

Tom Buchanan fishes
from Tom's Beach at Rock
pool on South Chesthill
Estate, River Lyon.

The wizard of South Chesthill

*Craig Somerville fishes with Malloch Trophy winner
Tom Buchanan on the estate where dreams came true*

PHOTOGRAPHY: CRAIG SOMERVILLE

M

ANY OF US learn to cast a double-handed fly-rod. Some successfully hook and land a salmon. Far fewer catch the fish of a lifetime. Then there are those really fishy types we all know that are just... well... "fishy". However, I must add a further layer to this ladder of salmon-fishing achievement, reserved exclusively for one man: the lovable,



Craig Somerville is media and marketing manager for Angling Active (anglingactive.co.uk). He has operated a luxury travel agency in New Zealand and managed front-of-house and kitchens in luxury lodges.

story-packed and relentlessly enthusiastic "Bucky". Tom Buchanan has caught fish in rivers draining nearly every corner of Scotland. That's more than a thousand salmon during his 72 years, some of which have weighed over 30 lb, including a fly-caught 35-pounder that tightened his line in April 2015. It's this fish that made me follow Tom to his favourite river and pool. I wanted to ask: "What do you have to do to win the FishPal Malloch Trophy?"

Actually, when we met, my question was a little shorter. I chose my moment, while we sat in the sun watching Anne Woodcock, of FishPal, cast a good line across a pool. I asked him simply: "Why you?"

His answer took the form of action rather than words.

This wiry man from Barrhead, all 5 ft something of him, marched along the riverside road, his waded legs a blur. Armed with two fly-rods and a gye net, he spoke loudly in a Glaswegian accent so that Anne and I, nearly half his age and yet relentlessly trying to keep up, could hear his opinions of today's cloud cover, rocks and the water temperature of the pool where we were headed.

As we scrambled down slippery steep banks and over rock faces, through fallen beech leaves and down dubious ladders, Anne caught my eye, grinned humbly and mouthed "Wow!".

Tom, already having read the pool from as far back as possible so as not to disturb any fish, turned to us as we panted our way up to him and said: "We'll just

give it half a dozen casts and move to the next pool over that next brow. That's all this river needs. If there's a fish in any of the pools we'll know it within 10 minutes max."

The pool at which we had arrived was one of the prettiest I'd seen in Scotland. The water was lightly tea-stained yet clear to the bottom, one side lined with granite ledges shaded by trees. The river is only 15 ft wide and beckons any angler to fish it. Tom took up position on a flat rock, away from the neck, and stripped off a little line, fishing just off the rod tip to start with.

The name Rock pool reflects its main feature and Tom shouted over as I was flapping around with my camera gear and a recovering pulse: "This is where I got it. It took right off the bow of that rock. On ma Monkey."

Tom ties a beautiful fly, and the icing on the cake is that he got the big fish on his own creation "Two thumps on the line," he told me. "I tightened, and then chaos."

He said that he shouted up to his wife, Mary, who was knitting in the car, and she came down to see him trying to stop the giant fish from heading downstream and into heavy rapids. Mary was

immediately committed to being the net-lady but after a good while and a first attempt they realised the net wouldn't be big enough.

Like a well-oiled machine, this parallel-thinking

"The pool was one of the prettiest I'd seen in Scotland"

young-at-heart couple manufactured an idea to beach the fish gently in a sandy bay between net and bank. The Owner treble hook then fell out, straightened by the battle.

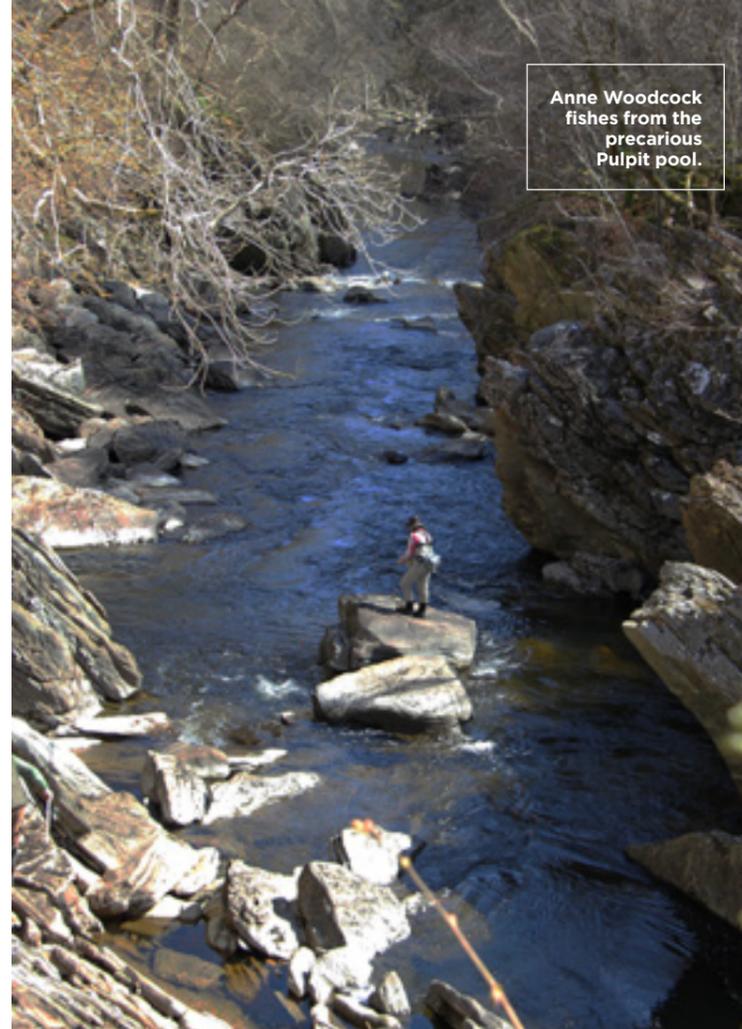
It probably also sank in at that moment that Tom had just shared a fantastic moment of achievement with Mary. Fittingly, above them, and above the pool was a memorial stone dedicated to John Fisher, gillie on the beat for 47 years from 1933, and his wife Jean Cameron, who were both respected as parts of the glen. As Tom finished telling me the story of his great fish, his tone dropped, his voice slowed and his eyes widened as he spoke of Mary. "My wife was my hero," he says, "because she took my digital camera out of my jacket pocket and took all the amazing photos. I've always admired the Malloch Trophy from afar, but I never thought I'd get my name engraved on it. Without her, I wouldn't have."

THE SCENE OF this drama was the South Chesthill estate on the River Lyon. The Lyon, a tributary of the Tay, flows east from Loch Lyon down the glen that Sir Walter Scott said is "the longest, loneliest and loveliest" in Scotland. Scattered with ancient stands of Caledonian fir, the walls of this U-shaped valley steepen as your eyes reach higher into its purple heather shoulders and snow caps.

As I drove through the glen in early evening light I was overwhelmed by its majesty. The last time I'd felt such power from a landscape was in South Island, New Zealand, where I had watched the sunrise burst over the glacial crests of Mount Cook from my bivvy next to the Glentanner River. A comparable sight but this time it was just an hour from home and the



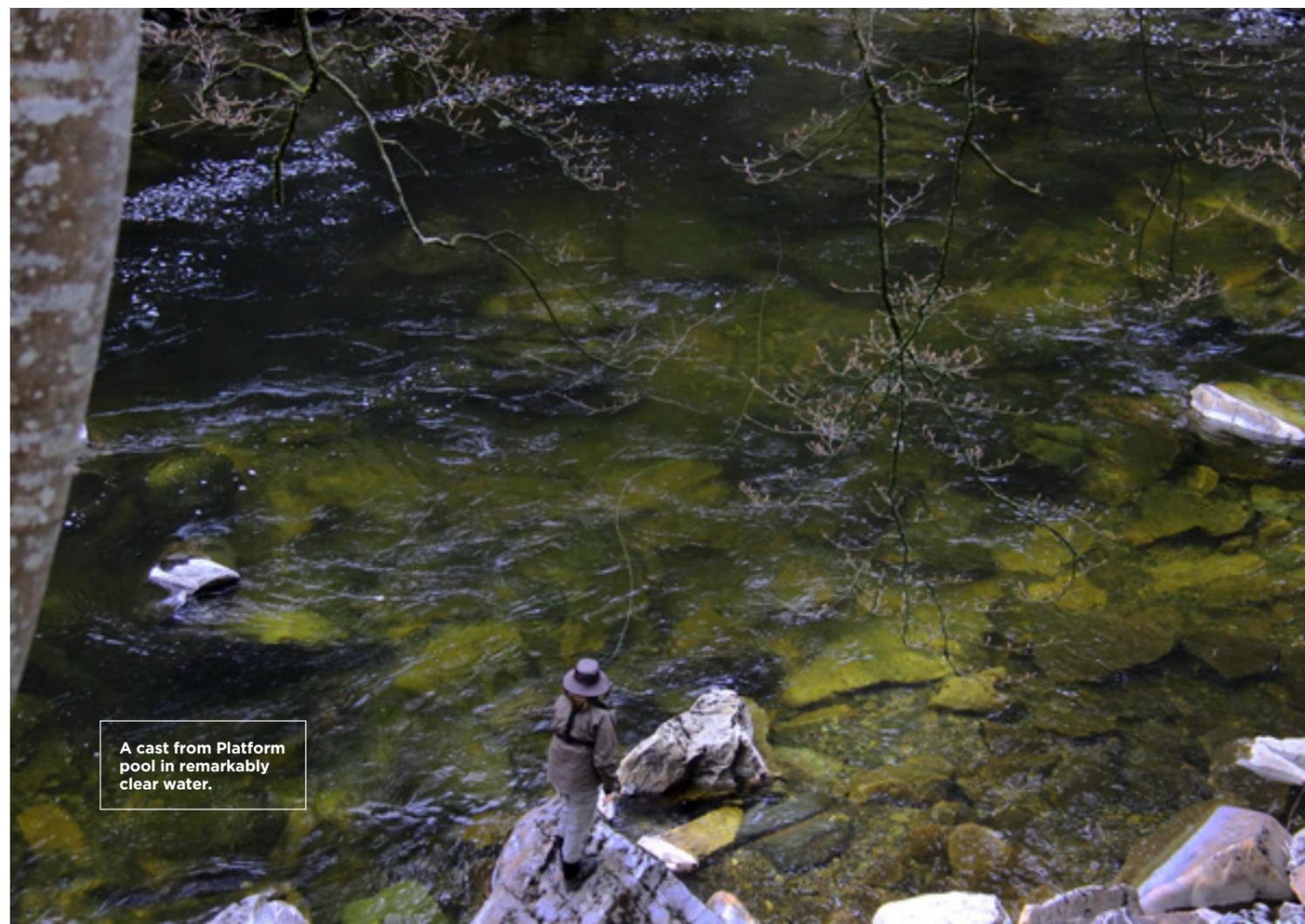
Mary's picture of her husband Tom with his Malloch Trophy-winning 44 in fish.



Anne Woodcock fishes from the precarious Pulpit pool.



Energetic and completely focused on his fly. No wonder Tom has caught so many fish.



A cast from Platform pool in remarkably clear water.

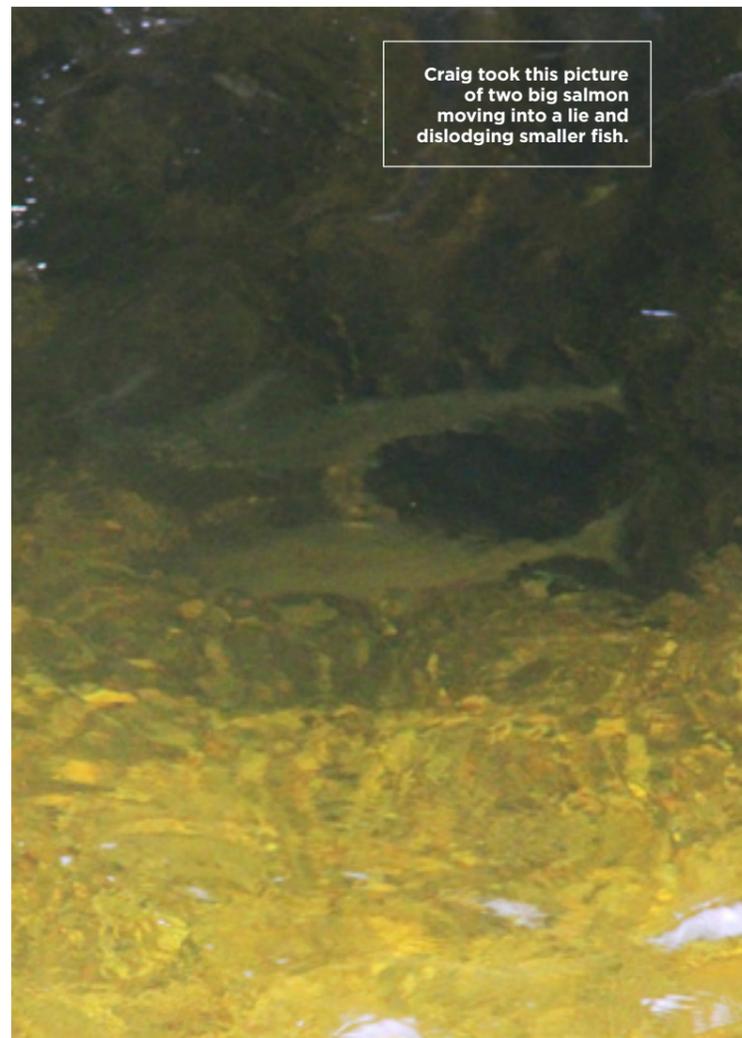


Tom fishing the tail of the Platform pool, "His second favourite fly pool".

CRISPIN RODWELL



Tom and Anne discuss flies at beautiful Roman Bridge.



Craig took this picture of two big salmon moving into a lie and dislodging smaller fish.

experience was shared only by the red stags silhouetting the horizon.

The river is transformed as it drops down the glen. From shallow, stepped, granite pools beneath the dam, it forms deeper, gentler, paddock-lined runs. Then it rushes into a gorge with rapids, bottomless wells of turbulence and waterfalls, and on under the bridge at Fortingall to wider and deeper pools that provide a pitstop for salmon about to undertake the last and hardest push they have faced since leaving the Atlantic.

The Lyon has a daily minimum flow, meaning it is nearly always fishable except for major spates. Weekly and pre-arranged freshets, which are artificial spates, are released to benefit the salmon and encourage them to run the gorge in summer levels. These freshets are the key time to fish the Lyon if no rain is forecast. The downside of a push-button spate is that the water is released from the bottom of the dam and therefore it is cold, discouraging the fish it is trying to encourage to run. This cold-water shock also affects insect life and perhaps a parr's food intake, but nonetheless, there is a regular freshet and fish are running the river.

A rare treat among the gloomy stories told of toiling salmon rivers today. How many rivers have you fished lately with fish in them? The Lyon is worth a visit.

There are also annual stockings of various stages of ova in the main tributaries of the Lyon, but these are small in the scale of things and only a gesture due to the success of the natural redds.

At South Chesthill and Inverinain Fishings you feel like you have travelled back in time. Here the wildlife co-exists with the people lucky enough to call the glen home: red deer don't run away, leverets sun themselves at the foot of garden walls, cock pheasants fight for the best of spring, and red squirrels peer down as you struggle into your waders.

In 1978 Major-General Charles Ramsay bought South Chesthill Estate and then acquired adjoining Inverinain shortly after creating a 7,000-acre estate with six miles of fishing on which a record 105 salmon were caught in 2012. The estate is now managed by his son Charlie.

The pride of the estate is personified by keeper Hamish Rae. Hamish is a temperate and quiet man who, when asked the right questions, reveals a wealth of knowledge and also how much he cares for the estate. He is keeper, gillie and stalker, taking guests of the cottage and house up on the hill and to the private hill loch where there are impressive brown trout. He shares his knowledge only when asked and stands proud as you fish, as if part of the river bank. Negative comments never pass his lips and a more natural gillie you will struggle to find.

His generous, caring partner Kay told me the names of "her" roe deer and apologised to me for jabbering away to them. I was in awe of her connection with something I had once lined up in sights and seen only as meat to butcher. Kay and her

way of life in the glen left a lasting impression - it felt like a richer life than that of anyone living in a city.

To fish the Lyon, bring your favourite 13 ft-14 ft double-hander with sink-tips. The river is small so short casts are all that's needed, but reach and line control are everything over turbulent boils of water and rocks. Bring, too, your switch rod. If the water drops to compensation level, and fine tactics with long leaders and a dropper are needed, then gently manipulating a switch rod among the pools is a lovely way to fish. Lastly, bring your trout rod. There are fabulous trout in the river taking dry-flies and sipping spent spinners, but also smashing 4 in Sunrays.

The gorge section is not recommended if you are unsteady on your feet, but the estate's six miles of single- and double-bank fishing and 32 pools offer access for everyone of any age and nobody should feel this is just a young man's river. Even the Inverinain beat, at the top of the fishings, is accessible

to the bank in Hamish's trusty Land Rover. Little wading is needed: most of your time is spent in welly boots.

Flies vary through the season but anything from Monkeys to small Cascades will work. Bring polarised sunglasses. A look down into the top of Platform pool from the high bank can reveal salmon lining up waiting for a change in conditions. Stealth and wit can convince one of these fish on to your fly.

TOM WILL BE the first to spot the fish, pointing and gesturing you over to see them. His excitement is infectious. Once I watched four fish lying on the edge of sand and rock in the neck of Platform, below the

"Leverets sun themselves and red squirrels peer down as you struggle into your waders"

SOUTH CHESTHILL'S BEST POOLS

Bridge

This productive holding pool fishes in all heights. Fishing starts from a ledge just upstream of the bridge on the true left and the fish lie tight to the ledge all the way down under the bridge. Either side can be fished in medium levels and the tail performs in higher water.

Island

An exceptional fly pool fished in all heights. In medium to higher water there is fishing from the neck to the tail. The mid section to the "Black" (a wet area on the right bank's rock-face) requires wading. Salmon often lie in the dead water further down.

Balintyre

This has changed considerably with recent flooding but it is a deeper holding pool with fish found tight to the right bank. The neck is worth fishing by wading in above the island. A boat is available to fish the lower stretch of Balintyre.

TOM'S FLIES FOR THE LYON

Monkey (tied on a 1/2 in tube, total length 2 1/2 in).

Kylie Shrimp (size 10 or 12 double).

Gold Willie Gunn (tube or size 10 double).

Silver Stoat's Tail.

falls, and then two considerably larger fish nudged in and stole their lie. I was able to get some incredible footage on my camera (see previous page).

The gentleman and friend that is Tom Buchanan showed Anne and I every fishy pool on the estate and both of us have developed a love for the river and a hankering to return and establish at least a little of the 50-year relationship Tom has with the Lyon.

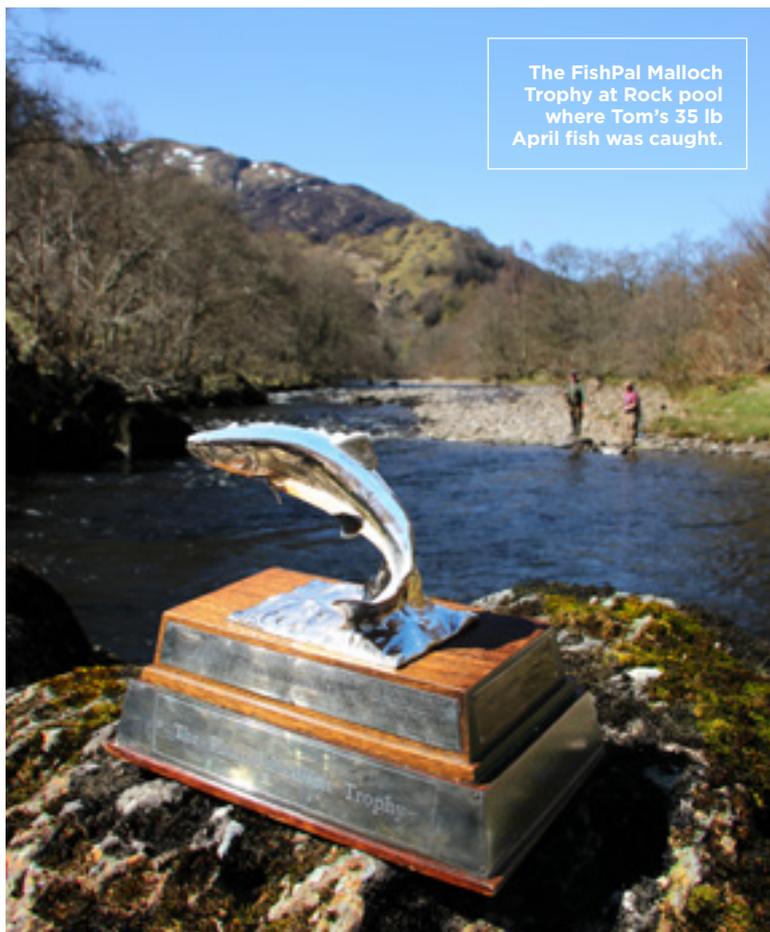
His answer to "Why you?" was simple. He said "It's a combination of a whole life of fishing. And what do you need? You need to be able to fish, and have a hell of a lot of luck. You need a bit of this, and a bit of tha'. It's a combination of everything I've learned on the rivers I've fished."

He went on to say "You know something? The satisfaction that I got when I saw that fish swimming away, nae cynic could diminish it by saying something bad to me about it. It was ma moment, cause I know myself, and being honest to myself, it does'nae matter what anyone else says. I'm dead against killin' them now.

"You know something? How would you like to come up to the Lyon with me in ten years' time and find that there's no fish left? I'd hate that. I've killed a lot of fish in my time and then in 1975 I wrote a song about catch and release with this in mind - I saw this problem coming."

Just after he said all that, sitting on the sun-drenched riverbank, he asked Anne what fly she had on and jumped up and headed over to her as she was about to change her fly. "Ah, I love the Kylie, the Kylie is a great fly..." and he carries on speaking as he drifts out of earshot.

The Malloch Trophy can be won by any fly-angler, although going by the calibre of Tom Buchanan, the trophy is awarded to deserved winners. Good luck to you. Maybe that next tightening of the line will be your chance. Have a witness, take measurements, a few photos and you'll be in the running. **T&S**



"The satisfaction I got when I saw that fish swimming away, nae cynic could diminish it"



A good life in the glen: keeper Hamish and partner Kay.

Book your trip

FISHING: Day permits available but those staying on the estate have priority. Price per rod per beat per day: trout, £10; salmon, £40 (discounts for multiple rods).

The South Chesthill beat five-year average is 73 salmon. If you need tackle and a gillie (guide/teacher) it might be possible to arrange this at extra cost.

For permits contact Hamish Rae. Tel: 01887 877 233.

E-mail: keeper@southchesthill.com

ACCOMMODATION: South Chesthill Estate offers two properties for lets, with or without fishing. Chesthill

House with seven twin bedrooms and two single bedrooms, £2,500-£4,200 per week, excluding sport; £2,500-£9,977, including sport. Gardener's Cottage with two twin bedrooms: from £420 per week, excluding sport; up to £1,165 per week, including sport. Find out more at www.southchesthill.com



Chesthill House:
ideal for a large
fishing party.

