Go on, admit it. We have all been there, hoping, praying. Sessions turn into weeks, months turn into years. Baits come and go, rods and reels swap and change. Lines fill spools and get stripped off, rigs go shorter and longer, complicated to simple.

Seasons come and go, boots wear out, waterproofs stop proofing and become just water. Your bank balance dwindles, fuel cards go into meltdown, and Duracell want to sponsor you for AAA Batteries!!!!!

Then, one calm, perfect evening when everything feels “just right”, and you get that feeling, you know the one, that feeling of “something is about to happen”. It just seems perfect, the air temperatures are up, water temperatures and river levels are rising with a warm influx from the South West. Your bait smells better than your favourite Sunday roast. The cast lands perfectly, you check the rig is not snagged and you’re in control. “WHACK!” The rod hoops over and over, the adrenalin kicks in and you lean into the fish. The fight is deep with short, hard plods and you just know it’s a ‘big un’. The scrap is amazing, like nothing you have ever felt before, but you are in control. The fish surfaces mid river, it looks huge. The splash from her tail makes bow waves across the whole river, the noise echoes through the trees. This is brilliant, here she comes almost at the net, but you know she will make another run just before the rim. Hand tightly clamped on the clutch, “zzzzzzzzzzzz”, there she goes, a deep powerful run almost to the spot where you had hooked her. You’re back in control now, praying to every god, you pump her back until she’s almost level with you. She then does the unexpected and carries on past you, working against the immense flow. You swap the side strain quickly over to halt her in her tracks, praying to God that she doesn’t come off. Eventually, after what seems like an hour she slips over the net!! The relief is awesome, you have done it! Shaking, you know she is a double, you just know it. But how
big is she? After resting her in the net, removing the hook in the water, and zeroing the scales against a wet sling, you lift her out onto the wet mat. “Wow, she’s huge”. Your heart is beating faster all the time. It’s turned cold now, but you are sweating. Round the scales go, 8-9-10-11-12......12-8. “Yes! Yes! Yes! It’s done. Thank you God”. Returning her straight away to rest and recover, whilst you get the camera equipment ready.

Out she comes, lying on the padded mat; you stare almost transfixed at her size and beauty. Coming to your senses, yourrattle off a quick succession of pictures, just to immortalise the fish and the moment. Placing her back in the net, head upstream you sit on the bank and just watch her settled in the mesh. Now fully recovered, you dip the net and she slips silently away to fight another day. At last it’s over, you have lost your ‘D PLATES’. Now you can sit back and enjoy whatever slips into your net!

That is how I felt for many a season in the early days.

I would like to tell you the story of the encounter with my first double....

At the start of the season in question, me and angling buddy, Rob Swindells had been enjoying great success on a stretch of the River Dove around Sudbury, on a lovely little club stretch. We had fished here for many seasons, with numerous fish in a session all averaging in the seven or eight pounds bracket with a fair few nines’ thrown in, and very few doubles bar the odd ten, and one known fish of twelve pounds plus, which was the holy grail to me. Alas, this fish just didn’t like me, Rob had already caught numerous doubles from different rivers and a nice ten pounder from this stretch of the Dove.

As we progressed, recaptures started to increase, so with heavy hearts we decided to look for pastures new.

We had heard on the barbel vine of a stretch on the Dove, consistently producing good fish, with odd monster thrown in.

With that, Rob managed to secure a ticket, and had a couple of trips over there to recce the swims, adding a couple of splasher in the
very first few trips! By the
time I had sorted my ticket
out, the close season was
upon us. This gave us the
perfect opportunity to do
loads of legwork.... About
three months' worth, and
eight miles on both banks,
what a brilliant ticket this
was!

After chatting with a few
locals and spotting good fish
in the shallows spawning, a
plan was agreed. We would
get our heads down and
concentrate on one prolific
stretch for a complete
season. Our time on the bank
is limited to 'after work
fliers', as we both work full
time (well I do anyway!), and
both have young families.
Getting this balance right is
an art form in itself, but is
very important to both of us.

The new season was
soon upon us, however
due to work and other
commitments, we decided
to hold off the campaign to
early September when time
and tide were with us.

September came and
went, and by mid-October
we were both champing
at the bit and eventually
we were out of the blocks
making at least two trips
a week, finishing work at
4pm, and doing the fifty
mile journey in about an
hour. We would arrive at the
stretch, pick our swims for
the evening and dig in until
12pm. Then, the downside,
the long drive home. After
picking my car up at 'Swins'
house, it was another half
hour back to mine, and I
was usually crawling into
my pit at 2am! This went on
for months', right through
Christmas into the New
Year, with believe it or not a
few fish in the eight or nine
pounds bracket to show for
the effort!!!!

Eventually, I managed
to equal my personal best
of 9lb 8oz on a very cold
February afternoon, when
the banks were full of eager
anglers. We had to walk to
what was almost the very
end of the stretch just to
find a peg. This was as we
say, 'sods law', but a result
none the less. By the end of
the season, we had finished
with some nice fish, but the
double had eluded me once
again.

The close season was
again spent doing
the much needed
groundwork on
other stretches of
the Dove within
the ticket, and

Getting this balance right, when you have a
family, is an art form in itself!

The enthusiasm
did not last for long however,
the blanks were getting
ridiculous. Although we
had cut our trips to once a
week, we endured nineteen
blanks in a row. That's
nineteen weeks, nineteen
hundred miles, and about
five hundred pounds in fuel.

The new season was
soon upon us, and with fresh
vigour and enthusiasm, we
were back. The enthusiasm

Inset right: Spawning
we received a phone call from Dave.

“Right lads, I have come up with a new bait just for you two, it will empty the Dove!”

“I have been passing the Dove on my way to Teme Severn HQ, and every time I have thrown a handful or so into your stretch, you can’t fail now lads!”

This was great, wild horses couldn’t stop us, and with that the next trip was organised. The following week we picked up the ‘new bait’, and we were off the very next evening.

On arrival, we noted a strong south westerly wind, with warm temperatures, and a very damp night. We settled into our respective swims, and awaited events with very high expectations. After an hour or so, I received a phone call from Rob “I have got one mate, can you do a picture for me? She’s a good double”. After bringing my gear in, I shot downstream to his swim, just as the fish had gone into the weigh sling. I did the honours and read the scale. “12lbs 10oz mate, she is a belter” I said to Swin. What a result, and with pictures done she slipped away into the blackness. This was to be the turning point for Rob, he was unstoppable, and every trip he whacked a double within an hour or so of setting up! I became a great personal photographer!!!!

This continued for about four weeks, until one very mild and quiet evening, I picked a likely looking swim about two hundred yards upstream from Rob. I went about my normal routine, checking my line, rigs, rings bait etc. I then proceeded to do a completely rubbish cast, dropping well short of my baited area in maybe twelve inches of water.

Now one thing that we had learnt is that casting more than once with each rod is the kiss of death.” Sod it, “I thought and left it sitting in the very slack water, not six feet from my bank, with a very silly bottom. I sat back and relaxed, enjoying the unusually mild evening. A few hours passed by with the usual interruption caused by Rob landing a ten pounder! Luckily he decided to self-take, so I could stick by my rods.

Another half an hour passed by with the night becoming eerily still, when the rod tip actually moved an inch or so and sprang back. I thought “that’s weird, it doesn’t normally do that”. ‘Whack!’ the rod moved a further three feet, and still in shock, I grabbed the rod as the bait runner sang the song I had longed to hear. “Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz,” off she went, shooting downstream. The fight was like nothing else I had experienced, with deep purposeful lunges all the time, I had to keep side strain on and the rod tip buried under the surface, to keep the line out of the one willow on my bank. In an instant, she changed tack and shot upstream, swimming right in front of me. “Come on,” I thought, “don’t cock this up Dutton”. Getting control of her, I swapped side strain and stopped her upstream rush. As the fish turned and came downstream, I piled on the pressure, begging her to come to the net. After a few tense and very sweaty minutes, she did just that and slipped delightfully into the waiting mesh. Job done! Rob had joined me, and as we gazed into the mesh, we both knew it was a double, but how big? Rob did the honours, as I lifted the sling.

“There you go Dutts, your first double, and a belter at 12lbs 12oz!!!”

Wow, this was brilliant, with Rob doing the honours with a new cannon DSLR, the pictures were superb, and with one or two fired off quickly, I returned her to the mesh and rested her until the tell tale thrashing signified she wanted to go home. Dropping the mesh, she slipped silently away.

The next hour was passed sitting on the grassy banks, sipping coffee and jabbering rubbish to each other. We had a good laugh, admiring the pictures and generally patting ourselves on the back. This done we decided to pack up and head back to the van. After the short walk back, we loaded up and jumped into the cab, “EhDutts lets crack open those butties we left behind.” “We started to open the packet, when a pungent aroma started to waft up our nostrils. ‘What’s that bloody smell, those sarmies smell dodgy!’

Dog muck. “Oh sh…, check your boots,” said Swin. Nope nothing, so we switched the cab light on for a proper scan. “Oh my God,” I said, looking at my hands and back, “it’s me.” As I had been sat on the grassy bank, slapping my own back, I had also been pattering myself in doggy doo!!!! It was everywhere, under my nails, up the back of my sleeves and down the back of my legs.

“Bloody hell Dutts, get a wash,” said Swin. “I now pronounce your first double as the doggy doo double!”

Two days later I was back in the same swim with Rob landing a ten pounder! "Whack", my next fish came from the same spot at a magnificent 13lbs 8oz! And so it continues, I have lost count of how many doubles we have had and I’m not going to count them. Put it this way, and don’t get me wrong we are not big headed or blasé, but if we land a low double now, we admire her from the net, weigh her for the records and put them back.

My, how times have changed since that first cast at Sudbury.

Getting back to Dave’s top secret bait, after landing my second new PB, Dave called me to say well done and explained “there was no new bait Mark, they were just some old boilies I’d had sitting in my garage for the last few seasons. I don’t even know what they are! Lesson learnt eh mark?! I didn’t even pre bait for you, all I did is install some confidence into both of you. There is no such thing as magic bait. There are great quality baits with top ingredients, which are a big part in how the bait works, but it’s all about how you apply them and how you fish that makes the difference.”

He wasn’t wrong, we have had many new types of bait to test all of great quality and all catch fish. Tight lines and keep on catching.

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