



Ross on Wye Angling Club

Minutes - AGM Tuesday 5th March 2024

Apologies

Peter Richardson, Chris Dowling, Kim Harman, Mark Harrison, Mike Evans, Roy Jacobs, Mr Cottis

Previous AGM Minutes – Agreed

Chairmans Annual Report

Introduction of Committee Members: **Gary Kent** - Deputy Chairman Holds relationship with Benhall Farm and helps organise bank work; **Nick Simmonds** – Membership Secretary, processes over 350 memberships, manages Club Mate; **Paul Dowgill** – Treasurer, manages income and outgoings; **Peter Richardson** - Secretary, helps run the Committee Meetings, publish agenda & minutes, correspondence outside the Club, Wildlife Reporting Group; **Mike Evans** – Head Bailiff for over 25 years, manages Day Ticket water (2 x a day) and looks after a lot of the bank work at Weir End; **Adrian Williams** - Health and Safety Officer, manages RoWAC risk assessments and health and safety policy; **Richard Woodhouse** – Salmon Representative, attends Wye Fisheries Group and reports on Salmon fishing and members interests; **Colin Owen** – maintenance, organises work parties and repairs; **Chris Dowling** – new member to the committee, very active with bank maintenance and produces our newsletter; **Wes Brown** – helps the Club with larger maintenance jobs; **Neil Harper** – committee member who has fished here in Ross since he was a boy, brings his practical skills and helps keep the town platforms in shape; **John Cheyne** – Welfare Officer, works for the Angling Trust and resident fish and river expert, organises our competitions; **Julian Lane** – deputy secretary, coarse and salmon fisher with vast experience of this river and has an in depth perspective of angling Clubs in general; **Mark Harrison** – not a committee member, but writes copy for RoWAC PR/Campaigning work.

Without these guys, the Club would not work. Lots of unseen work goes on, some of which I will attempt to summarise now.

President: Introducing Dreda Darling, our new president. Filling the shoes of her late father Patrick Darling. The Darling estate also provides the Club with fishing opportunities on the Sellack beat outside the salmon season. The Club's and Dreda's environmental and ecological interests are very much aligned and we hope to continue this long relationship with the Darling family long into the future.

General Coarse Fishing Report: Reasonable reports for 2023 season. Catch of 27 barbel over 4 days, 11 lb bream, number of pike over 20lb, large barbel in town. I had 3 doubles myself and the biggest I have heard of is 12.5lb. Perch to four lbs. Many chub, but the smaller ones not as prolific as previous years. It is not fishing as good as it did as say 5 years ago, but we seem to have hit a plateau despite the ecological problems the river is having.

Maintenance: Maintenance work has continued a pace throughout 2023, notably through the efforts of Colin and Gary. The Benhall Farm track access has been improved, following a suggestion from one of our members. In addition, you will see new signage and much better gated access to Upper Benhall.



At Weir End, Trevor Hyde and his team of Salmon Anglers have sorted the fence around the salmon hut, the Duchy (our landlord) has removed a tree that was in danger of falling over and damaging the hut. And Colin has repaired the car park fence.

Our new platforms in the town have seen significant use and have provided the much easy access required by some of our day ticket anglers. Colin has recently installed a rope to help with the steeper steps. Through a generous donation from the sister of the late Jeremy Talbot, one of our long-time members, the club is able to build 2 more platforms while providing bank reinforcement through natural willow installation. We still have our permissions from the EA and Natural Resources England to build more. Wes, our committee member will be starting work on these in the close season as soon as river conditions allow.

Work parties have been ongoing with attendance levels being mixed. The last session saw two very keen helpers, Steve and Lyndon do more in a day than I think an army could have achieved, so a special thanks goes out to them. We employed a private contractor to tackle some of the more heavy-duty work at Lower Weir End and I expect we will continue to do this in the future when required.

The Committee has voted on installing an electronic temperature gauge with a live-feed to our website. We are in discussion with the EA about a joint plan, but hope to have the sensor working this year.

Wildlife Monitoring: Our wildlife monitoring continues into 2024 and is run by Peter Richardson. It's a Whatsapp Group open to all members who post bird, insect and mammalian life they see during fishing trips. This data is collected by Peter and passed on the National Wildlife Organisations as part of their broader surveys. It's a fun group to belong to, and anyone wishing to join should contact Peter.

Membership Costs: In light of our new 25-year lease and the associated temporary fixed rents and the current inflationary economic environment, we are pleased to be able to hold all our 2024 membership and day ticket rates at the 2023 level. There will be no increases for next season.

Trophies and Competitions: The Club has a chest full of trophies and we have started to put them to good use. John Cheyne has organised two competitions this season; A species challenge and a biggest chub and barbel competition. For the anglers that took part, it was a great day and it is something we will continue into 2024 and beyond. We plan to display some of the trophies here in the White Lion, continuing our long connection with the pub.

Our own still water: Our search for a special still water and our own stretch of river will continue for 2024. We would be grateful for any information from local members regarding suitable venues for the Committee to investigate.

Relationships: Throughout 2023 we have maintained and expanded our relationships with:

- Local Angling Shops
- Tenant farmers who manage the land across which we have access
- Ross Town Council
- Angling Trust
- River Action



- Several Local River Campaign groups
- The Duchy (now Prince William)
- The Darlings at Sellack
- Local and national media, including the BBC and ITV

River Pollution: It won't have escaped members' attention that along with most of the rivers in the UK, our River Wye is suffering from an overload of phosphates. The scientific work that has been done estimates that 30% of this is from untreated sewage and 70% is from poor farming practices. Primary sources are likely from the chicken excrement spread on to the field due huge increase in poultry farming in the catchment and the fields that are left 'brown' due to potato and maize farming in the winter flood seasons.

Trevor Hyde has been continuing his weekly phosphate monitoring on behalf of the club (now been doing it for 3.5 years), the data from which feeds into a larger collection system. Results have varied throughout the year and here is a summary of Trevor's work for 2023:

Of the 88 tests only 10 (11.4%) were within the standard for phosphate. 12 tests were more than 10 times higher than the standard with the highest 64 times higher than the standard. The other 66 tests all were higher than the standard for the test site. That's 78 out of 88 tests failed the standard. I mentioned at last year's AGM that this would be a long fight; I am sure that part of the strategy of the poultry polluters and water companies, is simply to 'wait until the campaigns' go away. Well, the campaigners haven't and our commitment has not waived. I have been on BBC radio three times this year, we continue to issue press releases locally and are supporting River Action, a national organisation who have recently taken the government to court in Cardiff.

In addition, our secretary, Peter in his former capacity at the Marine Conservation Society produced a documentary and held workshops with local stakeholders in Ross and Wye and Chepstow about the pollution of the river, as a mechanism to keep the campaigning going and to raise awareness in all corners of our communities. Although the solutions to the problem are obvious, they are not easy. However, due to the pressure put on by the nation, things are finally moving in the right direction:

1. I mentioned the court case. Legal action and money are the main tools for action.
2. Avara, one of the largest poultry producers have agreed that by 2025, all of the poultry manure produced on their farms will leave the Wye catchment.
3. Welsh Water have spent £20 million on upgrading the sewage system in Hereford, the catchments largest treatment works.

Other Committee Updates: Chris Dowling has been producing the new Club Newsletter which is aimed at keeping members updated about what the committee is doing, letting folk know about upcoming events, such as bank clearing or competitions or just to share stories that members have written to him about. Submissions, comments and photos are encouraged.



We have purchased 2 high quality brush cutters to help our bank clearing volunteers deal with the ever persistence nettle growth, along with first aid kits. A number of the committee members underwent First Aid Training to improve the safety of our bank clearing days.

We have signs ready for the new platforms, designating their use for anglers only and we have a memorial plaque for the new swims in remembrance of Jeremy Talbot. Indeed, one of the swims will be named The Talbot Peg. In order to encourage children into fishing, in particular the locals to the river, the committee voted to make fishing free for children, provided they are supervised by an adult.

One of our new members, Martin Shaw, is in the process of producing drone filming of our waters, with a view of publishing video footage of our magnificent river on the website Peter has also produced some video introducing the club to potential new members that will be uploaded shortly on our Welcome page of the website.

While we hold our funds in anticipation of buying our own waters, the committee has invested £50,000 in a fixed term interest account at 5.08% until February 2025 (a year from now). This will provide approximately £3000 of income. The committee plans to continue seeking similar safe investments until the funds are needed.

Our website is updated regularly; both with day-to-day things like risk assessments and club rules, but also, on a more personal level, the Club News pages. This is done solely by Trevor Hyde, one of our trustees. A great thanks goes out to Trevor for dealing with the tech and keeping members engaged in the club. As ever, if you have any photos or stories you wish to share, then Trevor would be delighted to hear from you.

Plans for 2024: As well as the usual management of the club and the banks, next year will see us continue the quest for our own water and adding to the town swims. The river pollution campaign will continue as we strengthen new alliances, especially with the Angling trust and River Action.

We will be relying on members to support ongoing bank maintenance and we hope our moves to encourage junior anglers will have a noticeable effect. We will promote and more Club cohesion through friendly competitions, regular Club News updates on the website and through more publications of the Club Newsletter.

That is the end of the Chairmans report for March 2024. I will take questions at the end of the meeting. I am now going to hand over to committee member John Cheyne for an update of the Club's involvement with the Angling trust.

Angling Trust / Fish Legal Update

Secretary annual report: This has been another busy year for the committee, with well-attended meetings in January 2023, March, April, May, July, August, October, December, January and February 2024, as well as a number of bank inspections and work parties to maintain the pegs and swims as reported.

In addition to the suite of activities described by the Chairman, we have been liaising with Fish Legal regarding the ongoing complaint against Natural Resources Wales under the Environmental Damage Regulations regarding pollution of the Wye due to intensive agriculture upstream in Wales. Last month we also requested Fish Legal to represent RoWAC in their submissions to a consultation on proposals by French energy giant EDF. Among their proposals, they want to ditch the Acoustic Fish Deterrent on the cooling water intake for Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, which has negative implications for fish using the Severn Estuary, Wye and Usk - their consultation ended on Feb 29th.



RoWAC also supported a funding bid from the University of Swansea for their Protecting Shad, Salmon and Sea Trout (PSSST) project. The project aims to carry out extensive research on shad, salmon and sea trout in the Severn and Wye, including an investigation of the impacts of water extraction by the Hinkley Point plant. The project would also involve monitoring of fish in the Wye, and RoWAC have agreed in principle to collaborate. We are waiting to hear about the outcome of the bid.

On another note, 77 species of birds have now been reported by members to the RoWAC Wildlife Recording programme along our stretches of the Wye – many thanks to all who have participated and please do keep sending in your reports.

Treasurer annual report

Treasurer's report December 7th 2022 - December 31st 2023

Overall financially 2023 was a very positive year for the club with a balance of £8920 at the year end.

Income from membership in 2023 was slightly up on the previous year due to a small decline in the number of senior members and the fact that a Stripe/Clubmate error meant that we had 352 paying members in total. We did well to sustain the salmon membership at 33. Day ticket sales were the second highest since 2008 and guest ticket sales increased by 20%. The club was also very fortunate to receive a generous donation in the will of a former member. We also received a small government grant and refund from our energy supplier.

Expenditure in 2023 was down around £10,000 on the previous year; this can be attributed to the fact we did not build any new swims. We did though spend significantly more on bank maintenance and capital equipment to support this; in total this came to over £5000. We also purchased the materials for the new planned town swims. Due to errors by members there was a significant increase in our Stripe costs.

Due to the change in the club year approximately £250 of income and £1500 of expenditure will now appear in the 2024 financial figures. Overall therefore subtracting donations and outgoings and adding income the balance is around £4250.

The club invested £50,000 of savings in a Lloyds bank bond paying 5.08% and maturing in February 2025, with an interest of £3020.

The committee therefore recommend that for the third year running coarse angling subscriptions remain at the current level and salmon angling subscriptions for 2025 also remain at the current level.

Membership Secretary Annual Report: The RoWAC membership is full, with 350 paying members of which 35 are salmon members. We also have 5 honorary members and 13 juniors (at the time of the AGM).

We will continue to cap the total paying membership at 350 for the coming year and again we will offer 35 salmon angling memberships. At the date of the AGM we had 24 salmon members and continue to look to recruit more. Coarse members may renew from 15th March until end of April and invitations will be sent to applicants from the waiting list during May, to fill any vacancies.



The waiting list as exported from Clubmate on 5th March was 131. This was at odds with previous reporting, which indicated 170+. Following the AGM I queried the discrepancy with Clubmate, who advised that they have not made any changes which would affect the number of our prospect members.

Salmon Section Annual Report: The decline of Wye salmon continued in 2023 with the lowest recorded catch for over 100 years. Just 223 fish have been reported for the whole river according to figures produced by the Wye and Usk Foundation, with a high proportion of these taken below Monmouth.

Here at Ross we slightly bucked the trend with our best catch since 2019. But still only 4 fish landed with a further five lost in play. So much for single hooks on spinners and the barbless hook rules imposed on us by the EA/NRW!

Just to put our catch into perspective, Goodrich Court with its famous Vanstone Pool and Dog Hole only recorded one fish, whilst all of the other neighbouring beats blanked. Although this is our best catch for four years, our five year average still drops down slightly from five last year, to four for 2024.

Once again it was a year of weather extremes. At the start of the season, the river was at summer level and the opening week saw a handful of fish reported, all bar one from below Monmouth. Then we had the first of a series of big spates which put the river out for most of March and the first half of April. But on the 30th March, taking advantage of a window between two spates and with the river still very high, I was fortunate enough to land the club's first fish of the season. Weighing in at just over 20 lbs, it came from Hom Pil on our Weirend beat, and was caught on a spinner. Almost as soon as the fish was landed, the river started to rise and remained unfishable for another two weeks.

Once river levels began receding, fish started to be reported up and down the river. Not many, but all of superb quality. Typical big 3 sea winter spring salmon for which the river is famous. Almost all were over 15 lbs, with several over 20 lbs and topped by a magnificent fish of 35 lbs from Aramstone.

From mid April and through most of May we had good water levels which brought us some action. On the 22nd of April Julian Lane lost a big fish at Green Bank, and the following day Matt Cooper did likewise but at Watkins. Both fish were hooked on fly and both were on for some time before throwing the hook. Then on the 24th Jon Daniels landed our best fish of the season, a very fresh cock salmon weighing in at 22 lbs from Brighton Rock taken on a spinner. After that the next action was not until the 21st May; Jon Daniels, again but this time losing a fish at Watkins.

By the end of May water levels had dropped down to low summer level and, combined with warm sunny weather, we had our first an algal bloom of the year. We also saw increasing water temperature, and as a result we decided to suspend all salmon fishing on the club water effective from the 12th of June. Many other beats up and down the river did likewise. The fishing remained closed for nearly 3 weeks until the 29th June.

July and August brought some much needed rain, and the improved river conditions again produced some action. On the 19th July Trevor Hyde lost a small fish from the Loo on a Rapala. Then on the 8th August, Steve Boswell landed a salmon of 12 lbs from the Lower Loo, and followed this up on the 31st with a fish of 8 lbs from the Brook. Both taken on a small fly.

By early September we were back to warm weather, low water levels and increasing water temperatures. So once again salmon fishing was suspended on club waters, this time from the 6th to the 14th of the month. After this some much needed rain brought some relief, and although



conditions remained fishable right through most of the rest of the season, the only action was on the 16th September when I hooked and lost a fish at the Loo on a small single hooked fly.

So another poor year by the standards of only a few years ago. But over the years, this year included, we have consistently observed that the best time to fish the Ross waters is in the early season up until about the middle of June. At this time of the year, conditions dependent, it can be the equal of any fishery on the river. This is also the period when the large spring fish run the river, giving those members who are prepared to fish hard a real chance of a 20 pounder, as we usually manage one or more of this size most seasons. There is also possibility of connecting with something very much bigger.

As in past seasons, a number (17 in 2023) of our salmon members apparently chose not to fish. Can I therefore remind all our salmon anglers of the need to sign in at the hut, or text Trevor Hyde, whenever club waters are fished. It was also noted that Benhall did not receive much attention this season, yet only a few years ago the Wall at the top was the club's top catch. Perhaps it is the long walk from the car park putting people off; or maybe the state of the track to the car park, which has recently been sorted. But it can be well worth the hike, as it is very easily fished with both fly and spinner off a section of low open bank giving easy access to the water's edge.

With the poor salmon catches of recent years the club is finding it increasingly difficult to fill its compliment of 35 salmon members. This year we are down 10 and whilst the vacancies are filled by Coarse members, each lost salmon member loses the club £130 in lost income. So in an effort to stop the salmon section going into spiral decline and so avoid a large reduction in our income, the club has decided to participate on the Wye Salmon Association's Get More Rods on the River scheme. We have allowed two rods for its members to fish our Weirend beat on Thursdays during the coarse fishing closed season. There is also a further restriction in that an individual Wye Salmon Association member can only fish our beat twice in 2024 under this scheme. The idea is to get new faces experiencing our water and hopefully tempting them to become members. They may also add to our catches which in turn will make us more attractive to other possible members. Very much a case of 'a sprat to catch a mackerel'.

Finally many thanks go to Trevor Hyde for his work on behalf of our salmon members. In addition to his weekly phosphate testing, he also records the club's salmon catches and provides weekly updates to our salmon members of up to the minute information about river conditions, catches, fish seen, and prospects: and I am sure this helps members living some distance away when it is worth visiting our waters. This service will continue this year, but now enhanced in the form of a WhatsApp group so as to allow more interaction between our members.

Summary of Ross Angling Club Salmon Catches 2023

30th March - Richard Woodhouse 20.25 lbs, Hom Pil – spinning

22nd April - Julian Lane – fish lost at Green Bank – fly

23rd April – Matt Cooper – fish lost at Watkins – fly

24th April – Jon Daniels – 22 lbs, Brighton Rock – spinning

21st May – Jon Daniels – fish lost at Watkins – spinner

19th July – Trevor Hyde – fish lost at the Loo – spinner



8th August – Steve Boswell – 12 lbs, Brook – fly

31st August – Steve Boswell – 8 lbs, Brook – fly

16th September – Richard Woodhouse – fish lost at the Loo - fly

Motions Notified in advance

Approval of election of Chris Dowling as a committee member. Proposed Rob, Seconded Richard, Vote unanimous.

John Cheyne as Welfare Officer. Proposed Gary, Seconded Nick. Vote Unanimous.

Agreement to Freeze subscriptions. Proposed Paul, Seconded John Vote 21 in favour 1 abstention.

Election of Officers and Committee Proposed Roger Roberts, Seconded Paul Clifford. Vote unanimous.

Honorariums

The Honorariums for the clubs' officers is increased to £300 per annum and that ordinary committee members receive an honorarium of £100 commencing immediately after the AGM. Proposed Bruce Wemyss, Seconded Trevor Hyde. Vote - 9 for, 2 against, 10 abstentions

A.O.B

Paul - Before the AGM next year we will have a rent review. Request for an external review of a rent of a water, if anyone has any experience of being involved in the this on what we should paying. Richard Hemming stated that previous valuation was based on the salmon catch. Martin Shaw looking to action this. Speak to Ms Darling about how much they are valuing their beat.

John Cheyne - asked for feedback about ongoing events. Email any ideas.

22 people attended the meeting.

Meeting closed at 9.10pm