

Success On Short Sessions

Hardy & Greys academy member Andy Smith shows you how to make the most of a 'snatched' few hours on the bank.

Ever get that sort of feeling at the back of your mind that you need to be off fishing? There are times when the feeling builds to the point where I am consumed by the whole idea and it's no longer that I want to go off fishing, I just 'have' to go off fishing!

Once it's like this, the only resolve, of course, is to go and fish. Interestingly, this isn't a feeling that purely attacks the experienced anglers among us, it's just as common if not more so with the anglers who have recently taken up fly fishing and are eager to learn more. However, for those of us not retired as yet and having masses of family and business commitments tying up each day, the opportunity of dropping the lot to have a day's fishing on a regular basis – yes, I do mean a whole

day's fishing – is something of a rarity.

You may have to re-evaluate your fishing to become what I consider to be an 'opportunistic flyfisher', covering the smaller stillwaters that seem to be all over the country these days. I have found that some of these waters are within minutes of the motorway and for as little as an hour or two they can provide perfect relaxation and great sport.



TACTICS



Always have a few casts along the margins – fish are often close in.



Fishing from the windward shore, it wasn't long before Andy Smith was into his first trout.

The Venue

One fishery in particular that I consider is worth dropping into is just off the A1 in the village of Buckminster, near Grantham, and once leaving the motorway I know I will be standing by the water in just 15 minutes.

Buckminster is a classic sporting estate owned by the Tollemache family and is highly acclaimed for its quality shooting throughout the hunting season. It boasts being one of the leading venues in the country for organised pheasant and partridge shoots. Within the estate is the fishery, which is no more than four acres. It nestles in a picturesque valley just down from the village and to my way of thinking offers a real element of tranquillity for any visitor. As with most stillwater fisheries you can expect quality rainbows here and Buckminster has some nice resident browns as well.

The fishery is both a season and day-ticket water, with a really nice group of regulars always willing to give advice to anyone asking. Sue and Nigel Smith look after the water and are always a great

help to newcomers and will put you right on where has been fishing and what's been working in the preceding days.

What I like about these sorts of fisheries is that anything goes – you can have fun with whatever fly gear you have. If you are serious about small stillwater fishing you will no doubt have invested in a nice, light, 5-wt or possibly 6-wt

notch floating line – I say top-notch, because it really is false economy to go cheap on fly lines as it will affect your casting distance and ultimately presentation.

Leader, scissors and a few flies and so on go around my neck, then a net and we are ready to go! I pretty much have this sort of setup in the car all the time.

“A small water gives you the advantage of being able to move to take quick advantage of changing conditions in a minute.”

outfit, but it really is no issue at all to turn up with the gear you would use at one of the larger reservoirs without being frowned upon.

However, getting back to the fact that this is a 'drop in for a fish' visit, I generally only go armed with fairly basic gear so that I am fishing in the shortest possible time.

The Gear

So, ready to go in minutes – the kit for the session! A 9ft 6in 7-wt rod and a top-

I always find these drop-in opportunities of fishing thoroughly pleasing. But then I do approach them with a weird kind of pessimism. If I catch well for the hour or so I am there, I am really happy and pleased I took time out for the trip, however short it may have been. But if I don't catch, or even abandon the session because of the poor weather or water conditions, I am delighted with myself that I haven't wasted a valuable full day off!

So, with all this in mind and the fact that everything 'stillwater' that you have been reading about this year in TFF ought to work, condense your activities into a few of the tried-and-tested methods from those articles; remember, we are only fishing for a couple of hours or so.

Working Things Out

Few would argue that as you perfect your fishing around a small stillwater it often offers a micro insight to how things work on the bigger reservoirs. Certainly at Buckminster it does, given that the lake here has a wide variety of contours of depth and shape to the bank edges. Look to see how, on a water that you can literally walk around in 20 minutes, the changes in wind conditions and time of day have the trout moving to new locations, how temperature pushes the fish into deeper areas and, with the right hatch, how fish will line up for the food falling in their track.

Buckminster is great for all this as pretty much wherever you stand and fish you can observe activity in other parts of the lake. For example, with



A perfectly formed little Buckminster rainbow is released.



a westerly wind pushing up towards the dam wall, it's going to be a pretty safe bet that trout will be around the shoreline of that part of the lake, or possibly at the back end of the first bay.

Obviously as a regular you will experience these changes through the season, but at any rate the small water gives you the advantage of being able to move on from your fishing spot to take quick advantage of changing conditions in a minute. I am sure we have all experienced being on one bank of a big reservoir and having no luck, only to find that we should have been on

the other bank where fellow anglers have bagged up in a few hours?

Use The Wind

As with most stillwaters and fishing conditions, I am a great advocate of fishing into the wind or at least across it, letting the flies drift naturally.

I will at this point argue the fact that it is imperative for you to be able to master casting into the wind and, honestly, it's not at all difficult to achieve with some advice or instruction along the way.

Reading articles in previous issues of TFF, you will hopefully have absorbed the

facts of fly presentation and how fish judge what you are placing in front of them to eat. Become as tactical as you can and 'think trout' – consider how the natural fly would be presenting itself on or under the water and then make your presentation just the same.

The Fishing

My few hours at Buckminster were hardly in the best of conditions. First few days of September, patchy outbursts of rain, gusty winds, and extremely low warm water with the excessive algae bloom that has been present from the weeks of a hot dry summer.

Fish were showing on the odd occasion, although the day-book records in the fishing hut for August and preceding few days did paint a pretty poor picture, much as has been the case with so many waters this year, whatever their size and location.

So, given the water colour and not a lot showing on top, I set up with a weighted Montana on the point and a Bloodworm on the dropper, as these would hopefully prove to be a little more visible in the green water.

My leader setup wasn't particularly long, perhaps about 12 feet in total length,

Speed Fishing



A small travel rod, kept in the boot of the car, means you can take advantage of any fishing opportunity.



With a handful of tippet materials in various diameters you'll have all the bases covered.



A small fly patch, with some favourite patterns, is all that's required on short sessions.

TACTICS



A small black Fritz pattern, nothing fancy, can often bring rewards on small-water venues.

with the dropper about five feet back from the point fly. I was using fluorocarbon to make up my leader, starting with 10lb strength off the fly line, joining to it 8lb, then 6lb, all in sections of approximately four feet. If trout started to move on top then I could add a further 4ft length of 4lb on to the point so that I could use small dries.

If you prefer to use a commercial tapered leader, I recommend you choose the size that gives you a 6lb point, then add either a further length of 6lb nylon to it or, if necessary, 4lb.

Be Cautious

Don't barge straight to the water's edge, as these small stillwaters will often have fish feeding really close in near the bank, especially if you are on the water first thing in the morning or the very last thing in the evening.

Starting with a few short casts along the edge of the first bay, let the flies sink for about 15 seconds and then slow, long-pull retrieves allowing the flies to move up and then momentarily drop again, before moving to cast out more into the main open-water area and repeat.

Try different rates of retrieve, from an almost static 'just letting the wind drag the fly line around', to figure-of-eight and fast retrieves. It wouldn't be the first time that, having had no luck in a spot, I had a take as I vigorously wound my line in ready to move on.

Some would suggest it can be all too easy catching trout in these small waters. However, with so many anglers now opting for catch and release, the fish definitely become very wary if they have been pricked a few times.

In my case it wasn't long before I had the first take to the Montana on the point. Not a big fish, but a real fighter about 1½lb. The take came after casting directly into the wind and retrieving at a slow rate just about in pace with the drift coming towards me, so not much movement at all really. Nothing further happened over the following 20 minutes, so I changed the fly to a slightly larger black Fritz pattern with an orange marabou tail, and shifted position. At this point I was now casting across the wind, just leaving the fly being dragged by the drift of the floating line, and second cast I had another take that almost

pulled the rod out of my hand. This was a similar-sized fish in length, but really fat and in fantastic condition given the time of year.

I had no joy with the Bloodworm on the dropper and in the end I removed it to continue fishing with just the point fly. This seemed to do the trick and it continued to work well right through the two hours spent on the water!

As mentioned, the conditions were fairly unfavourable, although with a total of three nice trout to the net, another fish lost in play and several nibbles

along the way it turned out well! Two hours out of my day, fully relaxed and ready for whatever the rest of the working day wanted to throw at me – retirement no longer needed! **TFF**

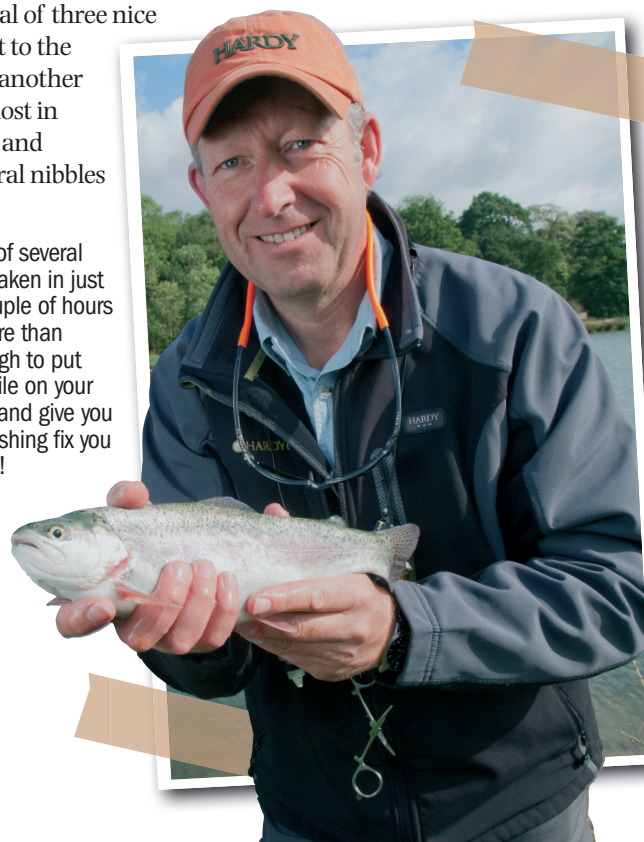
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One of several fish taken in just a couple of hours – more than enough to put a smile on your face and give you the fishing fix you need!