

Fishing – the close season, a time for reflection



The Almond, one of Paul's regular haunts.
This picture is near Mid Calder. Pic by Nigel
Duncan

Paul Buchanan, who has captained Scotland's river fly fishing team and is one of the most capped river internationalists in the UK, starts his fly fishing series for The Edinburgh Reporter with a look at tackle and how to approach the new trout season which starts next month

"In my view," he writes, "the close season is the ideal time to stand back and assess your tackle needs and to give some much needed TLC to the stuff you already have.

"Like it is for flies, you only need tackle for the methods you fish. By that I mean if you only ever fish with one rod and are perfectly happy then you won't need two rods.

"So, look at the methods you fish and ask yourself if you feel that the tackle you have helps you achieve that.

"Also look at the methods you may want to fish that you currently don't, dry fly, nymph, Duo or Trio, streamer and ask yourself if you could fish that method with the tackle you have.

"Dry fly rod: not too heavy 3wt, 4wt or 5wt is perfect for a river the size of the Almond. Dry fly rods are typically a little crisper in the action, not too floppy. This aids with accurate fly presentation, putting it exactly where you want it. It also helps with straightening the leader, very important when fishing a dry.

“False casting is also needed to dry the fly after lift-off and a crisp rod can generate a higher line speed. To be very effective at dry fly, the fly must be presented with the minimum of fuss/maximum stealth.

“You’ll find this easier with a dull fly line (olive/grey/straw) not a fluorescent one and also a fly line that is on the light side. Even a ninja will struggle to drop a Sz 18 CDC shuttlecock dry fly on a 6wt or 7wt line.

“Nymph rod: you can fish nymph with any rod that’s on the light side (4wt, 5wt) but because specialist nymph lines/French leaders are very thin and light, an ultra-lightweight nymph rod makes a massive difference to both handling very light leaders/lines and also bite detection.

“Typically Nymph rods are 10ft minimum and go up to 11ft 3in. This extra length helps when leading a team of flies down a specific current channel and helps to keep the line off currents that you don’t want to adversely affect the travel of the nymphs.

“I would seriously advise that you buy a nymph line or French Leader for this amazing method.

“Fly lines: are they light/delicate enough and dull enough for use on rivers that have spooky fish? Are the lines in good condition or do they need cleaned or replaced?

“I encourage anglers to buy economy fly reels but I always advise them to buy the best floating line their budget allows. A quality line by Cortland, Scientific Anglers, Orvis or Rio will serve you well for many years and using it will always be enjoyable and fun.

“Clothing: this is the most under-rated area for many anglers. Keeping warm is usually easy if you can stay dry. Wearing cycling/running longs under waders means you are warm and can fish all day up to your chest in water.

"I also wear knee high pop socks over normal socks and with them on waders slip easily onto your feet and come off just as easy.

"Same for the top half. I always wear an under armour type top to wick away the moisture and, on top of that, I wear a long-sleeved camo top. If it's freezing, the wading jacket completes the set. If it is roasting, the camo top is enough.

"Always go long-sleeved to avoid nettle stings and the need for messy sun tan lotion. For a hat, you just can't beat a wide-brimmed cowboy hat style as it protects all around your neck.

"The more glare you can keep off your eyes the easier you can read the water depth and see the fish you are trying to catch.

"My most useful present item of fishing clothing is the Buff as you can wear it as a hat, a scarf, a balaclava or a sweat band.

"I make sure I am travelling as light as possible so only carry stuff that is absolutely needed and I make sure it is accessible. I have carabiner clips all over my vest and my floatant, drying powder, sinkant are all fitted with wee loops so I can clip them on when I'm using them a lot, for example during a rise/hatch.

"Useful items are artery forceps, rod clip for a spare rod, specs retainers and a wee fly drying cloth.

"I never go anywhere without a wading staff. I find it as useful on the banking for getting down steep slopes as I do in the river for checking depth before I take a step, to steadying me in fast currents and crossing channels.

"Also, I use tungsten studs which are easy to screw into sturdy wading boot soles and invaluable on the slippery river bed.

“I have a magnetic clip on the back of my vest for holding my landing net and another on the front of the vest for securing the wading staff. Remember to carry water.

“Massive improvements can be made to your fly fishing effectiveness by ensuring your tackle and end rigs are well balanced.

“If your fly reel is too heavy or big it can affect how you fish, especially in long sessions. If you are fishing with fairly light nylon, it is a must that your reel is sensitive enough to allow a fish to run without breaking the leader.

“The same goes with the rod. If you attempt to fish a fly line on a rod that is not matched to that fly line your casting and fly presentation will always be a struggle.

“I see a lot of beginners that tie their cast nylon directly to their fly line. It can be done, and it can work but the transfer of energy from a thick fly line to a relatively thin piece of nylon spells disaster for presentation.

“If you use a whole knotless tapered leader (9ft) or even just a part of it between the end of the fly line and the cast nylon, energy transfer becomes smooth and fantastic fly presentation becomes effortless. Basically, for £2.45, you can transform your fly fishing world.”

Next time we look at tackle maintenance.