

RISING IN THE PENNINES

At Hury in Co Durham, Chris McCully discovers a remote reservoir where trout fatten on food blown from the moors





AS THE DROUGHT GRIPPED, I felt I couldn't breathe. In July and August 2022, I fished only sporadically, using three freshets on the Wharfe to do so. The extra water ran off quickly, yet when it was a flow and not a trickle, the river temperature was 13-15 deg C and angling was viable. The heat and humidity, however, meant that as the summer wore on, like many other anglers I became disheartened. I abandoned a day on Scar House reservoir at the top of Nidderdale because the acres of exposed sand and shales on the banks — the lake was at least 15ft below normal level — left me anxious and depressed. A trip to Dorset in 36 deg C heat (to part-exchange some tackle) revealed a country that no longer looked like

England: its dusty ochres and umbers belonged to late-summer Tuscany or a parched Provence. I thought about heading north; of sea-trout, floods, and heather in its August purples; but work and other duties kept me at the desk. I longed for open spaces, clean air and rain.

In early September, I drove to Hury. This 125-acre upland reservoir lies at the head of Baldersdale; the Balder meets the Tees north of Barnard Castle. The angling is run by Northumbrian Water. Unlike other lakes in the Northumbrian Water portfolio, Hury is maintained as a fly-only venue. I'm no particular advocate of "fly-only" — the business model underlying the evolution of some stillwaters into any-method trout fisheries clearly works to the financial advantage of the companies running such places — but I'm glad Hury is kept as it is. Because of its relative remoteness, because there's no sailing club, café, tackle-shop or visitor centre, and perhaps because of that fly-only constraint, it's the least-visited of the cluster of reservoirs lying nearby. Yet unlike Cow Green, Selset or Blackton, which are maintained as wild brown trout waters, Hury is stocked with rainbows. "There's a huge head of fish," said Simon Lee, "and we stock every week. There are also big rainbows in there — not many, but they go to 14lb."

Because Simon works for Northumbrian Water, I was initially tempted to be sceptical about the huge head of fish — he would say that, wouldn't he? — but on the first of two visits (September 2) I witnessed some of that stock moving in the flat calm of early morning. Rainbows rose everywhere. I'd cast for



Fishing the shallows on Hury's northern shoreline.

Hury's impressive Victorian dam. The reservoir was opened in 1892.

one, only to find that another had risen a couple of yards behind it. The rings of the rainbows' rises intersected and I found myself adjusting casting direction in mid-stroke. Quite what these fish were rising to I couldn't immediately determine: buzzers were an obvious suspect, but no midges were in the air and no shucks were evident in the surface film. I stuck on a Foam Daddy and a smallish Hopper. As soon as the flies landed, the water surface crinkled

beneath them — a sign that a rainbow had moved under them, tempted but unconvinced. I tried twitching them: more crinkling and swirling, but no result. I replaced the Daddy with a size 12 Black Suspender — and the line tightened. Before taking breakfast, I'd released a brace of fine rainbows averaging 2lb.

There was no one else fishing. I saw few humans or animals all day except a handful of walkers and ➤

"As soon as the flies landed, the water surface crinkled beneath them"



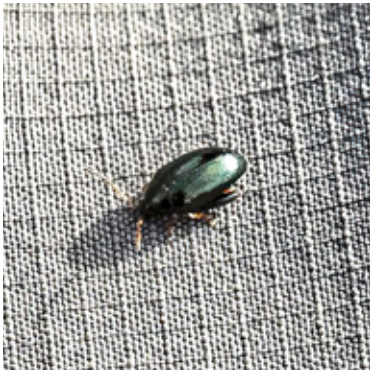
Chris is into a feisty rainbow which fell for a Black Suspender.



A fit Hury rainbow is released.

more sheep than I could count. As I disposed of the second cup of coffee, I did some homework — water temperature 16 deg C, wind wafting from the SE, air temperature 17 deg C, barometer 1005 and dropping — and poked under shoreline stones. I found little of significance beside occasional caddis cases and pea mussels; there were some buzzer shucks; and in the air there were tiny, metallic-backed beetles whose name I didn't know. (I still don't — their size was 3mm-4mm; the underparts were black/brown, the backs an iridescent brown/green.) I suspected it was these beetles to which the trout were moving in what was still a flat calm. I replaced the Suspender with a short-dressed, green-ribbed version of the same pattern. I kept the Hopper on, largely because it was an effective indicator.

I had a grand morning. There would be quarter-hour spells of activity, then a slower period. I imagined that rainbows were moving along the southern shoreline in groups of perhaps half-a-dozen. They rose quietly, intently. When the breeze came, they worked more predictably upwind. If you could cover a moving fish, then generally it would take. I missed plenty — of course I did — but schooled myself to wait for the draw of the line and only then to tighten. When Simon arrived at lunchtime to see how I was doing, I was able to report the release of four or five more rainbows. He asked what I'd been getting them on, then nodded when he heard about the beetles. "Yes. Because Hury's relatively nutrient-poor, terrestrials are important: hawthorns and black gnats in May, with heather flies, beetles and daddies later in the year. And there are buzzers as well, of course — tiny black ones." I asked him about sedges. "We have relatively few. You'll get fish on sedges, but buzzers seem more



The Hury fish proved fond of these still-unidentified beetles.



Time to reflect on a senior moment with the Thermos. Simon Lee, Andrew Scott and the writer — the smiles witness grand company and a prolific day.



important and in summer it often surprises me that anglers leave the lake before the buzzers hatch in the evening. They say they've seen nothing rising — but if they'd waited an hour or two, they'd have seen the lake alive with fish."

I'd planned to revisit Hury with Richard Faulks three days later and spent the intervening weekend fiddling with foam, tying up caricatures of beetles: beetle-mania.

September 5 brought with it ostensibly similar conditions — as on the 2nd, a light SSE wind, a water temperature of 17 deg C, a steady barometer (1009). Richard, Simon and I were joined by Simon's colleague Andrew Scott, who like Simon has a formidable angling knowledge of the lake. By the time we'd foregathered on the 5th, and because I'd done that reconnaissance three days earlier, I'd released one more (Black Suspender) — but had lost

three others on the Hopper during the play, when they were apparently solidly hooked. Was it simply incompetence, I asked Andrew, or was it the barbless iron, or was it...? Andrew hooked the Hopper into his fleece and looked me straight in the eye. "First," he said, "it's not really barbless — it has a micro-barb. Second, it looks to me as if the hook-bend has opened. And third, you missed a ring when you were threading your fly-line this morning."

I looked carefully at that hook-bend. Andrew was quite right: it had opened by an almost imperceptible degree. How had I not noticed? And how had I missed a ring? And how, back in April, had I driven for two hours, only to find I'd left the fly-rod back at home? Come to think of it, where was the bottle of Gink in its rather nice leather holder? And I'd left my lunch... where?

Among one's multiplying senior moments, ►

"I spent the weekend tying up caricatures of beetles: beetle-mania"



Andrew showing fine style with the net during his purple patch.



Simon casts towards the boil at Hury's western end.

“There was high cloud, fitful sunshine and the sound of the small wind”

sometimes it takes an expert eye to point out things you’ve missed and to set you right. I replaced the Hopper and knotted the Foam Beetle on to the point. Andrew, meanwhile, set up with a Booby on the point and two small Black Crunchers on the droppers. I asked him about the effectiveness of the washing-line at Hury. “It can be devastating,” he said, “particularly along the northern shoreline in the earlier part of the season.” I asked him about other useful fly patterns. “Crunchers, yes — with Kate McLarens and Bibios. One chap was doing well last week with red Diawl Bachs. Fished on the point, the Dawson’s Olive, Black Fritz and Cat’s Whisker are other favourite lures, sometimes weighted to assist turnover in the wind.” Although the conditions we encountered were benign enough for us to use floating lines, Andrew strongly recommended carrying intermediates and sinkers (he typically uses an eight-weight slow glass intermediate) and the use of waders and a line-tray to handle the prevailing westerlies. In very hot weather, he added,

fast sinkers and Boobies could be productive.

The four of us covered large areas of the lake on September 5 — not only the southern shoreline near the dam, but parts of the northern shoreline up to and including Reedy Point and Waterfall Bay (where there’s an incoming beck) and then the western end of Hury, where water from Blackton is pumped into the lake via a large boil. This is particularly attractive to rainbows in high summer, when they seek out the aerated water. Everywhere was accessible. The walking was flat, along tracks or sheep paths. There were grassy banks where you could sit or snooze. There was high cloud, fitful sunshine and the sound of the small wind. The pastures were green and not parched, the air was clean, the landscapes took your eye — and the rainbows rose in spells for much of the day.

We all caught fish. I wish I could report that my newly tied Beetle patterns were infallible, but they turned out to be just as useless as other flies I’ve designed: the small Black Suspender and the Hopper continued to work well, though, and I felt no compulsion to change, not even when Andrew struck a purple patch with his Crunchers during a prolific afternoon.

In a pause during the fishing, I asked Andrew and Simon about the greatest challenge they and Northumbrian Water faced in running Hury. “Social media,” they said. “People get on Facebook and other platforms and say the lake hasn’t been stocked, that there are no fish here and so on.” Over the two days ➤



A yellow foam-head on the Black Suspender proved irresistible — and is easy for old eyes to see.

Andrew Scott’s fly-box. Note the presence of beetle and other terrestrial patterns.

Looking down the length of Hury from the west.





Andrew with another cracking Hury rainbow. Hury's roach were also fond of the Black Suspender. Shuttlecock, Suspender or Shipman's?

we'd fished, I'd had direct evidence that this wasn't the case; Hury carried a massive head of rainbows. The problem, surely, is that while anglers have always grumbled, social media give grumbles a megaphone.

I also asked about what they most feared when they contemplated the angling future of Hury. "Where are the youngsters?" they said, almost in unison. Young people do go to the any-method fisheries, but easy success doesn't necessarily translate into durable engagement and naturally it takes time to learn to cast a fly and to understand some basic entomology. "We have tried to run courses for youngsters, but they seem to want more instant results."

This is a worry I hear being discussed everywhere in angling circles. Where are the youngsters? It's fine for dotards like me — old men who forget to thread their rod-rings properly, who lose fish because their eyesight hasn't been acute enough to notice an opened hook-bend, who contemplate a grassy bank with one eye on a snooze — to write with deep gratitude for upland waters, for open spaces and healthy ecosystems and all the care and management which go into them, but... where are the youngsters?

If you go — as you must — to Hury, take someone younger with you if you can. You'll find a remarkably well-stocked lake, rainbows that will take a full

fly-line on their first run, and opportunity to fish the gamut of stillwater fishing techniques, from traditional wet-flies to washing-lines. There's a sense of space and ever-changing light. Of course, there will be times, particularly in the early season, when this upland water seems bleak and its rainbows sullen, but in September 2022 it was glorious. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD FAULKES

Factfile

HURY RESERVOIR The fishing (bank-fishing only, March 12–October 31) is run by Northumbrian Water; a variety of ticket options is available (including catch-and-release) and tickets may be booked online: watersideparksuk.com/fishing/ That link also includes a helpful map. There's free car parking at both ends of the dam and a portaloo at the dam's north end. Wading is generally easy. The banks offer good access and the reservoir can be walked around in an hour — or two if you dawdle and take in the scenery.

