

## TEIFI TROUT ASSOCIATION – CANOEISTS / RAFTERS DISPUTE

### TTA Background, etc.

The Teifi Trout Association (TTA) was established in 1925, and for the last 84 years our Association has been providing angling facilities for local and visiting anglers.

Until the 1990s the bulk of the fishing utilised by the TTA was rented, but during the following decade our Association was forced to purchase a significant number of beats in order to retain the fishing for local and visiting anglers and also to prevent the waters being snapped up by private syndicates.

At one period our Club was borrowing in excess of £440k and many sceptics were convinced that the large burden of indebtedness would threaten the existence of our Association, but its dedicated members were up for the challenge and they worked tirelessly to raise the required funding to repay the debt within a short space of time,

The TTA is now on a firm footing and owns some 18 miles of prime salmon <sup>sea trout</sup> and trout fishing on the lower reaches of the Teifi, and a further 6 miles is rented.

Up to a 1,000 anglers fish TTA waters during the fishing season with some two-thirds being visiting anglers from other UK destinations and Europe.

These anglers invariably bring their families with them and businesses in the Teifi catchment are now reliant upon angling-related tourism income for survival.

The TTA is mirrored by another two major angling clubs on the Teifi, i.e Llandysul and Tregaron.

The importance of angling to the very structure of the Teifi hinterland cannot be overstated,

Local and visiting TTA members pay an annual subscription, and casual anglers can purchase day and weekly tickets.

All anglers fishing TTA waters must purchase an Environment Agency (EA) licence and this contributes substantially to the EA funding pot. This enables the EA to fund the cost of tackling major issues, such as water pollution, and to carry out other essential work to improve and maintain the ecology of our waterways.

Again in similar fashion the TTA utilises a great deal of subscription income, etc. to maintain and enhance the quality of fishing by effecting habitat improvement, removal of obstructions from the river, tackle bank erosion and maintain good river access, etc.

The TTA has a very well established River Maintenance team which has been fully equipped with the necessary machinery to undertake the work.

In recent years our Club has embarked on an annual juvenile salmon stocking policy in order to ensure that fish stocks are maintained at a level which will continue to attract local and visiting anglers.

The TTA also has a robust scheme in place to encourage juniors to take up the sport of angling.

There is a very active junior section that gives angling tuition to children throughout the year and is run by experienced coaches. A good proportion of the juniors has qualified to fish for Junior Welsh International teams and subsequently at senior level.

Again children from local schools are frequently invited to attend fishing taster days which has proved very successful with a good number eventually taking up the sport.

Furthermore, special facilities are in place to cater for disabled anglers with disabled platforms and suitable parking areas constructed along the river.

Our Association, like most other game angling clubs in Wales, is a member of the Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association (WSTAA), which is the national body for salmon and trout fishing in Wales.

We are aware that a deputation from WSTAA recently visited WAG to discuss some of the problems facing Welsh Angling Clubs, such as sheep dip pollution and unlawful and unregulated canoeing and rafting on Welsh rivers.

Although an excellent response has materialised in respect of the sheep dip problem, it is very disappointing to note that the illegal canoeing problem appears to have fallen on “deaf ears”. Again, our worries have been compounded in this direction following publication of the *Brighton University Report*.

There has, of course, been clear evidence that WAG is very much in favour of increasing craft-related water sports activity in Welsh waterways. To add to our concerns, there has been no indication that due consideration has been given to the potential damage that this increased activity could inflict on the fish population, etc., and water quality in our rivers.

### **Angling/Canoeists Conflict**

Turning to the ongoing problems involving anglers on a number of Welsh rivers, may we at the outset state that the TTA is not anti-canoeing and rafting, and the majority of its members would, no doubt, readily agree that the foregoing sporting activities are healthy outdoor pursuits that could easily be pursued without coming to conflict with angling interests.

In our opinion this could materialise if canoeists could accept that they must respect the law, agree that their sport must be properly regulated, and accept that they must contribute toward the upkeep of the river which they are traversing. It is understood that only some 2% of canoeists are members of the Welsh Canoeing Union.

Should acceptance of the foregoing points come to fruition, canoeing would not, as in the eyes of many, be viewed as a sport living on the edge of the law, and would be brought in line with other regulated outdoor pursuits, such as game angling.

Without appearing to cover “old ground”, as the law stands at present, canoeists are legally entitled to canoe without permission on navigable waters, and if we take the river Teifi as an example, the navigable section is from the estuary up to the tidal limit which is the bridge at Llechryd (some 4 miles from Cardigan).

In the freshwater phase of the Teifi, from Llechryd bridge up to its source at Teifi Pools, permission must be sought from the owner of each stretch of river that the canoeists wish to traverse beforehand.

Land and river owners have legal rights associated with their ownership, and any interference or trespass of those rights will cause conflict and could lead to civil court action.

We are aware that canoeists on the Teifi have permission to traverse the white water section below the bridge at Llandysul, extending to some 700 metres.

Again, we are aware that canoeists have access permission only on a stretch of TTA water near the Rugby Ground at Newcastle Emlyn, but although canoeists habitually use this water during the fishing season, which often results in conflict with anglers, no approach has been made to the TTA by canoeists to paddle on this water.

In past years the TTA has conducted a series of meetings with canoeists and, generally speaking, common ground was reached with our Organisation agreeing to the canoeists having an end-of-season run over our waters, subject to them contacting us beforehand for permission.

During that period the odd canoeist was seen from time to time on our waters during high water conditions etc. but our Association members invariably turned a “blind eye”.

Unfortunately, however, the whole ethos as far as canoeists and rafters are concerned appears to have changed dramatically, whereby we are now witnessing large numbers of canoeists and rafters illegally utilising TTA waters throughout the year, without giving any consideration to summer drought conditions, etc. and without seeking permission from land and fishing rights owners beforehand.

We have also experienced direct confrontation between anglers and canoeists during the peak fishing season when canoeists have shown complete disregard for anglers fishing the river and paddled through their fishing lines, and on a couple of occasions matters became very heated, and the police were summoned to rescue the situation.

It has become evident to our Association that the canoeists and rafters have on many occasions during recent months deliberately tested the resolve of anglers, and it is clear that if matters continue in this fashion it can only be a matter of time before there is a real danger of someone experiencing physical harm.

Again, if canoeists and rafters continue to intimidate anglers by descending on the river in large numbers during the fishing season, the quality of fishing will rapidly deteriorate and there is a real danger of visiting anglers being driven away from the Teifi.

Our Association recently decided that “enough was enough” and that it was high time to take legal advice to establish whether there was any mileage in attempting to secure, through the courts, an injunction against the main protagonists on the Teifi, namely the Llandysul Paddlers, run by Gareth Bryant under the auspices of Carmarthen County Council, and Jethro Moore, whose principal occupation is running a rafting business on the Teifi, and often frequents TTA water without permission.

Prior to finally going down this road, however, the TTA decided to try and arrange a final meeting with Mr Bryant and Mr Moore to establish whether there was any hope of a local agreement being reached at the eleventh hour. Prior to the meeting a great deal of correspondence had already passed between the TTA solicitors and Bryant’s/Carms. County Council solicitors.

The meeting was arranged and the TTA suggested that the canoeists and rafters could have access to TTA waters outside the fishing season which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 17<sup>th</sup> October subject to the arrangements being properly monitored and policed with craft being numbered for identification purposes and a payment for each run being made to the TTA.

Furthermore, any runs during the fishing season would be at the TTA’s discretion only and application for permission to float would have to be made beforehand.

Both Mr Bryant and Mr Moore advised us, however, that they were only interested in unrestricted access to the TTA water throughout the year. This, therefore, left our Association with no alternative but to set the wheels in motion for legal action to be taken in due course.

It is recognised that the Teifi is only a small river as compared with the Wye and Welsh Dee, etc. Apart from a couple of stretches, it is not considered big enough to accommodate unrestricted canoe and rafting activities without unacceptable disturbance to anglers and stocks of salmon, sewin and trout. Our Association, therefore, trusts that WAG will give priority to formulating a policy which will protect angling and fish stocks on the Teifi and other Welsh rivers from the damage being inflicted by canoeists and rafters at certain critical periods of the year.

## **Conclusion**

It is appreciated that angling is not yet an Olympic sport like canoeing, and may not attract as much media attention, but nevertheless, it is the largest participant sport in the UK and an unified angling lobby obviously commands a great deal of political clout.

Furthermore, in our opinion it is high time that angling is given the recognition that it deserves for the invaluable contribution that it makes to the Welsh economy (£120m).

Anglers also give up their time voluntarily without payment to constantly maintain and improve the ecology of our rivers and lakes which are constantly under threat from acid rain, sheep dip pollution, seepage of toxic waste from old mine workings, predation and damage by water craft, etc.

The TTA is at present also organising a petition against the irresponsible and unlawful approach now being adopted by canoeists and rafters in relation to traversing Welsh waterways.

A new organisation is being established for this purpose known as the Welsh Rivers Conservation and Angling Federation which will be an amalgam of the majority of Welsh Game Angling Clubs.

We would finally mention that the initiatives now being taken by the TTA to attempt to resolve the angling versus canoeist/rafters issue is fully supported by its governing body, WSTAA, and the Federation of Welsh Anglers (which represents Game, Coarse and Sea Angling in Wales) to which the TTA is also affiliated.