



Bob Sherwood in the Dyfi and (top right) with Illyd Griffiths

Fishing Under cover of the night

Bob Sherwood wades into the Welsh dusk in search of "sewin"

THE JOLT ON THE LINE IS LIKE AN ELECTRIC SHOCK

IN THE INCREASING DARKNESS. As dusk fades on the River Dyfi, just south of Snowdonia, fish are swarming up through a fast riffle, breaking the surface as they swim high in the water. One pulls the rod tip but avoids the hook. Another thrashes on the surface, in typical sewin style, and rolls off the line.

Sewin, or sea trout as they are known to anglers in the rest of the UK, might well be considered the national fish of Wales. The principality is rich in rivers frequented by these elusive creatures, which migrate at dusk and are best caught under cover of darkness. With heavy, rolling fish heard but not seen in the river pools, bats circling above the water and the cry of a vixen somewhere in the undergrowth, this is heart-thumping, haunting fishing.

There are not many more accomplished sea-trout addicts than Illyd Griffiths, "the sewincaster", who has invited me to join him on the Dyfi. This river, called Dovey in English, ranks alongside Wales' famed Towy as a source of big sewin. Griffiths knows the Dyfi intimately, and is possibly the only man in the country to have caught more than 50 sea trout weighing over 10lb each, all on the fly. But still he wants more.

"It gets in the blood," he says. "I live right on the estuary and

With daylight all but gone the fish continue to torment me, ripping and tugging

it makes it difficult, you know. Difficult not to go fishing."

After years of nights spent on the river, Griffiths thrives on little sleep. After a late night and early breakfast, I'm already struggling to keep up as we begin our second day of fishing. Living so close to the river, Griffiths spends his summer in tune with the complex equation of water height, clarity and fish movements. It seems to be the unpredictability of sewin that captivates him most. "If you cover a fresh salmon, then you can often get him to take the fly," he explains. "But sea trout are an enigma."

In clear water, anglers fish at night for the wary sea trout in deeper, slower river pools where they rest. But when the river is in spate and muddy after heavy rain, the running sewin do not hold in the heavily coloured pools and can be caught by day in shallower, quicker water.

The Dyfi is still dropping and clearing after a few days of high water, so we are fishing through the day and into the night. Griffiths, a retired dentist and now one of the most highly regarded casting instructors in the UK, is well known for the salmon fly he invented, "the boyo", as well as the "sewincaster" fly lines he developed. He ties me one of his favourite sea-trout patterns: tiny and black with just a hint of flash.

Griffiths fishes according to logic. He trusts in smaller flies during daylight hours, turning to larger flies as dusk settles. And he instructs me not to fish too deep during the day. "If the water is coloured, where do the fish have the best chance of seeing the fly?" he asks. "Near the bottom or towards the surface where the light penetrates?" It makes sense. He also tells me to fish the fly faster than I would for salmon.

I'm not the only one seeking his advice. As we drive along the river to a new pool, a car stops abruptly on the other side of the road. The driver quizzes Griffiths in Welsh about the fishing. As we pause on a bridge to look at the water, another local scurries across and hands Griffiths a mobile phone, urging him to give a report of conditions to his friend who is already on the line. He obliges without hesitation, as if this is an everyday occurrence.

The Dyfi is unusual in that its full length is controlled by an angling association, providing accessible fishing for locals and members from further afield. Though the waiting list for membership is long, visitors can buy permits allowing them to fish four days and nights of the week.

With its stunning setting among the Welsh hills, and the prospect of a really big sea trout as well as a salmon run, this is one of the most captivating rivers I have come across. It is also one of the most surprising.

As I wade down to a fresh pool a couple of miles from the estuary, a large shape emerges next to me, creating a vortex of water and sending splashes cascading over my waders. My first thought is of a huge salmon. My second thought is to get out of the river fast.

The mystery creature is still swimming under the surface. A minute later, the head of a seal emerges by the far bank. He is a far



THE DETAILS

Details of fishing permits on the Lower Dyfi, from Richard Evans, secretary of the New Dovey Fishery Association, on 01654 702721, only between 10am and noon on Monday and Friday. Weekly tickets exclude Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

more skilful fisher than I, and has certainly ruined this stretch for angling. It is such an unusual sight that I find it hard to be angry.

We move on upstream, where Griffiths quickly hooks and loses a sewin of about 5lb, followed shortly after by a fish that takes and stays deep. That could only be a decent salmon, one of the first to enter the river this year. It, too, is on only briefly and Griffiths' curses are carried down to me on the breeze. As I look up, he swears again, and then gives me his big grin.

As darkness comes on, Griffiths lands a near-3lb sewin, sparkling and fresh from the sea, which he returns carefully. "I kill very few fish nowadays," he says. It came from a spot just below, where he caught a gigantic 18lb 10oz sea trout earlier this season, a fish of a lifetime for most people, but not his biggest.

With daylight all but gone, the fish continue to torment me: nipping and tugging, rolling and splashing. I don't have the magic tonight.

Just a few days after I return home, I open an e-mail attachment to find a photograph of a fat 13lb sea trout, illuminated by flash amid the blackness of the early hours. The sewincaster has been prowling again on the midnight river bank. ■

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