

RIVER SPEY DIRECTORY (Originally from *The Atlantic Salmon Atlas*)

THE GLORIOUS SPEY is Scotland's salmon river supreme (and home to the best malt whisky), as many fishers might agree. From Grantown to where it meets the sea, the Spey is a fly-fisher's paradise with pool after pool of what is just sublime fishing. Choose any pool on any beat on that section of the river and you will find a current where the drift feels just right, leading to high expectations on every cast. Not many other rivers that I know of have the same ability to produce such hope and confidence when fishing. As with all our salmon rivers, things aren't as good as they were but to give an idea what things used to be like here's a quote from 1959 by one of the great Spey anglers, the late Richard Waddington: "How many realise the prodigious bags made on the best beats of the Spey? Last year Delfur alone had over 2,000 fish. One single pool, the Rock, on the Brae water, produces over 500 fish in a good season." Mouth watering stuff indeed.

The Spey ranks seventh longest of all UK rivers and is the third longest in Scotland. The Spey system has 36,000 km of river and burns within the watershed, and the main river flows for 157 km from Loch Spey to the sea at Tugnet. The main fishing is from Grantown to the river mouth, a distance of 75 km, though there is some fishing to be found upstream of Grantown. There are nine major tributaries, of which the most important for angling is the Avon (pronounced A'an). Being on the right beat at the right time of the season was always held to be an important part of Spey fishing. The old adage was: February and March, be from Brae to Delfur; April to June be in the area from Delfur/Rothes to Tulchan; July and August fish were well spread out; and September was best from Orton down to the sea. This is still fairly true, although the modern fast-running springers are now often found as far up as Grantown in March

and April. The middle beats have seen some strange seasons of late, sometimes appearing fishless while those above and below have done well. The one area of the Spey that seems to fish constantly well is the area from Delfur to Arndilly, often referred to as "the Holy Land"!

The Spey is a big river, but so big as to give one the feeling of casting over vast areas of empty water. It is a comfortable size with an average width of 40 to 60 metres. Most beats have the luxury of owning both banks so anglers can fish the larger pools from either side in order to cover the water thoroughly. Most beats have boats, which are put to good use on the larger pools. Fishing from a Spey boat you are either anchored and let down on a rope, or the ghillie wades and holds the boat against the current while the angler casts. Please make sure he gets a good tip after one of those sessions, fish or no fish!

Because of its rate of descent the Spey is regarded as the fastest flowing salmon river in the country. This fact undoubtedly has an effect on its character as far as the angler is concerned. The bed is rocky, comprising mostly pebble to boulder-size rocks. The river between Kingussie and Grantown flows quite gently as it meanders its way across the wide, flat upper valley. Once past the new road bridge at Grantown the river takes on its more familiar nature and now runs fast and broken through stretches of rapid into deeper stretches where the Spey salmon lie. Through its lower half the river runs between the high heather clad hills which shepherd the flow towards the Moray Firth. From Tulchan to Aberlour the hills squeeze the river through an ever narrowing valley. Downstream of Craigellachie the valley begins to widen again through Arndilly and Rothes until it breaks out again at Orton and flows over a wide alluvial plain all the way to the sea at Tugnet.



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As mentioned already the Spey is regarded by many as the fly-river supreme. To take in the view looking downstream from the Marypark bridge at that most fishy looking stream; or pulling over on the Craigellachie-Rothes road the opposite the Arndilly hut and gazing at the impeccably kept lawn that sweeps gently down to the most inviting sweep of water which fors the great crescent which is the Back o the Bog, is enough to make even the mildest salmon afficianado's mouth water. Such tantalizing scenes are repeated throughout the river below Grantown. Once upon a time many fishers would spin during the early part of the season, but thanks to the guidelines set down by the Spey River Board, and the willingness of anglers, most of the private beats fish only fly throughout the season and allow spinning in instances of high water.

The Spey not only gave us the most elegant and effective of fly-casts in the Spey cast, but many of today's most popular flies originated there. In the early days the river was famous for the sombre hued flies made from hackles from the local breed of fowl; Black Heron, Lady Caroline, Carron Fly and Gold Reeach being the best examples. They can still prove effective if used today, but the modern era of hair wing flies brought the Tosh, Munro Killer, Arndilly Fancy and Stoa's Tail to replace the old Spey flies. A fly of recent seasons, the Brae Shrimp, is also starting to make a name for itself.

Being generally a shallow river for most of its fishable part most of one's fly fishing can be done with a sink-tip or intermediate line in the early season. The lower beats offer more opportunity for a fill sinker from February to April, and this line should always be included in the kit bag as a "just in case". When the season reaches May then it is usually time to think about the floating line and smaller flies (always depending on the

prevailing conditions). May and June are regarded as the cream of Spey fishing because of the class of fish that run the river at this time - mostly 2SW salmon between 12 and 20 lb. Late June was the time for the grilse run to begin, but recent seasons has seen the grilse coming later and later. In 2008 they came as late as August, and in sparse numbers, which is a very worrying trend. Records show that the run of summer salmon is as great as that of the grilse and is probably another factor that contributes to the Spey's popularity. The season runs until 30 September, but from mid-August most beats have seen their last fresh fish. If fishing in September and looking for fresh fish it is best to be as far down the river as possible, preferably from Orton downstream. The Brae Water gets fresh salmon in numbers at the back end, but nothing like that of the fishing described by A. E. Knox in *Autumn's on the Spey*. In his day, late 1890s, the river from Orton to the sea belonged to Gordon Castle and fished by the guest's of the Duke of Gordon. From 1 September to 15 October those lucky few fished for fresh-run hogs which Knox mentions as being mostly in the 20 to 30 lb range. Most of the 40 lb Spey salmon were caught in those days, which must have been halcyon days indeed.

The Spey Beats

There is a little fishing downstream from Aviemore and very little upstream of the ski resort. At Aviemore the **Abernethy A.A.** has 6 km of single-bank fishing. Rothiemurcus Estate (Tel: 01479 810858 or info@rothie.net) also has a long stretch, almost 13 km of fishing on the right bank in the **Rothiemurcus and Pityoulish** beats. These waters do produce the occasional salmon, but the

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more likely fish one would encounter are sea-trout and brownies. Next beat down is **Kinchurdy** (Strathspey Estate Office. Tel: 01479 872529 or mail@strathspey-estate.co.uk), an 6 km single-bank beat for six rods. This is let mostly with sea-trout in mind in May, June and July, but salmon are present from around April onwards. The catch is around 75 salmon and 200 sea-trout each season. The beat fishes a double-bank rotation in the section where the opposite bank is **Kincardine** (Tel: 01796 483236). After Kinchurdy comes **Abernethy A.A.** with a 10 km stretch of double-bank fishing that contains 15 pools and produces around 100 plus salmon and 250 sea-trout in a season. The best period for salmon is mid-April to June and again in September. Day tickets are available at a reasonable rate for visitors staying in the Boat of Garten, Nethybridge, Dulnain Bridge and Carrbridge. There is wheelchair access to selected pools, and free permits are available to wheelchair users. Tickets available from: Boat of Garten Post Office, Aviemore Newsagent, Rothiemurcus Fishery Shop, Cairngorm Mt. Sports in Aviemore.

The **Strathspey Angling Improvement Association** (SAIA) comes next and this begins at Broomhill Bridge, about 6 km upstream of Grantown. The SAIA has around 8 km of fishing on the Spey and 19 km of fishing on the Dulnain, all double-bank access on both rivers. This water contains a fantastic selection of water for all methods and conditions. In all there are 32 named pools on the Spey section and 30 named pools on the Dulnain. The Spey fishing is divided into two sections, Broomhill Bridge to New Bridge in Grantown (pools 1 to 21) for day ticket holders, and Upper Castle Grant from Slop Aindrea to Slop Thomas (pools 22 to 32). Starting at the top of the beat the first pools are mostly spinning water, being gentle flowing and quite deep. From Saddle Pool (no. 6) the water becomes more lively and provides good

fishing for spinning and fly, and this continues all the way down to Polnagour (no. 21) paying extra attention to Taric Mor. Some of these pools offer challenging wading. For those fishing on a weekly or season permit access is granted to the Upper Castle Grant water, 11 gorgeous pools beginning immediately downstream of Grantown's New Bridge. This is where the Spey begins for real as the character of the pools becomes increasingly rockier bed and faster flow. There's something to be said for each of the pools here, but the SAIA is not wrong when it describes The Lurg as "a touch of real class". Tickets available from Mortimer's tackle shop in Grantown. Tel: 01479 872684

The first of the private beats we come to are on **Castle Grant** comprising Beats 1, 2 and 3 spread along 8 km of double-bank fishing. The fishing is for up to six rods, except Beat 3 which fishes 4 or 5 rods. Each beat has a ghillie, boats and a fishing hut. It's productive fishing with a good variety of water ranging from the streamy to deeper holding pools offering a chance of fish in most conditions. The combined average catch will be around 400. Fish begin to arrive in numbers in April, with May and June providing what's probably the best of the fishing. Most of the fishing comes with staffed accommodation in lodges on the estate. Strathspey Estate Office. Tel: 01479 872529 or mail@strathspey-estate.co.uk

As we progress downstream the beat names become more renowned, and next comes **Tulchan**. This estate offers fishing on four six-rod beats, all double-bank, over 13 km of river. This would seem excessive over rodding to the famous George McCorquodale who, in Edwardian days, had all of Tulchan to himself and his lucky guests (according to Dugal Macintyre in his *Memories of a Highland Gamekeeper*.) The beats contain pool after pool of captivating water that is some of the best spring fishing (April, May and June) to be found any-



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where. Catches have been up and down in recent seasons but the hatchery that is in operation on the estate will hopefully stabilize the situation in this part of the river. Anglers wishing to fish at Tulchan are required to take estate accommodation and can choose between staying in the luxurious Tulchan Lodge or taking a self-catering cottage. Tulchan Estate Office. Tel: 01807 510200 or estateoffice@tulchan.com

Ballindalloch comes next and there are two beats on the estate, **Ballindalloch and Pitchroy**, plus over 9 km of the lower River Avon. The Ballindalloch beat is 3.2 km of double-bank fishing for six rods, which includes the famous Junction Pool where the Spey takes in the Avon. There are a dozen named pools on the beat including Battery, Blacksboat Bridge, and Sawmill. A beautiful beat indeed that provides some classic middle-Spey fishing. The estate's lower beat, Pitchroy, accommodates four rods on 2 km of water. There's a good variety of water here and Black's Boat, on the downstream side of Marypark bridge is as mouth watering as you'll find anywhere. All fishing comes with the services of a ghillie and accommodation is provided in comfortable houses on the estate. Ballindalloch Castle. Tel: 01807 500206 or factor@ballindallochcastle.co.uk

At Marypark the Spey valley enters its narrowest point when the river starts to flow through the **Knockando** water. There are three beats, all double-bank fishing, in this hidden part of the Spey, far from roads and nestling quietly between the steep sided hills and quiet pine woods. What a pity it is that the tranquility is too often shattered by the paddling community, who have access to the river via the middle Phones beat. The top beat is Lower Pitchroy, a four rod beat with seven named pools and some of those pools are very large; the beguiling Polarder can take a morning to fish, so there is plenty of fishing for all. Phones, the

middle beat, fishes three rods on about 2 km of water that contains 9 pools. The Pouches is a glorious piece of water that will produce fish in various heights and was especially productive for grilse. Craigneish at the bottom of the beat is another favourite. The Home Beat, the most productive of the three, contains eight named pools and fishes four rods. The hut, situated at the top of the beat, overlooks the Long Pool and around the bend awaits such delights as Poleck and Craigsteel. Knockando Estate Office. Tel: 07919 183260.

Still passing through a narrow part of the valley we come to **Laggan and Carron**; Laggan lies on the left bank, and Carron commands the right bank. Together they share 4 km of river, which is divided into two double-bank beats that

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rotate each day so parties fish three days on the upper water and three on the lower over the week. Each beat fishes five rods and comes with the services of a ghillie. This is another beat that has a tantalizing bridge pool, which is also the site of the hut on the Carron bank. In all there are some 18 named pools that provide a good variety of fishing in most heights of water. For Carron contact Malcolm Newbould at malcolm@speygillie.co.uk

As we near the town of Aberlour, famous for its shortbread, the beats come thick and fast. This is the only stretch of the river where most of the fishing is single-bank. Downstream of Carron and Laggan, and on the left bank, is Wester Elchies with first Delagyle, then Kinermony on the opposite bank. Six rods fish the **Wester Elchies** (Malcolm Newbould (malcolm@speygillie.co.uk) side of the river, which stretches for nearly 4 km. This water holds 14 named pools and is split into two three-rod sub beats. Each beat has its own fishing hut but anglers share the services of a ghillie. The beat is one of the most productive of middle Spey fishings and has a five-year average of 255. Fish are caught throughout the season, but it is May to August that produces most of the fish. Most of the fishing is syndicated but there are often openings during the early and late parts of the season.

Delagyle (Savills, Brechin Office. Tel: 01356 622187) has the top 2.5 km of the opposite bank to Wester Elchies and takes four rods. The fishing starts at Dalbreck and continues down to Gean Tree, with Delene and Pol ma Cree being two of the best. **Kinermony** takes the remainder of the right bank fishing down to the Aberlour Burn, which marks the lower boundary for both sides of the river. In the 2.4 km of fishing are six named pools, ending in the Boat Pool. The beat is fly only, fishes three rods and are looked after by the ghillie/raconteur/blogger Jock Royan. Contact him for

news about availability at speyghillie@hotmail.co.uk

The **Aberlour A.A.** has 2.4 km of the right bank starting just above the footbridge in the Boat Pool. There are six pools on the water and six tickets are sold on a daily or weekly basis. Spinning, at certain heights, and fly fishing is permitted here. Further information from Munro Tackle, High St. Aberlour. 01340 871428.

On the opposite bank is **Lower Wester Elchies**, a slightly longer beat with six pools and the bottom two (Millford and Broom Island) face Craiggellachie on the right bank. Staying on the left bank the last two single-bank beats running down to Craiggellachie bridge are Upper Easter Elchies (**Macallan water**) and **Easter Elchies**. Four rods are available for Easter Elchies (3) and Inverfiddich (1). For details contact Peter Graham Associates. Tel: 01343 862969.

On the opposite bank (right) lies the **Craiggellachie** fishing comprising 14 pools over 4 km of river. The fishing takes eight rods and is divided into two rotating beats. Each beat comes with its own hut and ghillie (douglasjross@hotmail.co.uk), although only one ghillie is on duty in the early spring. There's a wide selection of pools of varying character, and all good for the fly. Recent seasons have produced an average of 231 salmon and grilse, with June and August being the most productive months. The extent of the fishing is to just above the mouth of the River Fiddich. This is the Inverfiddich beat, a very short beat of literally a few metres which goes with the Easter Elchies beat on the left bank opposite.

Upper Arndilly continues the fishing on the right bank, where there is 1.6 km of fishing for three rods. There are some gorgeous pools here ranging from Fiddich Mouth, through Heathery Isle, Upper and Lower Dips to Red Craig and finally Ladies Haugh. There is something for all



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conditions here with Red Craig and Heathery Isle being the most productive. This is excellent fly water and this method is adhered to except in high water. The beat is divided into three sub beats which the rods rotate through during the day, thus giving everyone a chance to fish all the water. The average catch for the beat is around 200, and the beat shows some excellent spring fishing in May and June. On the opposite bank (left) is Easter Elchies. Both beats end at Ladies Haugh and the river reverts to being double-bank fishing at Arndilly.

Now we come to the prime area of the Spey, for the next three beats provide what is probably the best, most sought after and productive fishing on the river. It starts at **Arndilly**, a 3 km double-bank beat for seven rods that contains 14 named pools. Three ghillies are in attendance, and the hut sits on the inside of a majestic sweeping bend that contains such famous pools as Arns, Back o' The Bog Jock's Tail and Gilmour. The beat has some excellent holding water and is no doubt why the fishing is so good. This is a "dead man's shoes" beat and therefore rods are extremely hard to come by. Many's the time I've been fishing the lower river in spring, usually to no avail, only to hear at lunch or the end of the day that "Arndilly had X-number of fish today". The fishing is factored by Smiths Gore's Haddington office.

Next to come in the Spey's glory miles is **Roths and Aikenway**. The beat begins with 800 metres of single-bank (left) fishing where they share the Town Road and Long Pool with Arndilly. The next 2.4 km is double-bank fishing all the way down to Gean Tree, the final pool on the beat. There are 11 named pools, many of the mentioned by the doyen of salmon angling writers, the late John Ashley-Cooper, who fished the beat for over 30 years (see *A Salmon Fisher's Odyssey* published in 1982 and again in 1985). The five rods are looked after by

two ghillies and parties are provided with accommodation at the lodge that goes with the fishing. Roths and Aikenway is one of the top beats on the river and is said to produce on average 460 fish per season. Catch and release is very much encouraged here. Leases are handled by Peter Graham Associates. Tel: 01343 862969.

Delfur follows and continues for over 4 km of fly water of the highest calibre. The fish obviously agree because Delfur is probably the most productive beat on the river, said to take 10% of the total catch. The days of producing 2,000 in a season, as mentioned above, are no more but it is still the place to be no matter what time of the season. I could easily believe that even the Spey's notorious "bad takers" of September rise freely at Delfur! Each week, from 11 February to 30 September, five fortunate rods get to cast their flies over the 11 pools in the hope of landing a Delfur salmon. There are five ghillies in attendance, a comfortable hut and boats are available on most pools. This is another beat glorified by the writings of John Ashley-Cooper and where he lost what was the largest fish he ever hooked - estimated at around 50 lb, hooked in Two Stones and they parted company in the pool below, Beaufort, which is quite a distance. Most parties stay at Collie Farmhouse, which belongs to the estate and is situated on the banks of the river. All enquiries regarding the fishing and Collie Farmhouse (available throughout the year) should be made to Peter Graham at Peter Graham Associates. Tel: 01343 862969.

At **Orton** the fishing comprises roughly 1.5 miles of double-bank fishing, which is split into two rotating beats. (The pools are described in a following article.) Orton Estate Office. Tel: 01343 880240 or enquiries@ortonestate.com

The **Brae Water** begins at the Twenty Pound pool and stretches all the way down to the road bridge that traverses the Spey at Fochabers, in

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all just over 9 km of double-bank fishing. This water is split into five beats, with Beats 1 and 2 occupying the first 1.2 km and Beats 3, 4 and 5 covering the remaining 8 km. There is some dispute over the Junction, Twenty Pound and Turn pools (they were formerly fished by Orton), but this will be resolved after the 2021 season ends. Most of the Brae fishing is leased to a syndicate but every season, for one reason or another, there are often vacancies during the first half of the season. This is fantastic fishing on an extremely well run estate. What makes fishing at Brae so special is the company of the ghillies, for the team there has aeons of experience under its collective belt. The youngsters up on Beat 1 and 2 seem to be having the best of it in recent years though as these beats have been producing some marvellous fishing, especially in May and June when the fish travel quickly through the first few beats on the river.

As expected, occupying such a long stretch of the river, there is a great variety of fishing to be found here and all of it is wonderful. The surprising thing about this part of the river is its width, which is surprisingly narrow (30 to 60 metres) for a lower section of a long river. With a river bed comprising gravel and loose stones the pools here do change after each big flood so there's always something new to look out for. The massive flood of September 2009 and April 2010 did immense damage and some major changes have occurred.

Downstream of Fochabers road bridge is the Gordon Castle **Castle Water**, a stretch of 2.4 km of double-bank fishing. The beat contains nine pools and is fished as two sub beats with six rods on each one. The vast Bridge Pool alone could keep two rods occupied all day, and the Birks is a joy to cast over. This water produces fish in the spring, and has been a revelation in the late spring in recent seasons. However, it's the summer and autumn when it comes into its own; the fishing can

be meteoric in September. Fishing is available by the week to parties of six rods with accommodation provided in a wing of Gordon Castle.

The fishing arrangements over the final few kilometres of the Spey become a wee bit complicated. After the Castle beat comes Gordon Castle **Lower Water 1** and **Lower Water 2**, and lastly Speymouth Angling Association from the railway bridge to the sea. For Brae Water/Gordon Castle/Lower Water beats contact Estate Office, Gordon Castle. Tel: 01343 820244 or factor@gleco.co.uk

From opening day on 11 February to 10 August the water from Tail of Quarry to and including Braehead is fished by **Fochabers A.A.**, then from 11 August the fishing is taken over by Gordon Castle and let as Lower Water 1. This is fantastic summer and autumn fishing. Fochabers A.A. Tel: 01343 821059.

Speymouth A.A. has about 2.5 km of fishing from downstream of the railway bridge to the sea at Spey Bay. Fishing is from both banks and visitors can obtain day tickets at a reasonable rate. There are six named pools on this ever changing, wide river where the Spey breaks up into many braids as it finds its way across the shingle bed. This is well worth a cast throughout the season but definitely comes into its own during the summer months for salmon and sea-trout. Details can be obtained from Moira Brown, The Wedges, Spey Bay, Morayshire, IV32 7PJ. Tel: 01343 820703 or email speymouth.angling@ymail.com