

We have all caught double-figure trout, well above, not everyone, but hands up who has actually targeted and stalked a fish of this size.

Recently, I accompanied big-fish stalker Malcolm Hunt to his local premier big-fish water, Lechlade Trout Fishery, on a bleak, flooded December day to gain an insight into monster trout hunting.

With countless numbers of doubles under his belt, I was guaranteed a masterclass of targeting these big fish: I was not to be disappointed.

Tackling Up

Malcolm is very selective in the gear that he uses and this becomes apparent when he speaks about how much trout he has in his setup. He uses Greys G-Tec 5 and 6-wt rods – their high-modules blanks have the guts to deal painlessly with the biggest of fish – and G-Tec reels, their Rulon disc brake pads ensuring total control throughout the fight, which is important when one of these monsters heads off into the middle of the lake or highlands it towards an underwater obstacle.

Fly lines are the next piece of gear he speaks passionately about – Charles Jardine

Presentation lines do exactly what it says on the tin: great in presentation and effortless in the cast. Roman Moser Braided loops, no less, attach the fly line to the leader and, wait for it, Drennan Sub Surface 8lb or 6lb to the business end of the leader. Why, you ask?

He says: "The Drennan has never let me down, it seems to absorb the pressure of powerful fish."

The next bit of equipment is polarising sunglasses. These are paramount for being able to successfully spot your prey. He favours a combination of Orvis Ghosts for low light and Costa 580 Phantoms for general use.

Choice of net is a large one, the bigger the better, and is essential for netting the sheer size of the trout in these waters. It still amazes me to see anglers approaching these fisheries with small nets. I tend to think how many trophy fish have actually been lost due to this.

The Approach

One thing that I have learnt is that too many fishermen storm to the water's edge, like an elephant into the jungle armed with a couple of hotman boys and start launching lures towards the

By getting the correct tackle all well balanced, subduing big fish like this is far easier than you'd imagine.



summit. Stealth is the name of the game – stay low, hug the margins, travel light and, most importantly, DON'T ignore what may be close in. Look into the water and not at it. Like driving a car, you look through the windscreen rather than at it and this is why polarising glasses are so

important in assisting you to spot your quarry.

Malcolm uses heavily weighted stalking bugs because getting the fly down to the same level and path of the trout is imperative. Most of his fish are taken this way and they will often take on the drop. Be patient, don't

move the fly and wait for the telltale sign of the opening and closing of the fish's mouth as he takes the fly. Then the strike – the moment of truth: be lightning quick because this can only be a split second as the fish mouths the fly.

Watch Them Closely

Take time out to observe fish behaviour. They are creatures of habit and big fish will move often than not swim a circuit, so if they have moved out of the swim, chill out and get ready to ambush them as they come around again. Don't become disheartened if a fish swims away at a rate of knots at the sight of your offering. This is a good sign, it simply doesn't want that fly. It could be something about the colour, size or the movement that he didn't like, so move on and change fly. The majority of your prey will be close in, often right under your nose,

so a bow-and-arrow cast will be needed, aiming the fly at about 45 degrees in front of the fish then manoeuvring it into its path. However, not all fish are taken this way and sometimes you will need to get really low to take the glare off the water. From a distance, look for large shapes, casting with a tight loop, and wait for the movement of the fish or the flash of white as the trout takes in the fly. High sun is



The tiny WAFF (When All Else Fails) is a great fly for stalking big trout – this one couldn't resist it!

more challenging because my friend because it makes seeing fish so much easier. It's a lot more challenging when it is cloudy; I witnessed this on several occasions because while we were stalking I was amazed to see countless fish appear, as if by magic, in front of us as the sun made one of its rare appearances on our outing. Lastly, and often forgotten, make sure your drag on your reel is set accordingly because any stories that you may have heard that these lumps do not scrap are a fallacy. Once hooked, they will mostly run you to your backing in the blink of an eye.

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more challenging Bushy lease. We head off and bump into fish-farm manager Rob Walker and are greeted with a smile, as always. He tells us where some good fish would be. Now, if there is one thing that we value it's the advice of fishery managers. Listen to them and follow their suggestions; they want you to catch fish.

At last we get through the first gate and I am immediately gestured by Malcolm to keep low. He has seen one and duly presents his first offering of the day in front of the fly, which sees the fly, turns as soon as it hits the water and swims away.

Lesson learnt and he immediately pulls out one of his fly boxes and selects another fly.

"I don't think he liked that," he says. We move on, crossing over the purpose-built two-man ferry, and it's not long before Malcolm spots another big rainbow cruising the margins, slightly deeper than the previous fish.

A short cast with a When All Else Fails (WAFF) sees a little interest from the trout but it lifts up in the water and swims past the carefully presented offering. "Didn't like that one either, but a better reaction," I hear, as I release my breath.



With Bushy lease full of water, it looks like Malcolm is kneeling on water as he plays a good fish!



Tools of the trade – a balanced outfit: small, heavily weighted flies and, most important of all, polarising sunglasses to help you spot your prey!