



Guide Philippe Dolivet covers a fish under the gorgeous green canopy over the River Léguer.

# A CAST IN FRANCE

Looking for summer-holiday sport? **Peter Gathercole** discovers a trout-filled hideaway just across the Channel

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER GATHERCOLE

**B** RITTANY OFFERS BRITS more than a standard beach holiday. Beyond its wonderful rugged coast are beautiful stone-built towns and villages surrounded by rolling green fields and dense woodland. It's a part of France that's blessed with numerous rain-fed rivers populated by wild brown trout and even runs of sea-trout and salmon.

Having holidayed in Brittany many years ago I had a vague idea of the quality of the trout fishing but last summer I fished it with Philippe Dolivet, who has lived in the region since childhood. I first met Philippe when he became editor of *Plaisirs de la Pêche*. Sadly, the title is no more and Philippe has turned his fly-fishing talents toward guiding and tuition. As a newcomer to trout fishing in Brittany I couldn't have been in better hands.

He had invited me to fish with him on his favourite water, the Léguer. It flows north through the Côtes-d'Armor region before spilling into the Atlantic close to the town of Lannion. Côtes-d'Armor is an ideal area to holiday with the family. Accommodation is plentiful, with *gîtes* and *chambres d'hôtes*, and there are ample rivers and a few lakes to explore. It's also a 30-minute drive from Ploumanac'h and the Pink Granite Coast, which is one of the most beautiful stretches of the Brittany coastline. Here the rest of the family can relax and enjoy themselves or try something more adventurous such as swimming, sailing or hiking.

The Léguer is rain-fed and its beauty rugged rather than refined. Even at its clearest it carries a slight amber colour, which when flowing over the sandy bottom gives the river a wonderful golden hue while still being lucid enough to spot trout finning in the current.

Great granite boulders populate the river, some the size of a small car, edges smoothed by time and softened by a coat of velvety moss. Intimate and heavily tree-lined, in some stretches you wade under a high vaulted ceiling of leaves and are bathed in a relaxing green hue as sunlight is filtered through the canopy.



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Old stone-built mills are dotted along the river's course, a testament to when the Léguer provided a source of energy. Some have been converted into sturdy chic homes or *gîtes*, others have been left to lie in ruins, their wooden mill wheels long gone and leaving little more than a rusting iron skeleton as a reminder to passers-by of their purpose.

We had walked a mile or so downstream to begin fishing a rocky part of the river. Philippe got in first, picking pockets between the rocks for feisty free-rising trout. Around every other boulder, fish could be spotted rising, taking tit-bits brought to them by the current.

These were beautiful wild browns – not large but golden flanked, many with large red spots and vivid white-edged fins. Léguer trout are renowned for their looks and strength rather than their size; a 16 in

fish is considered big.

The Léguer also enjoys runs of sea-trout and salmon and in a good year numbers are high enough to fish for them seriously. This usually happens after the first major run in early July and coincides with the highest tides. It can last until the end of the season.

The sea-trout are not large, the size of the bigger Léguer brown trout, but can be caught on light tackle using either nymph or dry-fly. The salmon are a trickier proposition and even having a chance of catching one requires the angler to react quickly when water levels are right – obviously difficult for the visitor.

Sadly, conditions were not being kind to us. Through gaps in the canopy, dark brooding clouds could be glimpsed. As we worked upstream a light shower began to fall, but it did little to dampen our spirits; in fact, the humid conditions encouraged a trickle of small olives to hatch. The fish that rose were all near to the bank, close to overhanging branches or to one of the large rocks. Few, if any, fish were seen midstream.

They were willing little trout, quick to respond to a small CDC pattern or a sparse Hare's Ear drifted over them. Hatches on the Léguer are typical of a rain-fed stream. During the early weeks of the season large dark olives and March browns are the main fare followed by mayflies, which provide a brief window ▶



“The trout accept zero drag, and if using very small flies that means ultra-light tippets”

when even Léguer trout lose some of their caution. Later in the season come sedges and terrestrial insects, while pale wateries, iron blues and blue-winged olives hatch in abundance, requiring the angler to scale down to an 18, a 20 or even a 22 to have any real chance.

The Léguer doesn't receive a huge amount of pressure, especially on those stretches designated solely for fly-fishing. Due to the tree-lined banks wading is the only practical way to reach the fish and to achieve a reasonable back-cast. Apart from the few rockier stretches, which can easily be skipped, wading is easy because the bottom is mostly coarse sand, and you just need to take a little care when navigating the deeper runs.

Even so, tackling the Léguer does require some experience of fishing with light tackle. And stealth. With fast-rising fish the angler needs to be as close as possible to their quarry to achieve the correct presentation in the different currents and to react to a lightning take. The trout accept zero drag, and if using very small flies that means ultra-light tippets. Philippe advises nothing heavier than 6X fluorocarbon matched with a four-weight line and an 8 ft rod. He also stressed that even though the water carries a slight tint it's important that the fly-line never enters the fish's window.

The fish might not be large but they fight like demons and once hooked, they'll head for a rock or a tree root with remarkable speed. Philippe, always keen to sing the river's praises, likens the power of a 16 in Léguer trout to one of 27 in that's been stocked.

Having fished the river for more than 40 years he has observed many fish feeding and he's convinced that the sea-trout often rise “just for fun” and in a precise tempo, a maximum of four to five times. On his phone, he showed me a picture of one fish of which he was especially proud. It was caught the previous September just after dawn on a windless morning. He'd found the fish in a known sea-trout lie - he told me that they tend to settle in typical spots covered with overhanging trees; rather shady and with deep, dark water, often where the current laps against a big flat piece of stone.



Though the rise was so small it could easily have been a minnow, he still thought it worth a cast. Using an ultra-long 7X tippet and a size 20 Stephan Florian Drag CDC Caddis he watched the fish rise twice before covering it. The take was almost imperceptible - just as if the fly had merely sunk of its own accord. On lifting the rod it was immediately obvious that it was a fish, and a very good one. It powered off upstream, then jumped two or three times; in the excitement he couldn't remember exactly how many. He now recognised that what had taken that tiny fly was a good sea-trout.

With the fish doing its best to make use of the all-too-close roots, branches and rocks, Philippe made the decision to apply maximum pressure. Fortunately, his experience, aided by a smooth drag and a rod perfectly suited to this style of fishing, paid off and to his relief the fish, a 16 in sea-trout, was netted. Though it took a fraction of the time to recount the story, it was obvious from his expression and gestures, particularly the way the imaginary rod was held, that Philippe was reliving every second of the fight.

**ABOVE**  
The pocket water requires accurate casts and short drifts.

**RIGHT**  
Old mills are common, many converted to gîtes.

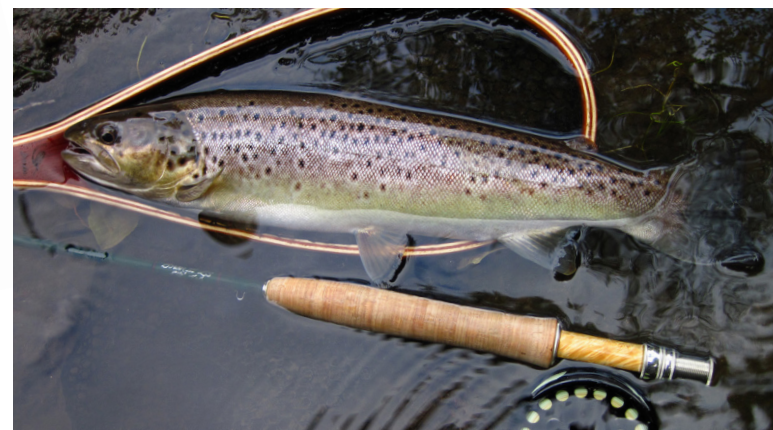
Philippe with a fish from fast-colouring water.

A typical 10 in Léguer brownie.

**BELOW LEFT**  
Philippe's hard-won 16 in sea-trout.

On the last full day of my trip, Philippe and I visited two more stretches of the river, again encountering beautifully marked wild trout keen to take a well presented dry-fly or nymph. In the warm summer sunshine, the Léguer showed just why it's regarded as one of Brittany's finest rivers. Birds sang while the huge mature oak, beech and willow looked spectacular. The grassy meadows were a picture, dotted with myriad wild flowers, butterflies and bees. By the river's edge large dark blue damselflies flitted back and forth, their metallic wings sparkling in the sunlight.

I did my best not to look where the sun hit the water because it showed a noticeable brown tinge. A shame, for the Léguer is a beautiful little river, with an intimate feel made all the more intense when casting a line under that arching canopy of trees. I just had to remind myself of that first morning and the Léguer's whisky-coloured water and the fact that next summer I could easily return. And, of course, those beautiful golden-flanked brown trout finning in the current. **T&S**



## PLAN YOUR TRIP

### GUIDING/BOATS

Philippe Dolivet, Brittany Fly Fishing.  
Tel: 33(0)6 4203 9366. Visit Philippe's website, offering river profiles, tuition and much more: [brittanyflyfishing.com](http://brittanyflyfishing.com)  
E-mail: [info@brittanyflyfishing.com](mailto:info@brittanyflyfishing.com)

### GUIDING RATES

Philippe offers rates for one, two or three people for one, two or three days, on river, lake or sea. Visit [brittanyflyfishing.com/en/rates-brochures](http://brittanyflyfishing.com/en/rates-brochures) for details

### ACCOMMODATION

Try David and Ben Kergudon Gites.  
Tel: 33(0)2 9824 1698. Web: [kergudon.com](http://kergudon.com)  
E-mail: [enquiries@kergudon.com](mailto:enquiries@kergudon.com)

### TICKETS

You can get daily, holiday or women's taster fishing licences online at [en.cartedepeche.fr](http://en.cartedepeche.fr) Chhose and then select “Lannion (22300) Fishing Association” and proceed.

### SEASON

The trout season closes on September 17.

