

A Season of Dreams

The small child that is within us all still had that dream to be realised.

Read and read again, those stories in the fabulous Creel magazine, a benchmark for fishing literary genius, left an indelible mark on the difficulty facing anglers in

I met Dick Dowling on one of the fishing meets; it was one of my first experiences of night fishing and took place on the Kennet at Calcot. I managed to hook a small barbel, and Dick who

totally different. Dick would sometimes fish a narrow channel where you could see the bottom, upstream from a wonderful holding swim where my bait would be sitting amongst the hoped for resident barbel. In the day I caught. Night, when they started exploring, Dick caught. We both learnt a tremendous amount.

Dick had been fishing a stretch of the Thames, and had caught a few, with the largest being around 9lb. He was convinced that larger fish were to be caught and generously invited me to share the pioneering. My previous Thames escapades had yielded me a number of fish with the largest around the 8lb mark...but it was very

tired and the brain by now was in overdrive.

A barbel of immense size was surging below me and it was only after the third lift from the rivers bottom that the barbel wallowed on the surface and smiled through the sun on it's enormous scales to reveal a mirror carp.



We persevered, no monsters but steady action, and I mean steady. The bream were amazing, our rods tips some days would play to a continuous rap beat as the bream dipped them non stop for hours. Some times they still managed to hook themselves, fish to over 10lb that promised barbel until the pressure was applied and they wallowed downstream towards the surface. We waited for the rods to bend over and stay that way before we lifted into fish. Carp over 20lb came, welcome sometimes unless they performed barbel like antics and fooled us till the net was lowered.

We had our targets though. Dick had caught a fish just over 10lb and it inspired us to continue and ignore the easier fish on the nearby rivers.

Barbel came; hard fighting fish that kept low and dogged and made us tingle with excitement. But the day came also. A warm late summers day, Dick and I joined by Jon for company. It had been a bream day, only Dick had managed a smallish barbel, Jon had caught big bream; I had netted a couple also that threatened to 'perfume' the car for a week.

A cast midstream, relaxing in the chair and feeling lazy in



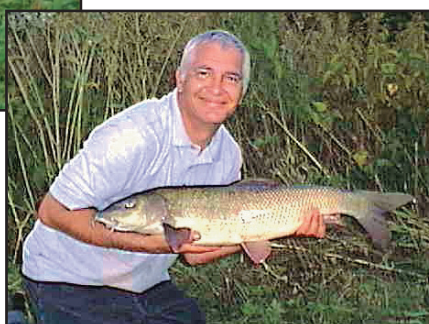
12.8 of River Thames dynamite

challenging that Southern enigma the River Thames.

I craved a Thames barbel of more than 10lb. Yes, I had caught barbel in excess of 13lb as long ago as 1995 from the tributaries, but a genuine Thames fish lured from the mighty river was a dream that I thought would remain so.

possessed the one thing that I hadn't considered necessary – a torch, answered my shouts of incompetence!

We became firm friends along with others, Ian, Jon and Chris. Dick fished almost exclusively after dark



11.4 First Thames Double

“Barbel came; hard fighting fish that kept low and dogged and made us tingle with excitement”

Many are the new friends I have met and fished with since becoming a Web nerd.

I have arranged many fishy get-togethers, raising monies for good causes, but to be honest, the real benefit is gaining a large group of like-minded fellows who share my love for barbel and all things fishy.

for barbel, and I fished only during the day.

Over the next few months, on the Loddon, Kennet and St. Patricks Stream we learnt from each other. Dick found out that barbel could be caught during the day. I found out that I was bloody useless at fishing at night!

Our swim selections were

hard going.

My first day at the new venue was successful, inching a lump of the pink indispensable through the margins gave me 2 fish with the biggest around 7lb. Interesting. Fishing the Thames is fascinating, who knows what those mighty water flows can hold, and so it proved.

Next visit after just a minutes fishing the rod arched downwards with a thump and the line stripped from the spool at a finger scorching pace. Despite a continuous increase on the clutch it was midstream before the fish

the late sun. Insects teasing.

The rod banged downwards and I lifted into a good fish. "Barbel, and a good one" I ventured after a sparse minute. The fish kept midstream, running upstream and then turned toward me, it lunged and thumped the rod downward again as I applied pressure. It didn't feel right; I was not gaining line properly and noticed the line was caught around the isotope fitting. Jon released it and now the battle was more even.

Eventually it came into the inside weed line and keeping it's head up I managed to steer it into the net being wielded by Dick. I knew it immediately, a dream, a Thames Gold double.

It weighed 11lb.4oz and Dick got out his video and captured the weighing and the release. I could not speak clearly, frogs had attacked my throat and the sun glistened my eyes. Real friends shared my joy and more importantly, understood.

We continued our Thames adventure, with the odd decent fish coming to our nets, but it was not until November time that I managed to better that fish.

Alone around 4pm and fishing the inside of a bend the rod nearly escaped my torpid grasp on an otherwise biteless day. It fought hard and deep but once lifted came up to the net easily. Shaking, mind scrambled and overwhelmed it announced 14lb.2oz of Thames barbel.

Now the difficult part, convincing the wife to come over after collecting the kids and take a picture. Bless her she did. No comment on the quality!

We continued to have a few fish, my best days result being four fish with 10lb.14oz and a 12lb.8oz. Dick kept out-fishing me but I began to feel uncomfortable that he still deserved a real monster.

The call came in late



Dick Dowings 13.11, shame about the blurred picture.

November, just as dark fell, Fishing with Paul Garner he had managed a wonderful, smile matching 14lb.2oz. I think I was more pleased than even he, and the video pictures confirmed it was a very different fish. Joy!

Dick was on a roll whilst I had ventured to other rivers, beating my Kennet and Loddon pb's he persevered and it was fortunate I was there to see him catching what was the hardest fighting, most beautiful barbel I have ever seen. Absolutely unmarked with pristine fins it pulled the scales to 13lb.11 oz. Another new fish.



It was not until developing the picture that we realised the camera lens had misted and the picture did not do it justice.

We have had a wonderful season on our rivers. We have challenged the Thames, we never will win because believe me there are fish along its many miles that would make even Ouse fishers happy, but we have caught our Thames Gold, the

dream is a reality.

Biteless last week, in the snow we watched the long tail tits cavorting amongst the overhanging tree. The swans made a triangle toward the sunset and the geese called

out to the fellows in the field behind to join them. Satisfaction is a wonderful thing.

Graham Elliott