

NYMPHING FOR SALMON

Extract from the book "**Salmon Fishing On River and Stream**" by ABK
This article was posted by ABK on the SalmonFishingForum

The easiest time to catch salmon is without doubt when they are fresh run and have newly arrived into a pool. The longer that fish stay in a pool the more difficult they become to tempt, they maybe more difficult, but they are not impossible. Usually when the river starts to fall back after a spate, anglers appear on the banks of most salmon rivers. The majority of them only ever fishing during text book conditions, when the river is most likely to produce fish, i.e. after it has turned and started to clear. As the river height starts to drop right back and the flow through the pools slow, many anglers seem to forget that fact that the salmon although no longer running are still present and taking up lies in the main holding pools. Many spate river anglers will not bother wetting a line during low water, preferring to wait instead until the river rises and turns once again. By adopting this approach they are denying themselves many opportunities of sport. If the fish are in the pools they can be caught, maybe not so easily, but none the less sport can still be had if one is willing to put in the time and effort. As the water starts to drop and approach normal running height most fish migration slows with salmon taking up residence in the deeper holding water to await the next rise in water. The longer these fish have to hang around between spates the less likely they will be inclined to rise through 5 or more feet of water to take a small subsurface fly. During these periods of low water conventional fly fishing methods take the occasionally fish, but in order to maximise ones chances it is best to put away the double handed salmon tackle and exchange it for a single handed rod and adopt a change of tactics. The following tale of two anglers comes to mind. They arrived for a few days fishing at the Kirkholme beat of the Stinchar and found the river running well bellow summer low. Both anglers where reasonably well experienced to realise that conventional fly fishing tactics would be a waste of time. One tired a deeply sunk Dog Nobbler and soon hooked a fish, only to have it coming off after a short struggle when the light trout hook straightened out. After this he tied on a weighted Pheasant Tail Nymph. To cut a long story short over the next two days both anglers took five fish apiece and lost several others.

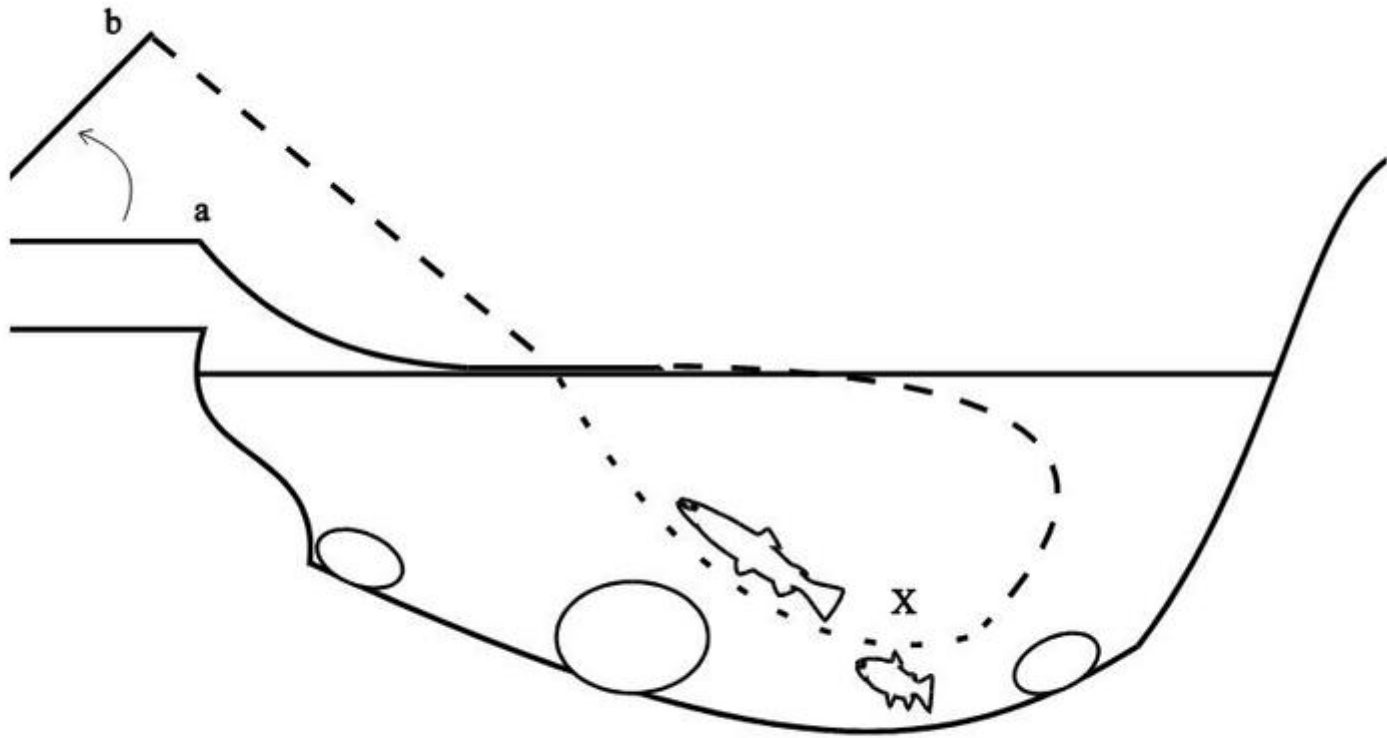
It is when faced with low water and bright overhead conditions that the single handed rod armed with small flies and light leaders comes into its own. This is not to allow us to fish a small subsurface fly with light tackle, but instead it is to fish a small fly deep, with control, and sensitivity, something that the longer rod does not facilitate. The technique that I am about to describe can be performed with the double handed rod, but the method is better suited to a light single hander. Another reason for putting

away the double handed rod is this, when using it many anglers for one reason, or another, seem to throw all caution and common sense to the wind. Many seem to think that salmon are not so easily spooked as trout, how wrong they are. If the single handed rod is used the same angler who thunders up and down the river bank with a double hander will now have to adopt the cunning and the stealth he practises when trout is the quarry. If the fish see you, you are wasting your time. Why the change of approach for one fish and not the other, I do not know! It is however a fact and one that never ceases to amaze me.

When fish have been lying up in a pool for some time they seem to become more and more indifferent to small sub-surface flies with each passing day. If you have booked a weeks fishing only to arrive and find the river running low, all is not doom and gloom. There are occasions when for some unknown reason they will take a small deeply sunk fly fished close by. One method of fly fishing during times of low water is a deeply sunk "nymph". It employs the same method as used and practised by trout fishermen who have unsuccessfully tried to tempt a trout by conventional presentation techniques. The method involves "inducing" a response from a trout by pulling a deeply sunk nymph up, past, and away from the fish. It is the lifting of the nymph at the correct time which seems to trigger the fish into taking. Trout will at times find a nymph fished in this fashion irresistible. This method of fishing is called the "induced take" and at times salmon that have been lying in a pool for some time can be tempted by presenting a fly to them in a similar fashion, i.e. on an eyeball to eyeball approach. In order to present our fly properly it should be well weighted, with either copper or lead wire wound along the shank of the hook before the dressing is tied. In the slower holding pools small trebles are ideal for this type fishing. If the lies are in a section of the pool that carries more pace a single hook with a brass bead, as used for the goldheads flies favoured by some stillwater anglers are ideal. I dress these goldheads nymphs on size 12, 10 or 8 International Sprite hooks. These hooks maybe small and light, but they have a wide gap, and are excellent hookers of fish. If the lie is in a deep fast run I will use a small quarter inch, or half inch brass tube. These tubes enable the fly to get down to the same depth as the fish relatively quickly. If limited to only one type I would have to choose the goldheads. These give better results then the treble, or brass tube version, not in hooking, but in the number of fish that are induced into taking. The goldheads dives head first, and rises head first when fished in the correct fashion. I believe that the gold bead helps exaggerate the change in direction. I am sure that it is this action which makes the gold head much more attractive to the fish than either the treble or brass tube. Another fly style worth trying which produces results is a Cats Whisker variant tied in the smaller sizes. Regardless of which style of fly or hook type one chooses the dressings should be kept sparse for best effect.

When fishing my own choice of rod is the Powerlite 10'6" Salmon and Seatrout rod made by Bruce & Walker. I find the rod is ideal for casting the small trebles, or gold heads,. It also has the spine to cast the small brass tubes effectively as well.

When presenting the fly it should be cast well upstream at the end of a about a 10 ft length of 7 to 10 lb. nylon. This should be attached to the end of an appropriate rate 5 ft sinking polyleader for the flow being fished. The line should be cast up and across from where the fish are lying, so that by the time the fly "drifts" downstream to where the fish is lying it has sank to the correct depth. This is very important if we are to fish the fly properly and provoke a response from the fish. If the fly is not allowed to sink to the "right" depth the fish more often than not will ignore it. They appear to be less interested in a midwater fly than one which is presented right down at nose level. It also goes without saying that it is essential when fishing the nymph to know the depth of the pool where the fish are lying. I like to use a full floating line, with an appropriate sinking polyleaders, as I feel that it gives better control, and allows me to mend several times to ensure that the fly has sunk to the required depth, before I start to fish the nymph. If the nymph is fished with a full sinking line it will not be so easy to fish it properly. A sinking line will be at the same depth as the fly when we start to bring it up, and away from the fish. When fished at the end of a sinking line the fly will initially be pulled past the fish, and not up, and away from it. It is the up, and away motion which seems to be the triggering factor. For the fly to be fished in the "induced take" fashion correctly we must use either a full floater with just a long length of nylon, or a floater with a short sinking polyleader. When using both these set-ups we fish the fly by lifting the rod above our heads to raise the nymph towards the surface. The action is quite similar to to the intial lift we make wjen going to execute a steeple cast. In so doing it will rise in a much more natural, and attractive fashion. By fishing the fly in this fashion we are therefore much more likely to produce the desired response from the fish. Why fish seem to find a fly fished in this fashion more attractive than a conventional overhead fly in low water I do not know, but perhaps it is because the fly comes closer, and closer, and then suddenly rises away, thus triggering the salmons latent predatory instinct. So often when spinning, or fly fishing a fish will take the bait or fly just on the "turn", i.e. just as the lure kicks round in the current. If this turning of the lure in the horizontal plane is so effective then why should a vertical change in direction be any less successful! I am pretty sure that it is the evasive escaping action of the nymph, lure or fly fished in this fashion that is the fundamental ingredient to the success of this method.



Many fish will follow the fly, and take at the last minute, just when the rod cannot be raised any higher. These rises are pretty spectacular with a great vortex appearing on the surface, followed by a good solid pull as the fish turns, and starts to head back to its lie. Other fish will take just as the fly starts to rise in the water. This type of take is usually very gentle, the fish merely moving forward, and sucking it in. If anything is felt, it is best to assume that a fish has taken, and to pull the hooks home at once, by drawing down on the line. Not all fish that come to the fly will be hooked, however a few will be. It is these fish that make it all worth while. Catching salmon by this method is not easy, so if you are not prepared to put in the time and effort then perhaps you, should, like the majority put your rods past when the river falls back, and potter about the garden instead. One thing is definite though, if your rods are hanging up in the garage waiting for the next rise in water you will not hook anything. I would rather be using them than seeing them gathering dust. So when the river drops back don't vegetate your time away waiting for rain, put your rod up, and have a go. There are many questions, and many things about salmon fishing to which I have no answers, but one thing that I am certain of, is, that if you do not go fishing you will not catch fish.