

LILLIPUT WATER*

By PETER TURNBULL-KEMP

MOST of us know a Lilliput Water. It may be a highland burn or a drowsy summer brook shrunk to a string of shaded pools. Lilliput can be a tiny tarn or a lochan set deep in the mist-swept heather. For others, it may be an unruly cascade, slicing through golden gorse, or a dark and secret woodland lake. It might be a miniature effervescence, framed in a massive moor, or simply dew-clear depths of utter upland silence. In contrast it can be a slender sliver of green-girt limestone riches or a bright torrent swollen by spates from midday melting snows. Lilliput can be a lonely thing among cluttered rocks, desolate and sear, with only the wind for it to chatter to for company.

Whatever its nature, Lilliput in any form offers the fly fisher one constant thing. This is its store of bright and somehow cheerful little trout, as wild as the midget creatures on which they prey. Sadly, few of us pay lasting tribute to the Lilliputs we know, forgetting our debts to such waters for our earliest tuition, or shrugging the miniscule away as now beneath our notice.

Certainly waters of this kind are not for bragging fishermen's plunder. Once the excitement of the novice has gone, Lilliput is no place for much killing. It may be possible to measure success, if measure it you must, by numerical means; but the real rewards are almost intangible. To be sure, the occasional prize may be won. For those fortunate enough to fish tiny waters harbouring briefly the wild wanderers back from the sea, there will sometimes be the cataclysmic eruption of inappropriate sea-trout bulk and silver. Even where the sea-trout do not come there may still be the comparative monster, dark with the concealment and the years that gave it time to grow, plucking the heart with excitement when it rises unexpectedly.

Yet, for the most part, the fun and the joy of Lilliput will come from its regular sprite-like inhabitants, and the wise fisher will match his tackle to what he may reasonably expect, rather than to wishful thinking. Much of the food of the typical lilliputian trout is taken underwater, but surface offerings will seldom be spurned for very long. Indeed the normal floating diet of the little fish will generally be both habitual and catholic. An angry bee may figure now, a struggling ant provoke the next snatching rise, and a beetle then vary the fare. No doubt this will be dull for the angler who is a strict imitationist, but Lilliput can provide its own sophistication. This will be found in the use of the floating artificial, presented with the most delicate of equipment.

A hairlike leader and a wisp of rod seem all that is truly fitting for waters such as these. Thin terminal tackle for tiny barbless flies, and a rod delicate enough to handle both with sympathy. Somehow the irreplaceable aesthetic appeal of a good split cane rod, with its varnish and silk, seems to fit the fairy-tale world of Lilliput better than synthetic rod materials. On practical grounds, few of the rods manufactured in synthetics can handle truly delicate terminal tackle, and one should perhaps search among the products of the shrinking band of master rod-builders.

The childish jingle, *One, Two, Three*, can describe the finest of tackle for minor, magical waters. With apologies to metric purists, the simple phrase stands for 1 oz. of rod, 2 oz. of reel, and a No. 3 line or lighter. I use a six foot two-piece cane by

Leonard of New York, rated for a No. 2 line, and weighing 1 oz. This is balanced perfectly by an Orvis reel exactly twice the rod weight. The rod was originally designed for 8X leaders and No. 28 flies, and its slender responsiveness makes all but the very smallest of trout a captive well worth recollection. With a total weight of less than 4 oz. for rod, reel, line, backing, leader and fly there is little to blunt the sense of contact with a game opponent of any size.

To some of us it will be logical that surface imitations for Lilliput ought to be small, and have impeccable floating qualities. Furthermore, that they should be resistant to being pounced upon by numerous hungry little trout. The traditionalists will be content to use conventional fly patterns, possibly palmer-hackled or having the buoyancy of clipped deer-hair bodies. I have had success with the North American designs, rejoicing in such exotic names as the Natural Irresistible and Rat Face McDougall, although the hair bodies of these cannot be tied on hooks much smaller than No. 16. Once equipped with wings, hackles and tails these have, however, excited a proportion of the splashy rises most of us associate with slight alarm. One suspects they may be a bit too bulky for the Oliver Twists of the world of trout.

Those who are a little less shackled by the orthodox may prefer tiny unhackled and cork-bodied terrestrials, ideally tied on nothing larger than a short-shanked (5—XS) No. 16 hook. On the water they are approximately the same in size as a No. 22 of traditional design, while retaining the better gape and bite of the larger hook size. To me they look in every way beguiling propositions for elfin trout. Slipped from the mouth of a captive they require only a quick rinse to be set bobbing through rough water as cheerfully as before.

Tactics, where stream conditions are involved, need not be a blind searching of the water with the upstream fly. Instead, the imitation should be placed where experience hints a trout could lie. One of the smaller excitements of this brand of angling is the unmistakable fishy confirmation that your intuition was exactly right.

If Lilliput is for you a little lake, then the correct tackle will also prove to be that elusive item—authentic gear for fishing the tiniest midges. When the evening calm is a network of overlapping sunset rings, the delicate equipment will come into another version of its own.

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to believe that man's present abuse of his surroundings may drive those who seek for only wild trout to Lilliput. If that time comes, then might it not well be that the tackle described will then become the commonplace? I, for one, will not mind. For even when the longest day is gone, and the fisher looks across the tumbled miles to home, the featherweight equipment still remains the good companion it has been throughout the well-imprinted day.

* *Author's footnote:* The charming phrase "the waters of lilliput" was first used by the British writer Arnold Scott, writing in *The Field* of 15th November 1973.

The *Field* of 5.9.74 said that it was now sadly in order to unmask a pseudonym. "Arnold Scott" was W. H. Lawrie, who had died recently. He had been a regular correspondent and a writer of a number of books on English, Scottish and Welsh trout flies. W. H. Lawrie's books in the C.P.S. Library include his latest work, *International Trout Flies*, 1969.