

ON FELL BECK FISHING

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After one abortive attempt involving some bushwhacking and very cold bivi, we got Monte Cinto (8891 ft., and the highest in Corsica) on the second attempt by a different route and after a more comfortable and warmer night under a huge boulder.

On the way down we saw a pair of partridges, which was unexpected at that height.

Looking back at the mountain Charles Tilly said 'Well, that's my last mountain, Eric—it's small hills from now on!'

This set me thinking.

Pasture Beck, Hartsop, Patterdale, with Gray Crag in the background. *Geoffrey Berry* ▶



When you are part way between a 'Toothless Tiger' and a 'Geriatric Eccentric' (A.J.79 p 274, and A.J.81 p 125) and unable to manage the high hills, some form of outdoor sport is clearly indicated: and to those who qualify and have not yet tried it, I commend fell beck fishing.

Fell becks are everywhere, they all hold trout, albeit small ones; and you don't need permits, although in theory at all events, you require a Water Board Licence costing about £5 (O.A.P.'s pay less!) Shuddering from that outlay, or if you feel like it, ducking it, the remainder of your gear should be as cheap as possible—a long rod (at least 11ft.) reel, line, a yard or two of fine gut, and a few hooks, Stuart (2 hooks) or Pennal (3 hooks) my own preference being for the former.

And, of course, worms: none of your great long red snake-like creatures but a brandling about 1½ inches long, is the ideal. In the long dry summer of 1976 worms were far more difficult to find than were the trout, but generally a compost heap or middenstead yields up the treasures, which are toughened up by being kept in moss for a week or so.

You need a small lead shot on the gut trace about 9 inches from the hook, and the worm should be impaled with its head up towards the rod tip.

When ready for action you fish up stream—and it will surprise you how far up the beck, in fact almost at its source, you will be able to catch fish. Using a length of line which with the gut cast is no longer than your rod, so that if you hold the shot in your left hand, the line is taut, you lob the worm forward into the "white" water at the head of the pool, and bring it back towards you at the same rate as the water flows; when you feel a click, perhaps ever so slight, strike by swinging the fish onto the bank at your side. More often than not he will drop off the hook, so you have to watch him as he describes a parabola.

Dog Bob is useful in searching out and finding fish in the rushes and thick grass, and is rewarded with trout too small to keep, which he eats and apparently enjoys whilst they are still alive!!

To begin with you will not catch any trout, the only catch will be your hook in the moss on the beck bottom, and the reason for this disappointment is quite simple. You are breaking the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is that you must keep out of sight of the fish; 'Beckies' are far more timid than their sophisticated brethren of the Kennet or Dove rivers, and the least sign of anything strange—moving sheep, shadow cast by your rod or—worse still—brightly coloured clothing, surmounted by a 'pudden face',

sends them off out of sight and feed instantler,

Your climbing training will be helpful: often the only progress up the beck—that is without showing yourself to the fish in the next pool—is by scrambling up the rocks in the bottom or sides, and a well-hidden approach pays dividends.

The fishing season is March through September, and the best time is when a flood has run off, but you will catch quite big fish at the end of the season when the river fish are running up the smaller streams to spawn.

Beck fishing is not quite such fun as climbing, but you will find it has its moments, particularly for those who have to take life more slowly or who have had to give up big mountains: I hope you will enjoy it as much as I do.

Dow Crag from near Torver

F. H. F. Simpson

