft *Salmon rods*
TESTED

The dream ticket.
Mayfly, bent cane
and the Itchen



WIN
A SNOWBEE
G-SX TROUT
ROD

TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

Fifty

**GAME-CHANGING
RESERVOIR TIPS**



TWEED TEMPTATION

Why salmon magic happens at Makerstoun



**PICKING
POCKETS**

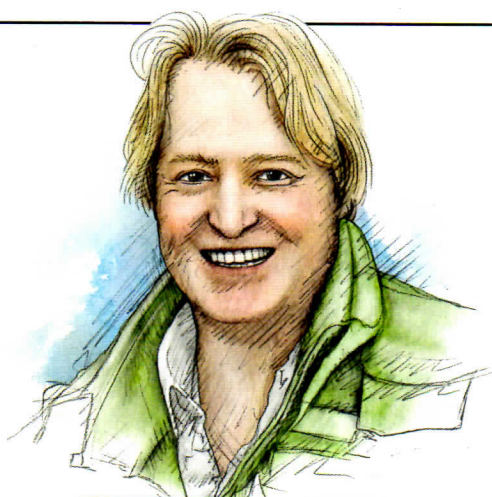
High summer trout in a
stunning Eden gorge

TROUT
HOOK
**STRENGTH
TEST**

**TINGLERS
AFTER DARK**

Tie a deadly single-hooked
sea-trout tube





CHALK TALK

Here and everywhere

*Technology has transformed
Simon Cooper's work as a
fishing guide*

THERE HAS BEEN MEDIA CHATTER of late about remote working – that ability to harness technology to work where and when you like – not being the panacea of employment freedom. It is, apparently, making life more stressful; work has no off switch; employers (the editor if he's reading this) are 24/7 gangmasters. But as an early adopter of this practice with almost three decades under my belt I'm going to disagree. I think it's marvellous. Of course, the technology has moved on since those early days.

When I started Fishing Breaks the mobile phone was in its infancy. Yes, it was small enough to carry in a large pocket, but the only thing worse than the battery life (an hour, if you were lucky) was the dismal coverage outside the M25. On a river? Forget it. Naturally, I could not afford something as fancy as a secretary to answer my calls. Frankly, I could barely afford my ropery Land Rover. I was a one-man band alternating between being a guide and riverkeeper during the day and receptionist remotely picking up messages from my answering machine in the evening. To this day I can tell you the location of just about every call box in the Test valley.

The advent of a mobile phone that worked was truly a godsend. I know there are those who still see the advance as the spawn of Satan; they scowl and mutter dark incantations when someone has the temerity to take a call on the river. But suddenly I could return a call if not exactly in real time but sometime other than nine o'clock at night. This did lead to a certain amount of subterfuge when guiding. Vibration on mute made me a little Pavlovian, leading to all manner of excuses – I need a pee/I'll nip back to the car for more flies/I'd better check on the others – as I disappeared into the

bushes to pick up a message. I'm sure my clients thought I was deeply antisocial as I turned down all invitations to lunch. Usually I told them I was going to scope out the parts of the river as yet unfished. In truth, the moment they disappeared out of view I'd hook up my phone to my laptop and download my e-mails. Anyone under 40 will not have a clue what I am talking about.

Texting was briefly helpful, but it has been the smartphone, combined with the ability to surf the web on the move, that has led remote workers to the sunlit uplands. Not only did I once carry a phone, a laptop and the numerous cables and charging devices they required, but also a giant ring-binder with paper diaries for dozens of beats. Thinking back, I'm amazed so little went wrong. But today it is all up there in the cloud. Riverkeepers might appear a little antediluvian, but those calloused fingers are more wired to the web than you might ever imagine.

I guess to a certain extent I had a certain advantage over most other remote workers: people actually expect me to be on the river when I answer the phone. Often, they're disappointed when I'm not. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't pretended to be on a river when I was in fact somewhere considerably less interesting. That said, I've taken plenty of calls while fishing in the most amazing places; I try not to boast. It is remarkable how you get a signal in places that are simply empty expanses on the map.

However, I can understand how the mobile phone might go from being a friend to an instrument of torture. In the time before the ubiquity of e-mail and the arrival of the wonderful Diane to the Fishing Breaks office, my phone rang all the time. It didn't seem to matter what time of day or day of the week. It just rang. And rang. And rang. A last-minute Friday dash to the Post Office (five-mile round trip) could take an hour as I'd pull over time and time again to take yet another call.

"I'd be lying if I said I hadn't pretended to be on the river"

In the end, connectivity is great. Not sure which beat to pick? Thousands of miles apart, we'll browse the internet together, chatting for free, courtesy of Skype, until we arrive at your choice. Clients and guides hook up with remarkable ease. Mistakes that in the past would have escalated to major hassles are smoothed away with a call or two. The logistics of a fishing trip have become much easier. Lost your maps? I'll send a little widget to your phone which, thanks to the digital ingenuity of Google maps, will take you to the gate.

But here's a thought: once through the gate all the technology will count for nothing. The great delight of fly-fishing is that it remains largely unchanged; a time traveller from the Halford era could take your rod and cast your fly without a second thought. An ensuing conversation about the hatch would straddle those 150 years as if they had never happened. That, among many other things, is what makes our sport so utterly wondrous. **IRS**

■ Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks, the chalkstream fishing specialists (fishingbreaks.co.uk). He is author of the best-selling *Life of a Chalkstream* and *The Otters' Tale*. His new book *Frankel: The Greatest Racehorse* is published in July.