

DAILY ANGLING CLUB

The River Girvan, Ayrshire

Advisory Visit Report
Undertaken on behalf of the Wild Trout Trust
By Ron Holloway MIFM

30th March 2002-



Fig.1.

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DAILY ANGLING CLUB – RIVER GIRVAN
ADVISORY VISIT – 30th March 2002

This Advisory Visit was undertaken by Ron Holloway (R H Associates) on behalf of the Wild Trout Trust (WTT) in the company of Peter Connelly (Chairman Dailly Angling Club) Bruce Lindsay (Treasurer Dailly Angling Club) and Ronnie Sinclair (Restoration Committee Chairman).

Objectives of Visit

To look at the River Girvan within the boundaries of the Club waters and to pinpoint and identify problems within the seatrout and brown trout habitat that may be controlling the natural holding and breeding potential of the fishery and to recommend such measures that could be taken by the Club members to mitigate any problems found and to further advise on any habitat protection and enhancement work that could be made.

Background.

The River Girvan is a typical West Coast spate river where angling activities are controlled by the height of the water above mean base flow. The Dailly Angling Club have leased the water for many years and have a five year renewable lease. There has always been excellent relationships with all landowners. One particular stretch of the river was canalised around the turn of the century – circa 1900 – when a considerable double meander of some 2000 yards was cut off and isolated from the river. Little structural work has been done over the years to improve holding habitat although several weirs have been constructed at various times. The fishery supports 40 members, each paying an annual subscription of forty pounds. The fishery is predominantly sea trout, brown trout and a few salmon. No stocking is undertaken though the beat above stocks annually with brown trout. Water quality is fine with noted populations of minnow very evident. Invertebrate life appears to be healthy with caddis dominant. There are no mayfly (E.Danica). Substrates consist mainly of gravel, cobbles, large rock and sand with gravel riffles embedded with sandy fines

and silt. There is an annual growth of wild water lilies which flourish in the slow flowing canalised stretch.

SITE ONE. (See Fig.2)

The natural island here must not be touched but some holding territory could be enhanced by constructing a rock feature on the gravel riffle at the head of this pool. This construction (see Fig.2) comprising of rocks and boulders would speed up the flow and scour a deeper holding pool below the structure and just upstream of the island. It is essential that this construction is placed so that it is submerged at mid to high water flow – i.e. 1ft above water level as seen on the 30th March 2002 (low water?) The triangular profile of this construction is essential as this will prevent further bank erosion below the structure.



Fig.2.

SITE TWO

No major problems here although to create more habitat diversity it is suggested that some single triangular groynes be installed in a series, i.e. alternating one on one bank and one on the other bank, to encourage flow to meander to and fro – (see Fig.3).



Fig.3

These constructions (groynes) should comprise of heavy stone and rock that will be resistant to movement in high flows. Again, these should be positioned one foot above low water mark so they are overtopped during spate flows. The advantages of this are:

1. To encourage fish to lie below the construction.
2. To provide fishing stages for members
3. To speed up flow and keep suspended silt on the move
4. To scour a clean river bed

SITE THREE (See Fig.4)

Improve instream holding potential along this stretch with random placement of large rocks to create more holding lies. A couple of triangular groynes could be placed to further increase holding area and to improve fishing access.



Fig.4.

SITE FOUR (See Fig.5)

Return large rocks to river to create holding lies. On the far bank where there is a large bank of sandy silt deposited it is suggested this is planted thickly with willow and alder saplings. This silt/sandbank needs to be stabilised with planting as soon as possible to allow the saplings to root during summer and hopefully stabilise the bank before the next high flows of winter.



Fig.5

SITE FIVE (See Fig.6)

This silt and sand deposit should be left and, once protected by fencing, natural vegetation should stabilise. This could be assisted by planting a few willow slips and alders.



Fig.6

SITE SIX (See Fig.7)

Some work is required here. The present weir has accelerated bank erosion for some distance downstream. This structure needs to be re-profiled to divert high river flows away from the banks, for the suggested profile see Fig.7.



Fig.7.

Again, it is essential to keep the structure low, as in the other structures, so that it will be overtopped by high flows but will divert the main flow away from the bank into the centre of the river. To help stabilise the eroded area, plant up with natural vegetation and once fenced off, this growth will help to stabilise the river bank.

SITE SEVEN (See Fig.8)

This mini weir is encouraging bank erosion on the far bank and if not addressed soon will become worse. A serious “nick point” has already started to form at the far end of the weir and needs urgent protection.



Fig.8

It is suggested that the weir is re-profiled and the nick point infilled with stone and rock (See Fig.8 for suggested re-profiling of weir). Use the existing stone and rock and, again, ensure the construction is only 1ft above low water level.

SITE EIGHT (See Fig.9)

This entire bank needs to be protected from grazing animals and once fenced, plant a few willows and allow the natural ground vegetation to grow which should stabilise this boggy bank.



Fig.9

SITE NINE.

The stretch of river through “town water” below new bridge, is an ideal site for the construction of two or three well built triangular groyne structures from which the children of the village can fish. These groynes would also instil more movement to the flow and help to scour further holding areas. Consideration could also be given for the construction of a safe and accessible wheelchair fishery platform, the design of which should be discussed with the Health & Safety Officer of the local Parks & Recreation Department who will be glad to give help with the standard of construction and design etc. It is suggested this structure be sited just upstream of a useful fish holding area/pool. To keep a more natural look, build each platform of

river stone and cement to construct and ensure a smooth, non slip top surface. If possible also site in reasonably shallow water.

SITE TEN (See Fig.10)

There is severe bank erosion occurring below this ill-profiled weir. It is suggested that the far side of the weir be rebuilt to divert high water flows away from the bank. The undermined tree will then be protected and the high flows directed towards the middle of the river which should also improve the holding pool below the weir. The nearside of this weir is alright.



Fig.10

SITE ELEVEN (See Fig.11)

The effluent discharge from the disused coalmine looks very bad but, in my opinion, looks far worse than it is. A brief inspection of the bed of the outfall stream did show evidence of some invertebrate life (mainly caddis). Although sparse, there is life in this effluent outfall. The appearance of the iron oxide deposits could indicate that there has been a recent heavy discharge of iron oxide laden effluent which may have



Fig.11

occurred during some high groundwater run off events. SEPA Water Quality monitoring codes of practice should show the quality and content of this discharge. Whichever authority or agency is responsible for maintaining the water quality should be able to give all necessary information on discharge from this mine. Constant pressure should be kept on the responsible organisations and if the Club is not happy, press for explanations from SEPA and, in the last resort, set out the whole story clearly to your local MSP. It is surprising what a letter from a member of parliament can achieve.

GENERAL COMMENTS.

The river as seen at low water does afford reasonable holding cover for migratory trout. Though, in my opinion, with some structural readjustments as described, this holding potential could be increased substantially.

The first problem to be addressed should be fencing. Negotiations should be opened up with the landowners to assess the possibility of fencing off the river margins from

grazing animals, remembering that drinking points still have to be available. It is recommended that a systematic plan of action be set down to cover all the work which needs to be done. Once you have this, then split it into “mini” projects that the Club and members can readily achieve over one year. It should be remembered that when constructing rock structures, these have to be built in a substantial manner which will resist the highest flows. Once the long term plan is set down it is essential that the Club call in the local SEPA Officer to discuss all the plans. From this meeting, SEPA will (and should) give all necessary advice and guidance which the Club will need, covering everything from consents to availability of grants for fencing etc. Let SEPA be the main partner in what may possibly end up as a five year project. When the plan is agreed with SEPA then present it, plus a copy of this report, to the River Girvan Salmon Fishery Board, asking for their opinion and where and how this restoration plan fits into their long term management strategy for whole Girvan river system.

Finally, when you contact the Girvan Salmon Fisheries Board, be sure to mention that to return the river to its original course by re-opening and connecting the river back to the double ox-bow which was isolated by the canalisation, would not only benefit the river for migratory fish but create more holding habitat. This operation would also alleviate the threat of serious flood damage by dissipating the flood water over the natural flood plain. To substantiate this would involve discussion with an experienced fluvial geomorphologist and a hydraulics engineer who would be qualified to evaluate such a scheme. In my view, it would be the best thing to happen and of great benefit to the river for the future.

The alternative would be to restore the habitat in the canalised stretch and, as discussed, this would take many thousands of tons of rock and stone to be transported and planted in the channel to restore any vestige of salmonid habitat. This, of course, would cost a great deal of money. In my opinion, returning the river to its original course, would be less expensive and a much more reliable option.

Consideration could also be given to installing a sea trout egg incubation box into the burn beside the school. This could rekindle the interest of the children and raise their awareness of the problems there are and also instruct on the life cycle of the migratory fish that use the River Girvan. Extreme care has to be given to the siting and fixing of an incubation box so it will survive during high winter flows, consult with SEPA and the Girvan Fisheries Board on such a useful educational scheme.

SUGGESTED ORDER OF PRIORITIES.

1. Plan the siting and numbers required of stone groynes.
2. When project plan is formed contact SEPA to take advice and guidance on implementation.
3. Negotiate fencing opportunities
4. Plan work so that it is achievable in parts within the capabilities of the Club.
5. Start work at top and work downstream.



