

CHEW TO HOST THE 2009 SPRING INTERNATIONAL

by John Horsey

This May will see 56 of the UK's top fly anglers visit the West Country, as Chew Valley Lake hosts the Spring International Loch Style match.

The Event will be contested between England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Having qualified from last year's National Final at Bewl, I will be fishing for England in this important match, along with other Chew regulars Simon Gurney and Andy Haskins.

I was actually the England Captain back in 2003 when these twice annual "Home Internationals" were last held at Chew Valley and thankfully we won the day in a very hard fought match.

The preceding weeks on Chew had been fantastic, with fish feeding hard on buzzer and bloodworm all over the lake. In fact, we even commented that the match itself could be a lottery, as there were so many fish being caught on a whole host of methods.

But as is so often the case with practicing for competitions, the weather conditions changed during the official practice sessions and the trout became almost impossible to tempt!

This is where thorough practice really comes into its own, with team members being allocated certain areas of the lake using specific methods and fly patterns.

Often, it is just as important to find out what doesn't work and which areas do not hold fish, as it is to determine the best flies and methods. Basically it is a process of elimination.

As the weather had turned sunny and windy, the buzzer hatches had almost stopped and no fish were to be found moving on the surface. The bloodworm feeders also appeared to have ceased, as had the nymph feeders.

On one overcast afternoon, the buzzers hatched in profusion and most of the competitors turned to dry fly tactics out in the middle of the lake. The sound of screaming reels filled the air and some superb resident rainbows were hooked, lost and landed.

However, once the clouds passed and the sunshine returned, the surface activity stopped as quickly as it had begun.

After 5 solid days of practice, our team plan was to fish medium sink D13 lines with Booby and nymph combinations. The top areas for this method were off Nunnery Point, behind Denny Island and in Villice Bay.

However, if we had cloud cover, our game plan was to head for the nearest wind lane and fish dries. I had 3 takes that day. The first fish took



Team Captains of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in 2003

a Ginger Hopper dry fly off the False Island and the second – a cracking 3lb rainbow – swallowed my Coral Booby near Nunnery Point. Sadly, I missed the 3rd and final take behind the Island.

Now 3 takes in a day's fishing does not sound much, but to put things into perspective, our 14 man England Team weighed in a total of 18 trout to win the match quite comfortably from 2nd placed Wales. Scotland were 3rd and Ireland picked up the Wooden Spoon.

Although Chew Valley was almost "crawling" with trout at that time, if they do not want to feed, there is little you can do about it. So success becomes a relative thing and in the circumstances, our team total was a good one and came as a result of extremely thorough practice by a bunch of dedicated competition anglers.

The crucial point to be stressed here is the importance of having good weather conditions. Now I know the last 2 years have been extremely wet, but that means plenty of cloud. If we get cloud, then the buzzers normally hatch on Chew and the trout will inevitably feed – and often right at the surface.

I believe that the last 2 years have seen some of the best dry fly fishing on Chew Valley for many a year and the buzzer hatches at times, have been phenomenal.

The water levels have been maintained at almost top level for the past couple of seasons and this too has helped to re-colonise the margins with insects.

So I am expecting the 2009 season to be another bumper year and with the Spring International being held in mid-May, I believe the home nations should be treated to some superb nymph and possibly even some dry fly sport.

If you fancy playing a part in the event yourself, then the Confederation of English Fly Fishers will be recruiting 28 volunteer boatmen for the match. Your job will be to act as controller for 2 anglers from different countries and there is a fantastic opportunity to observe at first hand how some of the best fly anglers in the business go about tackling Chew Valley Lake under strict match conditions.

If you are interested in offering your services for the day, then contact Woodford Lodge. As a competitor, I fully understand the importance of having controllers for these matches and I guarantee you will have an enjoyable day on the water.

Perhaps I'll see you next May!



Victorious England Team from the 2003 Spring International