

DYFAN MORRIS

FISH TALES FROM WALES

I always feel a pang of sadness at the end of summer. This is usually short lived however, as October and November promise some of the best fishing of the year if, like me, grayling is your favoured quarry.

Not only is this handsome, powerful fish at the peak of condition, but the spectacular autumn scenery along the river can leave you rubbing your eyes in disbelief that somewhere so close to home could be so beautiful.

In the New Year, when all the crazy Christmas dust has settled, there is a long and frustrating wait before the swollen, flotsam-filled rivers are revived and shrunk by spring sunshine. Reading my favourite fishing books and tying flies act like nicotine patches—they get me through, but it's not quite the same.

Last winter, just as I was coming to terms with my forced abstinence from fishing, the phone rang. On the other end was Louis Noble. As a professional guide and instructor, he teaches most of his clients western techniques on western gear. Once his fishing time is his own though, his unequivocal weapon of choice is the tenkara rod.

He too had been in the grip of cabin fever and decided a project was needed to remedy this. We pored over huge maps of North Wales and trawled the internet for information. Our goal was to find new water, chance a drive west into Snowdonia, and maybe, just maybe, find tenkara Shangri La in the mountains there.

We drew up a short list of potential destinations. The next phase of our project was to identify who controlled the fishing and find out whether we would be allowed to wet our lines.

From what we understood, most of these rivers were fished with worms or spinners by the locals. Fly-fishing was generally considered unsuitable because of the nature of these fast and rocky streams. This was probably true as far as conventional gear is concerned, but we weren't taking conventional gear. Tenkara has unlocked these rivers for fly-fishers and has given us the opportunity to be pioneers and pathfinders.

We would cover miles of ground, exploring some of the more isolated streams. To be able to slip a small box of



flies, a reel of tippet, forceps, and snips in a small chest pack or your coat pocket, clip your rod to your rucksack and head off confident you have everything you need to explore these places has seriously upped the ante.

With our plan made and hit list finalised, I drove home re-energised and full of good spirit, until I realised it was still only the start of February. Now the beginning of the season would seem even further away.

Our first outing met with success and failure in fairly equal measure, but that statement is debatable depending on your understanding of what fishing is really about.

The planning, research, and journey had been our success. Instead of talk, we had taken action and had enjoyed

every step. We had journeyed to the unknown through some of the most beautiful and haunting landscape there is and had found a river that looked every bit as good as the one we had imagined.

In a time when our towns and cities are growing more and more generic, we had the privilege to stand in a place that reflected the soul and character of its nation. Wales is a land steeped in myths and legends. It was not hard to see why, as we looked out over dark mountains and watched the rolling mist blow across the wings of barrelling birds of prey and past Stone Age ruins. Huge boulders left abandoned by the last Ice Age littered our pretty little stream. These monoliths, softened now by a covering of damp, green moss, stand as testament to the power and magnitude of Mother Nature. It gave me goose



bumps to run my fingers along the grooves cut into the hard stone and slate, which were made as the valley was carved by shifting ice and trapped rubble all those millennia ago.

Our failure? You've probably guessed ... we caught no fish. We had neglected to take into account that winter up in the hills hangs about for a few extra weeks before it has to clear off to make way for spring. Oh well!

My first fish of the venture came from the gin-clear waters of the Afon Ogwen (or River Ogwen in English). It was rocky and fast flowing as one would expect. It has been fished mainly for migratory fish with worms when the river was in spate. On our visit, it was low and we had the place to ourselves.

As I waded out I saw, across furious crashing white, a small pocket of dark, serene water. A calm eye of the

storm; surely it must hold a fish. The true value and beauty that lies in tenkara's simplicity was appreciated once more as the level line drifted by slowly and under complete control, despite the surrounding chaotic flow. Sure enough the line spiked downwards, and through the torrent and turmoil, a Fabergé made, wild brown trout was brought to the net.

The fish tend to be small and few in numbers. However, I would gladly swap a hundred flaccid, deformed stock fish for a handful of hard-fighting, wild, Welsh trout. The hiking can be hard going too, but each pool you find is yours. To explore these waters will take a lifetime—and that is an immensely exciting prospect.

DYFAN MORRIS lives in North Wales, UK, with his very patient wife and their two lovely boys. He's an ex-soldier who has found peace and purpose in family life and fishing.