

Colin Brett in Ireland 2002

The Invicta winter evening talks got under way in October with Colin talking, with the aid of a high tech projector and laptop, about his experiences in Ireland in the past 12 months. Colin and wife, Carole, have owned a bungalow in Ireland for the past 15 years. It is located in Askillaun which until recently I thought was the name of the house, but I am assured that there is more than one property in the village! It is about 20 miles west of Westport. For those of you who only see a map of Ireland on the weather forecast, it is about 200 miles WNW of Dublin, which amounts to a 3½ hour drive on a reasonable day. The bungalow overlooks Clew Bay to the north, still renowned for big skate. To the west is Clare Island and the Atlantic. The south east quadrant embraces the Loughs Mask and Corrib. L. Conn is located towards the NW. The Delphi system lies due south. It was interesting to find a local link, as the estate is owner by Peter Mantle, a member of the well known Cambridge garage (as in car rather than music) family. The whole area is remote and rural. The Delphi area has been described as "fairyland".

The local river is the Bunowen, which is a typical west coast spate river. The fishing season starts in April and runs until the end of September, although effectively the fishing is from mid-June to the end. The same applies to the other river close by the Carrowniskey, which looks interesting as it terminates in a land-locked lake, the water entering the sea through seepage through the sandbank until a spate clears a passage for the returning Salmon. This is reputed to contain both Salmon and Sea Trout. Fishing in these rivers is covered by the same permit at £20 per day. If staying in the area for any length of time a season permit is a feasible option.

Colin is a well known Pike addict. Alas the Western Region Fisheries Board has yielded to the pressure from local game fishers and has declared that all pike must be killed and has a gill netting operation in place in the major Loughs. This may account for the explosion of coarse fish in these waters. Although this action is partly funded with EU money, it does seem to be a misplaced use of rather limited fishery funds. The Central Fisheries Board is currently reviewing the policy. If you have any opinions perhaps based on local experience in the UK, submissions must be made to lorraine.flanagan@cfb.ie before 20th December 2002.

Colin had momentarily engaged moan mode. Fish cages have appeared in the sea near his pad. The experience in Scotland suggests that they can be an environmental disaster. The output of salmon on the west coast of Scotland is currently 120,000 tonnes a year. The effluent alone is claimed to be the equivalent to the dumping of untreated sewage from a city of 10 million inhabitants. Toxic algae blooms, feeding on the effluent, have been ingested by shellfish and allegedly caused severe outbreaks of food poisoning. Extensive shellfish grounds have been shut down. The fish are fed on a fish rich diet, already enriched in dioxins and PCB's resulting in some farmed salmon containing many times the permitted levels. Then there are the 26 different chemical treatments ("medicines") required to maintain the health of the fish. Mass escapes (tens of thousands) have allegedly occurred with the result that native fish are displaced from their natural habitat. The role of various parties in promoting this vandalism (c.f. hunting with hounds) is regularly reported in Fly-Fishing and Fly-Tying on the Scottish page. Hopefully any cages around Ireland will be located in areas where there is a sufficient flow of water to disperse the effluent and minimise the problems experienced in Scotland.

This year Colin has diversified into sea fishing. When he mentioned Blue finned tuna, I remembered chasing shoals of these fish during a visit to Oz last year, each member weighting round 50 lbs. I was astonished to see the BFT he was referring to were many times this size weighing in at over 900 pounds and about 3 metres in length - the fish that are popularly known simply as tunny. These were at one time found in the North Sea. Alonzo (AKA Laurie to his mates) Mitchell-Henry caught the British record weighing in at 859 pounds in 1933, fishing alongside the herring fleet off of Scarborough. (As an aside the M-H's were one up on the Beckham's as his name was bestowed shortly after a trip to Italy!). He had previously encountered tuna off Nova Scotia and can claim to be the first to capture one on rod and line. Not only was he an accomplished sea angler but also a well-known big game hunter. His family at one time owned Kylemore Castle (now a Benedictine retreat and well worth a visit) which is just 20 miles south of Colins pad. It is quite likely that the young Mitchell Henry was aware of the fishing potential of the Irish waters at the turn of the century. He died in 1965, one week short of his 99th birthday. Further info from www.mitchell-henry.co.uk.

The tunny fishing in the North Sea collapsed over a period of just four years from 1950 to 1954. The reasons for this are not clear. The tuna breed in the eastern Mediterranean. They visit the northern waters over the period August to November. Maybe the sea currents changed or there was a spell of cold weather. I would have thought that there were still plenty of fodder fish around at the time. Nevertheless, in the 1980's large fish were observed off the west coast of Ireland. There was some confusion as to what they were. However, when commercial fishermen started to bring them ashore at places like Cahersiveen, Fennit and Galway it was soon apparent that they were BFT. A particular hot spot was around Rathlin O'Beirn island in the NW corner of Donegal Bay. Hundreds of fish have been spotted in a single day. Some locals reckoned it was worth trying to exploit the resource and introduced purpose built boats equipped with fighting chairs with a view to establishing a big game fishery. The "Leah C" and "Naomh Cartha" are two such vessels. The history of the tuna revolution is recorded on www.cfb.ie.

Colin has been aboard the Naomh C, skippered by Adrian Molloy. Alas he was unsuccessful. Nevertheless in 2000, a 75 year old, Alan Glanville, hit the headlines with a mere 353lbs tiddler following on the very next day with a 529 lb specimen which at the time was the largest fish ever captured in Irish waters on a rod and line. Note that these fish were captured just a few miles off of Killybegs - a small fishing village in Co. Donegal. At the end of the following season the tuna record was hoisted to an incredible 968lbs by Adrian Molloy, again a mere 300 metres off of the shore. If you are thinking of beach casting you are faced with some of the highest cliffs in Europe! Tuna fishing is not easy. 15 fish were caught on rod and line by two boats in the 2001 season. Tuna fishing requires patience and perseverance.

Heavy duty tackle is required. The Intalcanna rod (www.intalcanna.com) caused a bit of head scratching amongst club members but apparently it is a reasonably well known Italian manufacture obviously supplying the Med market. The reel was from the same stable and held about 1000 yards of 130 pound mono. I discovered that the name of the Hardy ForTuna reel did not just refer to its price tag! A downrigger is used to control the fishing depth. This can either have the traditional lead weight on the end or a vane (in American parlance - a downplaner). Have a look at www.bluefintuna.com for more details and some interesting linked sites. The tuna are generally feeding on mackerel in which case the rule is to fish 5 - 10 metres down, or possibly garfish which tend to shoal near the surface. By all accounts the

tuna may jump clear of the water when they are feeding. Wow! Some have been estimated at weighing 1500 pounds which is close to the IGFA world record. The scheme is to troll at about 5 miles per hour. Interesting comment for when I was down under, the fact that we failed to hook tuna was attributed to the fact that we did not pull the lures fast enough i.e. at full throttle. The outriggers carry a cluster of teasers which are plastic squid-like attractors, supported on a spreader bar. Trailing behind was the lure, which in the example shown by Colin was a bright green jointed plug. Although described as a Rapala, at 500mm, somewhat bigger than the ones you would find in the average fisherman's box. I noticed that they were only equipped with single hooks.

When the fish takes it is allowed to run for some minutes before striking. The lucky angler is strapped into the seat and hopefully the fight is on. Tuna can travel at speeds of up to 50 mph. At that pace it could strip 1000 yards of line in about 90 seconds. No wonder the drag systems on the reels are based on carbobn-carbon, as used in F1 cars. Considering the tuna might weigh in at 1000 pounds, it is perhaps surprising that they can usually be subdued in only an hour although there are examples on the www where the fish have been played for anything up to 12 hours.

So what does this all cost? The charge for hiring the Naohm C, complete with tackle is 600€ for the day, which is about £400 in real money. There is only one rod so members of the party have to decide in advance the order in which they will take the chair. For further details take a look at www.tunacharters.ie

The tunny have returned. 92% of the Bluefin Tuna caught in the North Atlantic are destined for Japanese consumption. Unfortunately Japan in the past has shown scant regard for conservation policies and it remains to be seen if the fish will survive and continue to visit the Irish coastline.

Colin is now offering his bungalow for letting. I suggest that you contact him if you are interested - 01954 200956 or colin_brett@ntlworld.com.

DGJ

01.11.02

Colin in British Columbia

A talk given by Richard Sheard who runs World Sport Fishing out of Wyboston, lead Colin to book a holiday in British Columbia seeking out the Salmon and Sturgeon. Colin who had never ventured further than Ireland was mildly apprehensive – how would he get on driving on the right for instance. Same as when you go up to Rutland in a hurry I would have thought!

Colin and Carole set off for Canada last October from Gatwick heading for Vancouver via Calgary. The flight took 11 hours and to put things into perspective, half the trip was over Canada! The stay was based on a Chilliwack Riverside Lodge (www.riverbendguesthouse.com) near the Frazer River. This is located about 1 hour by car, east of the airport. The Frazer River is 1378km in length. By the time it has got to the lower reaches it is the width of Grafham and between 1 and 20 metres in depth. Wait for it – the drainage area is larger than the British Isles! The flow rate at Hells Gate, a gorge near to

Chilliwac, averages $8550\text{m}^3.\text{sec}^{-1}$ but the range is $360\text{-}15000\text{m}^3\text{sec}^{-1}$. Like many waterways in the area, it is a working river so expect the odd log or two and barges carrying sand and gravel. The Frazer system is the most productive salmon fishery in the world, which sounded like a reasonable claim given that an estimated 800,000,000 million fish migrate every year. At anyone time there are probably 20,000,000 fish in the estuary but the crab fishery has the greater commercial value. Salmon by the way is a generic term applied in this case to five species of Pacific Salmon including Chum, Chinook, Coho, Sockeye, and Pink. For further details of these fish and the best periods to fish see www.fredscustomtackle.com.

The Frazer River was closed to fishing when Colin was there because of problems with the fish passes. However, the crystal clear Harrison river, a tributary of the Frazer, flowing out of the mountains from a lake a mere 90km in length, proved to be equally productive. Fish were running in groups of 50 –150 at a time and they were accessible from the bank. Note though that the river was very fierce and care was needed if you were not to end up as a “bobber” – the local slang for an angler who got washed away! The 1st Nation was “allowed” to and did fish by any method including dynamite, shooting spearing and drift netting. The fruits of their efforts were locally on sale illegally and referred to as “Frazer Valley Chicken”. Visiting anglers were limited to a single barbless hook. Now it wasn’t strictly fly-fishing unless you are of the opinion that the use of the blob fits that description. Colin tried for two days to catch fish using conventional fly-fishing methods but was unsuccessful. Hence he adopted the local technique using a polythene float about the size of a large cigar case, heavily weighted and a lure on the end. This had to be cast upstream to enable the bottom to be fished effectively. Colin used a 9-foot Shimano Beastmaster equipped with an Abu 6001C multiplier filled with 50lb Power Pro braid. Bites tend to cause the float to disappear rapidly, which required a quick response. A fixed spool reel could not meet the necessary response. This led to the capture of a 17lb Chum. Colin had never before experienced such a powerful fish on the end of a line.

Spinning is another technique where the lure is suspended beneath a float. Colin hooked a Chinook which took 150m of line whilst it was chased well down stream. After a 25-minute fight Colin was left with a burnt thumb and a 20-pound fish.

The Chilliwac River was also very fierce – Colin used the term “express train”. It was the home of Chinook in the 40-60 pound class. These are much sought after in October/November using spinners and egg flies.

A view of a sand bar on the Frazer River showed an array of rods just as would be expected on a UK surf beach. The rods were indeed surf casters although they were handling a 16-20oz terminal weight tossed out 25-30 feet into the torrent. And some of the rods did have bells on their tips to indicate a bite.

All of these migrating fish are doomed. Colin showed a picture of the fish fin-to-fin attempting to reach the spawning grounds. Some of these are artificially stripped on specially prepared beds. One farm alone produced 6 million fry. The fish carcasses unclaimed by bears and eagles were returned into the river and surrounding areas to “feed” the environment.

The Frazer River also provided the opportunity to catch Sturgeon. These are occasionally landed in the UK but I do believe that they are the property of the Crown. The fish is an ancient throw back to the era of the dinosaurs. They live for 200 years and at 1500lbs are the largest freshwater species in the world. They have tiny eyes and feed by feel through

barbules on either side of a snout-like mouth. Most anglers are aware that sturgeons feature an array of bony studs [scoots] along the lateral line. These are not generally hazardous except in the smaller fish.

The excitement starts with a trip in the guide's jet boat. This was equipped with a 175hp pump with the ability to drive the boat at speeds of up to 55mph in a few inches of water and turn in its own length. Who needs Alton Towers? The throttle was either in the stop or go position with little in between. Sturgeon usually feed on crustaceans but because of their reliance on smell it was usual for the angler to employ stink bait based on the rotting body of a salmon, or simply the heart or the roe. This was enclosed in a pink chiffon net and secured to a 9/0 Gamakatsu hook on the end of a 150lb Pro-braid line. Leads varied from 8 to 16 oz. The rod, supplied by the guide, was based upon a one-piece 8ft Lamiglas blank and the reel was a TLD 20 multiplier, which incorporates a powerful lever drag.

Colin and his partner caught 36 fish one session. Colin caught one at 140 pounds, which was 5'9" in length, although fish as large as 700 pounds have been captured. Far from lying doggo on the bottom, sturgeon frequently leave the water like a torpedo and give a sporting account of themselves. It was essential to set the drag correctly or risk losing the tackle. All fish are tagged and returned.

Whilst they were over in Canada, Carole and Colin decided to visit Vancouver Island. This involved a short ferry trip to Nanaimo and a drive through the largest temperate rainforest in the world to Tofino – a surfers Mecca. They stayed at Weigh West Marine Resort and did the touristy things like exploring Clayocot Sound – claimed to be, possibly, the most pristine place in the world. Colin deviated slightly from the plan when he met a guy running a charter boat (www.tofinocharters.com). The sea was by all accounts full of Coho, which provided food for the herds of huge smelly sea lions and even the occasional cormorant. This was another high-speed trip or it would have been but for an early morning fog bank. The tackle consisted of an all-electric downrigger based on a 20-pound lead weight in order to maintain the correct fishing depth. The boat was fully equipped with everything necessary to ensure a safe trip. The echo sounder was looking for "bait balls". These are tightly knot shoals of anchovies, which attract the Coho's. A dead anchovy, alongside a "shiner" (an attractor spoon) was trolled around such a ball and this led to the capture of a 23.5-pound Chinook, which had to be chased half a mile into the bay to avoid a breakage.

C & C completed their holiday with a session whale watching and spotted both humpback and grey whales wandering down to California.

Anglers are well advised to check out possible hazards before venturing to foreign climes. Coyotes were common in BC but were regarded as relatively harmless. Black bears seemed to be playful on the one occasion they were seen. The less friendly Grizzly bears were rare around Chilliwac. However, Cougars were common on Vancouver Island and they were considered very dangerous and often scoured the beaches for prey after dark.

The 6-day fully insured fishing trip cost £1900, which included £200 upgrade on the flight, car hire, breakfast and evening meals, licences, guide hire, bait and could include tackle if required. This price is per angler for 2 anglers sharing. A feature of this holiday is the consistency of the fishing. Colin's fears about foreign travel proved to be unfounded. Vancouver was very much like England and the local population; particularly those on Vancouver Island could not have been friendlier. The weather was mild although it did rain

on a couple of days. There can be no greater recommendation of the holiday in that Colin has booked to go again this year. If the photo gallery on www.worldsportfishing.com is anything to go by I can understand why!

DJ

6th March2005