



Southern England

The majority of chalk streams in England are a world away from the rushing Highland rivers of the far north. The environment in the south, where almost all these rivers are found, is far softer and more gentle, epitomised by the fact that, while fishermen are relaxing at huts, their rods can simply be stood outside in racks, without any fastenings, whereas in the north they have to be clipped in position to stop them being blown away. Fly-fishing in the south takes place mainly in summer, when the weather is kind, but in Scotland the angler has to battle with gales, sleet and snow from February on. There, the water is almost always discoloured to some extent, but in the south it is so clear that trout have to be stalked and approached with guile.

Although only 40 miles long, from its source near Basingstoke to its mouth on Southampton Water, the Test is perhaps the most famous chalk stream in the south of England. Its gin-clear water and abundance of weed make it ideal for salmon and trout, and it is rich in the invertebrates and other insects on which trout feed. Runs of salmon have declined sharply in recent years, due partly to netting in the estuary, partly to the silting-up of redds, or gravel spawning beds, and partly to the overall decline of the Atlantic species, which has not yet been fully understood. Stocks of brown trout, on the other hand, are augmented by the introduction of reared fish, and the river remains a prime target for trout fishermen, who come from all over the world.

John and Beverley Fairey, who live on the beautiful Bossington Estate, complete with its magnificent William IV house, had plenty of surprises in store for me – not least that Beverley is the great-granddaughter of F.M. Halford, the Victorian pioneer and author of *Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice*, first published in 1889. I had been told that Halford had had a great-granddaughter, but I had failed to make the connection, and I blushed at my ignorance.

No matter. I was treated to an inspection of one of Halford's rods in its fine cane carrier, and a lovely woven creel. Around the room were beautifully-drawn maps showing the Faireys' four miles of water. Stuffed fish caught by three generations of Halfords adorned the walls, together with a painting of Beverley herself fishing Beat 6. Fortified by this quick dose of history,

The Test

Bossington Fishery

Facing page top:

The old Thatched Hut

This building with its fine tall windows dates from the 1830s

Facing page lower:

The Weir Hut

A building of more recent construction

