

The chapter below is taken from pages 134 to 136 of

THE SALMON RIVERS AND LOCHS OF SCOTLAND by W L CALDERWOOD

Second edition, published in 1921, by EDWARD ARNOLD & CO

Chapter VII

RIVER YTHAN

ANGLING SEASON: 11th February to 31st October

NETTING SEASON: 25th February to 9th September

District Fishery Board sits in Aberdeen. Clerk, D W R Chalmers, Esq, Advocate, Golden Square, Aberdeen

This river and the Ugie flow quietly through the gently undulating country which lies between the districts of Formartine and Buchan,

The Ythan rises at the springs called the Wells of Ythan and takes a course East then North East to Auchterless where there is a low fall. The stream then turns abruptly South East, and, with the road to Turriff on the right hand and the railway on the left flows in this direction to Fyvie. It then meanders with many windings through the flat stretch between Fyvie and Methlick, past the old House of Gight, which belonged to Lord Byron's mother – the thick walled ruin is now a picturesque ruin, the property of the Earl of Aberdeen. From Gight to beyond Haddo House the stream is richly wooded on either bank. I am afraid to say how many thousand trees I have heard were planted on the Haddo Estate by the distinguished statesman and forebear of the present peer, who then held the property. The Ythan is most enticing to the trout fisher in many of the reaches near Methlick.

The general course of the river is thereafter South East, with one or two curves before reaching Ellon; and soon afterwards, at the Kirkton of Logie Buchan, it expands into the estuary, which is 4 miles in length and rather more Southerly in direction. The actual mouth is somewhat constricted, the outgoing water having to contend constantly with a sand bar fed from the perfect wilderness of sand - the Sands of Forvie. The course of the river from the Wells of Ythan to the mouth is about 36½ miles.

The estuary as defined by the 1868 Salmon Act, 'a portion of a circle of 300 yards radius, to be drawn from a centre placed mid-channel in the river where it joins the sea at low-water of equinoctial spring tides'. This is one of those estuaries so defined, apparently, as to provide for a shifting river mouth. I am not aware, however, that the Ythan estuary has to be remeasured at regular intervals as the Bervie estuary has to be, where, according as the little river has gone a few yards this way or that, a stand of nets on a rocky point is thrown out or put in. On a flat sandy shore, such as that of the Ythan, a few yards make little or no difference to the position of a net, so long as it is placed in proper relation to the river mouth.

The district of the river Ythan does not extend more than about a couple of miles along the shore Southwards, whereas the mouth of the next river, the Don, is 10 miles distant. Since the Don netting ceases on the 26th August, there is a whole fortnight's difference in the length of

time the Ythan's net may fish. The Don fishers, who are just alongside the most Southerly Ythan nets, feel this to be rather a grievance. It is, of course, only what occurs in several localities, only here the difference is specially obvious. (Note added – the author seems to have overlooked that the Ythan nets start a fortnight after the Don nets viz the two seasons are equal in length)

With regard to netting in the estuary, this has somewhat lessened in recent years. Practically only one net is fished for about two hours daily. This suits the rod fishers of the tidal waters, the fishing of which is leased in part to the Udney Arms Hotel at Newburgh. The Ythan is an excellent sea-trout river, and as this salmonid favours an estuarial habitat much more than the salmon proper, the long tidal reach of the estuary forms a good rod fishery for both adult trout and finnocks. The fishing is carried on from boats, and from July to September inclusive the sea-trout are in best condition. They vary in weight from 4 ounces to about 2 ½ lb and larger. Salmon are seldom fished for in the estuary, but a basket of 10 lb of sea-trout is considered satisfactory by those who know how to do well here.

Fourteen miles of the river is held by Lord Aberdeen, who has right of fishing on both banks. With his usual generosity a most liberal share of this water is made available to the public, though his Lordship's tenants have the benefit of a cheaper rate. Eleven miles are thrown open in this way, and a ticket for the whole season may be secured for 20s, while single day tickets are also issued at 2s 6d. (Apply to C G Smith, Estate Office, Haddo House, Aberdeen). The lowest 3 miles forms the reserved water, part going with Haddo House and part being let to a sporting tenant.

The take of salmon in the Ythan varies very much, a list of the approximate rod totals from 1893 to the present time (which I have before me)* showing a range of from about 90 to about 300, The river sometimes fishes very well in spring, the average for a recent period of twenty-two years being about 70 salmon. In 1891 the spring catch reached the respectable total of 140, the majority being taken on Lord Aberdeen's water. Owing to the gentle nature of the river, spring fish make a fairly rapid ascent.

The autumn fishing on the other hand, is usually most successful on the lower reaches, and some of those fish are of heavy weight for a river of this size. In 1905 the best fish was 27 lb taken in Upper Haddo House water; in 1900 a 28 lb fish was got. On the coast fish of 40 to 50 lb are uncommon, and evidently these big fellows sometimes ascend the river, for in the Haddo House Museum there is a fish of 51 ½ lb, which, I believe, was found dead in the river.

There are several good burns, tributaries of the Ythan, and up these sea-trout run in great numbers as the season advances. In the past I have heard that certain Aberdeen worthies have thought it worth while to visit these burns when they thought they would not be seen. The method of fishing under such circumstances has for its primary object the securing of a maximum number of fish in a minimum length of time. Nowadays, however, the burns on the Haddo House estate are closed for fishing of any kind on the 14th October.

Note:- The text above for the Ythan is identical in the second edition of 1921 to that in the first edition of 1906. Catches post 1906 were included for some rivers in the 1921 edition but at * did the author update from 1906 for the Ythan?