

Where your next grayling could be a four-pounder

TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

When less is more

**Don Stazicker's guide
to scaling down your tackle**

THRILLING THRUMSTER

**Stunning trout on
a Caithness cliff edge**

Tie the Red JJ

**A back-end salmon tube
of distinction**

COCH-Y-BONDDU BROWNIES

The best value wild trout fishing in Wales

OCTOBER 2023 £5.95 ON SALE SEP 21-OCT 18

10 >



TRUTH BE TOLD

Heaven save us from climate hysteria, pleads Simon Cooper



CHALKSTREAMS ARE NOW mainstream news (no pun intended) for the national media. A full-page article in the *Daily Mirror* on their travails — who would have thought it possible? Certainly not me when 30-plus years ago I set up Fishing Breaks. Fly-fishing on chalkstreams? Let me tell you it was no sure-fire chat-up line.

Sure, people had some idea about fly-fishing, although not perhaps of the most flattering kind. Memories of J R Hartley and the *Yellow Pages* TV advert were still fresh, so tweed-clad old buffers with halitosis and a hint of dementia were considered (wrongly!) my target audience. And as to the term chalkstream, people frankly had no idea and cared less, eyes glazing at my youthful exuberance and garbled geomorphic explanations.

But today chalkstreams are, metaphorically, everywhere. MPs lucky enough to have such special rivers flowing through their constituencies shoehorn mentions into their Twitter feed at every opportunity. Local councils vie to promote clean-up campaigns and educational programmes. The Government has agreed to give chalkstreams special status in the Levelling-up Bill this summer, which will be the first time specific protection for chalkstreams will be written into UK law.

When I talk about chalkstreams today, people get it — their eyes light up. Sure, they may not precisely understand the geological or ecological niceties, but they understand why they are special and, most importantly, why they deserve to be saved from the excesses of our human existence. Frankly, this is amazing and with due modesty, I think it is fair to say that I, along with some greater others, have played a part in this PR success. However, success is not without its downsides.

Firstly, such is the deluge of bad news that people might be tempted to think all chalkstreams are effectively open sewers, devoid of life and beyond saving.

This is patently not the case, so we must take care to explain that the streams are not already beyond some invisible, existential tipping point. The problems and solutions must be shared without resorting to hysteria. Which brings me to the *Mirror* article, which tried to conflate chalkstream woes with climate change.

We were treated to the quote from Sir James Bevan, former chief executive of the Environment Agency (EA), who said: “We need water wastage to be as socially unacceptable as blowing smoke in the face of a baby.” Really, Sir James? Maybe during your time in charge, you should have found it “unacceptable” for the water industry to rely on infrastructure built a generation ago to serve a population of 50 million which now inadequately serves 65 million. And then we had quotes from an environmentalist stoking drought hysteria (somehow Pakistan got a mention) with the article further managing to include dog whistle phrases such as “climate emergency” and “more heatwaves”.

Heaven, save us! We are not a dry country imminently getting any drier. Rainfall data going back three centuries puts us at a steady 32 inches a year in southern England. Even the EA, a climate change cheerleader, predicts maybe a tiny percentage change with drier summers and wetter winters. Or maybe it will be the other way around; they are not exactly sure.

For here is the killer fact: we need just six inches of rainfall a year, one fifth of what always falls from the heavens, to supply all our water needs. Ultimately, if we run out of water and suck the life out of chalkstreams, it will not be because of the climate change crisis/emergency, but rather a failure to use wisely the resource Mother Nature so generously bestows on us. ■

Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks, the leading chalkstream fishing specialists. Follow his fortnightly blog on saving our rivers at fishingbreaks.co.uk