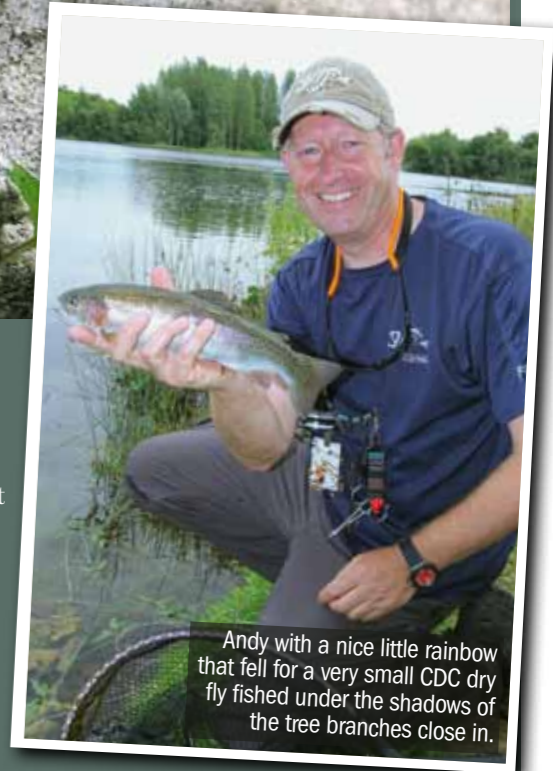


Keep It Close

G Loomis Pro-Team member Andy Smith believes that we'll catch far more fish if we take our time and pay close attention to the water's edge.

A light line and smaller rod is ideal for targeting the margins. A Klink is a good bet too when the trout are high in the water.



Andy with a nice little rainbow that fell for a very small CDC dry fly fished under the shadows of the tree branches close in.

Why is it that we only feel pleased with ourselves if we have managed to cast a full line out across the water? Also, why do we continually judge our expertise against that of others by how far we can cast?

It could be just a testosterone thing, but for many it's in a real belief that somehow the further the line goes out the more chance there is of catching a trout. My dad, quite a legendary casting instructor in his time, would regularly remark to fellow instructors and clients wanting to achieve greater distance: "If I needed to cast that far I would get a boat." And quite honestly, he was absolutely right!

Power And Distance

Having said that, so many new rods launched these days are all about achieving optimum power and massive distance, with even the line manufacturers getting in on the act as well.

Rods have been developed and marketed for maximum power and distance as their

priority in an effort to win over the prospective new rod purchaser who wants to cast further and be able to power out a line into the sunset. So what we get in many situations are some wonderful rod-and-line setups being used that are in essence a real overkill for a lot of – in fact most – fishing situations.

Ironically, many anglers rarely achieve any more distance using these rods than they do by using something altogether lighter, unless they have perfected their casting technique through some form of intense instruction.

For sure when fishing big waters, and especially when using intermediate and sinking lines, or casting big flies, having a powerful rod that sends your line into the distance really is a must. However, how many of us nowadays find that our favourite trout waters are generally less than 10 acres in size, some even less than five? I'll stick my neck out here and say the vast majority of anglers.

Clever Fish, Close In

I am not the first to extol

the virtues of fishing the margins close in and certainly won't be the last but honestly, on these small stillwaters where the fish are constantly bombarded with Montanas and Cat's Whiskers at 30 yards out, there's more chance of catching fish within five yards of the bank. Truthfully it's often where the larger and wilier trout hang out.

It's as if they know that they are less likely to get hooked anywhere near the margins of the lake. They are not fooled by the thrashing and crashing of heavyweight fly fishing tactics, these fish are altogether a little more cute!

Most of the smaller waters we tend to fish these days are really quite deep, even close in, and they often produce surprising catches time and time again. How often have you heard someone, after landing a fish, tell you it

followed them right in and took the fly at their feet? The truth is that the trout was more likely always right in front of them, close in, and happened to notice the fly rising up as the rod began its lift ready to make the next cast.

By applying a careful approach and not showing yourself against the skyline or waving your arms around trying to haul out your entire fly line, you too will find trout closer in.

Trinity Lakes

To prove my thinking I recently visited Trinity Lakes Fly Fishery, in the East Midlands. This picturesque two-lake water remains

crystal clear all year round. After just a few hours of being at this fishery there's a realisation that it's a place to be cherished; sympathetically landscaped for the wildlife, but with dozens of spots to suit both the novice and the more experienced caster to fish from.

The way that everything is laid out, with casting platforms and large grass peninsulas, very little of the water is inaccessible and most can be covered quite easily with a 5-wt rod. Being developed from old gravel workings the entire lake bed undulates, giving wonderful fishing areas full of deep pockets as well as some delightful silty slopes.

The water clarity allows for some amazing sight fishing, the trout are very easily spooked, the reedy banksides often necessitate precise presentation and lastly the fish are really fussy about what they eat and, just as in rivers, these trout are often only turned on to precisely what is hatching. So thinking small, thinking natural and opting for a few patterns from a typical river fly-box selection

almost always pays off here.

In essence, Trinity can be on occasion a real frustration to newcomers to fly fishing, but so rewarding for the more experienced angler who has realised it's not all about Fritz, marabou and distance casting!

Few areas of the lakes are anything less than four feet deep at the edges, so armed with a decent pair of top-class polarising glasses and a stealthy approach up to the water's edge, fish can be seen and successfully caught at no more than a rod length out. For this feature, no presentation used to catch fish was any more than about 12 to 14 yards out from the bank.

Light Lines

As is normal for me, it was out with a 9ft 5-wt rod setup, which does for pretty much all of my fishing on rivers and small stillwaters these days. Not that close-in fishing is the exclusive domain for 5-wt setups, but if you are going to make a habit of this style of fishing I am afraid using reservoir 7-wts is really overkill.

Apart from the fact that using a 5-wt outfit



When there's no room for a back cast – note all the trees and shrubbery behind Andy – then the roll cast is the ideal choice for punching out a line over the margins.

“Aiming high with my forward cast the fly settled gently to the water and became the target of a nice rainbow.”

is an absolute dream in comparison with most of the beefy 7-wt gear on the market, the lighter outfit will enable you to make precise, light presentation casts at a very minimal distance with virtually no disturbance to the water as you lift off for a cast and then re-present. Fishing close in I don't need a long leader, so for optimum

A proper rainbow, a long and lean fighting machine that's been at large for some time, fooled by a Klinkhamer.

presentation I am using a proper tapered leader of nine feet with a 5lb point. However, if my fly choice ends up really small or the fish get pickier, choosing a lighter leader tapering down to 3lb could prove essential, or I would stick

Fly Presentation

That location was in itself a fairly straightforward deal, casting short but straight out. However, it's true to say that many close-in and/



with the 5lb tapered leader and attach a short length of lighter nylon for the same effect and the ability to create a dropper.

Making a start along the meadow stretch of the larger of the two lakes seemed as good a place as any. There were no fish showing at the surface, but with a careful approach to an open space between reed growth I could see fish regularly passing along a fairly deep drop-off about 10 yards out. With nothing notable as fly life on the surface I opted for a small brown Klinkhamer and proceeded to cast out to cover the passing trout. Aiming high with my forward cast the fly settled gently to the water and became the target of a nice rainbow, and before the camera was even out of the bag and set up it was “fish on!” Honestly, crystal-clear water, seeing the fish take and the joy of seeing a light rod bent double – it doesn't get any better.

or tight positions have to be tackled almost at right angles to the bank, often with a roll or low-pitched side cast, given that normal casting generally sees your flies caught up in the bankside trees.

I have to say that learning the roll cast technique is a must anyway, but in this instance it will be a real advantage, especially when it may be vital to drop a fly really tight in alongside an overhang. In bright, hot weather, dense overhangs are generally a great fish habitat in rivers, but it can be just the same for small stillwaters and these will often produce a take from fish that are sheltering in the cool and shade. In these locations, think about what might be dropping off the overhanging bushes. If there's no interest to the dry on the surface, sink it; often as the fly very gradually sinks you can be into a fish.

Smaller Lake

Moving on to a sheltered corner of the smaller nine-acre lake, it wasn't long before I spotted a small group of trout patrolling the margins to my right. They were about 12 yards away, but only a yard or so off the bank. With no access in front of these fish, a low-level side cast 10 to 12 yards along the bank did the trick.

Again, I cast a small dry over the fish and just tweaked a little surface movement into it, in part to gain the trout's attention and also to soak the fly a little so that it sat deeper into the surface of the water. A second or two later and I was rewarded with one of those takes that seems to unfold almost in slow motion, as you watch the fish casually move to your offering and sip in the fly, then explode into life as it realises what's happening.

What a sensational take, and from a lovely brownie too.

The crystal-clear water allowed Andy to spot fish cruising close in – this one was ambushed with a small nymph, fished tight to the reeds on the left. The trout took the fly as it was allowed to freefall through the water.

Deep Water At Your Feet

Catching close in isn't just about using dry flies. When fishing over deep water with weighted nymphs it's worthwhile not rushing through the lift-off into your overhead cast. If you are casting from a platform over a good depth of water, you will undoubtedly have trout below or at least close in front, providing you are quiet and have not been thrashing the water. By lifting the rod up really slowly so as to raise the flies in a natural path up from the depths and then combining that action with a roll cast, you can easily get fish taking just a rod length out.

This method of fishing close in can be deadly throughout the year.

Afternoon Session

The afternoon session saw me back on the 12-acre lake, but given the bright afternoon sun it was going to be more difficult. There was one spot where I knew I could find some great shade over the water from a large group of trees and a quiet approach found fish feeding, sipping the surface. A few well-placed casts brought nothing, with



Nearly there! The platform gave Andy access to deep water right under his feet.

the trout refusing to look at any of the light-coloured dries that had proven so successful earlier.

After gently kicking around the grass at the water's edge and knocking some of the branches of the trees to see if what the fish were feeding on might be originating here, loads of small, black ants floated out over the water. A quick change to a black CDC, a few tentative flicks close in and it was fish on again straightaway, this

time a lovely, pristine rainbow!

So, instead of the usual attempts to cast out to those annoying fish that always seem to be rising five yards further out than you can ever manage, try to take in exactly what's immediately around you. Walk around the water carefully and quietly and try to find the fish, rather than just dropping in at the first spot of well-trodden bankside.

In essence, a successful session can often be about NOT going the distance! 🍷

What a fish! A stunning brown, taken by casting along the marginal shelf, is proof indeed that the good fish can be caught close in!



Margin Top Tips

- Always take extra care when approaching the water's edge; be soft-footed and use bankside cover where possible.
- Use a lighter rod than you'd normally go for; a 9ft or 10ft 5-wt model is ideal – the lighter line rating will allow you to present your flies far more delicately.
- The trout that cruise the margins will be feeding properly; this means using small flies that represent the naturals they are feeding on.
- Always ensure that you are wearing polarising glasses; they will eliminate surface glare and help you locate fish far quicker.
- When presenting a fly to a feeding fish at close range, do not strike too hard or too fast; use a slow, more deliberate rod lift because this will cushion the take far better.
- Pay particular attention to weed beds; trout will often feast on the larger bounty of aquatic insects that use them as their home.
- You will often find deep water close in, so try a weighted nymph and allow it to drop through the layers close to your position; it's surprising how often a trout will come up from the depths to take it.
- Gauge the fish's cruising depth so that you can ensure 'lead time' to allow your fly to get down their feeding zone before they reach your offering.
- Try targeting the calm shadowy water under overhanging tree branches; not only is this a haven for resident fish it's also a good source of food.
- If you're getting refusals, try dropping down in fly size and use a suppler tippet to allow the pattern to behave more naturally; this can work wonders on difficult trout.