

the wildfisher

spirit and soul in wild places

27
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EIGHT DAYS IN SOUTH UIST

Written by Dave Westburg



“You really must come to South Uist, it’s the best sea trout fishing in the world. I know the place to stay and the best ghille and will join you if I can” said Chalkstream Chronicles author Neil Patterson in response to my friend Greg’s complaint about two fruitless weeks spent chasing seatrout in Wales and England.

In August 2010 we arrived in at Kinloch on the shores of Loch Druidibeg after a Seattle to Glasgow to Bebenacula flight and a 30-minute drive.



Breakfast Brown Trout from Loch Druidibeg

Day 1

After an introductory tea and whiskey with Wegg Kimbell (Kinloch proprietor) we spent the evening on Loch Druidibeg which sits outside Kinloch’s back door.

I caught 5 Browns for breakfast fishing a traditional cast of a #12 claret bumble on the bob, #12 golden olive bumble middle dropper and #12 mallard and claret point.

Druidibeg yielded 3-5 fish each evening either just before or just after dinner. We fished Druidibeg for an hour or two on days when seatrout fishing was slow.



Loch Druidibeg from the Bedroom Window



Day 3

We fished Loch Fada, one of most famous sea trout lochs on the island and the favourite of ghille Ian Kennedy. We had the sort of cold, wet, windy, miserable weather which makes a ghille smile. Ian selected of claret bumbles, teal blue and silvers and kingsmills and explained tactics: a medium cast downwind of the drifting boat followed by four pulls and then a raising of the rod to trip the bob fly through the waves. The fishing was exciting. We caught three sea trout with the best fish a 5 pounder which hit Greg's #12 Claret Bumble on the bob. We half dozen other large seatrout swirl and raise waves as they followed our flies. Pound for pound these fish fought harder than any salmon, coastal cutthroat or steelhead I've ever caught.



Day 2

Greg and I walked into some hill lochs to stretch our legs after two days of travel. Schoolhouse loch (a hill loch not to be confused with the more famous Schoolhouse sea trout loch) was dour and yielded only two browns. We caught 12 wild browns, however, in an unnamed loch over the hill. I fished a cast which would have made R.C Bridgett proud: a size 12 butcher on the bob, a size 12 woodcock and yellow middle dropper and a size 12 grouse and claret on the point.



Day 4

I caught my first Atlantic salmon - a 5 pound grisle - on a size #12 Dunkeld at the mouth of a burn which enters Loch Bharp. Bharp's native salmon run used to be supplemented with ova planted by the Lochboisdale Hotel which has given it the reputation as the salmon loch on the island. Greg hooked and lost a salmon. Neil Patterson made the ghosts of angling authors past walk from their graves by catching a sea trout and several browns on a Chernobyl Ant. And to think that this man is Scottish.

Day 5

We fished Loch Roag, perhaps the most prolific sea trout loch on South Uist on a under a bright, cloudless blue sky. After a slow morning, we abandoned the loch for an early dinner and then returned for great dusk fishing. Our boat's take was six finnock (small sea trout) and three sea trout with the fish falling to a #12 butcher on the point or a #12 claret bumble on the bob.



Day 6

John Kennedy calls Bornish the premier trout loch in South Uist and arguably the best loch in the Uists in terms of numbers of fish caught, quality and consistency. This clear machair loch sits in a bed of finely ground sea shells a couple hundred yards from the ocean. The loch has large shallow flats which trout cruise in the spring or at times of low light. It is a brown trout fishery because there is so much food that the browns stay home rather than migrating as is the norm in the food-restricted peat water lochs. We tried a soldier palmers, claret bumbles, golden olive bumbles, dries and nymphs. We caught 10 browns up to two pounds but the larger fish (Ian tells us there are Browns up to 6 pounds) eluded us due to the bright sunny weather. On a return trip I'd like to spend a few days from the bank attempting to unlock the secrets of the Bornish weedbeds with shrimp and chironomid patterns.

Day 7

A gale on Loch Fada. 20 miles an hour average wind with gusts to 70. The wind made it impossible to fish the drift but we caught 2 finnock and 1 sea trout on a claret bumble and a butcher fished in the sheltered lees of a couple points on the loch.



Day 8



On the last day of the trip I proposed a contest to our ghille Ian Kennedy. I would fish just the three favourite sea trout flies of Hamish Stuart: Zulu on the bob, woodcock and green middle dropper and Claret and Mallard point. My boatmate Greg would fish any three flies chosen by our Ian. This was the big showdown. Tradition versus the present. The flies of one of the island's best past fishermen versus the flies of one of the island's best current fishermen. Classic Scottish wet flies versus Hoppers and Gorgeous Georges and Revered Mothers and who knows what. We were tied at 6 small seatrout each going into the last drift when Greg won the contest with a 5 pound seatrout caught on a Claret Bumble.

I swear our drift veered off into Greg's take. Remember Jamesie in A Man May Fish? You can't trust the man at the oars when his reputation is at stake.

The Contest Winner



Conclusion

If you've never caught a seatrout go to South Uist. If you've never caught a big seatrout go to South Uist. The fishing isn't easy but you'll probably see more wild seatrout in a week than you'd see in a year on your local river.

What to Bring and Where to Stay and What to Read

Tackle – We fished 9-11 foot rods with 6 weight lines for sea trout and 9 foot 5 weight

rods for browns. We fished size 10-12 flies for seatrout. I went down to size 14 flies to fish browns and to fish for finnock in the Roag burn. Our best sea trout patterns were the claret bumble, butcher, teal blue and silver Zulu, Dunkeld and Goats Toe. The browns liked a golden olive bumble, mallard and claret, woodcock and yellow, dry muddler and a dry olive sedge. We used 14 foot 8 pound test Maxima ultragreen leaders for sea trout and 12 foot 6 pound test Maxima ultragreen leaders for browns.

Other Necessaries – Bring your best raincoat and a pair of chest waders. The waders will keep out the rain and will allow you to fish from shore around burn mouths and in sheltered bays if it's too windy to take out a boat. You'll also need a good midge repellent if the wind drops.

Accommodations – Kinloch (www.kinlochuist.com). Address: Grogarry, Isle of South Uist, HS8 5RR. Telephone: +44(0)1870 620 316. Email: wegg@kinlochuist.com. An angling-oriented bed and breakfast operated by Wegg Kimbell. Wegg is aptly described in the September 2010 issue of Flyfishing and Fly Tying as “a man of fine intelligence and understanding and a friend of Bacchus who feels perhaps more keenly than most of us the slings, arrows and general cock-ups of everyday life. Wegg can arrange fishing for you on the seatrout or machair lochs. He makes a mean steak and kidney pie and will clean and poach your catch and lend you any of the 200 plus books in his angling library. Just don’t get him started on Brevil toasters. Other accommodations on the island include the Anglers Retreat (www.anglersretreat.net), the Lochboisdale Hotel (www.lochboisdale.com) and the Borrodale Hotel (www.isleshotelgroup.co.uk)

Fishing – The best island seatrout lochs (Roag, Fada, Schoolhouse, Upper Kildonan and Mill) as well as the Machair lochs are controlled by the South Uist Estate (Telephone 01878 700101, fishing@storaubhist.com) which permits only 2 boats or four rods a day on each loch to manage the pressure. The fishing fees for the estate lochs are 55-70 pounds/day per boat for two seatrout rods, depending on the month you want to fish. Trout fishing costs 35 pounds/day per boat for two rods. Bank fishing is 6 pounds per day. Ghillie fees are 60 pounds per day. The ghillies encourage catch and release and the best west coast sea trout lochs do not have estuaries suitable for fish farming so the future appears bright. This is not a duffers holiday. You need to be able to cast well (often in a wind) and need the arm strength to fish a 6 or 7 weight rod all day. You are also at the mercy of the weather. Too bright and calm and the seatrout will be skittish. Too windy and you can’t go out in boats. Don’t overlook the brown trout fishing. South Uist and Bebencula (the nearby island over a causeway) have several hundred peat-stained freshwater brown trout lochs which can be fished for 6 pounds a day. The brown trout fishing peaks in May and June. I caught brownies up to 2 pounds and Ian Kennedy tells me there are bigger fish.

Ghillies - There are 4 full time ghillies on the island. I’d highly recommend Ian Kennedy. Ian has good blood lines. His father John Kennedy ghilled for 20 years and is the author of 70 lochs a valuable guidebook to the trout fishing in Bebencula and South Uist. Ian has the eyes of an osprey and will spot fish coming to your fly several seconds before they strike. He’s an accomplished fly tyer with a sense of what patterns work and when. And if that’s not enough he cast an entire 40 yard airflo fly line. Dare him at lunch and you’ll see.

Books - Anglers have been coming to South Uist for almost 200 years. Here’s a list of helpful books on the island’s fishing.

[70 Lochs A Guide to Trout Fishing in South Uist by John Kennedy](#). Reprinted in 2009, this book provides the details on access, boats and best fishing areas on a selection of Bebencula and South Uist brown trout lochs. The emphasis is brown trout fishing, not sea trout.

[The Book of the Sea Trout](#) and by Hamish Stuart. Stuart fished the South Uist lochs in the early part of this century and his book is full of references to Roag and Bharp and Killdonan.

[Fishing for Sea Trout](#) by H.P. Henzell contains a chapter on his experiences fishing South Uist.

[The Loch Fishers Bible by Stan Headley](#). Bornish is one of Headley’s favorite brown trout lochs and his books talks about Bornish, Fada and Roag.

[Fishing the Scottish Islands](#) by Roderick Wilkinson describes fishing opportunities on South Uist and the rest of the Scottish islands.

And last but not least [Trout Lochs of Scotland](#) by Bruce Sandison.

Dave Westburg lives in Seattle, WA where he owns a small finance company and spends his leisure time fly fishing for sea-run cutthroat on Puget Sound on the North Fork of the Stilligumish river.