

# THE SALMON RIVERS OF SCOTLAND

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE FLEET

THIS small river, which drains seventy-three square miles, opens on the 24th of February, and is netted till the 10th of September (ten days more than it should be), and fished by rod till the 31st of October. Rising at an altitude of 750 ft. above sea-level, after a run of twelve miles it falls into the Dornoch Firth, two miles to the south of Golspie. The mouth is crossed by a viaduct just a thousand yards long, over which passes the high road from Golspie to Dornoch; in this there are four arches with sluices, which keep in due bounds the currents of the river and the tides, the chief outlet being at the north end of the viaduct and within a few yards of the Mound Station. Above this viaduct the dammed waters form a reedy, swampy lake, and farther up the lower part of the river is nearly all dead water, yielding but little sport with salmon, though at times sea trout are got. Fish do not enter the river until the first flood at the end of June or early in July, which is a curious fact, sandwiched as it is between the Brora and Helmsdale on the north and the Kyle of Sutherland rivers on the south, all of which are early ones. This little stream, however, has one peculiarity, without which it would hardly be worth mentioning as a salmon river, for it is the only place in Scotland where salmon are regularly killed by rod and fly in salt water.

About three miles seawards from the Fleet mouth is a stretch of salt water called Loch Fleet, in which about an hour after the tide ebbs a current is formed, which runs with all the rapidity of a strong river stream, and in this salmon are taken with rod and fly.

A further feature of the Fleet is the remarkable salmon ladder at Torbol, on the Carnach, a tributary on which there is a series of falls some sixty feet in height, up which the fish have been successfully taken. The late Mr. Bateson of Cambusmore—which is at present rented by Mr. Laurence Hardy, M.P.—was, I believe, the inventor and engineer of this, the first fish-pass (about 1864) that took fish up such a very formidable obstruction.

The total length of the pass, which cost £600, is three hundred and seventy-eight yards, the first one hundred and forty of which are very steep, up which the fish are taken by the ingenious principle of a ladder within a ladder, which provides two sets of pools, a larger and a smaller, in the breadth of the ladder, a large one on the right hand side with a small one on the left. In the step below the order

is reversed, and the fish is thus enabled to pass alternately from shallow to deep, and *vice versa*. At the head of the ladder a sluice regulates the water flow, admitting only what is required for the passage of the fish. Salmon, grilse, and sea trout ascended in fair numbers, and the waters above the fall soon became stocked and yielded sport to the rod.

The Cambusmore shooting on the south bank of the Fleet has the lower fishing of the river. Earl Amherst, at Morvich, on the north bank, and Mr. H. H. Bolton, at Rovie, have the remainder. The angler on the lower reaches of the Fleet is daily looked down on by the monument on Golspie Hill, erected to the memory of one of the late Dukes of Sutherland, the same duke who, at his own expense, emigrated so many of his crofters, greatly to their benefit; the tradition relates that after the putting up of the monument some wag scribbled on its base the following lines:—

“ There was once a great Duke of Sutherland,  
Whose crofters were fond of their motherland;  
But to each one he said, Your passage is paid,  
And off you must go to some other land.”

I vouch not for the truth of this story, but at any rate the lines are rather funny.

In 1909 there were a remarkable number of fish caught in this little stream—no less than 172 salmon and grilse and over 200 sea trout—the heaviest, of 20½ lb., was caught in Rovie Pool.