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# HEAD-BANGERS IN THE HIGH HILLS



*Wynn Davies* stretches his legs to fish a lofty Welsh lake, where he encounters a beetle with a novel means of self-preservation

**T**HERE IS A LAKE in Wales that I have always wanted to fish, ever since I read about it in Frank Ward's book *The Lakes Of Wales*. Although Llyn Ffynnon Lloer is only around six acres, at 2,225 ft it has the reputation of being the best trout lake over 2,000 ft in the Principality. It lies in the heart of Snowdonia, in the Carneddau mountain range between the summits of Pen yr Ole Wen and Carnedd Dafydd.

Ffynnon Lloer is variously interpreted as "well" or "source" of the moon or even "dream moon". These names refer to the ancient Druidic custom of celebrating the new moon and May Day, "spirit nights" when men and women of the locality would go to the lake and dance on its shores.

I am not getting any younger, and I thought I had better get Llyn Ffynnon Lloer under my belt while I still could, so I arranged to meet Gwyn Jones and Bryn Evans, from the Ogwen Valley Angling Association, who would guide me to the lake.

The Association has four lakes, the lowest of which is Llyn Ogwen at 1,020 ft above sea level.

As we climbed, Llyn Idwal

came into view at 1,220 ft, and another 600 ft up we espied Llyn Bochlwyd. These two, with Ffynnon Lloer, are excellent wild stocked lakes. Ogwen has wild brown trout, but is also stocked with rainbows.

On our climb, Gwyn explained his deep love of Ffynnon Lloer. He has fished the lake for 40-odd years, as did his father before him, so if anybody knows it, he does.

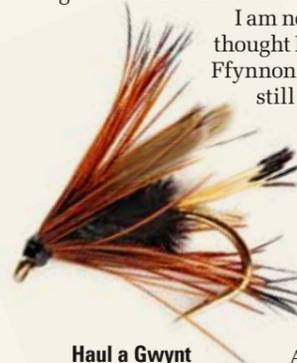
Apparently the size of the trout runs in cycles. A few years ago he was catching them up to 1½ lb, then they became more numerous but smaller. Now, said Gwyn, he was catching brownies of around 8 oz.

I have come across this phenomenon before on high mountain lakes. But whatever the trout's size, the higher you go the stronger they become – they fight twice as hard as their lowland cousins.

As we took up station by the side of the lake, several mountain walkers passed by, giving us quizzical looks. One said that he had always wondered whether there were trout in this lake, to which of course we answered in the affirmative – "and big ones, too!"

I love meeting new anglers, delving into their fly-boxes and seeing new patterns, or old patterns tied with a twist. Gwyn's fly-box was in a league of its own, with row upon row of Welsh and traditional flies, every one a natural born killer. Mallard and Claret and Alder sat happily with old Welsh flies such as Blewyn Het and Ceiliog Hwriad Corff Main.

Gwyn also showed me his father's fly-box, which he uses solely for Ffynnon Lloer. Inside were some



Haul a Gwynt



Fishing the shallow south shore. Rocks underfoot can be treacherous, so take care when wading.



"Are there trout in here?" asked a passing walker. Of course there are – this one took the click beetle imitation, the Chwilen Pen Clec.

French Partridge Mayflies and Fan-Wing Mayflies with clear plastic wings.

These must have been 50 years old, so even back then they were using synthetic materials. Truly there is nothing new under the sun.

And then Gwyn and I heard a "click". This sound always brings a smile to my face, for it signals the presence of the click beetle. When threatened, this insect plays dead, folding its antennae and legs and dropping to safety in the dense undergrowth.

If it falls on its back it rights itself by flexing a special joint between its thorax and abdomen and increasing the tension on a kind of trigger mechanism. When this is released, the beetle is catapulted up to a foot in the air and this is what creates the clicking sound.

The adults are on the wing from May to August. In Welsh the insect is called Chwilen Pen Clec, which loosely translates as "head-banging beetle".

In Snowdonia it is so well known that there is a specific tying of the same name.

I always imagine the beetle feigning death on the water. Up rises an unsuspecting trout to eat it, when it clicks into action and with one kick gives the trout a bloody nose. That, of course, would be impossible, but the thought still makes me chuckle.

As we tackled up, Gwyn gave me some of his flies and a cast was made up of Mallard and Claret, Haul a Gwynt and, of course, the Chwilen Pen Clec.

It is possible to wade the shallow south shore for some distance, taking care to avoid the large, irregular slabs of rock on the lake bed. For the rest, there is no need to wade, and the traditional step-and-cast is the effective way of covering as much water as you can.

With the beetle were olives and stoneflies hatching, and by overturning the rocks close to the shore it was evident the lake was in good health.

We caught beautifully marked fish that fought very well, including the odd half-pounder. But I could sense Gwyn's disappointment at not being able to catch a larger fish and show me what the lake is capable of producing.

As we walked back down into the valley an idea took root. There are, I think, eight lakes more than 2,000 ft up in Wales that hold trout – it would be quite a challenge to "bag" them like so many Munroes before I slip into my dotage.

Whether this is a good or a bad plan only time will tell. You never know – I might even get fit.



● Wynn's first love is wild trout fishing and he has fished for them extensively in the UK and overseas.



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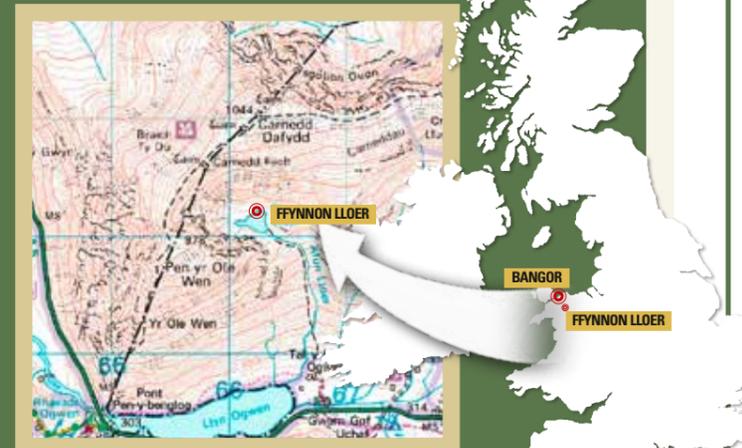


**CHWILEN PEN CLEC (GWYN'S TYING)**

**Hook** Size 12 Kamasan Wet Fly **Tag** A few turns of gold tinsel  
**Body** Black silk with peacock herl **Hackle** Black hen **Wing** Magpie  
 Gwyn substitutes the gold tinsel in the tag for pearl tinsel and finds this more effective at times.

**FACTFILE**

- On Ffynnon Lloer adult day tickets are £15, weekly tickets £40. Juniors (16 and under) pay £7 and £20.
- Tickets are obtainable from Ogwen Falls Café, by Llyn Ogwen; Ogwen Bank caravan park; W.Edwin Jones grocer, opposite the Victoria Hotel; and Dinas Farm, Tregarth.
- For further information, e-mail: sgotwrs@gmail.com  
 Website: www.pysgotaogwenfishing.org



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**THE WELFARE** of wild trout, and the wellbeing of the rivers which support them, is fundamental to the Salmon & trout Association (S&TA)'s work, which is why we are monitoring the Environment Agency (EA)'s Trout & Grayling Strategy (T&GS) closely and critically. Members report mixed attitudes towards the T&GS, and so we find ourselves, not for the first time, between a rock and a hard place.

No one seems to disagree that wild brown trout need protecting. The debate is whether the T&GS is the most effective way of achieving protection, with the mandatory stocking of triploids being the most contentious issue. The EA's assertion that this is being imposed on precautionary grounds to halt genetic introgression is causing some, including S&TA, to question a cherry picking approach from the Agency. Genetics are not the only issue with brown trout viability, yet there is a suspicion that the EA will rest on its laurels, thinking that triploids will cure all ills. They won't!

Wild trout stocks in England and Wales are suffering from habitat degradation, and not being able to fully utilise suitable juvenile habitat. Causes include excessive water abstraction, diffuse pollution/siltation, ill-sited hydropower schemes, insensitive canalisation and barriers to fish passage, all of which require a precautionary approach from our environmental regulator that is presently missing. What is required is a commitment from the EA, and their political masters, to address the dreadful condition of our waterways, less than 30% of which merit the tag, 'good ecological status,' under European environmental legislation.

Angling exploitation played its part in the past, with some of our forebears thinking that river's had an endless supply of trout for them to kill. Catch and release is protecting wild stocks today, but some anglers still want to take the odd brace home for the pot, so supportive stocking is needed. Proper research is required to decide whether triploids will perform this task efficiently - do they rise to the fly, will they adversely impact wild fish stocks, and are they strong enough to withstand a six foot chocolate spate in a rain fed system?

But triploids will only ever be sticking plaster for a far greater malaise - the continuing lack of genuine political commitment to address our failing aquatic environment. S&TA's campaign is to cut through official weasel words and demand action from our decision makers, so that they impose a precautionary approach to the management of all those other habitat