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Trouting on a
shrunk Dales
stream

TROUT & SALMON

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Thrilling dusk sport
with blue-winged olives

DRY-FLY DECISIONS

When to use one,
two or three flies
on stillwaters

Loaded Gunn

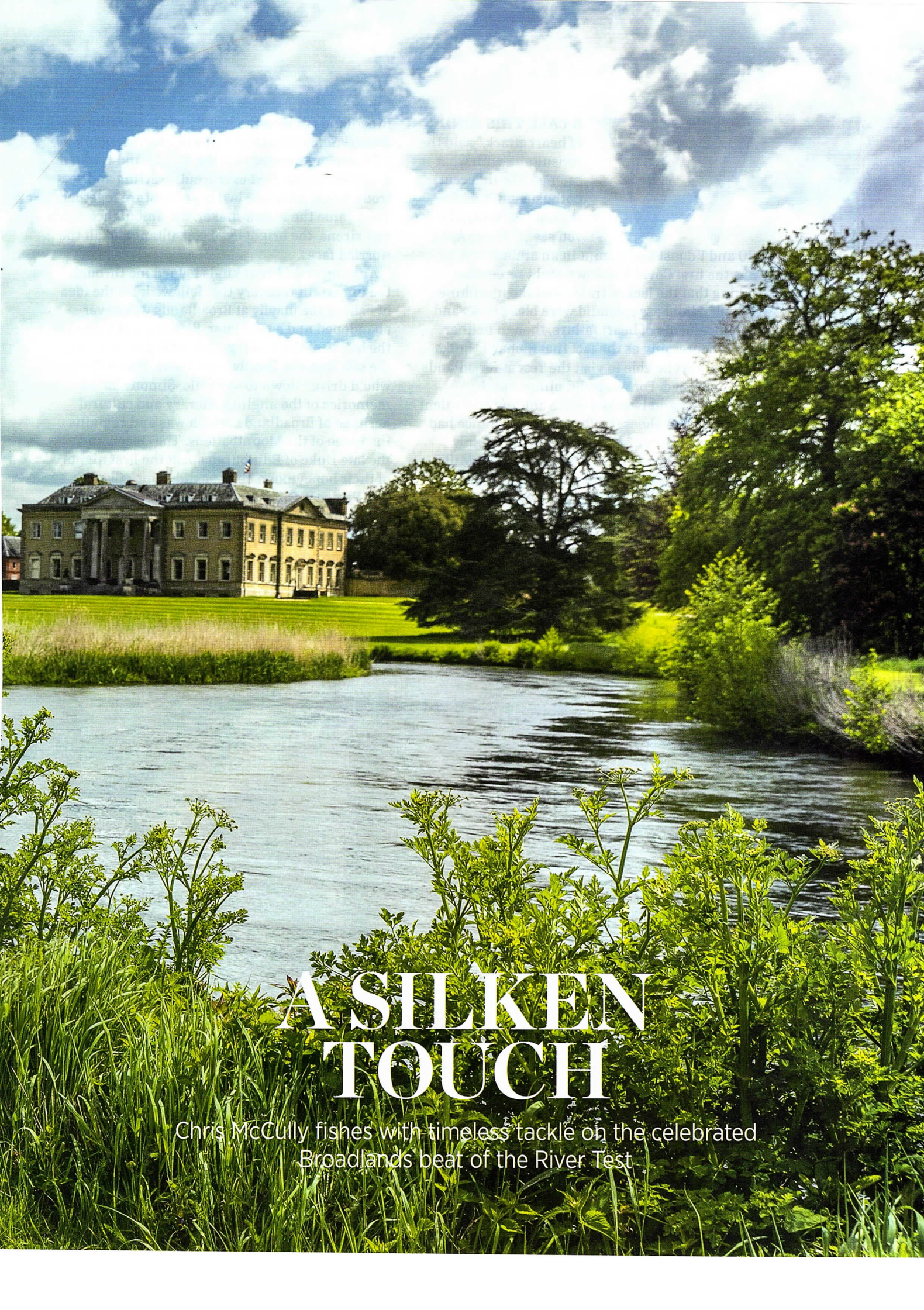
Canny ways to
improve a classic
salmon fly

Mawddach returns

A sea-trout recovery in West Wales

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A SILKEN TOUCH

Chris McCully fishes with timeless tackle on the celebrated
Broadlands beat of the River Test

Fishing towards
the Palladian:
House beat.



WE CALL THIS KIND of heart attack," said the consultant, with what seemed like indecent enthusiasm, "a widow-maker. Left ventricle, you see...." It was April

2020 and I'd just had a jaunt in an ambulance. It was the first Covid lockdown and I remember thinking that the lack of traffic and the morphine were splendid. Less splendid were bleak looks and pronouncements of heart failure, though neither were as depressing as the fact that Richard Faulks and I wouldn't be able to visit the Test at Broadlands as we'd planned. For weeks I'd pimped and polished, tied and tweaked – the angling equivalent of shining one's shoes. A 9ft cane CC de France had been cleaned; the silk line had been thoroughly proofed. With the engineering help of Garry Mills in Redditch I'd even brought my first fly-reel, an Intrepid Rimfly, out of retirement. If someone had told me, back in 1968 when I bought the reel with pocket money, that one day I'd fish the Test at

Broadlands during the mayfly while working on a *Trout & Salmon* feature, I'd have been incredulous. I'd therefore decided that the Rimfly and I, who'd experienced our first-ever trout, grayling and sea-trout, would have one last big adventure together. Then came the widow-maker, the ambulance lights and sirens, the bright-eyed consultant and all the worried faces.

Angling of different kinds helped me through the uncertain recovery that followed. Yet the idea of fishing the mayfly at Broadlands was never abandoned and a year later, Richard and I stood on the banks of the Test together with the cane rod, the silk line, the Rimfly – and with Simon Cooper, who'd driven down to say hello. Simon shared memories of the angling, literary and cultural heritage of Broadlands, which was and remains the home of the Mountbattens. The Queen and the late Duke of Edinburgh spent the first nights of their honeymoon here, as did Prince Charles and Princess Diana. In part of the estate's literary heritage the former river keeper, Bernard Aldrich, wrote of his time at Broadlands in *The Ever-Rolling*



CHRIS McCULLY
has written or edited more than 30 books, including *Normads of the Tides*, a book about Irish sea-trout, published by Medlar Press.



Stream (1984), and detailed some of the pressures falling on the estate as a result of Charles and Diana's honeymoon arrangements, which included precautions against press photographers cladding themselves as frogmen in order to gain access via the Test. Simon had known Bernard, so we spent a happy half hour among Simon's memories and in the remembered pages of what is a good and important book.

Then we walked the river. The Broadlands fishing comprises two adjoining beats, the upper or Tanyard beat (wide, relatively shallow, wadable) and the House beat (deeper, slower, unwadable but with good tree cover in places). The Test hadn't been immune from the deluges that afflicted England in May 2021, so it ran high and was, unusually, carrying a touch of colour. Richard pointed out that this slight turbidity might help rather than hinder, since it would serve to conceal us from any rising fish. As Richard uttered "Rising fish" we saw the first mayfly dun. Then another. It was 10.16am. By 10.20 the CC de France had been threaded and a dry mayfly knotted on to a tapered leader with a 5lb point. ➤



Chris's 1965
CC de France
rod and 1968
Rimfly reel.

A portly
Broadlands
two-pounder.

*"As Richard uttered 'Rising fish' we
saw the first mayfly dun"*



Lifting into
the first trout
of the day.

*“So well tied that it had clearly emanated from
the fundament of a very superior duck”*

One artificial mayfly pattern that has recently become popular is Oliver Edwards’ design, the Mohican. This is most life-like and, with deerhair among its constituents, floats well. Because I find the pattern fiddly to tie, it’s one fly I buy: Fulling Mill do a version in sizes 10 and 12. I also carry a pattern of my own, the duck’s arse mayfly, which originated on the Wallop Brook, where in 2014 I encountered trout so choosy that they would only take mayfly duns when the naturals were fluttering. Accordingly, I fumbled with CDC, with one plume tied as a wing and another wound as a parachute hackle. This design is mobile, lands softly and floats superbly (until a trout takes it, when it becomes soggy and useless). Simon, who was peering into my fly-box as we tackled up, lit immediately on this masterpiece of design and tying. “Oh, Chris,” he said, beaming at a row of duck’s arse mayflies. I braced myself for the compliment that was surely coming. He pointed at a specimen so well tied that it had clearly emanated from the fundament of a very superior duck. “That will float like a ... like an absolute mess on the water, won’t it?” I’m sure

Simon had meant that as a compliment — hadn’t he? — and thereby had also christened the pattern: the Messy Mayfly.

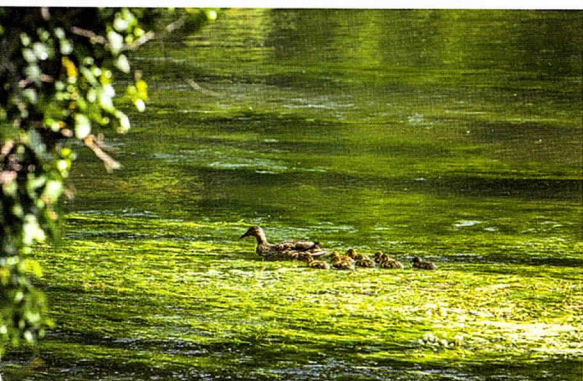
The mayflies continued to hatch as we walked to the downstream end of the estate water. The hatches weren’t steady; the naturals came in flushes — ten minutes on, ten minutes off — but these flush hatches were to increase in intensity, with peak activity in the late afternoon. At 11.01 I knelt to the first proper rise we’d seen.

Cane is heavier and slower than modern rod-building materials — the 9ft CC de France weighs 5oz and a casting stroke has to wait for it — but cane and silk have two advantages. They drive beautifully through any kind of breeze (silk is thin in diameter) and they assist accuracy. On a river like the Test, you need both that impetus and that precision. There at Broadlands the silk line straightened over the water’s green reflections; the duck’s arse mayfly pitched forward and cocked; the trout saw it, let it drift ... then swam after it and annexed it. As the trout turned down the iron held, the cane pulled over and the Rimfly’s ratchet gave the sort of well-greased growl it had almost forgotten how to give. Minutes later, we were admiring a trout that Richard put at 3lb and I put at less. We compromised on 2³/₄lb and released it to the river. So silvery was the fish that I suspected it might be a sea-trout — the Test had had a recent run of these fish on the high water of earlier May — but sea-trout or brown trout, did it really matter? It was a beautiful trout; it was Broadlands at mayfly time and the old Rimfly was dusting off its medals.

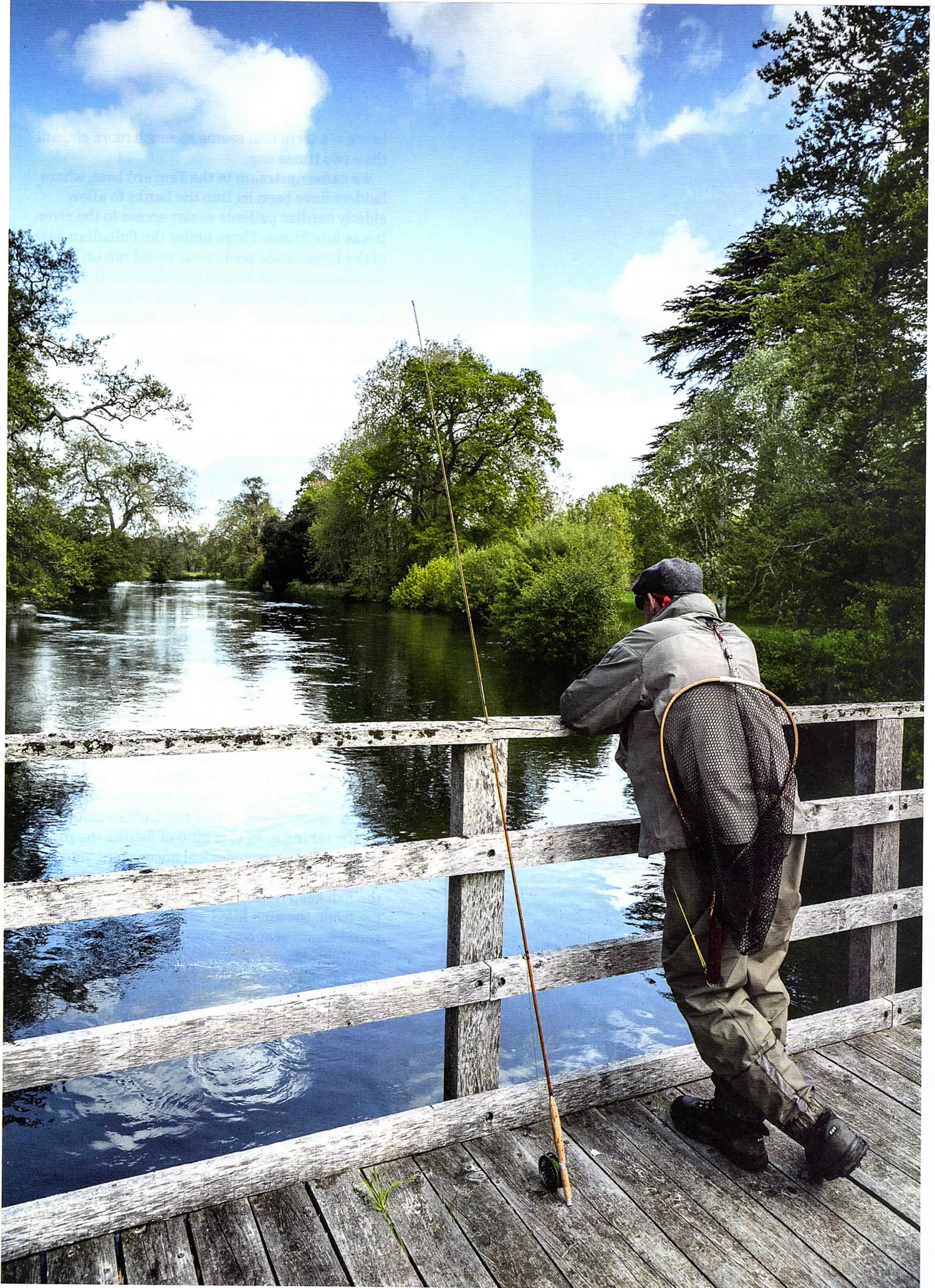
The Test here is a wide, powerful river. Naturally, you look to midstream to find rising fish. You may see some trout rising in obvious places, but the bigger fish aren’t fools and may have chosen more secluded lies. These larger, wilier trout often rise in spots difficult to cover: they’re tucked into an eddy circling under bushes; half-hidden by a culvert; stationed under a branch. At Broadlands a trout rose in just such a place, hard by a bush where a current exhausted itself in a high bank. I knelt again, there was a backhand cast, the silk line forced itself across the breeze. None of it needed any particular skill, but it was still a satisfying moment when the fish took. Unlike the first, this trout was portly, red-spotted, aldermanic. Its 2lb made a ➤



**The Messy
Mayfly.**



**Spring
abundance.**

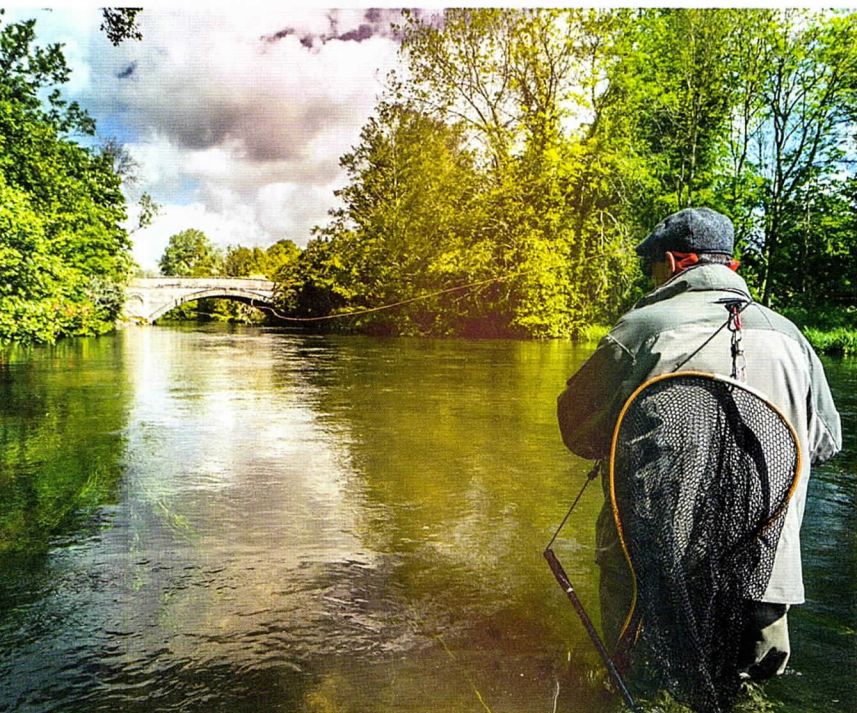




A well-stocked box of Mayflies.

*“In this kind of fishing the minutes
lengthen into psychological
encounters, into dramas”*

The upper reach of Tanyard beat.



brace — a term that seems so much more elegant than two times one.

We came upstream to the Tanyard beat, where ladders have been let into the banks to allow elderly cardiac patients easier access to the river. It was lunchtime. There under the Palladian gaze of the Broadlands portico my mind ran on butlers and hampers, but Richard recalled me from the daydream by requiring — no, by demanding — that I catch a trout in a position that would allow him to capture both bent rod and portico in the same image. It was quite impossible. We were in a lull in the mayfly hatches and nothing was apparently rising. His lenses, I said firmly, would have to wait. Except they wouldn't. From the corner of my left eye I saw a trout rising tight against the bank. It was such a brief movement that it could have been an illusion brought on by too many imaginary pork pies, but a duck's arse mayfly cast speculatively over the spot brought a quick swirl, a tightened line and a trout trying to use all Tanyard's weedbeds to its advantage. At last, however, the work was done and a fish of 1½lb was released with a lash of its tail.

After lunch, Richard put down his cameras and retrieved a rod. These days I gain as much pleasure from seeing friends and guests catch fish as I do from catching them myself and it was instructive observing Richard's careful, intuitive approach to those Broadlands trout. If I've made the fishing seem straightforward then in truth it wasn't: the trout didn't rise to every natural mayfly; some fish were taking something we couldn't identify; and even when fish were plainly taking the mayflies they could and did refuse an artificial, however well-presented, a dozen or more times before finally taking it. In this kind of fishing the minutes lengthen into psychological encounters, into dramas. Through it all, the fly keeps coming and the fish keep rising. The birds are as busy as the trout, the air's filled with life and all the restlessness of spring. Nevertheless, despite the loveliness it isn't easy.

At the upstream end of Tanyard in midriver there's a visible stick — an eroded branch attached to a fallen tree, around which are shallows and weedbeds. The stick was our mark: six yards below it a fish was rising, very quietly. The Test was flowing with force, but Richard was determined to stalk that trout. He went up to his oxters in the river as he waded across, but at last he arrived within casting distance. Then he waited.

Mayflies littered the surface; the trout continued to rise, with its dorsal awash. I wish I could write of some violent swirl, some moment of climax, but when the trout took Richard's fly, it did so softly. The rod arched and pulled over. There was no fuss.



Chris holds Richard's trout of a lifetime.

You know a trout is big when it plays deep. You know a trout is big when you can't get its head up or encourage it towards the net. You know a trout is big when a massive tail appears for the first time. Somewhere during the tussle Richard called to me, but time had become inaudible. It passed in slow motion and spanned a silence in which there was only the bent rod, the skill, the pressure. Eventually, the trout was persuaded over the rim of the net. Real life resumed, the Test was noisy again, the swifts shrieked in the columns of the sky.

The net and the fish together weighed 9lb. The net alone weighed 2lb. Do that sum and the result means one of the biggest brown trout we'd ever seen, an aged and magnificent warrior that had taken the Mohican. And if, as you should, you visit Broadlands, you may well find that trout rising in the same spot, because we released it safely again to the river and to its lie by the fallen tree.

We tried to fish on, but it was the end of the afternoon and everything was already perfection. Later, the Rimfly and I reflected on our last big adventure together. Were all the preparations

worthwhile? the reel asked. Was Broadlands as grand as you imagined? Would you fish there again? You can bet not only my left ventricle but the rest of what's left of my heart that they were, and it was, and I would. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD FAULKES

Factfile

BOOKING The fishing at Broadlands House on the Tanyard and House beats is available exclusively through Fishing Breaks: fishingbreaks.co.uk. Leave to fish is granted between May 4 and July 29 and there's a minimum booking of three rods from May 13 to June 7. It's advisable to enquire now about booking next year. Chest waders and a stick are indispensable on the upper beat; a long-handled net will be useful on the lower.

