

# New Beginnings

## Part 1

By Paul Thompson

Spring 2002, and a move to pastures new was in the offing. With my wife Jane, and 3 year old son George, I upped sticks and moved east to west, landing in Hereford.

The decision was taken carefully, and involved jobs, houses, congestion, etc, etc as valid reasons for doing so, but also fishing. I had been lucky enough to fish at places like Adams Mill, and other stretches of the Gt.Ouse, but couldn't see the attraction lasting. Having grown up in Bedfordshire, I knew the river well, but after spending the whole of my adult life travelling with the forces, I knew this was not the place to settle down.

Herefordshire on the other hand seemed almost perfect, cheaper everything, glorious countryside, no real congestion, close to the in laws (nothings perfect eh?), but most of all, it is situated in

a barbel triangle.

With the rivers Teme, Severn, and Wye all within easy reach, and more besides. Even before we moved, I knew it was the right choice, and now I know it definitely was.

Since I caught my first barbel on the Teme at Cotheridge in 1993, there was no looking back. I continued fishing for other species and branched out into carping when the going got tough at places like the Mill, but to say I was unsuccessful is an understatement.

After the Teme came the Swale, the Lea, and the Severn and two sessions on the Wye at Bredwardine. But I never really got into any sort of stride and my barbellng suffered as a result. Up until the start of the 2002 season, I had gone nearly two years without even seeing a barbel!! My last fish being a PB of 9lb 6oz, taken on corn at Radwell



*"Where it all began".*



on the Gt.Ouse, on a wet October night. Always easy to remember your last fish, even if it was two seasons ago....

So, time for a change and time to get sorted out and catch some fish. Previously I had always taken a fairly lacsidasical approach to all my fishing, but now I was ready to concentrate on doing things right, and that meant putting in the effort.

I began the new season on the Teme, exploring the BAA stretches, and generally finding the going hard. Despite, or perhaps because of, trying different tactics on each outing, the fish weren't reading my script and I blanked through June.

Come July and I found some fish. I had spent all day in a 'beach' swim fishing two rods in the deep water against the far bank on the bend. After yet another frustrating day, during which I had a couple of liners, but learnt

next to nothing, I moved to a very snaggy swim just before a bend in the river. I decided to put a very light lead on and using boilies as bait, swung the bait into the main flow and let the current take the tackle right underneath the snag. Within 30 seconds the rod bent double and the butt cracked me on the elbow. Shortly after I landed a barbel of about 5lbs and managed to repeat the feat twice more before dark.

I was elated and left the river feeling very relieved and realised I had learnt some very valuable lessons about bait placement, rig choices and more importantly, about thinking through a problem. What's more, having finally caught a barbel after such a long time of trying, that I got the bug again. This time though, it was serious...

I continued catching sporadically on the Teme, as the water levels gradually lowered and the fishing started to suffer, although I didn't seem to be helping by adopting my standard chuck it and chance it techniques!



*My P.B. at 9lb 8oz.*



I then had the sense to give the Wye a try (again), as although the glorious 16<sup>th</sup> was spent on the Wye at Breinton, it was an inauspicious start, which lead to many lost feeders in the rocks, and the discovery that the waders I bought in the spring, were no longer waterproof. So I contacted Dave Burr, and a gentleman called Ray Ellis, both of whom know the Wye very well. These contacts took place on the Internet, Dave through the Society, and Ray on Barbel Fishing World. I arranged to meet Ray for a day's barrelling at Bredwardine and Dave promised to come along for a chat and to show me around.

Despite only taking a chub that day and Ray blanking, and with Dave rubbing our noses well and truly in it, by taking a barbel of around 8lbs shortly after arriving (well he should really as he practically lives on the river up there!!), that day set the scene for the season. It dawned on me that I should be concentrating on 'my' local river first and foremost and that I could keep the Teme on the backburner. This way I would really be able to get to know the river as I could visit it almost every day just to spend some time there even if not fishing. Breinton Springs is 10 minutes away in the car, and has now become a regular jaunt with the family along that part of the Wye Valley walk.

I received an invite from Ray to fish lower down the river at Symonds Yat, and he presented me with the ideal opportunity to establish myself on the river. The stretch is fishable on a day ticket and I joined Ray and Steve on a gorgeous looking piece of river which just screamed barbel. Just that morning I had taken delivery of a new rod, a 12ft 1 ¾ lb Insight RB. I purchased this to

replace the Gt.Ouse specialist that I felt wasn't up to the job of big casting and big weights. I coupled the rod with the obligatory Shimano 5000 Baitrunner, loaded with 10lb mainline.

Ray gave me a few hints about where to find the fish and I settled into a swim a few yards downstream from him and Steve.

Before long, we were all into fish, Steve had taken a barbel of eight pounds just as I arrived at the river and along with Ray, continued to feed and catch. This was Steve's first proper barbel session and he was understandably very, very happy.

After catching a couple

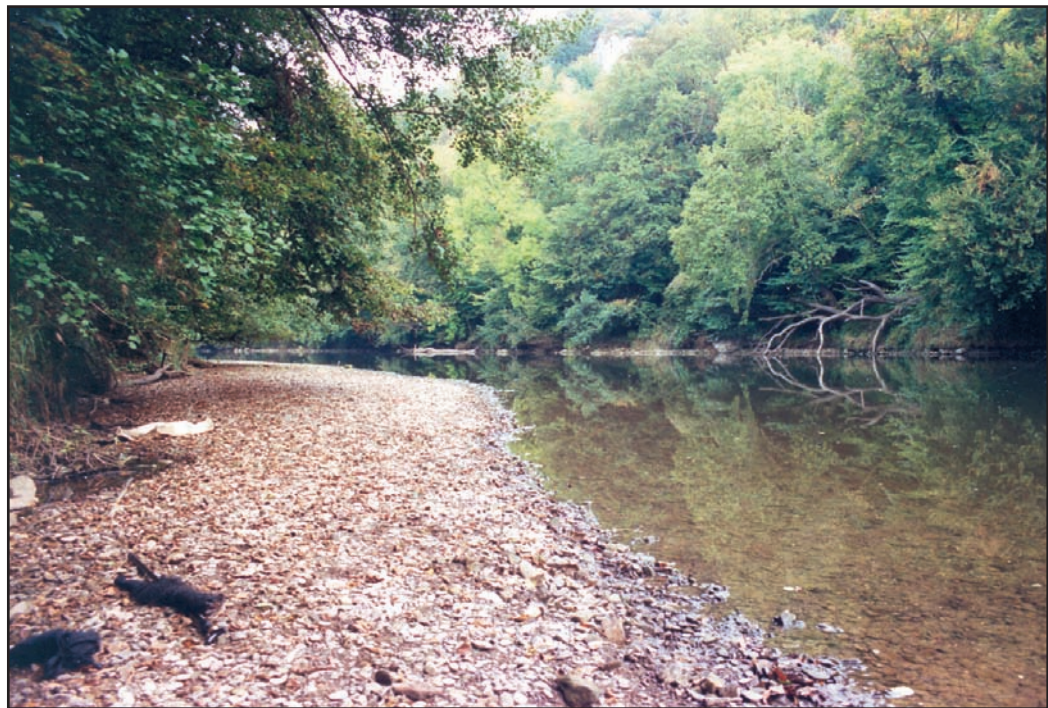
around as this huge barbel lay in the folds of the net. The scales stopped at 9lbs 8ozs and I was a very happy bunny indeed. A new personal best, on a brand new rod, on my first time at this particular stretch of river. I am indebted



to Ray for that barbel. He went out of his way to introduce me to the river at Symonds Yat and to put me onto the fish at the expense of his own fishing. He had already done likewise for Steve and made two men very happy that day. Since then, I

interesting as he was unaware of anyone else catching barbel on boilies along this stretch of the Wye.

Then one sunny day in September with water levels at their lowest for 25 years, I had another red letter day catching fourteen barbel to eight pounds, and two chub. The latter stages of this day were witnessed by a chef from the local hotel. 'Frank' hails from Zimbabwe and up until then had no idea what a barbel looked like in the flesh. He sat patiently on the bank and didn't have to wait too long before I had yet another fish. Despite the usual round of questions regarding why the fish go back in the river



*"Life's a beach". A low River Wye.*

of barbel to about 5lbs, the rod tip flew round and I found myself attached to a heavy fish. Initially it stayed deep and virtually stopped in front of me in the deeper water. It was just summoning up some strength though, as it then started to plough up and downstream whilst I held on feeling very nervous indeed.

Ray and Steve joined me and we eventually netted the barbel. Big grins all

have become firm friends with both Ray and Steve and know that the generosity shown to us by Ray that day is typical of him.

The swim was very productive indeed and I fished it many times over the coming weeks, always catching barbel, most of which were in the seven to eight pounds bracket. I also caught the majority of my fish on boilies, a fact which Ray found very

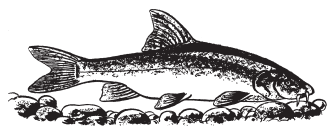
and not on the plate, he was in awe of the beautiful creature I placed in his hands and gently returned it back to its home.

I continued to catch well from the river and again took another p.b. this time a chub of five and a half pounds. I was also on hand to witness a chub of six and a half pounds landed by a lady angler from Yorkshire which came as part of a momentous haul of barbel taken that day

by five anglers.

At last I had found the special place that had escaped me for a long time. I've learnt countless lessons this season. Some have been the wisdom passed down from others like Ray Ellis. Others I have learnt for myself and my barbellling has changed for the better.

After an interminably long dry summer, the rains



finally arrived and October has brought with it the first autumnal floods on the Wye. Using my new found confidence and knowledge, (I won't use the word wisdom, as this inevitably translates to old age, sorry Dave and Ray!!), I tackled the Wye in the first stages of flood and after a couple of blanks before the river coloured up, I fished a swim at the deeper end of

the stretch. Trickling some bait behind a large rock one rod length out, and dropping the hook bait into the tail of the crease caused by the obstruction, I caught three barbel in quick succession. The largest was six and a half pounds but for me, the size doesn't matter. It's the approach that I adopted that caught the fish. Rather than staying blinkered, I've opened my eyes and adapted my style when necessary and have not been afraid to do something different. As a result my fishing has improved and I'm enjoying my barbellling more and more with each trip to the river.

Though, as they say, all that glistens is not gold. The last few outings on the river have seen it in many different moods with the levels changing dramatically in some cases. During this period I have suffered the inevitable blanks, whilst



*Summer shallows on the Wye*

others around me have been catching barbel. I wouldn't mind so much, but fish are coming out of the swims I fish and on the same baits I use. I suppose it would be boring if it were too simple though!

In a few months the Wye has become very special to me, and I have started to understand her moods. Just like a good woman I suppose, if you are patient and persist

then the rewards will be worth the effort (that'll earn a clang round the ear from the wife no doubt.) I suppose though, that like most women, I'll never get to figure her out completely.

In the next instalment I'll continue to relate the rest of the season and let you share in the ups and downs of my new beginnings.