

The River Halladale

A Detailed Guide to The Fishing

INTRODUCTION

General

The Halladale is a highland spate river which has its origins in the Flow country on the Knockfin Heights to the south of Forsinard and runs north for 22 miles entering the Pentland Firth at Melvich Bay. Water from the Flow country maintains a summer level but like all spate rivers, the Halladale can suffer from low water in a prolonged drought. There are three lochs in the system (Nam Breac, Sainn and Saird) which are dammed and used to provide extra water.

The Strath Halladale website www.strathhalladale.com contains a useful beat map and up to date river level and catch record together with historical catches.

Access to the river

Access to the river is easy and cars can be parked off the roads where indicated on the fishing map in Fishing Parking Places and NOT in Official Passing Places, please.

The Fishing

Fishing is from both banks of the river and although anglers can fish much of the river while wearing gumboots, waders will allow for better presentation on many pools as well as enabling anglers to cross the river when water levels allow.

From a fishing point of view, the river is divided into the Upper Halladale and Lower Halladale. The Lower Halladale water, which is described in this guide, is eight miles long divided into four beats numbered 1 to 4 from top to bottom, fished in rotation by moving down one beat per day. Beats change at midnight. Fishing is by fly only from both banks, with three rods permitted per beat.

The two Upper River beats which do not rotate can also be booked through the Administration Secretary, Audrey Imlach (07879 866738 and website)

Season and runs of fish

The salmon season opens on 12th January and closes on 30th September. Salmon start to enter the river at the beginning of the season and can be caught in small numbers in the early months. From the second half of March numbers of fish build up considerably, depending on the water conditions, and there can be a good run of spring fish averaging approximately 9 -10lbs with some at the 18lb mark. The recent 5year average to mid June is about 650 salmon and grilse.

Grilse averaging 4lb+ start to run from late May onwards and can continue to do so until the end of the season.

Summer salmon enter the river from June until September. These latter are heavier than the spring fish, averaging about 11 -12lbs with the occasional fish of 20lbs plus.

Without a loch at the top of the river, fish normally make their way upstream to their spawning areas with many fish staying in the lower pools. In November / December fish can be seen spawning down the entire length of the river.

The four main beats have great variety as the river flows through moorland, agricultural grassland, rocky gorges with low falls and on to the 'canal' with flood banks in the lowest section of the river.

The river is tidal for the bottom mile or so of its course, which is below the bottom beat, from the A836 coastal road and it then flows past Bighouse Lodge, Strathview Cottage, The Netstore and Fishery Cottage to the sea.

The varied nature of the river encourages the use of a number of fishing techniques which are described briefly below.

Fishing Techniques and Ghillies

The Halladale is a very interesting river to fish and repays mastering a number of different techniques to get the best out of it as well as increasing fishing enjoyment.

This will also be increased by the knowledge of a local ghillie with experience both of the pools and the appropriate methods at varying water heights and temperatures.

The River Manager, Reuben Sweeting has the names and telephone numbers of several recommended ghillies who are excellent value. Please contact him if you wish arrangements to be made for a ghillie to accompany you and your party as required.

General:

As the Halladale is fished from the bank, care should be taken to avoid being silhouetted against the skyline while fishing or to show yourself to the fish or make obvious movements, especially in low water.

The river flows from south to north in general terms and so when there is sun care should be taken to avoid casting shadows onto the water.

Hand-lining: It is important to keep the fly moving so hand-lining at various speeds is much used and hugely productive. The importance of this point cannot be overemphasised!

Backing up: Backing up is a technique much used in Sutherland and Caithness and is recommended not only in slower pools but elsewhere as well particularly with a good upstream wind. Backing up as its name implies means starting at the end of a pool and working towards the head. The line is cast out almost straight across the river and the fisher then takes two to five paces upstream creating a belly in the line which causes the fly to work. The fly is then hand lined back to the rod and cast again and so on.

To be most effective backing up needs a good breeze on the water to conceal both the fisher and the line, but it can have some remarkable results. It is also a good way of fishing back up a pool having fished it down as it presents the fly to the fish in a very different way.

Hitched and Wake fly fishing: This is often practised in various forms using a floating line, particularly in low water. Hitched mini tubes, Muddlers, and other hitched and wake flies, may be greased and with indicators to make them float and show up better are fished by casting across the current and then allowed to "skate" on the surface across known lies, often causing a reaction where sunk flies have had no effect.

Dibbling: Dibbling, using a bushy or wake fly on a dropper skating along the surface with a sunk fly on the point as an "anchor" can also prove highly effective in areas of faster water, particularly for grilse. The technique involves casting across the current and leading the dropper back on the surface of the water by holding the rod tip well up and working the fly back to the rod. Muddlers often greased make good wake flies.

Alternatively, the flies can be lead from side to side across the current with the rod point. Very often the dropper attracts a fish which will then take the point fly.

Equipment

The Halladale is not a large river, although some of the pools are a fair size. In general, a rod of 10-14 feet will be adequate. In spring, using sunk lines and large flies a double handed 12-14 ft. rod with an 8/9 weight line is perfect.

Once the water has warmed up in May a double hander of 11-12' with a 7/8 line or a single-handed rod of around 10 ft. is all that is needed, though the longer rod is useful for dibbling.

N.B. Electrical cables cross the pools in a number of places and caution should be exercised when using a carbon fibre rod.

Flies. Flies are of course a matter of personal preference but because the water can be dark in a spate flies with some colour (red, orange, yellow, blue) are chosen by most people. Shrimp patterns of all sorts, Alisdair, Willie Gunn, Munro's Killer, Stoats Tails etc. have all been successful, tied on double hooks, tubes etc. Temple dogs, Pot Bellied Pigs both unweighted and either on bottle tubes or with cone heads are also highly effective – as are Collie Dogs and Sunray shadows in the right conditions. Sizes range from 2.5 inches to 1.25 inches in spring down to No.2 for a large spate in summer to No.10, 12 or smaller for low water conditions. When the water is low it is often clearer and darker flies may then be more successful.

Treble hooks are not permitted.

The River Manager, Reuben Sweeting is an expert fly tier and appropriate flies for the different parts of the season can be bought from him.

Only knotless landing nets are permitted on the Halladale. Gaffs and tailers are not allowed.

IMPORTANT - GYRODACTYLIS SALARIS is a parasite which is deadly to salmon and has decimated some European rivers, particularly in Norway. Although there have been no cases recorded in the U.K. it is essential that this parasite is not introduced to the UK or of course the Halladale.

As a preventative measure all anglers must sign a declaration that their equipment has not been used abroad or if it has, they must have their equipment disinfected (particularly boots, nets, lines and flies) before starting to fish. Disinfection takes very little time and the liquid used is harmless to fishing tackle. Alternatively, the relevant equipment can be put in a deep freeze for 24 hours.

Reuben Sweeting (07920 571026) can arrange for the disinfection of fishing equipment.

Dogs: Dogs are allowed by the river but must of course be always kept closely under control, particularly with sheep and lambs but with wildlife as well. Any dog which misbehaves can be banned from the river by the River Manager.

OTHER FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

Wild Trout Fishing: The Forsinard Fly Fishers Club (“FFFC”)

There is rich feeding in the river for parr and wild trout and the latter rise freely and can reach a good size. The largest caught in the river in recent years was a 5lb fish from Harpers. Trout are caught on both wet and dry flies and there are good hatches of fly from the end of April onwards. [Please take out all trout caught on the river.]

The local loch wild trout fishing is exceptional and covers approximately [50] lochs managed by FFFC. Reuben Sweeting is one of the Founders and Managers of the FFFC. A number of the lochs have boats which can be booked. The Strath Halladale Partnership is a corporate member and fishing tenants for salmon fishing are associate members and may book trout fishing through FFFC. To book trout fishing on one of the lochs as an associate member please contact FFFC secretary, Paul Byrne, on 07904 483085.

The local lochs have a very good stock of wild trout which are free risers in normal conditions and can fish well from the beginning of May to end September. The lochs themselves vary from limestone areas with fewer very large fish (3 to 6lbs+) to more typical acid lochs with lots of half pounders, with all the variations in between. Trout up to 2lbs are not uncommon.

Seatrout: At certain times of the year seatrout run the Halladale and can be caught in the river and the estuary. Fishing tenants fishing the river may fish the estuary for seatrout and finnock which can be caught on a fly not only in the river and in brackish water as the tide ebbs and flows but also in saltwater

in both daytime and the evening. Grilse will also sometimes take in brackish and salt water and a number are caught in the estuary and sea pools each year.

FLORA & FAUNA

A large variety of wildflowers are found in the strath and in the locality. In March to May there are primroses and violets by the river and king cups in it followed by various sorts of orchids, harebells, vetches etc. with ubiquitous gorse and broom through an extended season. The sea cliffs in early summer are covered in euphorbia maritima in acid green flower with white silene complementing the nesting fulmars and terns.

A large variety of sea and wading birds can be seen by the river and estuary from sandpipers, ringed plover, greenshanks and redshanks to roseate terns, eider ducks and fulmars around Portskerra harbour. On the various lochs water birds vary from northern divers and rare ducks to geese which breed in the strath.

On the moorland buzzards and harriers are common and both golden and sea eagles and ospreys are seen besides a large number of exotic visitors.

Other wildlife abounds on the river and otters may be seen quite frequently.

AN HISTORICAL NOTE

According to 'The Salmon Rivers of Scotland' the Halladale is "supposed to take its name from a son of the first Earl of Orkney, one Halladha, who was killed in a battle in the Strath, and buried where he fell; the field is still pointed out by the locals, a deep circular trench with a stone in the centre marking the burial place of Halladha and his sword."

In more recent times the estates of Forsinard and Bighouse were part of the lands of the Dukes of Sutherland, who were responsible for cutting the canals and building the flood banks in the lower part of the river in 1831 when they acquired the estates. This was done to prevent flooding of the valuable hay crops in the fertile floodplains. The top of the Strath is an area which did not escape the effects of the Highland clearances in the early 19th century when a number of people were forcibly moved to make way for sheep and Portskerra was built to house some of them.

The Duke sold the estates in 1919 and in the 1920s Bighouse Estate was owned by Colonel Hartley and produced several thousand brace of grouse a year. He was responsible for a number of the 'improvements' to the pools and in particular those between Smigel and Lady Bighouse. At that time, when labour was cheap, he also built the dams at lochs Sainn, Saird and Nam Breac.

Commercial netting has operated in Melvich Bay and the estuary from the 18th century to relatively recent times though it has all now ceased.

The river and surrounding estates went through a number of hands in the mid 70s and early 80s and at one time a timeshare scheme was set up on the river and a handful of shares were sold. The dams built by Colonel Hartley which had fallen into disrepair were renovated in the mid 80s and a channel was dug at the mouth of the river to ease the passage of fish into the river in low water.

By 1989, the five-year rod catch average had reached 200 fish a year before increasing sharply in more recent times to over 650 a year.

An up to date catch record is available on the website www.strathhalladale.com

A significant amount of pool improvement and repair work in the lower river has been carried out since 1985. The objective has been to create deeper holding water throughout the length of the river to reduce stress on fish in a dry year as well as creating more fishable water.

In addition, a significant programme of habitat improvement work has also been undertaken since the late 1980s mainly in the upper reaches of the river to increase the carrying capacity of the river for parr and smolts.

GUIDE TO BEATS AND POOLS

(Though a ghillie will be far more effective, entertaining and productive!)

This guide describes the main pools and runs on the Lower River beats. However, if an angler is walking the river it is well worth trying the smaller runs and 'holes' between pools especially when grilse are about.

Introduction

In the following guide the references to "**left bank**" and "**right bank**" are as viewed looking **downstream**. The indications "left bank" and "right bank" after the pool names below is the suggested bank from which to fish but often pools can be fished from either bank depending on the wind.

The references to pools etc. should be read in conjunction with the Beat Maps which are available to all Fishing tenants and can be found on the web site] The Beat Map also shows parking places on the A897 and routes down to the river by car to most of the pools giving easy access.

There are river height gauges on each beat. **Low water is taken as being 3" or less on the gauges and high water as above 1' 6"**.

Each beat is marked at its beginning and end with a board beside the A 897 main road. There are one or more fishing huts beside the river on each beat.

At the end of this section there is a subjective schedule of which pools will fish well at different heights of water.

Beat 1

The hut for Beat 1 is at Bridge

A suggested itinerary

The large parking area to the West of the Cemetery gives an easy approach to fishing Cemetery and Cemetery Bridge Pot. Either walk carefully up the riverbank to the head of the pool or along the edge of the field and cross the fence by another stile at the head of the pool to avoid disturbing the fish.

Drive down to the tail of Hughs as shown from the A897. Walking up the RB of Hughs gives access to the rowan tree pot and the main pool itself. Crossing the river below hughs allows access to the LB of Jetties.

Parking on the A897 above Jetties where marked gives access via an easy walk up to the top of Jetties and down to Nhare. If desired.

It is either a short walk from Nhare to Primrose Run, Croick and Dukes or these three pools can be approached from a parking place on the main road opposite Primrose run.

Upper Chilsey is best approached from a parking place on the back road from Bridge to Cemetery opposite a cottage by a burn. Cross the field towards the river and turn right and follow the river to the Tail of Dukes. This can be fished before continuing to Upper Chilsey.

Bridge car parking is reached by turning off the A897 at bridge past the hut to the end of the road before doubling back and entering the gate on the right just above the hut. The run at Above bridge is an easy short walk above the main pool – and well worth fishing.

Cemetery - Left Bank

This pool, immediately below the confluence with the main tributary the River Dyke, has been deepened to allow fish to rest comfortably in low water, as it is the last holding pool for some distance. It has a short run at the top of the pool followed by a deeper section with trees on the right bank which stop halfway down the pool. The pool is fished from the left bank and in medium to low water the fish lie

mainly off the right bank and in mid stream from the broken water to the end of the trees. In higher water fish will also lie off the croys on the right bank and the pool can be fished down from either bank until the river becomes shallower towards the bridge.

Cemetery Bridge Pot - Left Bank

The pot below the bridge often holds fish particularly in higher water. The fish lie mainly in the current for thirty yards or so immediately below the bridge but in high water fish all the way down into the tail of the pool.

Hughs and Rowan Tree Pot - Right Bank or left bank (Caution Electricity Cable)

Rowan Tree pot is marked by a large rowan tree on the left bank and is at the top of Hugh's pool. The river is shallow and the fish, which lie close into the bank on the left side under the rowan tree, are easily spooked. It fishes well at medium river heights.

Hugh's Pool proper starts immediately below the Rowan Tree Pot with deeper water under the left bank and then a shallow section with some large stones in mid stream where fish often lie. The river deepens by the stone banking on the left bank at the top of which there is a very short croy and below which there is a weir at the tail of the pool. An electricity cable crosses the river and there is a ford below the pool.

Besides the lie amongst the large stones, there is a good lie just off the short top croy and there are lies in the body of the pool and under the electricity cable down to the weir. Fish carefully below the weir and round the croy below and through the remainder of that small pool.

Backing up can be effective.

There are two pots which can fish well for grilse in medium water between Hugh's and Jetties, one under the left bank and one under the right bank at the beginning of the left-hand bend.

Jetties- Right Bank or Left Bank (Caution Electricity Cable)

Jetties is in effect two pools, an upper pool with fishing off (or opposite) a long green grass bank and a lower pool with stone/ grass jetties on the right bank below where an electricity cable crosses the pool. The upper part of the pool fishes well in medium to low water and can be very productive. Taking fish lie from the very good run in to lies close into the rusty gate on the left bank. In medium to high water, they also lie mostly on the right bank under the electricity cables, by the stile and off the 'jetties' down to the tail opposite the lone tree on the left bank. In higher water this part is best fished from the left bank.

Nhare -Right Bank

The pool is really in three parts with trees on the left bank of the first two parts and the third part more open. In medium and low water, the fish lie mainly in the streamy run at the top of the pool which should be approached with care to avoid frightening the fish. In 1ft or so of water the fish drop back to lie in the main body of the pool. and in the run along the trees in the second part and in higher water the fish tend to drop right back into the tail of the pool which can then fish very well.

Primrose Run - Left or Right Bank

Primrose Run starts on the downstream side of a small burn coming in from the right bank below Nhare. It is mainly fished from the left bank and the river can normally be forded above the run in to the top section of the pool. Firstly, there is a small pot where taking fish lie followed by a shallow run and then a pool with gabions on the right bank. This streamy run along the gabions and rocks on the right bank is also best fished from the left bank. Fish as far down to the head of Croick as the depth of water will allow.

Croick - Right Bank

As the banks are very open the pool should be approached with care. Fish lie off the promontories on the left bank, but several large stones have been placed in the body of the pool to create lies so all the pool is worth fishing.

Fish also over the stones at the tail weir and below the weir itself.

Dukes -Right Bank

Dukes has a weir at top and bottom with a good stream through it and stones in the main body forming lies. Fish hold in the pool and can be caught in most heights of water.

Fish also below the weir at the tail. This area above Upper Chilsey can be fished from the left bank when fishing Upper Chilsey. (see below)

Upper Chilsey – Left Bank

Tis excellent pool is best approached from the back road as described elsewhere. In low and medium water fish the head from the gravel and then fish the main body of the pool to the islands on the next bend from the high bank taking care to keep back from the edge so as not to show yourself.

Chilsey – Left bank

This pool is about 300 yards below Upper Chilsey and is worth a cast in medium water. The pool starts above a fence coming to the river on the right bank and continues for about forty yards with two small croys on the right bank.

Bridge – Hut (left Bank)

There is a run on the bend Above Bridge Pool, which is nearly always worth a cast, especially if walking down the river. It can be fished from either bank but is easiest from the left bank.

Bridge pool is a most popular and easily fished pool., ideal for beginners. Fish lie in the neck of the pool so start fishing as high up as possible casting over the fast water and bringing the fly right back to you. The run at the head is a good spot for dibbling.

Remember to keep back from the river and fish all the way down to the bridge casting across the stream to the far bank and hand lining it back. Fish right down to and under the bridge and start immediately again on the other side.

Below the bridge for about forty yards there are lies off the right bank and in the middle.

In high water the fish drop backdown the pool – first below the bridge and then below the gauge.

The lower part of the pool fishes well in a spate. Fish below the gauge all the way down to the trees at the bottom till the fast water is reached. Fish lie particularly under the electricity cable halfway down the pool. This part of the pool can be fished in the largest of spates when fish lie close to the left bank.

Beat Two

The Huts on this beat are at MacBeths and Smigel

A suggested itinerary.

On the back road from Bridge heading North takes you to the left bank of MacBeths. There is a parking place above Macbeths from which you can walk up to Mackenzie's Run and Harpers, also fishing the left bank of Macbeths on the way back.

On the right bank the access road above Garden takes you down to Garden and then to the hut at MacBeths. From the hut you can cross the river above MacBeths in suitable water and walk up to Mackenzie's Run, Harpers etc and also the top end of MacBeths. Returning to the right bank fish all the way down Macbeths.

Drive down and Park by Garden Pool giving an easy walk up to the head of Garden via a track through the gorse bushes and fish Garden all the way down to the weir at the bottom. From there you can walk down to Upper Bighouse. –normally well worth while.

You can drive down to Smegil through the gate by the converted Chapel near the Mill and post box, parking where indicated. After fishing Smegil pool you can then walk on downriver to fish Gorkil, the Hut Pools and Lady Bighouse pool.

Alternatively, these latter pools can be approached by walking across the fields and upstream from a parking place in Sandy Murrays farmyard, taking care not to obstruct his access to barns and gates.

Mackenzie's Run - Left Bank

This is an improving pool with a streamy head and a slower tail. It fishes well in low water and fish lie in the streamy water at the head but in high water they lie more on the right bank where the river broadens out, and towards the tail. The head requires a roll or Spey cast on account of trees.

Harpers - Left Bank (Caution Electrical Cable and SEPA gauging station wires.) or Right Bank

Harpers is a big holding pool with a shallow run in at the top above the gauging station which is well worth fishing. Fish lie in the main body of the pool and often beneath the electricity cable which crosses the pool. In most water conditions fish lie off the right bank, particularly above and below the electricity pole, all the way down to the tail. In high water they can also lie in the head of the pool and may also move across to the left bank into the slacker water in the tail.

This pool can also be fished from the right bank including the head in high water particularly.

There is also a small pot by the birch tree on the right bank below the tail of Harpers which holds grilse and is worth fishing through to the tail in medium water.

Macbeths - Left or Right Bank

This is an excellent holding pool and can be fished from either bank. Grilse are often taken right at the top of the run into the pool which should be approached with care and not waded. Fish lie all the way down the run and off t the head of the stones on the left bank.

They also lie on the left bank and in the middle opposite the first little burn mouth and in the deep water on the left bank by the mouth of the second little burn. In high water the lower third of the pool can be good. Fish lie off the croys extending from the left bank and this part of the pool particularly is more easily fished from the right bank.

Garden -Right Bank (Caution Electricity Cable)

Start fishing Garden about two hundred yards above the parking place and seat. This is best approached by walking up the grassy track towards Macbeths and cutting through the gorse by a track to the head of the pool.

Fish the head standing well back and continue fishing past the bench paying particular attention to the area by the large croy. Take care when casting by the electric cables.

The large pool below the croy holds fish at all heights of water and there are lies all the way down to the tail. There is a particularly good lie in the centre of the river just downstream of the power line pole nearest to the river. It is a good pool at most heights of water.

Upper Bighouse -Right Bank

This pool is best approached from Garden by walking down the right bank. A low weir at the top has created a good stream at the head of the pool which extends down into the main body of the pool. Fish beside and below the trees on the left bank. This exciting pool extends for about 80 yards and can be fished in most states of water.

The main road can be reached easily from this pool by recrossing the burn at the head of the pool and then following the easy walk up the bank towards the road.

Smigel - Right Bank)

Smigel is an excellent pool in most water conditions. It has a run at the top which nearly always holds fish even in low water.

Approach the head via the path through the bushes, crossing the burn away from the river and then walk to the top of the pool. Fish lie in the stream above the burn against the rocks and opposite the burn on the left bank and in the middle. In the centre and tail of the pool fish tend to lie towards the left bank and in the middle. And there is a good lie towards the left bank about ten yards above the seat.

Fish the pool to the tail and then try a few casts off the weir upstream towards the left bank.

Gorkil -Right Bank

This pool is in two sections. The first, which is difficult to fish, is a small deep pool where the river narrows to about eight feet between two high rock faces before flowing into a small pot. It can be fished from upstream of the rocks or off the top of them. In a spate it is spectacular.

The lower part below the pot is fished off the low rocks on the right bank down to the weir above the Hut pools. Fish lie especially by the sheer rock face on the left bank and in front of the weir. It fishes best in medium to low water and though awkward to fish has yielded a number of fish from time to time.

The Hut Pools (Right Bank)

This attractive series of pools linking with Gorkil were originally formed by Colonel Hartley with man-made weirs (railway lines) in the 1920's. They produce fish particularly during the grilse runs in summer. Good lies are under the left bank and above and below the weirs. The old Hut fell into disrepair and has been removed.

Lady Bighouse - Right Bank

Lady Bighouse is quite a large pool and provides a good contrast to the Hut pools immediately upstream. There are several good lies in the centre and towards the tail and just off and below the croys, which come out from the left bank. The neck of the pool is a regular resting place at all heights of water.

Beat 3 The hut is above Forsil

The hut has an excellent view of the tail of Victorias upstream and Forsil and Runout downstream.

A suggested itinerary

Munro's is best approached by parking at Sandy Murray's farmyard with a short walk across the fields. Alternatively, park along the fence on the A897 above the new barn on the road near Forsil and walk from Forsil to Munro's up the side of the river and back down via Boys and Victoria.

Victoria, Forsil, Run Out and lower Run-Out are easily reached by parking on the A897 as above and walking across the field towards Forsil.

Park at Calgarry off the A897 and take the short walk to the river. Lower runout is to your left and the head of Upper Ashills to your right. Ashills can also be reached by walking down the right bank from Run Out and Lower Runout.

Cross the river above the head of Ashills and fish the middle and lower part of Ashills from the left bank – thigh waders are needed in lowish water but chest waders in medium water are necessary.

Calgarry can be fished from the left bank but the river is easily crossed below Ashills and fishing Calgarry from the right bank is probably better.

Alternatively, park near Mugs on the A897 and walk up to Lower Ashills and Calgarry.

Munro's - Right Bank

This can be a very productive pool in most heights of water.

Fish lie in the run above and between the rocky outcrops at the head of the pool. As the pool widens out fish lie by big underwater stones off the left bank and in the centre of the river particularly just before and after the end of the line of small trees on the left bank. There is a good lie in the centre of the river about ten yards below the trees. Continue to fish down to the fence.

In high water fish lie from the end of the trees on the left bank right the way to the very tail of the pool.

Boys - Right Bank and left bank

Boys is a small pool formed by a huge chunk of rock on the right bank which creates a run-in mid-stream. The current runs across the pool towards the right bank forming a small bay before hitting the rocky slab. Fish lie by the boulder in midstream and against the slab.

Fish also over and below the line of stones across the river from the rock in medium water.

The pool can best be fished from the left bank: wade across above the pool. Alternatively, in higher water wade carefully out to and stand behind the rock just off the right bank at the head of the pool and fish the pool from there.

Victoria - Right Bank

This is an interesting and very productive pool which can change a lot from year to year. In low water fish lie right up in the neck of the pool and dabling is often the preferred option. Fish also lie off the rockface at the top of the pool often taking as the current leaves the face which is also a good spot This is a good place for hitched and wake flies too.

Again, fish the lies from the rock face down to where the pool starts to narrow which is also a good lie itself. In the lower half of the pool fish sometimes lie all along the sheer rock face towards the tail.

In low/medium water fish can be caught right down in the tail just above the falls -- but this can be tricky and is best fished with a ghillie.

Forsil - Right Bank (and Left Bank)

Forsil is a large pool which generally holds many fish. In a big spate the falls are an impressive sight, but the fish drop back into calmer water.

In medium and low water fish lie in the stream below the falls and in front of and between the big rock in the middle of the pool and the right bank and past the big rock to the end of the streamy bit.

It is also well worth a try casting back up into the pool from the head of Run Out, especially in a strong upstream wind.

The fishing hut and bench above this pool is an excellent lunch spot.

Run Out - Right Bank

This can be a productive stretch of water where a weir creates a deep fast stream out of Forsil under a high bank on the left. It is easily fished off the shingle on the right bank and is an ideal spot for children and beginners. It can produce fish in most heights of water.

The gravel head changes each year, but one can usually start to fish as the run leaves Forsil and continue all the way down concentrating around the croys which come out from the left bank wherever the water looks deep enough to hold a fish.

Lower Run Out starts below the bottom croy and has a submerged boulder creating a good lie about ten yards down in midstream. Fish right down the pool if possible.

In higher water the fish move down to the wider calmer water below the first croy and to lower runout.

Try to avoid casting shadows, particularly early in the morning when the sun is behind you.

Ashills - Right and Left Bank (Caution Electricity Cable)

There is a good stream at the top of the pool before the main body of the pool is reached. This is best fished from the right bank and is a good taking spot. Cross the river above the head and fish the main body of the pool from the left bank. Fish lie among and below the stones, and particularly under the right bank 15 yards either side of the rusty gate(?) on the right bank below the passing place on the road. The lower half of the pool is worth fishing and can be fished from the right bank in high water.

Calgarry - Right & Left Bank

This pool is best fished from the right bank but can be fished from either one.

The pool is in two parts and fish lie in the streamy water in the upper pool below the weir at the top.

In the lower half of the pool the lies are off and between the short croys on the left bank and in midstream. Fish also below the weir at the bottom of the pool.

Lower Ashills - Right Bank or Left Bank

Lower Ashills is a holding/resting pool best fished in medium to high water. Fish tend to lie down the centre of the pool. They also lie in the neck of the pool and dibbling here can be effective even in low water. In high water fish will lie towards the bottom of the pool and above the rock in the tail.

Beat 4

The hut for this beat overlooks Stone pool and is reached down a short track by some sheep fanks on the A897 main road. This track leads down beside the river through two gates to Havaig.

A suggested itinerary

There is a parking place on the main road above Mugs and both Mugs and Conagill can be easily approached from there.

Otherwise, park by the hut above Stone pool and walk upstream to fish Sandy Braes, Barriers, Stone pool, Corner pool and Keddies.

Alternatively, if a fisher is dropped off by Mugs, they can fish Mugs, Connagil, the Pot, Sandy Braes, Barriers and Stone on the way back to the hut. Or continue down river and fish Corner too.

From the hut drive down the track to Havaig and park at the end of a long straight stretch where the river turns ninety degrees to the right but make sure that all gates are closed.

There is a gate through the fence to Havaig. From Havaig it is a short walk downstream to Fearaig and the head of Weedies.

The tail of Weedies, Otter Corner and Canal can best be approached by car from the access road off the A897 leading to Otter Corner. It is then a short walk up to Weedies or down to Otter corner and Canal.

Mugs - Left Bank

This is a pool at the foot of a large hillock with an excellent run in. The river should be crossed above the pool if it is safe to do so and the pool then fishes beautifully from the shingle on the left bank. Alternately, the stream that flows under the right bank can be fished with difficulty using a dibbled dropper from the right bank, but fish are easily frightened. The pool holds fish even in extremely low water and should not be ignored.

Fish down to the weir at the tail taking particular care on the corner above the weir.

Connagil - Right or Left Bank

Fish are seen in all parts of this pool but tend to lie in the run in from Mugs at the top of the pool, particularly in the centre above and below where the burn comes in on the right bank. In higher water fish the right bank down past the gauge to the tail as fish fall back towards the centre and tail of the pool.

The Pot – Left Bank

This recently formed small pool between Connagil and Sandy Braes holds grilse and fishes well in low and medium heights of water. Stand well back from the pool on the left bank and fish it right from the head.

Sandy Braes -Right Bank

This is a large, deep pool on a bend in the river which produces a good number of fish each year. The neck can be fished successfully from either bank but is probably best fished from the right bank as fish lie not only in the stream at the top but close to the left bank as the current comes round.

Fish also lie in the narrows halfway down the pool on the left bank and this part of the pool should be fished carefully. Fish down to the tail of the pool.

Barriers - Right Bank

The river runs out of Sandy Braes in a shallow stream through gravel which deepens as it turns a corner to the left under a grassy bank. In medium to low water fish will lie towards the top of the long run and above and below the small croy on the right bank but in higher water they lie towards the bottom in the wider and slower part of the pool.

In low and medium water, the pool is best fished from the left bank but can be successfully fished from the right bank in higher water.

Stone – Right Bank (or left bank)

This pool holds fish throughout the season and can be fished from either bank water height permitting. The head is undergoing a significant change, but fish normally lie close to the right bank, above and below the croys and the large stone which gives this pool its name. In low water they move nearer the Stone. Always make a few casts from above the Stone that you think are too close to it and you might be in for a big surprise.

Corner - Right Bank

This pool has deepened and improved considerably in recent years and fish lie from the neck where the river turns ninety degrees to the right and off the rocks under the left bank to the tail and is well worth spending a bit of time on. Stand well back from the river and keep as low as possible.

There is a gate opposite the tail of Corner pool onto the track which leads back to the hut one way and Havaig the other.

Corner pool can also be approached directly from the track.

Keddies - Right Bank

The pool has croys at the head followed by a long run with a number of lies in it. Dribbling should be tried at the head in low water. In high water fish all the way down to Havaig, paying particular attention just above and below the 'bight' upstream of Havaig itself.

Havaig- Right Bank

Havaig is at the end of a long stretch where the river again turns right by about ninety degrees. Start fishing towards the left bank above the apparent head of the pool and above where there is a large 'bight' in the left bank and continue through the neck of the pool to the tail. Lies have been created with large triangular concrete blocks which can be seen in lower water in the head, middle and tail of the pool. In high water fish all the way down the wide straight lower section of the pool to the fence and gate.

Fearaig -Right Bank

Fearaig stretches from the croys two hundred yards below Havaig to just above Weedies. Fish lie from the streamy area at the head of the pool, off the first two croys on the left bank. In higher water the lower croy also holds fish

Weedies -Left Bank or Right Bank

Weedies is a long pool running straight between flood banks for approximately 600 yards. Nine croys have been built at the head of Weedies to create an area of varying flows and depths to enable fish to pass in low water.

In Spring, fish through the croys and concentrate on the area up to 100 yards below the weir at the tail of the croys, but in Summer concentrate on the tail of the pool.

At the tail fish from about 100 yards above the ditch and bridge on the right bank to the tail (a distance of about 200 yards). Fish lie all across the river and under both banks and may well be seen cruising up and down. If there is a good breeze backing up can be highly effective as can the use of hitched and wake flies.

Otter Corner - Right Bank

Between Weedies and Canal the river flows over a gravel bed. There are several deep holes on this short stretch of water where fish tend to lie, mainly on the left side of the river.

It is worth fishing the run between Weedies and Otter corner keeping as out of sight as possible.

Otter Corner itself tends to change each year but fish lie where the river flows from shallow to deep water and against the left-hand bank.

The River can be crossed below Otter corner to the left bank where there is a single fence post on the top and there is a ramp and handrail up the slope. A run has formed just below this crossing which is well worth a cast as the water becomes quite deep especially under the right bank.

Canal -Left Bank or Right Bank

This is another long, straight stretch of river between flood banks. It has a run in at the top with a weir which fish lie behind. —and sometimes just in front of. Pods of fish can often be seen moving up and down the pool.

Be careful and try to keep out of sight as far as possible particularly when fishing around the top weir.

Fish particularly between the two electricity cables which cross the river but again fish can be seen moving anywhere along the stretch down to the Akran burn at the end of the beat. Pay particular

attention to the areas above and below the 'bights' on the right bank between the cables. Providing there is a reasonable wind on the water and preferably if it is overcast, the Canal can produce fish even in the lowest water. Backing up can be successful if there is a wind and is an excellent way to fish this long stretch of river. Flies from hitched and wake flies to tungsten headed ones are all worth a try depending on conditions.

Fish tend to run into Canal two hours before to two hours after a high tide - especially if it is high enough to back up water into the canal (tides over 4m approx.) so fish Canal then.

Staff

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What is Fishable?

The following is a subjective guide to how pools fish in different heights of water, marked from 5 (very good) to 0 (useless!). The "Beat & Pool Analysis" gives the results for each pool, but pools will change from year to year.

<u>Beat 1</u>	<u>High</u> > 1'6"	<u>Medium</u> 1'6" - 3"	<u>Low</u> 3" - 0"
Cemetery	3	5	4 (Head)
Cemetery Pot	1 (Tail)	5	1
Hugh's	2	5	3
Jetties	5 (Tail)	5	4 (Head)
Nhare	5 (Tail)	5	3 (Head)
Primrose Run	0	4	5
Croick	1	5	2(Tail)
Dukes	2	5	4
Upper Chilsey	3	5	4
Bridge	5 (Tail)	5	4 (Head)

Beat 2

Mackenzie's Run	0	3	3
Harpers	5 (Tail)	5	2 (Head)
MacBeths	5 (Tail)	5	4 (Head)
Garden	3	5	4
Upper Bighouse	4	5	3 (Head)
Jubilee	1	2	0
Smigel	5	5	4 (Head)
Gorkil	0	3	4

Hut Pools	0	4	4
Lady Bighouse	2	4	2

High
> 1'6"

Medium
1'6" - 3"

Low
3" - 0"

Beat 3

Munros	5 (Tail)	5	3 (Head)
Boys	2	5	2 (Head)
Victoria	4	5	4 (Head)
Forsil	4	5	4
Run Out	4 (Tail)	5	4
Lower Run Out	4	5	3
Upper Ashills	5 (Tail)	5	3 (Head)
Calgarry	2	5	4
Lower Ashills	3	3	0

Beat 4

Mugs	2	5	4
Connagil	5	5	3 (Head)
Pot	0	5	4
			4
Sandy Braes	4	5	4 (Head)
Barriers	3 (Tail)	5	4
Stone	2 (Tail)	5	3 (Head)
Corner	2 (Tail)	5	4 (Head)
Keddies	1	4	2
Havaig	4 (Tail)	5	4
Fearaig	4 (Tail)	5	3 (Head)
Weedies	5	5	4
Otter Corner	2	5	4

Canal

5

5

5(Head)

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