



Kingdom of THE COCH

High in the hills near Harlech are a brace of wild waters that host a famous hatch of beetle. *Wynn Davies* timed his visit to perfection



ONE FLY IS synonymous with fishing in Wales, and especially the mountain lakes of the

Principality. It is the coch a bondu, as it is more generally known, the coch y bonddu, which means “red with a black trunk”.

This is a very old pattern, the identity of its inventor lost in the mists of time. The first reference to it is found in George Agar Hansard’s Trout and Salmon Fishing in Wales (1834). It is tied to represent the bracken chafer, an insect sometimes referred to as the June bug. Its larvae live and feed in the roots of plants, and when they reach about 15mm they pupate in the soil at the end of April, remaining there until the end of May/beginning of June. This explains why so many take flight at the same time – already hatched,

they await the right conditions to emerge.

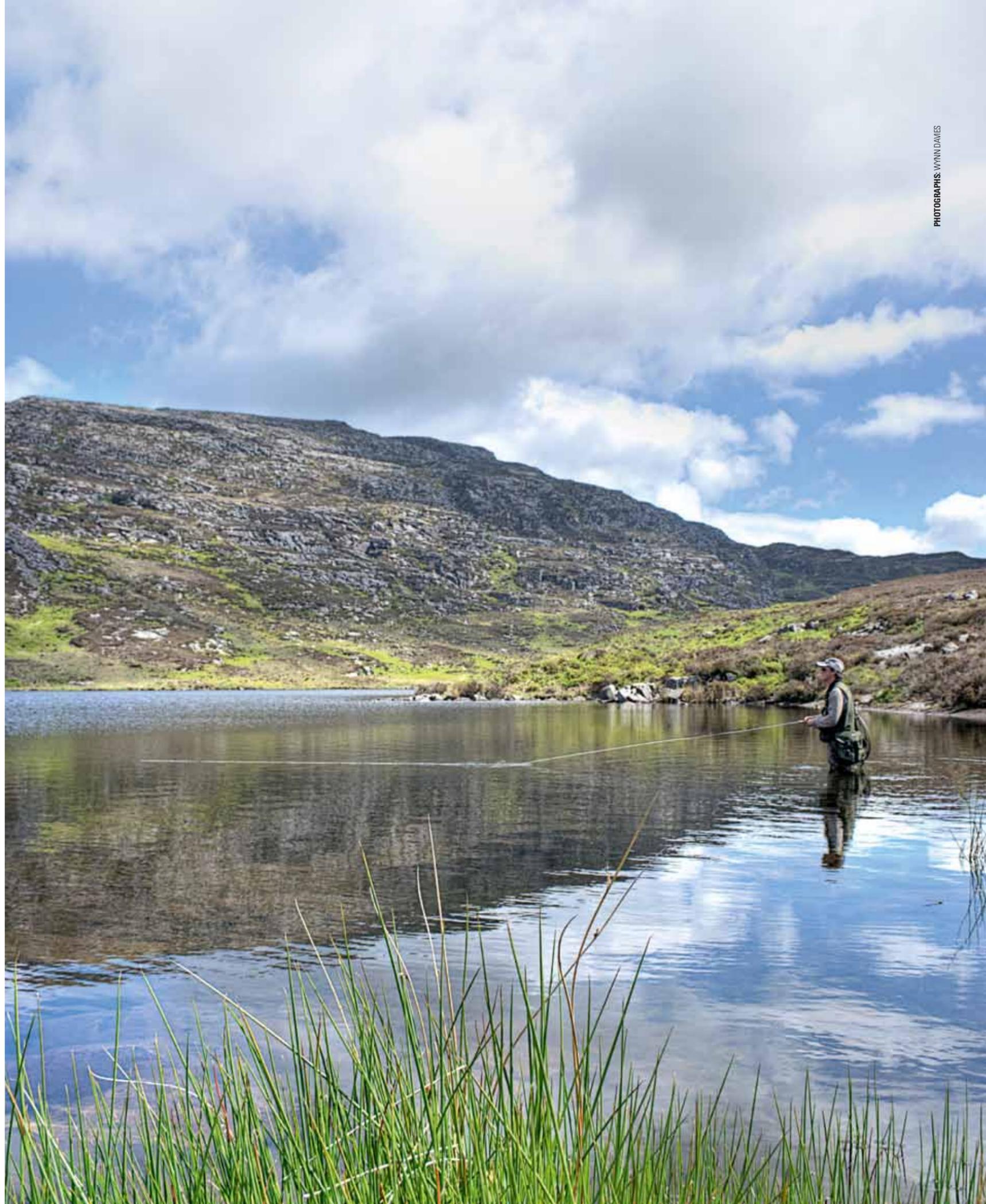
This beetle, along with the daddy-longlegs, provides sport of an intensity almost equal to the Mayfly hatch enjoyed on the rivers of southern England. The coch a bonddu hatch lasts for just two to three weeks before the males, and then the females, die. The hotter the day, the denser the hatch, which is the reverse of what anglers might expect. On cold days the beetles will not fly.

This year I decided to visit two natural lakes above Talsarnau, near Harlech in North Wales, for my annual fix of coch fishing. Llyn Eiddew Fach and Llyn Eiddew Fawr (Little and Large Ivy Lakes, respectively) are 4.5 acres and 33.5 acres in extent and set in glorious countryside. En route to the lakes, the view of the estuary and Portmeirion is spectacular and fully justifies the walk. Around the larger lake are the remains of

manganese workings that were active from the 1880s to the 1920s. Manganese was an important element in the electro-plating of firearms and the development of batteries. Although the workings are small, you still have to marvel at the effort required to dig and transport the ore all the way down the mountain to the estuary, with no mechanisation at the miners’ disposal.

Nearby is Bryn Cader Faner, one of the most beautiful Bronze Age circles in Britain. It is about 4,000 years old, and the outward-slanting stones create a somewhat menacing, jagged effect. A robber pit at the centre of the cairn exposes a large cist, or stone-built coffin, which once contained the remains of a local ruler, but otherwise the cairn is in excellent fettle.

Come early June it was a case of continually checking to see if there was a hatch of coch a bonddu at





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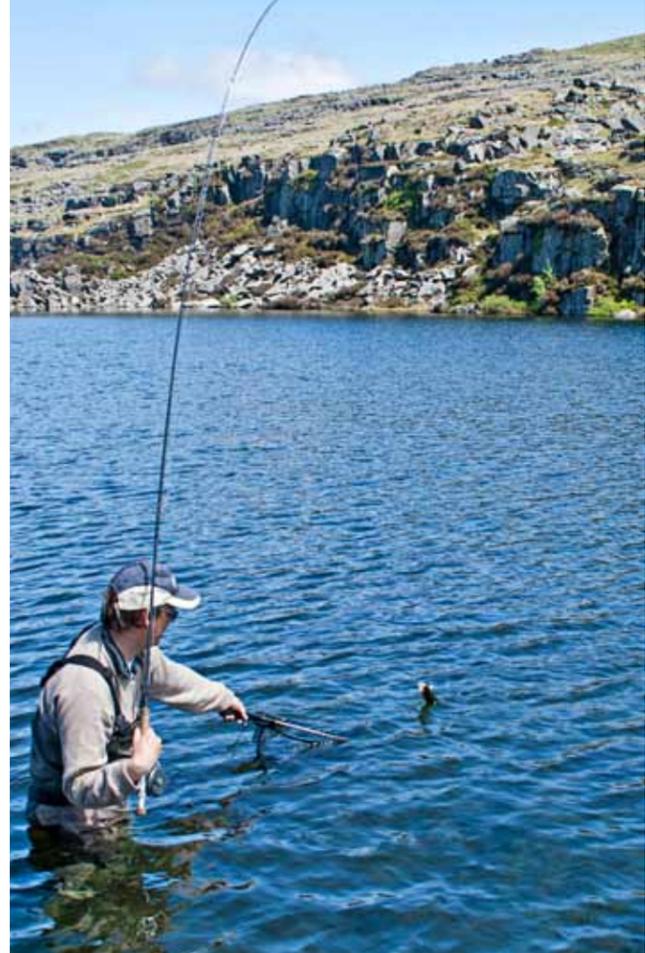
low level: in the mountains the hatch would follow a day or two later. The day arrived and I met up with two members of the local fly-fishing association, Dafydd Id and Alun Williams.

Dafydd and I go way back and have fished various places together, Ireland included. As we walked up to the lakes we agreed

This Coch Hopper will often out-fish everything else and will work throughout the season as a general damp pattern of some distinction.

It is worth remembering that as the trout become engrossed with the hatch, takes become more confident and to strike too quickly could mean a lost fish.

On the day we three elected to



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run of sewin, but that is not the case.

We caught fish to about 1½ lb on both the dry and damp coch patterns before breaking for lunch to debate whether or not to fish the larger lake, where we knew the fish to be smaller. Curiosity got the better of us and we walked the

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that it was best to be at the waterside by around 10 am, when the hatch would start and then intensify, peaking by mid-afternoon. Its density would depend on how hot the day was. The fish would soon lock on to the beetles and feed hard for a few hours before becoming sated.

Some fishermen, myself included, believe that the beetles are mildly toxic, which limits the number the trout can comfortably eat – but this is pure conjecture.

To fish a coch a bonddu hatch you really need only three flies, all of which are imitations of the natural. One is wet, one dry, and the third was shown to me many years ago by Emyr Lewis of Llanbrynmair. His Coch y Bonddu Hopper is a standard dry-fly with the addition of half-a-dozen knotted pheasant-tail legs. Everything below the hook shank is cut off, so the fly sprawls awash in the surface film. You cast it out and wait, occasionally twitching it to mimic a struggling beetle. When a trout takes you must wait for your fly-line to move before tightening into the fish.



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fish the smaller lake, which Dafydd said held the better fish. It is strange, but I have found that whenever a small and a large mountain lake are close to one other, the smaller one nearly always holds the better fish – don't ask me why!

As we tackled up the fish began to rise, at first out in the middle of the lake. This elicited a curse from Alun, who had meant to bring his float-tube.

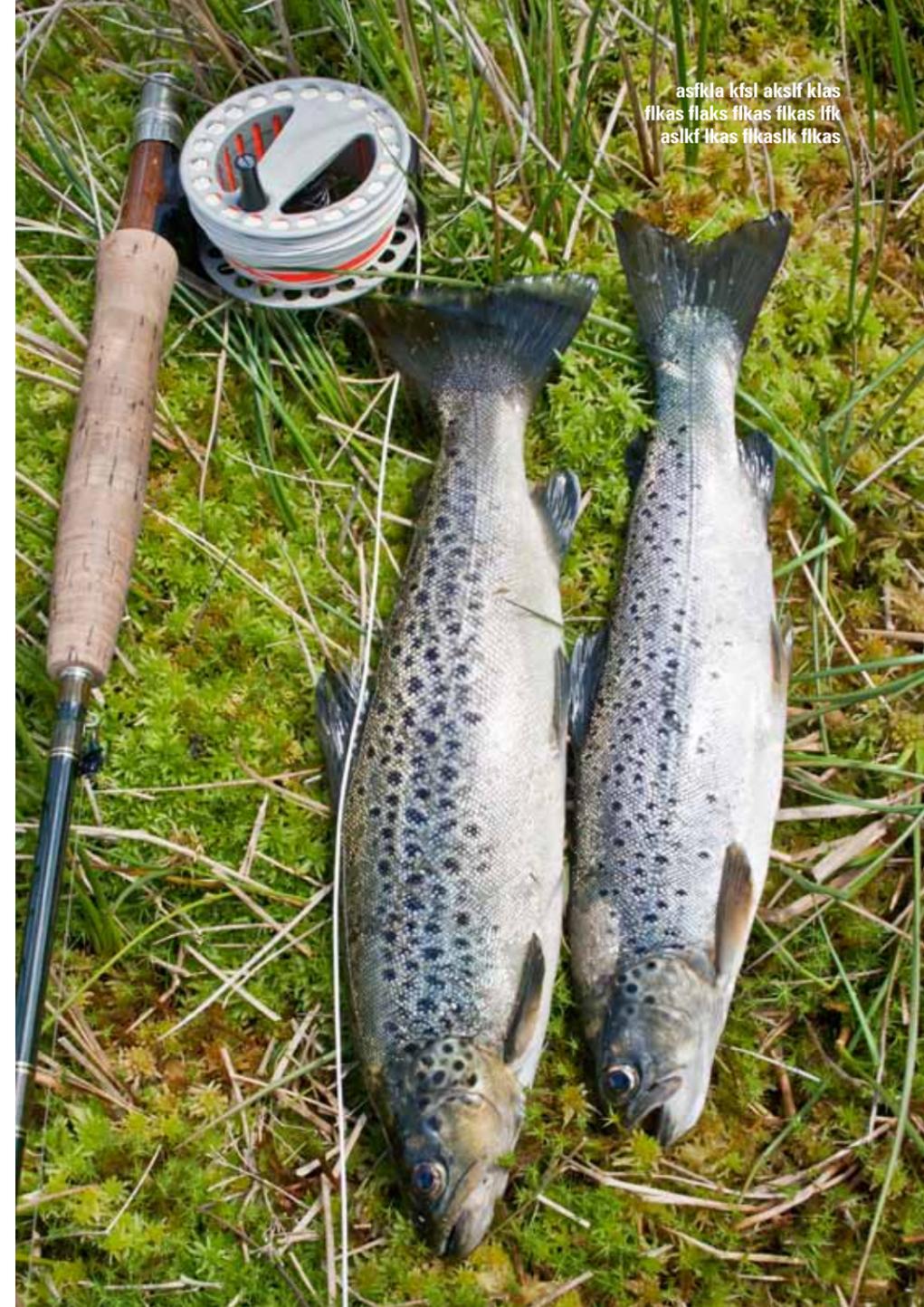
An overcast morning gave way

to a bright, sunny afternoon, the hatch intensified and the fish eventually came within casting distance. It was possible to second-guess the direction of travel of these hard-feeding fish and cast to them, and after a barren start things got distinctly interesting.

And what fish these were – unlike your average mountain trout they bore no red spots or brown livery, but rather the silver sheen of fresh run sea-trout. You would swear that the lake had a

hundred yards or so to its shore. Fish came immediately and yes, they were much more diminutive, but their enthusiasm to take the fly more than made up for that. Some would say that this lake was over-populated and would benefit from some of its fish being moved into its smaller neighbour, to the benefit of both. It would be interesting to know the Environment Agency's stance on this proposal.

By half-past-four the hatch had reduced to a



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FACTFILE

- Artro & Talsarnau Angling Association. **Contact** Dafy Owen, tel: 01766780302.
- **Day tickets** £8; weekly tickets £20; season tickets £40; OAPs £20; Juniors £15.
- **Tickets** from Penrhyn Guns, Penrhydeudreth, tel: 01766770339. Murphys Newsagent, Harlech, tel: 01766780460.
- The Old Bakery, Llanbedr, tel: 01341241380. Beachcaster Barmouth, tel: 01341281537. The association has four more lakes and also salmon and sea-trout fishing on the River Artro.

trickle and the fish lost interest in chasing our flies. But no matter, the coch a bonddu had delivered again – not quite as predictable as the Duffer's Fortnight of the Mayfly hatch, but still an opportunity to try for some really great trout.