

A reel adventure

With the new year a motivation to try new things, LAURA CARTLEDGE turns her hand to fly fishing.





It is said to be President Obama's favourite past time.

Avid fans enthuse about the way it offers an opportunity for tranquillity and to escape the busy city life.

And Hampshire, an area brimming with lakes and rivers 'rich in trout and other freshwater catches' is believed to have been a favourite spot for the man who established it as a sport - a Mr F. M. Halford, in the late 1800s.

However, despite all this, I'll admit I still hadn't got my head around why I was standing on the bank of the River Test, as ready as I could be, for a day of fly fishing.

I had just enough time to blame my love of the outdoors and my passion for trying new things before Orvis instructor James Doyle told me to have a go putting a rod together.

It would turn out to be the first challenge of many, and after a little help, just as rewarding as the rest.

Then a little briefing followed which explained how globally Orvis are passionate about helping sports men and women get the most out of their chosen pursuit – both by providing the perfect clothes and classes.

"It is about enjoying the outdoors in a different way," said James simply, "that is at the heart of it."

On the fly fishing front the demand is bigger stateside, with an estimated 13,000 courses a year taking place and only 1,000 of them in the UK.

Coupled with reports of a decline in the number of people taking fishing licenses here, the work is on to attract new participants to

the sport.

"You can fly fish wherever there is water; it is not just about trout," James explained, outlining how Orvis aims to make it as accessible as possible. "People can set out with kit for about £100, we provide vouchers and details for local fisheries, venues, local guides."

In addition the brand itself runs free '101 Beginners Courses' - covering the basics from knots to casting in two hour sessions – day long 'On the Water Classes' and 'One-to-One Personal Tuition Days' on The River Itchen.

The next step of my education was arguably my favourite as we were shown the surprisingly beautiful 'flies' used to trick the catch into taking the hooks.

Each is a mini work of art using wire, feathers from ducks' backsides and beads to imitate how different insects appear from underneath.

These, I was told, are attached to a fine 'tracer' – a tapered length of nylon – which in turn is tied on to the line which works as the weight.

So far, so good, I thought as we headed to a patch of grass to turn our hands to castings.

"The movement is like throwing a ball," James reassured. "So it is easy when you have got it, but it is just about getting the muscle memory.

"Quite often we practise this on grass with beginners, including in parks in London which make for a funny sight, but you can do it on a roof top if it is safe."

I'm going to be honest, I was far from a natural.

In fact, just as I seemed to have mastered it and we were set loose on the water my true 'abilities' shone through.

I caught my own hair, my own rod and weeds, before quite spectacularly, getting my hook stuck in a tree.

But that wasn't the best bit, when it was freed it turned out I had managed to catch another fisher's abandoned fly from the branches.

"I've been fishing for over a decade and have only done that once," laughed one of my riverbank comrades.

And for the rest of the day I tried to reassure myself that fish were too big a target for me.

I was also told, a few times, that my casting meant the fly was having a 'heavy landing' - impressive for something that is weightless – and could also be giving the game away.

However all that didn't mean that trying wasn't oddly hypnotic and addictive.

With a beautiful setting Ratty, Mole and friends would have envied and a picnic lunch, the time soon passed.

As I left I knew perfecting my technique would take some time but I already felt hooked.

The fly-fishing season for 2016 starts in March. For further details about Orvis' fly-fishing courses, schools and lettings visit www.orvis.co.uk or contact Sporting Adventures on 01264 349515.



Where to fish...

If you would rather fish in Sussex rather than cross over the border to Hampshire here are several local places to visit.

01798 342048
www.dunctonmillfishery.co.uk

Brick Farm Lakes Trout Fishery
The Fishing Lodge, Brick Farm Lakes, Windmill Hill, Herstmonceux, East Sussex, BN27 4RS 01323 832615
www.brickfarmlakes.co.uk

Yew Tree Lakes
Yew Tree Lane, Rotherfield, East Sussex, TN6 3QP
01892 852430
www.yewtreelakes.co.uk

Duncton Mill Fishery
Dye House Lane, Duncton, Petworth, West Sussex, GU28 0LF

Fly Fishing Sussex
13 Riverbank, Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex, BN43 5YH
07754 567242
www.flyfishingsussex.com

Pride in the produce of the area

After my fly fishing experience The Bourne Valley Inn, Saint Mary Bourne, proved the ideal place to rest my head.

Not only is each of the nine elegant four-star rooms named after nearby lakes, brooks and rivers, but the restaurant also gives a strong nod to the surroundings with fish dishes dominating the menu.

With smoking and curing taking place on site, and shooting taking place 'across the field', a real pride in the ingredients is evident everywhere.

This was evident in my starter of Beechwood Farm crab Scotch egg, the special of stone bass with fennel, samphire and clams in a smoked tomato dressing and the outstanding gin and tonic jelly with lemon sorbet for dessert.

A three course meal, including a bottle of house wine, costs approximately £45 per head. Room rates, for double occupancy and including breakfast of your choice, cost: £85 Sunday - Thursday and £120 Friday - Saturday. www.bournevalleyinn.com

