

Little and large

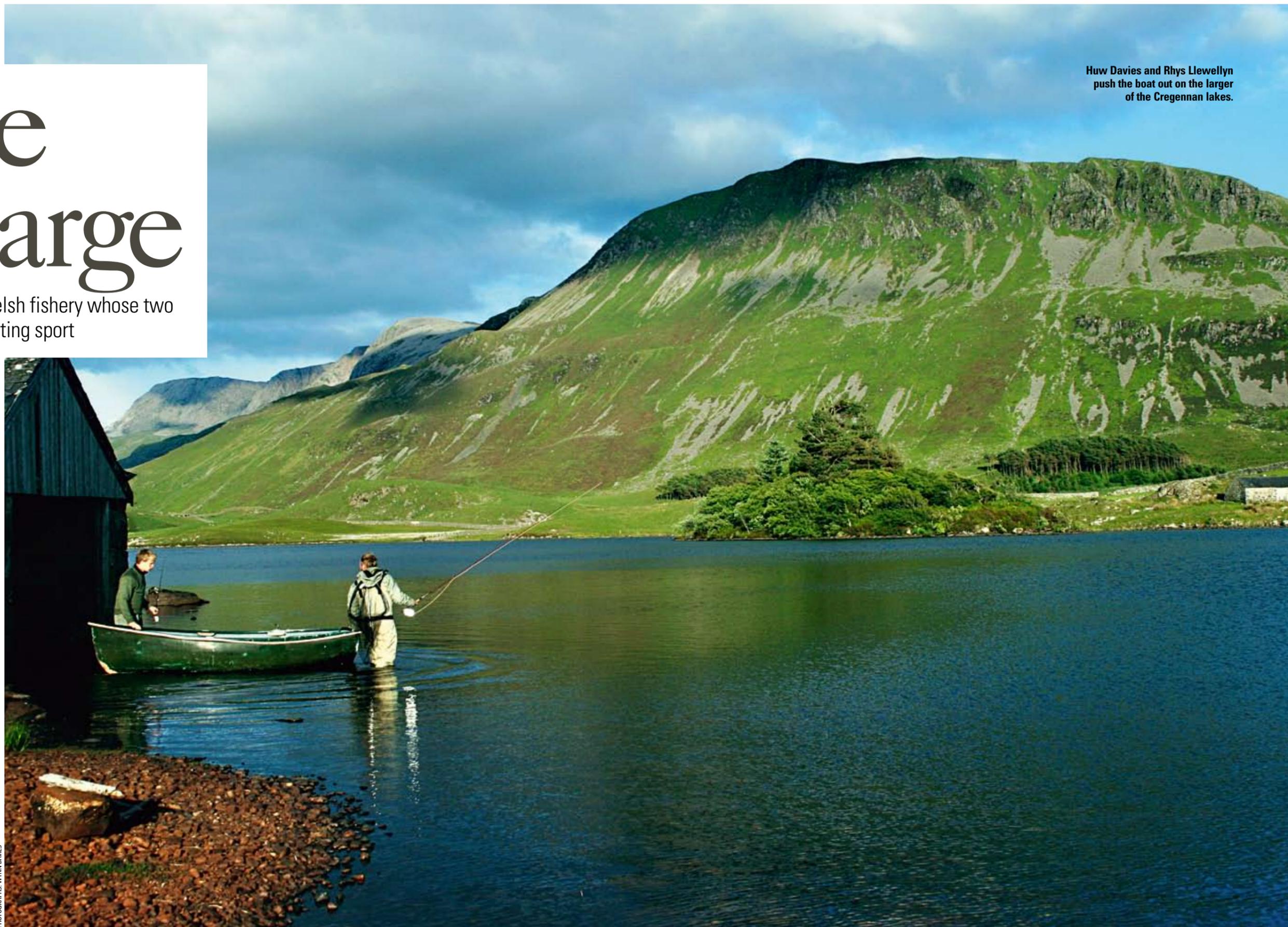
Wynn Davies visits a Welsh fishery whose two natural lakes offer contrasting sport

HERE'S A QUESTION for you. Given a choice of fishing two natural lakes – one a wild-trout water whose fish average 6 oz-8 oz and the other stocked with very fit rainbows that are considerably bigger, and where both lakes are equally attractive – which would you choose?

The reason for my posing this conundrum is that I have just returned from fishing Cregennan Lakes. These two natural waters are situated at an altitude of 800 ft in breathtaking scenery about five miles west of Dolgellau. There is a convenient car-park and loos on the shore of the large lake, which extends to 27 acres and is a wild brown trout fishery. The second lake, which is only about 50 yards away, is 13 acres and regularly stocked with blue and rainbow trout to 6 lb, although it, too, has a wild trout population. I can think of no rainbow trout fishery more picturesque than this, while as a wild trout fishery the larger lake has a few rivals – but not many.

The lakes lie in an area which is one of the most important national geological sites and has some of the cleanest, best-exposed and most complete sections of volcanic and marine sedimentary rocks in Britain, which makes for some interesting walking

PHOTOGRAPHS: WYNN DAVIES



Huw Davies and Rhys Llewellyn push the boat out on the larger of the Cregennan lakes.

and wading. Lying in an area of open access, the walking is tremendous, offering an alternative activity for family or friends who do not fish.

As with so many mountain lakes in Wales, Cregennan has a fascinating history and associated legends. One such legend was that the ancient Celts used to visit the lake to throw their treasures in to ensure their continued good fortune. In the 12th century near the lake was Llys Bradwen, the residence and court of Ednowain ap Bradwen, head of one of the 15 tribes of Wales. Some say that this is where the name Cregennan originated, as he used to try offenders in his court and then hang the guilty beside the lake. For in Welsh "Cregennan" is said to have mutated from "crog gangen", which means hanging branch.

It seems that in the 19th century

wild fishing was valued at an even higher premium than it is today, for records show that in March 1879 W. Taylor, the then owner, leased the lakes to Arthog Hall for the princely annual sum of £12. This in today's money, would work out at around £7,400, making it very exclusive trout fishing indeed.

In 1959 the National Trust was given the lakes, together with 705 acres of surrounding land, by Major Wynne-Jones in memory of his two sons, who were both killed in the Second World War. Even idyllic places can have troubled histories.

On a recent visit I was accompanied by my son Huw and good friend Rhys, and we had decided in advance to start with the small lake. If there is no one at the farm or no reply on the phone you can begin fishing and Emlyn, who runs the farm and manages

the lake, or his son, will drop by to collect the money. As the lake has only one boat, and there were three of us, rotation between bank and boat was the order of the day.

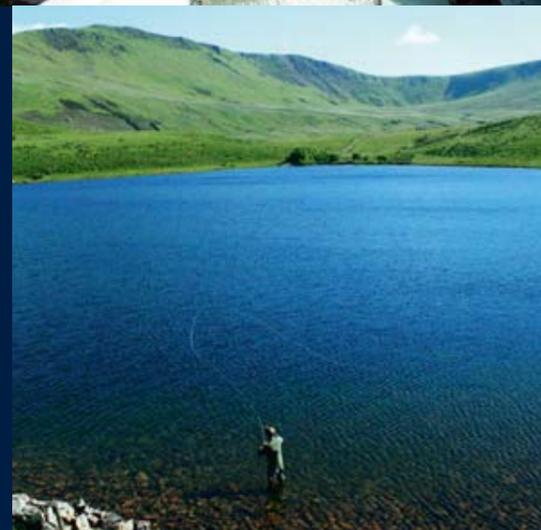
There was not a cloud in the sky and it seemed as though we were in for a hard day, although a number of rises gave cause for optimism. After a few hours' fruitless fishing the trout were still rising but we were not catching them, which caused some head-scratching. Though there were olives, coch-y-bonddu, sedges and midges on the wing the trout were not taking them, and nor would they take any sub-surface flies we offered. The breakthrough came when Rhys, fishing from the boat, finally caught a rainbow. The riddle was solved when the fish was spooned: it was stuffed to the gills with snails. When the snails are migrating, the trout can become preoccupied with them as



Clockwise from left: heading down the track to the smaller lake; a small but pretty rainbow for Rhys Llewellyn; the two lakes lie in wonderfully wild countryside.



Clockwise, from top left: A typical wild brownie from the larger lake; Huw Davies plays a rainbow on the smaller lake; fishing from the bank can be productive too; a good drift on the smaller lake.



they rise to the surface, so we changed to Black and Peacock Spiders and began to catch fish. My son, who had put some floating snail patterns on his cast, usually fishes for wild trout, so his strike is tuned to their lightning-fast take. Rainbow trout, however, are far more leisurely, taking the imitation with a gentle draw. Many times Huw managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of the fish, but eventually he slowed down. The rainbow trout were in superb condition and a tribute to the management of the lake and the purity of its water.

We decided to move to the larger lake, on which there are two boats – though, as on the small lake, only oars are allowed. The extensive shallows at the west end can be very productive, but with the sun still shining brightly we decided to fish around the island, where the water is deeper, and the tree-fringed shore of the west bank. While fishing the shore

using the traditional step-and-cast method is productive, I much prefer to be afloat, for then you can admire the scenery as you drift and not have constantly to watch where you are walking. The wildness of the surroundings and the sheer peace that these places offer is wonderful.

There was no head-scratching over snails on this lake, for we caught trout on our regular patterns – Hare's Ear variants and black flies such as Cormorants and Bibios. Now my son was in his element! Soon we were catching beautifully marked trout averaging 6 oz-8 oz, with three-quarter-pounders not uncommon, but even these are much smaller than the rainbows in the other lake.

As we sat and discussed the day, we decided unanimously that the large lake and its wild fish was our favourite.

A word to the wise, however. Cregennan Lakes supply drinking water to the households

in the valley below, so be careful not to contaminate the water or be tempted to go for a cooling swim. While I am reliably informed that they no longer hang people on the shores of the lake, you can never be certain.



Factfile

Large lake – day £12; evening £6; under 14s £3.
 Bag limit – day, two brace; evening, one brace.
 Small lake – day £20; evening £12; under 14s £12.
 Bag limit – day, two brace; evening, one brace.
 Boat on either lake – £10.
Contact Tel: 01341 250 468/426 or 07854 139 766.
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 Website: www.cregennan.co.uk