



Fordun and dusted

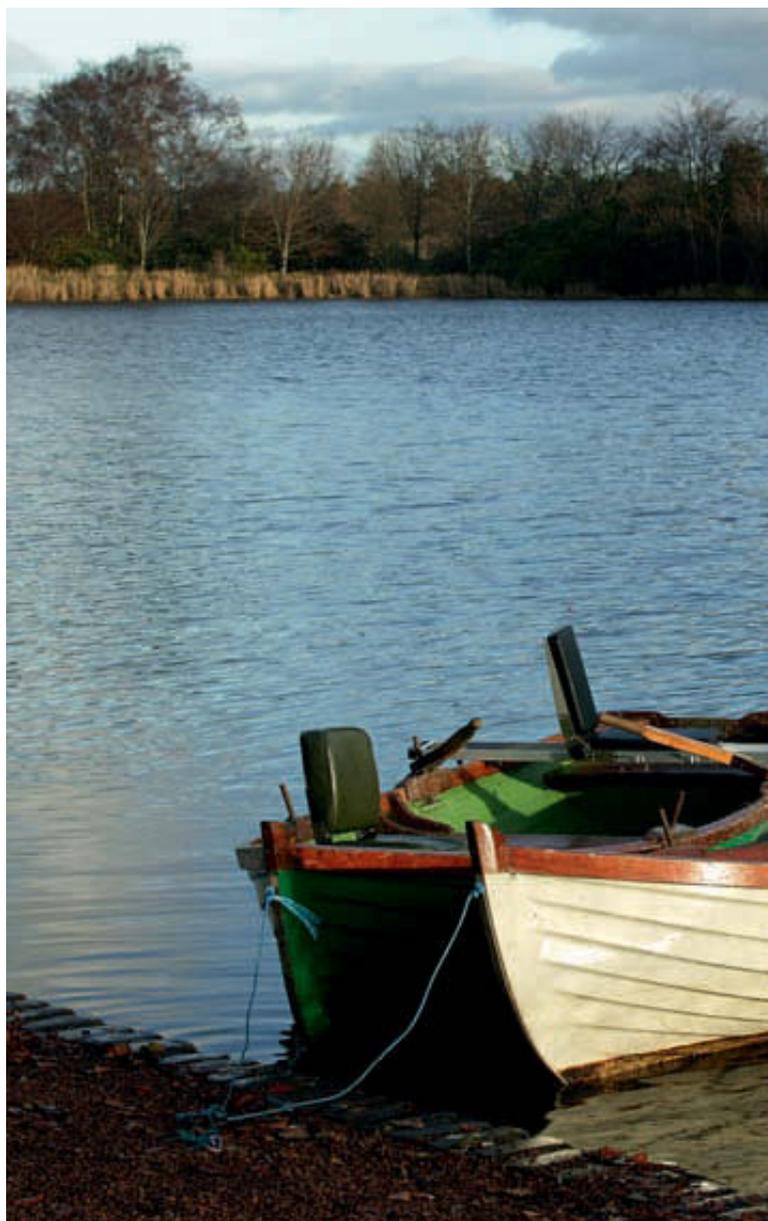
YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AS
STUBBORN AS SHACKLETON TO
VENTURE OUT TROUT FISHING IN
SCOTLAND'S WINTER MONTHS

It was with a sense of nervous anticipation that I watched the trout – a four pound rainbow – slide with agonising slowness towards the outstretched net. Yet it was soon safely in its confines, the fly was removed and the fish slipped back into the loch, considerably wiser, but otherwise no worse for wear. It was 11.30 in the morning and, so far, the day had gone remarkably according to plan.

All too often, journalistic forays into the countryside produce a fruitless day out. It sometimes seems that the first whiff of the written word causes creatures to scuttle into their burrows and fish to dive for the shelter of the weed-filled abyss.

Yet today seemed quite the opposite. Not only had an obliging trout been quick to grab my damsel fly, but other creatures mentioned by my Orvis-endorsed guide, Stewart Collingswood, had been equally cooperative. We had hardly rowed out of the Victorian boathouse before our first sighting of a kingfisher, which decided to put on

Clockwise from top left: Stewart Collingswood meets Rob at the Lodge; Boats ready for fishing; Preparing fishing lines; First cast.



a little display of its own fishing talent, launching itself headlong into the clear waters of the loch in search of a stickleback.

What's more, despite the impending approach of the winter solstice, conditions were remarkably pleasant on Fordun Loch – a rare warmth emanated from the low sun and the worst of the westerly wind was blockaded by the trees and rhododendrons surrounding its cosy 11-acre expanse. Further warmth was also being added to the cockles by the generous dram of Orkney's finest which had awaited us at the fishing hut when we'd arrived.

And as we sought to outfish the kingfisher we were soon greeted by a rare visitor from subarctic Eurasia, a whooper swan, which paddled past with a broad yellow bill which appeared to have been added to its graceful white head as an ill-planned afterthought. An otter and an osprey – also regular residents at Fordun Loch – would have completed the full range of rare beasties, although it was too late in the year for the fish-eating raptor to be eking out an existence in cool northern climes.





SOON AN AROMA, MADE ALL THE MORE DELICIOUS BY ITS RURAL SETTING, BEGAN TO DRIFT IN FROM THE KITCHEN.

As a more of an angler than a twitcher, I found the scaly residents of greater interest than the feathery émigrés. But with one fine specimen landed we were happy to head back to the bankside hut, for the angling and the wildlife were by no means the only attractions of a day on the water with Alba Game Fishing as the company's founder reminded us, they take care of all aspects of a day's fishing – including transport, tackle, tuition (if needed) and lunch. It was the last of these which now sounded particularly appealing and, judging by Stewart's foodie fervour, it seemed unlikely that we'd have to settle for a cheese-slice sandwich washed down with a bottle of Bru.

As Roy and I sat down in the wood-panelled 'hut' – with comfy chairs, a pressed white tablecloth and even warm running water, it wasn't your average bankside bothy – our suspicions were soon confirmed. Stewart had traded his fishing waistcoat for an apron and soon an aroma, made all the more delicious by its incongruously rural setting, began to drift in from the kitchen.

Plates of Thai-inspired curry, laced with ginger, lime



and chilli, were soon laid before us, complete with neat restaurant-esque coriander-topped piles of hot rice. And beside these appeared a crisp cool bottle of Sauvignon blanc. To someone for whom winter fishing picnics had always been associated with forcing down a bland bap with hands numbed by the cold, the feast that awaited was even more of a treat.

Fat, happy, and suitably fortified we returned to the lochside – the lure of the fishing sufficient to lift us out of our post-lunch reverie. For, while in winter the fish might be lurking deeper in the water, they're still very much possible to catch in good numbers throughout the year.

And I was especially eager to see some of the plump wild brownies – progeny of the famous Loch Leven strain – which had been introduced at the loch's 19th century creation as part of the rural retreat of Glasgow's ship-building family, the Reids. Thanks in part to Stewart's cunning habitat management tactics, which have helped boost the local food supplies, these brown trout now

average about 11lb and grow in excess of 7lbs.

By the time the last rays of the sun were catching the tops of the Ochills another lightning quick rainbow of just under 3lbs had been landed and several others been briefly, but not firmly, attached. As we rowed back ashore it was with a quiet contentment – inspired by good food and fine fishing – that I began to dismantle my rod.

I'd not caught a glimpse of a brown trout, nor of an otter, but otherwise the day had gone remarkably to plan.

With Alba Game you don't have to make your own lunch. Or your own luck. **SF**

Clockwise from top left: Stewart pours a glass of wine; An unusual 'Whooper' swan takes off; Stewart and his nosy dog prepare to release the first catch of the day; Stewart's extensive range of fishing flies; Lunch – a Thai-inspired curry.

FACT FILE

For more information on guided trips to catch salmon, trout, pike or grayling call 0131 538 6428 or visit www.albagamefishing.com