

# Pursuits

The things we long to do

Bright silver salmon and wild trout swim in the river Lyd. But it's a chilly day and the fish are lying low ➤➤

*Fishing with Bob Sherwood*

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➤➤➤ The end of the line jags forward and I feel the initial surge of the fish as the fly rod arcs over.

I spin the reel, and a river Lyd brown trout comes protesting to my hand before I set it free again, unharmed. The first wild, native fish of the season is my own personal harbinger of spring, and despite the biting easterly wind I can now declare winter over.

A little way upstream, Anne Voss Bark catches my eye and grins. She knows the feeling. And she knows these intimate West Country rivers better than anyone.

The grande dame of English fly fishing is showing me the Devon streams that have been an integral part of her life since she took over The Arundell Arms, now possibly the country's most famous fishing hotel, back in 1961.

Converted from an 18th-century coaching inn, the hotel in Lifton has 20 miles of fishing for salmon, trout and sea trout on rivers including the Tamar, Thrushel, Wolf, Carey and Ottery. But it is the Lyd that is quite literally Anne's home water – her wooden-frame house sits on the banks directly above the pool where we are fishing.

Spring fishing can be unpredictable, but even in these cold conditions a smattering of dark "olives", the first of the upwinged flies to hatch on these rivers, is drifting down the currents of the Lyd, a Tamar tributary that rises on Dartmoor. No trout are showing an interest in them, though.

As we peer into my fly box, Anne unhesitatingly picks out a parachute Adams dry fly to match the bugs floating on the surface. "From the moment I started fishing with a dry fly and got my first fish, I was hooked," she says. "I absolutely love it."

With her 80th birthday approaching, it is clear that she has lost none of her enthusiasm for the sport, a bond she enjoyed with her late second husband, Conrad Voss Bark, the renowned fishing journalist and author. She even used to bring her children down to



Anne Voss Bark and Bob Sherwood fly fishing on the Lyd (below); Gary Champion (right)



**THE DETAILS**

The Arundell Arms Hotel, Lifton, Devon PL16 0AA, 01566 784666, [www.arundellarms.com](http://www.arundellarms.com)

sleep on these banks while she fished for sea trout at night.

Anne snakes out a roll cast, the perfect way of dealing with the restricted space of the small streams. May offers the best of the dry-fly sport on these spate rivers, but I have dragged Anne out on a bitter late-April day and the fish do not want to rise.

She refuses to weaken but I, more prosaically, select a weighted nymph that bears a close enough

resemblance to the underwater, immature form of the hatching insects. It sinks down to the riverbed where the fish are lurking hungrily. In the quicker water, the trout are keen to grab the fly.

I land another feisty eight-inch fish, a typical Lyd brownie in a river where a 12-inch specimen is a cause for celebration. They may not match up to Horace – the 3lb 4oz trout proudly displayed back in the reception of the Arundell Arms, caught on the Lyd by Commander Clutton on July 25 1942 – but they are just the size that trout in these rain-fed waters are supposed to be.

Anne admires the trout with me. "They are so vulnerable," she says, "but they survive so incredibly despite everything."

As if to prove her point, the next fish is a bright silver salmon parr, a baby fish that was spawned last year and will run to sea as a smolt next year. Salmon runs have been disappointing on these rivers in recent years, but here is evidence at least of successful spawning.

Anne Voss Bark's only concession to age is to accept a hand up the steep banks



Anne has seen the insect life decline markedly since she first set up home here. "People love fishing these little rivers because they are so small and secretive," she adds. "And I feel a very strong sense of protection for them."

That may be an understatement. As well as running the hotel, Anne has been a founder member of the Westcountry Rivers Trust, chairman of the Tamar riparian owners association and vice-chairman of

the national Salmon and Trout Association. "We have to take responsibility for the rivers," she says. "Everybody has to do their bit."

We shelter from a rain shower, and Anne's only concession to age is to accept a hand up the steep banks that are cloaked in wild garlic. "It's a bit of a bore," she smiles. "That's why I like to fish the chalk streams now, as the banks are easier to negotiate."

Her thoughts soon turn to fishing in warmer days and she lights up at the prospect of a day on the Test later in the season – a birthday treat that has been organised by her family. She also talks of trout fishing with friends in Montana and her first bonefish trip to Cuba last year.

I suggest that a proper holiday might be to get away from angling, but she laughs. "I love to go away fishing because then I forget about work," she says.

The cold is seeping in now and Anne stows her waders, net and staff in her Jaguar and seeks warmth back at the hotel, leaving me to explore further up the Lyd.

Gary Champion, a master fly-casting instructor who often teaches on these rivers, is also fishing the beat. I watch him dropping his fly with great precision into the creases, seams and glides of the Lyd, searching out the trout. This is not the most technically demanding trout fishing, but the bigger, wilier wild fish will still refuse a fly that is not drifting naturally with the current. It is not as easy as he makes it look.

I am holding the line high above the fast water of a riffle when the best fish of the day takes aggressively and holds fast in the current. I briefly allow myself to entertain a fantasy of Horace's great grandson, but this is the characteristic deep fight of a grayling. And, in an instant, the hook slips and the fish is gone.

The trout keep coming to the deep nymph though, showing me what this shimmering stream is capable of producing. As the last quicksilver trout slips from my hand back into the water, I offer silent thanks that these rivers are being watched over by such a benevolent guardian as Anne Voss Bark. ■

Bob Sherwood is the FT's London and south-east correspondent, and a qualified fly-casting instructor.

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## Wellbeing Splitting headaches

By Pamela Druckerman



Marital spats used to be expensive. There were the therapists and solicitors who billed by the hour, and the friends who had to be bribed with dinner.

Now the internet lets you gripe about your relationship endlessly, and for free. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of ailing souls give and receive succour on websites such as [Wikivorce](http://www.wikivorce.com) and [SurvivingInfidelity.com](http://www.survivinginfidelity.com). Much of the live chatting gets going after 10pm, when the kids are tucked in bed and the wife (or "X2B") is downstairs watching TV.

**THE DETAILS**

Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA, 020 8938 2353, [www.tccr.org.uk](http://www.tccr.org.uk)

"Going through a divorce is a nightmare," says Paul Maitland, founder of [Ondivorce.co.uk](http://www.ondivorce.co.uk), one of the earliest British sites of its kind. "To be able to talk to other people helps you escape from that torment." That's putting it politely: much online discussion – Who gets the dog? How do you divide a pension? – quickly digresses into what users

call "vents": long, detailed rages about their partners. But whereas women typically initiate couples therapy, Maitland estimates that half the people on [Ondivorce.co.uk](http://www.ondivorce.co.uk) are men. "I suspect it's a less scary forum [for men] because it's not as exposing as going to a therapist," says Christel Buss-Twachtmann, head of training at London's Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, a counselling centre.

Many marital websites can, however, make divorce seem inevitable. Even on [Divorcebusting.com](http://www.divorcebusting.com) (motto: "It's never too late to save your marriage"), members use pseudonyms such as "near the end" and complain of a marital syndrome known as ILYBINILWY ("I love you but I'm not in love with you").

Buss-Twachtmann says that, when sorting out emotions, it helps to involve your partner. "Often people end up coming to us anyway," she says. "When one person goes on the internet, they often don't get themselves into the conversation they need to have." In other words, you probably get what you pay for.

Pamela Druckerman is the author of "Lust in Translation: Infidelity from Tokyo to Tennessee" (Penguin).