

## Reel Life



David Profumo

# Putting the luck of the Irish to the test

**I**T rises in Kerry and flows for some 75 miles through Cork and Waterford before debouching into the Celtic Sea. Some call it the Irish Rhine, but its native name is *An Abhainn Mhor*, the Great River—and that the Blackwater certainly is. I hadn't visited this part of Eire since a piking trip 40 years ago, and was keen to test its reputation for the salmon.

Our little fishing club usually arranges its annual outings in England, but member Jennings reported favourably on a hotel near Fermoy run by the Green family, and so we converged on Ballyvolane House.

Describing a hotel as like staying in someone's home often conjures visions of dubious casseroles and recalcitrant plumbing, but this fine Georgian mansion is both stylish and comfortable. My bathroom may have provided a pitcher rather than a power shower, but there was a stag's head mounted on the wall. We devoured afternoon tea before a fragrant fire, and set forth through a paddock to try the trout ponds before supper.

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**'The water was as smooth as the local brogue'**

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Although by no means exclusively a sporting hotel, Ballyvolane offers access to four private beats on the

Blackwater, and at about €85 per day (plus a State Licence), this is reasonable value. Like The Queen, we arrived mid-May, and it was not the river's fault that this coincided precisely with a lull between seasonal runs. Ballyvolane means 'the place of springing heifers', but it was a brace of hefty springers we were really after.

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Martin and Norman, our two (expatriate English) gillies, assured us next morning that the water was fining down after a much-needed spate, and we should see some salmon. It's a bit of a drive to the fishing, but luckily those great folk at [Tourism Ireland](#) had provided me with a stonking BMW 4x4, so we fairly whizzed down the lanes. I was to begin at the Gairha beat, and it was a soft, overcast day as we walked through the pasture and tackled up. I was test-driving a new Guideline 14ft double-hander, loaded with a Rio intermediate shooting-taper, which proved just the ticket. Norman (a former geophysicist of considerable charm and ability) approved my Gledswood Shrimp—'that looks lethal'—but didn't like my knot. 'That won't be any use,' he said, deftly retying it. I could see we were in good hands.

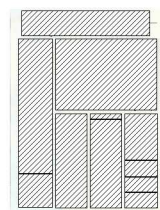
Soon, I was covering the Upper Pool—attractive fly water, as smooth and fast as the local brogue. Sand martins dashed in and out of bankside burrows. A kingfisher flashed upstream. A local rod opposite lobbed in his bunch of worms. Member Whitestone briefly engaged

with something that indeed broke his line round a stone. Norman showed us some fancy casts, such as the Snake Roll. The handle fell off my reel. We returned to our lodgings, happy but fishless.


Considering that, shortly after its construction in 1728, two of its tenants were murdered by their butler (who was subsequently hanged, drawn and quartered), Ballyvolane has a relaxing ambience, and as somewhere for the hedonistic angler to stay, it would be hard to fault. Breakfast is served until noon, and Justin Green—formerly of Babington House—constructs a trademark rhubarb martini. The food is impeccable. However, I could find no copy of *COUNTRY LIFE* among the many glossies (Green: see me in my study after luncheon).

We dined on butterflied lamb, followed by gooey chocolate pudding, then repaired to the tented pavilion on the lawn for snifters and Cohibas. There ensued a capella renditions of numbers from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Member Grossman having once played the Narrator, and your correspondent was cast in a student production as Frank-N-Furter). None of this did much for our Snake Rolls the following day.

On the pleasant Ballyhooly Castle Beat, we also failed to connect, and it was looking as if the daily limit of three salmon was going to be academic. On a return visit, I think we'll plump for September, which tends to be more productive.



As a delicious fillet of brill was just being served on our last night, a fellow Irish guest jovially exclaimed: 'Take a good look at it, boys. That's the closest you're going to get to a fish!'

Sure, I laughed in me sleep.   
Telephone 00 353 25 36349 or  
visit [www.ballyvolanehouse.ie](http://www.ballyvolanehouse.ie)

David Profumo caught his first fish at the age of five, and, off the water, he's a novelist and biographer. He lives up a glen in Perthshire, with a labrador who only understands Gaelic.



**Gillie Norman waits patiently for salmon on the Blackwater's Gairha beat, just below Ballyduff**