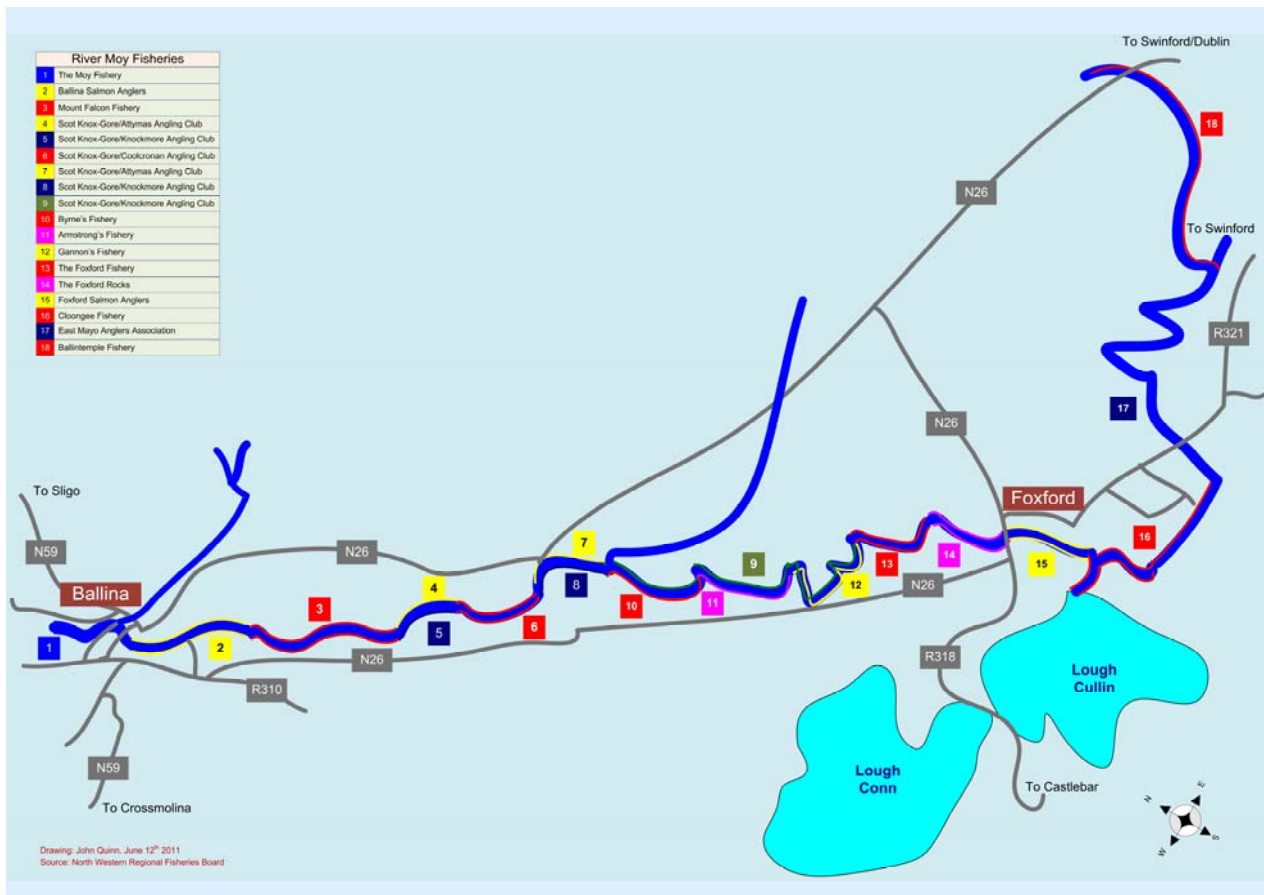


Beyond the Ridge Pool

By **John Quinn MSc IT**, Published on April 26th, 2012

The mere mention of the River Moy which straddles the counties of Mayo and Sligo in north-western Ireland will instinctively evoke images of the famous Ridge Pool sited as it is in the middle of the busy town of Ballina. If the madding crowd and expense of the Ridge Pool is not your preference, why not explore the miles of affordable and testing fly fishing on the outer stretches of the river? The river terrain is remote, rugged and physically demanding, but you could be rewarded with that elusive springer or hardy grilse. Cloongee Fishery is one of the most productive of these fly waters and I decided to give it a try in early June of 2011.



The combination of bright sunshine and the strong south-westerly breeze of the day were not ideal fishing conditions. Undaunted, I set out on the 40 mile car journey from Tuam to Foxford which seemed to pass in no time at all. You always seem to feel that illimitable optimism at the start of a day's fishing and time just flies. Given the bright sunshine it would be prudent to wait until the late evening for an improvement in the conditions.

In the meantime, I popped over to Ballina to check out the Ridge Pool. It was deserted except for one hapless angler who seemed oblivious to the unsympathetic effects to the fishery of a high tide. In his favour though, salmon are mysterious creatures and you never know when they might strike, and besides he would have to be content with the vagaries of having had to book his slot months in advance of the visit.



Back to the Ballylahan Bridge in Foxford and things were definitely looking up. Martin Howley the local water keeper and a number of other anglers were milling around. Martin has intimate knowledge and an affinity for the local fisheries, and when he is about salmon are definitely moving. His presence was reassuring and notwithstanding the unfavourable conditions there might be a good chance of a fish. Watch out for that fading red van and you'll know whether Martin is there or not. On Ballylahan Bridge advice is actively sought and freely given. It is definitely worth spending a few minutes there if only for the camaraderie or to get a direct sense of the river's condition.



Tiernan Brothers in Foxford village was the next stop to pick up an angling permit and to enquire about any good fly that might be doing the rounds. For these types of occasions you should avail of the half-day permit for Cloongee. After a brief consultation with Michael Tiernan, we decided on a Green Highlander type fly tied on a gold size 10 treble hook. The fly didn't look very promising out of water but I'd reserve my judgment for later.



The River Moy daily update by the Tiernan Brothers is a prerequisite for a visit to any of the Foxford fisheries. The update includes catch returns, current river conditions and a short-term forecast of likely river conditions. Granted the selling of permits and related sales is an important revenue stream for their business but any hint of commercial bias in their reporting is fully offset by impartial advice and friendly service.

 Iascach Intire Eireann Inland Fisheries Ireland		Ardarae House, Abbey St., Ballina, Co. Mayo. Tel.: 096-21332. 096-22788.		Cloongee Fishery Angling Permit / Receipt			0549
First Name	John	No. Rods	Session	Day/Date	Time Issued	Fee Paid.	
Surname	Quinn	1	PM	02-06-2011	1547	€25.00	
Address							
		Issued By.					
		Date		02-06-2011			
Country	Co Galway	Salmon Licence No.		A 1P568E			
<small>Retentions: 1. This Permit is not refundable or transferable. 2. The following will automatically invalidate this Permit (a) The use of Prawns/Shrimp as bait. (b) Fishing without a Valid State Salmon Rod Licence. Log Book & tags. (c) Breaches of Cloongee Fishery Regulations and or Fisheries Law.</small>							
<small>This Permit is Issued on the strict understanding that the Holder will fill in and return Page 2. (Catch Return)</small>							
<small>The Board cannot vouch for the safe state of the fishery at any time due to changing weather and water conditions and the possible presence of hidden and unknown dangers. Anglers are warned to exercise the utmost care for their safety and that of others using this fishery. This permit is issued on the strict understanding that the Board's duty to the holder is limited to that owed to "Recreational Users" under the Occupiers Liability Act 1995.</small>							

The Cloongee fishery is only 1.5 miles from Foxford village, and I arrived there in the late evening as the sun was low in the sky. The beat measures three miles in total incorporating all angling methods.

The fly-only water is somewhat less than that and is well developed with designated pools such as the Big Rock, McGowan's, Lynch's, Murison's and Wrigley's.

As anticipated, the fly water was clear and fast-running, at a nice temperature with an average depth of 0.5m making it ideal conditions for the fly. The Green Highlander looked meaty and darted around gleefully in the fast water. It had a promising look, its predominantly green and orange pattern positively complimenting the colour of the limestone river bed. The combination of this natural colouring and the exotic speckle of cascade tinsel extending from the belly of the fly made for a compelling lure and my confidence continued to rise.



The average width of the river beat is 50ft. I found that a 12ft double-handed rod, medium Spey sink-tip 9/10ST line and a 10-pound leader was appropriate tackle for the conditions and robust enough for any grilse that might be encountered. A wading stick is strongly recommended because some parts of the river deepen abruptly to over a metre in fast running current over an uneven and slippery river bed.

Beginning at Madden's rock I worked my way systematically downstream using the sink-tip line to slow down the fly as it swept across the fast flowing water. The faster water is always on the surface of the river and the sink-tip is expert at quickly penetrating the surface to the slower moving water underneath. Being early June, I hoped that this would give the flighty and moody grilse the best opportunity to engage the fly.

It was late evening now and the sun was gradually disappearing behind the trees. The breeze was dropping and the peace and tranquility was punctuated only by the pleasant and inimitable swish of a line in a well executed

cast from a fellow angler downstream. From behind the trees you could also hear the conversion of other anglers returning from the beats upstream. Their subdued conversion was a sure sign that they were also without a fish. I could see too that that my fellow anglers downstream were not having any luck.

Continuing downstream towards the Big Rock pool, I continued to fish in earnest paying particular attention to any rock formations on the river bed that would facilitate a travelling lie for any weary grilse wanting to rest awhile. The beat has a number of these types of lies where a migrant fish ought to be instinctively attempted to establish a territory for the duration of its stay. Presentation of the fly to its best advantage to cover these lies is made easy using the fast and undulating current of Cloonee.





It was getting late, and the mind was beginning to wander when all of a sudden there was a take. I never at any point felt that I had control, and I suspect that it was just toying with or attempting to drown the fly and had I resisted the temptation to strike immediately I might have hooked it fully. Isn't it amazing too that fish will always strike when the concentration is at its lowest? Up until that point the focus was total, and in a split second, this happens!

The primeval urge to hunt is a powerful emotion, and I couldn't help but feel bitterly disappointed at not landing that fish. On the other hand, when I had calmed down I had to admire it for successfully running the gauntlet of fish eating aquatic creatures and marine dwelling predators and now managing to outwit a determined angler.

It was time to call it a day and to head for Bourke's Bar in Foxford for a pint and some quiet reflection. The atmosphere in the bar was charged with the talk of salmon and you could easily identify the successful hunter from the others by the mood of the visiting anglers and you wouldn't dare sully the moment by bringing up the story about the one that got away. The local anglers had more sense and had gone straight home. The visiting angler would instead prefer to cling to what remained of an enjoyable day.



Cloongee Fishery at a Glance

The Cloongee Fishery is one of the most prolific fisheries on the River Moy with a five year annual catch average in excess of 800 fish. It fishes best in the early part of the season. It extends over 3 miles of both single and double-bank fishing and performs best in the early season.

Daily River Updates: Visit www.themoy.com

Angling Permits: Available from Tiernan Brothers Foxford priced at €25 for a half day and €40 for a full day.

Favourite Flies: Ally's Shrimp Cascade, Bann Special, Foxford Shrimp and Green Highlander

The Cloongee fishery is highly recommended in terms of value for money, good salmon habitat and accessibility. The fly water has a number of pools where the challenge of presenting the fly to its best advantage is intriguing. The fishery is easily within reach of Foxford village, well signed and accessible through the use of a number of strategically located foot styles and well worn tracks. The day did not produce a fish but the question is would I do all again? The answer is a resounding yes! Silly question really!