

## A Wylfe at Stoford

Handy Research Sites:

<http://davewiltshireflytying.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/wylfe-on-mays.html>  
<http://www.goflyfishinguk.com/fly-fishing-locations/chalk-streams/river-wylfe.php>  
<http://wildbrowntROUT.wordpress.com/2012/05/27/river-wylfe-stoford-bridge/>  
<http://www.nswrodfisherssociety.com/userfiles/file/2011%20Fishing%20in%20Southern%20England.pdf>  
<http://www.theswanatstoford.co.uk/fishing.html> and apparently Swann at Stoford has a Facebook site.

I recently had my second sojourn to Stoford, on the River Wylfe. The first time was in October. Advice in London was that the Avon/Wylfe didn't need waders. I got down to the spot on the river I could access – stagnant black mud, overhanging trees, coolish water. Then out into the flow – bloody cold! I braved the water a little over the next few days, but spent the rest of the time buying some neoprene socks and considering buying some waders.

Back then, the Blue Winged Olives were hatching, as highlighted to me by the staff at Orvis, right outside the shop in Stockbridge. Other good tackle shops in the area included Robjents in Stockbridge (where I found their last Loop net), and the Rod Box near Winchester (who graciously repaired my rod tip). Other recommended flies back then included EHC and buzzers. I also had to wait (but enjoy watching) a UK fishing journalist and a local fisherman working the river, watching them work very short casts and short drifts (no more than 15ft away from the fisherman), but catching a few small fish (about 15-20cm). Apparently the grayling season was just opening.

Returning with some travelling waders, I was more prepared. I also took a rod tube, and collected a nice cane rod from the Rod Box I'd spotted the previous October. My previous stay at Stoford had also discovered some beginner Pflueger fly kits, with bright green 6wt fly line.

Arriving back in the middle of summer, the water level was pretty much the same, the bank was very similar, and the water was still cool. About the only variable seemed the air temperature. After some quick tackle shop purchases, I dumped my bag, rigged my travel rod, and headed across the road. As per the previous visit, some trout were active on the surface on the near and far bank. Whether I'd been fishing oh so much blinder fishing early mornings and late evenings in darkness, or the underwater plants had grown, there wasn't much chance for nymphing with the river featuring 2-3m long growth, with small channels alternating between banks of weed.



Local waters in July



Local parachute-style fly from Farlows or Orvis

Working my way up, in a manner similar to what I'd seen (and trying longer casts in case I wasn't stealthy enough), I'd successfully hooked quite a few trees and not much else. After about an hour, the second-to-top section broke whilst trying to recover a snagged fly. A short rest (and dinner), then making the most of the long days (the day after the pagan solstice at Stonehenge) with trying out the "new" cane rod. It cast better than the short travel rod, but not much luck. There was some surface activity, but a bad grip on the rod had worn some of the cork away. Time for a rest about 9:30pm, and an early rise on the Sunday. It probably didn't help that after creating a bird's nest form my frog hair tippet, in the time it took me to tie back on again, I had another bird's nest formed. I could hear the cider calling across the road, and my casting was getting fatigued.

Out early the next morning after sunrise, I decided to work downstream, then back up. Shortly after getting below the bridge, there is closed waters for a local fishing club. Just above that though, a nice little trout snaffled my EHC (with a red floss and copper or gold ribbing underbody). The drought broken, spirits were up. Not too much action moving back up before breakfast though, except for spooking some dark brown mammal which I'd also seen the night before swimming across the river.



A start. First trout, caught against the far bank. Blue sign was the start of private waters.

Mid morning wasn't too bad, but the few hits were lost with the slack line casting upstream. By mid afternoon I'd made my way at most 100m upstream from the stairs, limited by the waters getting up within a foot of the top of my waders. The day had stayed cold (probably around single digits), and a strong wind from my left (with periodic bullets) wasn't helping my casting, although I had noticed a numbers of mayflies just like my greendrake riding the gusts from the trees and dipping onto the water.



Some drift pasts and fly pasts offered a good chance to watch the bugs drifting down. My CDC Greendrake is on the rod.

Turning around and casting downstream, I was aided being a left-hander, and able to keep a little more tension on my fly as it drifted down the gullies between the weeds. I was also able to more



naturally dip and lift the fly like the mayflies were doing. Missing the first couple, I managed to hook a nice brown trout about 4pm. I like to think it was the same one I'd seen hiding behind the tree by the stairs, which although he had looked at my flies a few times casting upstream (including my CDC Greendrake), had passed them up. I debated about keeping the trout, but recalling the publican and his family weren't that keen on trout (and not fishermen), I returned it for another day, and after a few more casts, headed in for dinner and meeting some others in the pub.



Second trout, caught near the reeds. Swann Inn and garden area in the background.



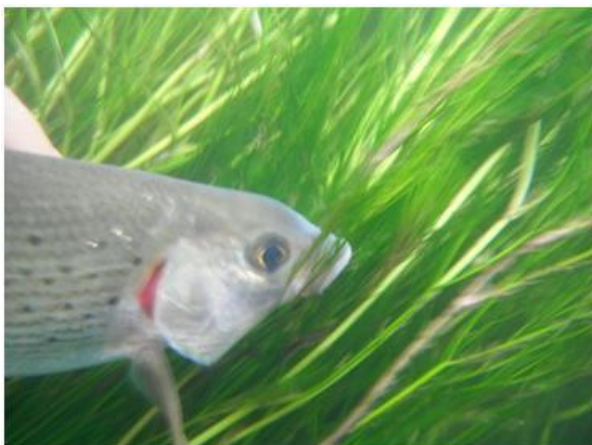
The same trout

The following days was probably my last opportunity if my waders and boots were to dry. I had maybe 45 minutes to get dressed and fish before meeting some others for dinner in Salisbury. There wasn't as much wind as the day before, but there were occasional mayflies coming down. They

certainly seemed to be more likely in the late afternoon/evening. I'd worked my way back up, and back down, but it was much quieter than the blustery, overcast day the day before – there wasn't even much surface action. I had seen a nice 40cm (at least) weed, which I thought couldn't be a trout on the way up. The forked tail confirmed it – then I thought it probably wasn't a carp, but a grayling, and its head as it swam around confirmed it. I must've spooked it too much as it looked a few times at the flies, but no joy. One the way back, I'd worked my way past the first steps and where I caught the brown the day before, but recalled a few small jumps near the second steps, and under the overhanging tree behind. At almost 6:10, I still had a few minutes to give a couple of last casts before needing to show and change for dinner. Second last cast, drifting down a little channel, my greendrake was again engulfed and I hauled this poor fish up over the weeds and netted it. It turned out to be a nice grayling. It happily recovered in the flow on top of the weeds, letting me photograph it for about 5 minutes before finally swimming off. By this stage, I was running a little late for my 6:30 meeting, so a quick change out of the waders and I merrily enjoyed a few celebratory drinks in town.



A nice grayling on the local fly, caught behind the weed channel in the bright reflection towards the bridge arch



The dense weeds provided a good short term support for both fish and rod.

**Accommodation:**

The Swann at Stoford is a nice old pub, literally across the road from the River Wylye. Its fishing rights to the river attracted me last year, and brought me back. Quite a few aussies and kiwis stay there enroute to Stonehenge and the chalk horses. They manage their bookings through Booking.com – they also had a sign out the front for vacancies, offering rooms from GBP39. They have two beginner rods in the shed (both are now rigged – one left, and one right handed). They had 6wt line (which, although bright green, matched the weeds reasonably nicely), and the rod wasn't too bad. My first fish was on my 6wt reel and cane rod, fish 2 was on their rod and reel, and fish 3 was on my rod and their reel. They also have a drying room, which they were happy to offer up for use. Main access however is from the main pub entrance, and upstairs via numerous fire doors and (now) nice new carpet and steps. As such, I rigged and de-rigged outside on the benches, saving rod tips and felt boots. I also carried a plastic bag to put the boots in each trip back. They do however offer to deliver food (and presumably drink) to the garden bar (expect social commentary on your casting skills), so you probably can arrange a food or drink delivery streamside if you want to stay in waders. After the cold weather and a few hours fishing, I welcomed the change for a pit stop.

**Nearby waters.** If wanting to fish the River Avon, there is a small carpark (for 1 small car) amongst bramble nearby, in Middle Woodford. Going from Stoford, once in Middle Woodford turn right (to Lower Woodford), and just near the last few Middle Woodford houses is a gap in the bramble on the left. I only fished it in October (without waders) and caught lots of bramble, but with chest waders it is probably shallow enough to wade out and fish.

**Fishing licenses** are available from the post office (including their website). Even in-country, they don't like an Australian address, so just use your hotel address. I think it was about 2 or 6 pounds per day, and 10 pounds for 8 days for the trout and coarse fishing license.

**Bugs.** As mentioned, blue-winged olives and caddis are quite regular (particularly more in the morning and lunchtime, with the mayflies out in force in summer. I noted quite a number of nymphs in my wading boots if you can get deep enough. The NSW Fly rodder's article is correct in noting the mayflies are quite big. I think I tied mine on a size 10 or 12 hook, as seen below. The July 2013 Fly fishing and Fly Tying has a nice article: A View From The Chalkstreams – Grub Up, covering the various hatches. Pleasing to see it has a similar picture as my bugs on the water, "Pale evening dun. Mostly seen June/July, mid-late evening, placid flows. Light hatches in mild conditions, becomes airborne after several fluttering hops." Although the ones I was seeing were definitely coming from shore, possibly laying eggs. There were also some bright blue/purple dragon flies, and some mating going on both with the dragonflies and duns. The hatching did die off later in the evening, even though it was still bright until about 10:30pm.





Local dragonfly along the shore



Take-off



Some residents in my wading boot

### **Men's Jewellery Shops.**

London has an Orvis in Dover St, and Farlow's. Farlow's is part of the Sportfish chain, and to ensure the items I wanted were in stock I pre-ordered them. The guys at Farlows always welcome aussies (and offer service discounts), and regularly see Peter Morse – an aussie fishing mag is a good way to break the ice. There is reportedly a fly fishing shop in South Kensington.

Enroute. In addition to Orvis and Robjents at Stockbridge (nice fish in the river, but "No fishing in town. Interesting to see the women's Orvis shop is two shops down from the mens'), there is also the Rod Box just off the motorway near Winchester. The Rod Box also post their secondhand tackle on their website.

There is a couple of sports shops (including fishing) in Salisbury itself. If limited in travel (and outgoing luggage), quite a few 4 & 3pc rods were in stock and reasonably priced in Salisbury (e.g. Vision and Shakespear) – even down to 2wt if you're looking for a lighter rod.

Quarantine experiences. Although warned to be wary if there is a bird flu outbreak etc, bringing fly tying materials, flies and fishing gear back from the UK hasn't been a problem, via Sydney or Melbourne. I used felt-soled wading boots this time, and they worked well although they were still damp on arrival on Friday after stopping fishing 4 days earlier.