

*Please refer to
the first enclosure
D.B.*

12

The Past Salmon Fishing Season on the Annan, and how it was affected by the Brydekirk Caul.

*Fish Pass
Ancher
1896
Coulter's
under supervision
of P.D. via water
above water falls dill*

AN unusual number of Salmon entered the Annan during September and the first week in October, when the river for several weeks ran almost continuously in heavy black waters. To these early fish fresh from the Solway, and not heavy with spawn, the Caul itself presented no very serious obstacle in places while the river was high, but few of them were seen to go near the Pass, and but a very odd one entered it. In fact, in the then state of the river, there was such a mass of tumbling white water thrown up from the steps in the Pass that salmon would not face it.

From about the 10th October till the 14th November the river was very low; the bottom step in the Pass stood up above the surrounding water, thus presenting a barrier with a fall over it instead of there being a lead into the Pass. For some five weeks, therefore, fish did not seem to find the Pass, and there was not sufficient water for them to attempt the Caul itself. During this time salmon kept creeping up from the Solway, and collecting in the streams and pool below the Caul; and it was not until the 14th November that a rise of a couple of feet in the river enabled fish to get beyond Brydekirk.

On the 15th November the river was somewhat muddy, so that fish were not showing themselves; but on the 16th the water bailiffs reported a number getting up. According to independent observations made during half-an-hour in the forenoon of that day, 12 salmon got into the Pass, but all were washed out again; whilst in the afternoon, during an hour and a quarter, 29 went in, and 3 of them got through. Hundreds of old sea trout and heuling were jumping at the Caul throughout the day, and they made a poorer attempt at it than the salmon.

The following record shows conclusively that ^{after carefully getting} ~~in the fore~~ to the higher waters in any quantity, and few would appear to have passed Brydekirk between the middle of October and the end of the fishing:—

Craigielands—The season was a complete blank! The keeper never saw a good fish rise, and a break with a small one, through a flaw in the gut, was his season's sport.

Wamphray Water—The Raehills keeper reports that not a single salmon was caught on Mr Hope-Johnstone's water during the season.

Dinwoodie—According to the keeper only 4 salmon were landed, although there were a good many fishers, this water being open to ticket-holders.

Jardine Hall—Not a salmon was caught during the season, and the keeper never even saw one on this portion of the river.

Halleaths—Got 8 salmon in all, the last fish being landed as early as 7th October.

Hightae—On this open water, where there are many fishers from Lockerbie and Lochmaben, and where the use of cross-lines is permissible, the record by all methods was 13 salmon.

Dormont—Mr Keswick reports that 5 fish were landed on his water.

Kirkwood—Only 1 salmon of 22 lbs fell to the rod on Mr Steel's water, and neither he nor his gamekeeper ever saw a fish rise.

Murraythwaite—On this water only 4 salmon were accounted for, all being caught before the middle of October.

Castlemilk—On Sir Robert Jardine's water, where the fishing is open to ticket-holders until the latter part of the season, only 11 salmon were landed. One keen fisher reported the late ones as being

as black as his boots, and not worth taking at all! Before the alterations to the Brydekirk Caul, this stretch of water was second to none on the river.

Hoddum—On this, Mr Brook's water, which was also open to ticket-holders until about the end of October, and where many rods availed themselves of the opportunity, 29 salmon were caught, but of these only 2 fish were taken in November.

Mount Annan—Above Brydekirk Caul, which divides this water about midway, 8 salmon were landed during the season, of which only 1 fish, which had been some time up, was killed in November. Neither the proprietor nor his fisherman caught a single fish between them on this water. Endless tales were told of fish going through the Pass in numbers sufficient to stock the river several times over, but the keenest fisherman in the village would not have said "thank you" for the offer of a day above the Caul during the latter part of the season.

Mount Annan—Below Brydekirk Caul there were landed 119 salmon, averaging just under 20 lbs. Of these 103 were caught by 3 rods, and 88 of them were taken in the stream and pool immediately below the Caul, whilst it may be noted 40 of them were got in November. There were also a number of salmon hooked and lost on this water daily.

To sum up, only 82 salmon were caught in the 25 miles of water between Brydekirk and Moffat, and in the mile of water below Brydekirk 119 were caught; whilst between Mount Annan Island and Annan Bridge 54 salmon were landed by ticket-holders and others.

After the close of the fishing season, or say 16th November, there was no fresh run of salmon from the Solway, and few fish were seen at the Caul until the end of December, when a heavy flood and south-west gale brought a great number up the river, and the following observations were then made:—

1st January—The day after the flood there were 207 attempts at the Caul itself between 3 o'clock and 3.30, but not a fish got one-third of the way up, and the Pass was such a foaming torrent that nothing went near it.

2nd—For nearly the whole day salmon were attempting the Caul at the rate of about 50 attempts in 15 minutes. Not a fish got over the Caul, and nothing went into the Pass.

3rd—During the forenoon fish were going at the Caul much as on the previous day, but increasing to 64 attempts in 10 minutes, and by 2 o'clock in the afternoon there were as many as 165 attempts in a quarter of an hour, 18 fish got into the Pass, and all were washed out, but 2 were seen to get over the Caul, after a hard struggle, at a spot some half dozen yards beyond the Pass, where the water is blacker at the foot of the Caul than elsewhere. This is apparently caused by the water thrown off from the buttress to the Pass, where it is built up the river, and it was here where most of the fish were observed to go over in September.

4th—There were 135 unsuccessful attempts between 11 o'clock and a quarter past, and from half past 11 to 1 o'clock 516 were counted. A few fish tried the Pass, but all came back; whilst only a single fish got over the Caul in that time, at the same place as before. An old fisherman present declared he had never before seen such a sight, and that he could have filled a cart with the fish tumbling about within reach of the side.

5th—More salmon than ever; as many as 200 attempts in a quarter of an hour. Nothing got over either Caul or Pass throughout the day, although 22 fish got into the Pass, with the usual result.

6th—The wind having changed to a strong north-east gale, hardly a fish showing at the Caul, all having dropped back; and having been repeatedly disappointed, it is now too late in the season for most of them to try it again, even if the surroundings were favourable. During this week many salmon after jumping against the end of a broken wall on the Mount Annan side of the Caul lay more or less stunned for some seconds before getting back into the river, and two dead fish free from disease were afterwards seen in the Salmon Pool probably injured in this way, or on the stones of the Caul against which fish were constantly throwing themselves. Careful observation has led to the following conclusions:—When the river is low salmon do not attempt the Pass, probably because there is no lead into it, and because the lower step sticking up is a barrier instead of an attraction. When the river rises a foot or two some fish attempt it, and a few get through early in the season; but when the rise

Handwritten notes: *7/12 2 fish* with a '+' sign.

is over a couple of feet they are washed out, and heavy spawning fish find it impracticable at all times. Under the usual conditions of the river during the late autumn and winter months, the tumbling mass of white water rushing from the Pass appears less attractive to the fish than the Caul itself, however unsuccessful they may be in their attempts to scale it.

Opinions have been expressed that salmon go over the Caul or through the pass without being seen, that they run up in a flood or at nights; also, that broken white water attracts them. As a matter of fact, nearly every fish that attempts either Caul or Pass during the day can be seen without much difficulty. Fish do not run in a heavy flood or red water, but even if they did they could not face the Caul, and they never attempt it till the water clears. If they run at nights how is it that fish are so scarce above and increasing in numbers below, as has been noted they do not show themselves at the Caul in quantities until 10 or 11 o'clock in the forenoon, whilst by the time it is dark they have ceased to attempt it? Fish are not believed to see clearly in broken white water, neither do they appear to be able to retain their balance, and it has been observed that the most of them go over at the spot where the water runs blackest from the foot of the Caul.

The river having fallen in between the 5th and 10th January, and late fish having had every opportunity of reaching the spawning grounds if they had got over, an inspection of the upper waters was made, with the following results:—

Craigiellands—On the 14th January Keress, the keeper, reported—"Sorry to say salmon on the spawning beds in the upper reaches of the river are very scarce—only an odd fish here and there, where I have seen them by the hundred." "Moffat water is a good place for them, but I am told there is not a fish to be seen in it."

Wamphray—The Raehills keeper reports salmon very scarce in this water, just an odd one here and there, but a good few in the Kinnel.

Dinwoodie—The keeper has only seen a very odd fish since the close of the fishing.

Jardine Hall—Black, the head keeper, says—This portion of the river is no better stocked than it was last year, hardly such a thing as a fish to be seen.

Halleaths—The gamekeeper examined this water carefully on the 14th January, but only 2 pairs of fish on the whole of it. Such a state of things has not before occurred during the many years he has been at Halleaths.

Dryfe—Blackstock, the keeper, who has been at Dryfeholm for some five and twenty years, says there have only been 3 salmon seen in Dryfe this season, and on going over the water on the 10th January there was only a single small fish, where previous to last winter there were generally from 15 pairs to 25 pairs after the New-year.

Dormont—On 20th January the keeper writes—He is sorry to say there is no improvement in the number of fish compared with last season; in fact, the fish are not on the spawning beds, and are not to be seen in the river. One may be ferreting on the river banks for days and never see a fish rise, where formerly there would be a dozen or two every day, and he is perfectly sure there are very few salmon in Dormont water.

Kirkwood—Mr Steel's keeper, under date 19th January, reports the spawning season as a complete failure; has been constantly at the water, but has only seen 4 fish in all.

Murraythwaite—Keeper and others examined this water on several occasions between 15th and 20th January without seeing a single salmon.

Castlemilk—An inspection of this water on the 19th January failed to discover a fish.

Milk—On the two miles of water below Castlemilk not a salmon has been seen spawning this season, where, previous to last winter, there were always from 20 to 30 pairs of fish during January. Higher up Saunderson, the head keeper, reports that 5 fish are all that have been seen.

Hoddom Castle—There have been reports of many fish on this water, but the water bailiffs and others have only been able to discover a few pairs here and there, where a dozen pairs might have been seen in previous years.

Mount Annan—Above Brydekirk, which water extends to where it joins Hoddom at Meinfoot, there was not a spawning fish to be seen on the whole of it between the 10th and 20th January, and

several inspections were made. Below Brydekirk, previous to severe frost setting in about 20th, the spawning beds were crowded with fish, more especially in the neighbourhood of Mount Annan Island, where, on the night of the 13th January, poachers broke the lock of the boat on the pool above, and are believed to have netted the spawning ground at the head of the Island, the boat afterwards being allowed to drift down the river, where it was found next morning. A staff of water bailiffs had to be constantly on the watch, first at the Caul and afterwards lower down to protect the fish between Brydekirk and Annan. In the pool above the Island a few diseased fish are to be seen, but it is too late now for it to spread as it did last year when the water bailiffs are reported to have buried between 200 and 300 salmon, many of them unspawned, that had died from disease below Brydekirk. Fish, however badly diseased, were not removed whilst alive, there being an idea that they might be washed down to the Solway and recover in the salt water.

Paragraphs have appeared in the newspapers to the effect that the Fishery Board are satisfied with the efficiency of the Pass, that there are plenty of fish in the upper waters, and that no complaints are now heard about the Caul, but members of the Board who have not had an opportunity of seeing for themselves, upper proprietors and others interested can better form an opinion as to the real state of matters, after perusal of the foregoing observations:—It has been clearly demonstrated that the Caul was so altered 18 months ago, that it became a greater obstruction than formerly, and although the new Pass was a move in the right direction, it will be manifest that, as it at present exists, it does not afford a free passage to fish at all times, as required by the Act of 1868. Alterations are therefore essential not only in the interests of the upper proprietors but of the net fishers as well, and under the circumstances it has been suggested by practical men, and their ideas may be improved upon by experts, that if the top of the Pass were further lowered, and the steps taken out or reduced in height, making it more like a simple Pass as at the other Caul on the river, fish would run through the black water without receiving any check. It is believed that in any case there is more than enough water for the requirements of the Mill, and, judging from the greater distance the river is now dammed back above, there must be much more water than there was before the alterations to the Caul. A small apron in the corner on the Mount Annan side would give salmon, sea trout, and herlings, for all are affected, an alternative mode of ascent, and the cost of such apron, together with the alterations to the Pass suggested, would only be small. This outlay various upper proprietors and others would

1st February, 1897.

J. G. G. G. G.
Mount Annan
Annan