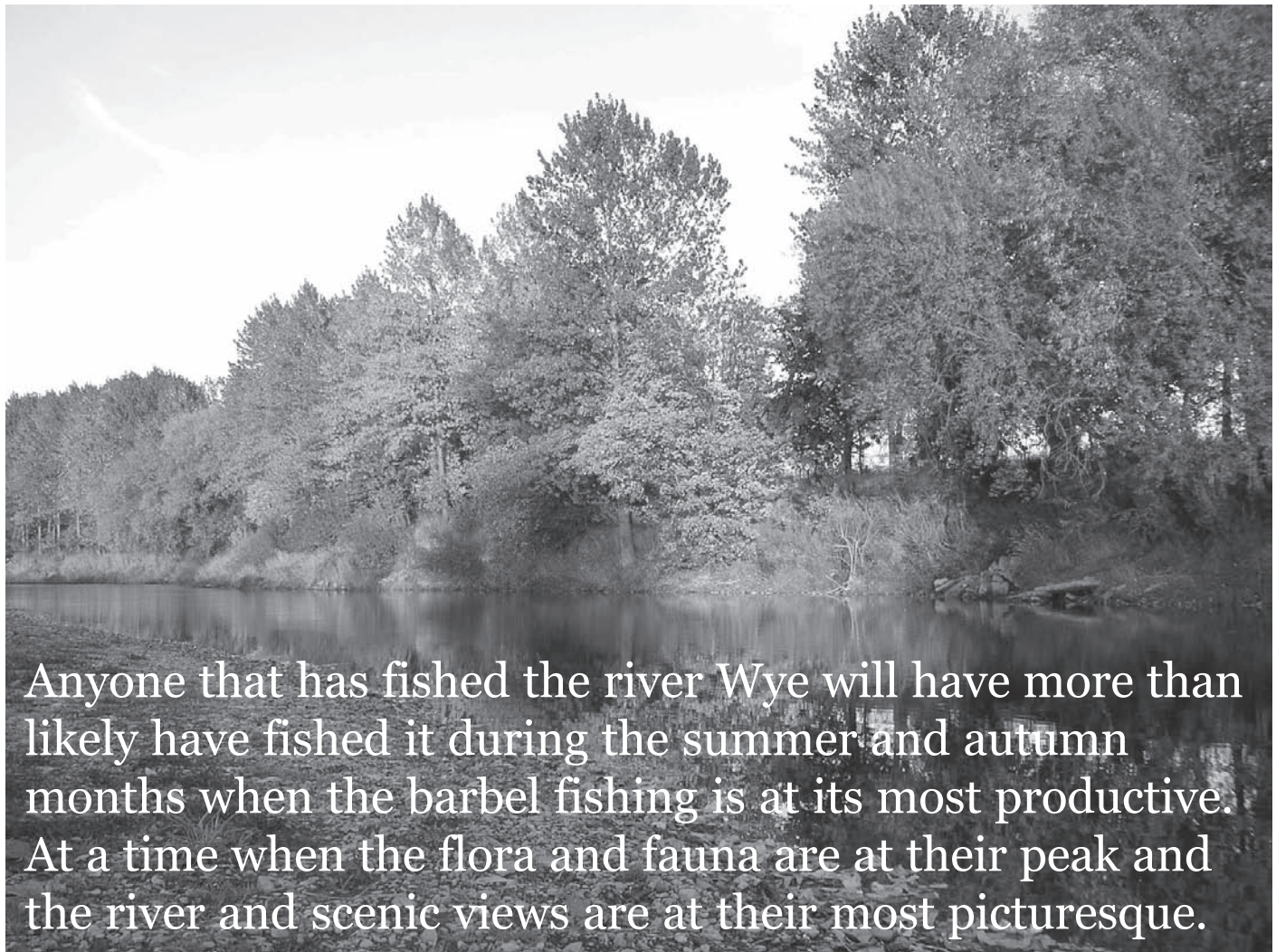


# Wye Winter Barbel



Anyone that has fished the river Wye will have more than likely have fished it during the summer and autumn months when the barbel fishing is at its most productive. At a time when the flora and fauna are at their peak and the river and scenic views are at their most picturesque.

**A**t that time of year it is a fantastic place to fish and to spend lazy days wandering its banks soaking up its magical atmosphere. A time when multiple catches of big barbel can be a common occurrence to the angler that knows the river well. In the summer and autumn it probably has some of the best barbel fishing available in the country but winter barbel fishing on the Wye is a completely different proposition.

I have been fishing the Wye for about eight or nine years, mostly during the

productive summer months with the occasional autumn trip. I tried a few winter trips during the first couple of years of fishing but even with, what at the time seemed like decent winter conditions, I failed miserably with blank after blank. With the Wye being a round trip of 220 miles and a drive time of between five and six hours depending on traffic, it didn't take too long for me to give up on the winter Wye. Consequently most of my winter fishing time has been concentrated mostly on the river Severn (which is so much more predictable than

the Wye in winter) with an occasional session on my local river Dane.

During the winter months the river Wye can be a very hard and difficult; it is also a very dangerous river to fish with its steep slippery banks. The river is usually swollen and very cold, fast flowing and deep. Its banks are usually uninhabited by all but the most determined of anglers. Safety is very important in such condition, so a life jacket and a rope to access swims are strongly recommended as a life is not worth losing for the sake of a fish.

On a normal river in winter a period of cold weather is followed by a warm front bringing in extra water from warm rain, this in turn switches the torpid barbel into a frenzy of feeding activity and everyone has a field day. On the Wye it's the same scenario, but a different result in that the new water comes from the Welsh mountains and is generally made up of snow melt, this brings freezing cold deoxygenated water into an already cold river. The result is very little feeding activity for long periods of time. Very few



# Barbel Fishing



anglers fish during winter so very little feed is introduced, this can make swim building or hotspot creating something close to impossible.

During season 2003/2004 I had my best ever season barbel fishing on the Wye, both for numbers of barbel and for size and quality of barbel. My catches included 21 nine pound fish to nine pounds fifteen ounces, and 6 doubles including two different eleven pounds eight ounce barbel which equalled my personal river best, the vast majority of these fish being

caught during the summer and early autumn.

Filled with the confidence and enthusiasm of my best ever season I couldn't resist another crack at fishing the Wye during the winter months, hoping to hook up with one of its elusive monsters and maybe improve my personal best. I knew it would be difficult, and that I would have to endure quite a few blanks along the way with the possibility of having nothing to show for my efforts. Some people have said I must be mad fishing the Wye in winter, I suppose it helps

that I'm a bit pig headed and single-minded about my barbel fishing. I like to think of it as being determined and dedicated, although at times I have questioned my decision to fish the Wye in winter and more than a few times have said to myself "what the hell am I doing here" after sitting out another cold and wet blank session.

Winter barbel fishing on the river Wye really starts for me in October or November when hopefully the river has not lost too much warmth and the south-westerly winds bringing in the rains

that are still warm. (And with no snow melt from the Welsh mountains to spoil things). The barbel will not have moved too far from their summer haunts and multiple catches are still on the cards.

My plan for the winter was to constantly watch the weather trends, predictions and water levels, then, if I wasn't working, I would try and get on the river and fish as often as possible. I don't mind blanking the odd time in favourable conditions, but its pointless making the long drive just to go through the motions and blank when



## Wye Winter Barbel Fishing By Steve Kimpton

conditions are poor

The beginning of October was good with water temperatures up to 12C. During the month I caught 15 barbel including 3 nines and a 10-11.

In November it got a bit harder and I only caught 3 barbel, 7-00, 7-12 and 8-15,

effectiveness in the colder river conditions of winter I have been looking for a more effective winter bait that would be appealing to the barbel in the colder conditions. I decided on a boilie and paste approach, but knowing that going down this route can be

which is made specifically for the cold water conditions of winter.

I wanted to keep to small baits, thinking that the barbel would be more inclined to pick up smaller baits when the river temps are low and the barbel don't need much feed to keep

wrap a paste around it. With a 10mm hair rigged boilie and a paste wrap the paste bait will break down in the flow and leak off its flavour to attract the barbel. When the paste has broken down after a period of time I would still have a boilie on the hair. It's something new for me using such High-Tec baits such as boilies and paste so at first needed a couple of fish to give me the confidence to use a new bait exclusively. It's not really a good idea to experiment with dodgy baits or flavours in winter when the barbel are not as actively feeding as in summer. You could be fishing with inferior bait and not know the reason for the lack of bites and blame the river conditions. You can't really beat catching a few barbel on a new bait to give you the confidence to tough it out in the harder conditions of winter.

I first gave the bait a try



with water temperatures reaching 8C.

During December the weather was very changeable, either rain or frosts. It seemed that every time I was off work the conditions had deteriorated due to frost and it didn't seem worth the long drive for a blank. As soon as I was back in work the weather and river conditions improved. I couldn't get it right for my days off. So during December I didn't fish at all. But it didn't stop me thinking about tactics and bait that I wanted to use for the rest of the winter on the Wye.

During the summer months most of the barbel I've caught have been taken using pellets, they have been a fantastic bait for me this season. But as pellets tend to lose some of their

expensive I started looking on the internet for bait companies. I stumbled on a bait company called "Eurotec Angling Products" who were looking for field testers to test their bait for them. (They can be found at [www.eurotec-angling.com](http://www.eurotec-angling.com).) They were offering their bait products at reduced prices, up to 40% off RRP, with the possibility of 70% off RRP in return for giving them feedback on catches and promoting their bait either through the angling press or through angling friends. I thought it was too good an opportunity to miss so rang them for a chat, Nigel Hudson was the man I spoke to, who I found to be very knowledgeable about baits. I explained what I was planning for my winter fishing and he suggested using a bait called "Enigma"



them going. I like the idea of using a paste in winter and believe that a paste with its flavour constantly leaking off has got to have definite advantages over more conventional baits. To go along with the paste I wanted a small 10mm boilie made of the same ingredients so that I could

on my local river Dane at the beginning of January, the river was low and clear with water temperatures of 5C. Using The Enigma 10mm boilies hair rigged with the Enigma paste wrapped around the boilie I fished a couple of swims with no success. I moved to a different swim with a tree in

the water and fishing from an upstream position I cast the bait to the edge of the tree and let it roll underneath. I didn't have to wait too long before the rod tip flew round and I was into a small barbel of about 3lb. Next cast I had another barbel of about 4lb. I was quite pleased to have caught a couple of barbel, even though they were small ones, in such cold condition using new bait. I now knew that even in cold water conditions my new bait would catch barbel, I was confident and ready for the Wye.

My first trip to the Wye of 2004 was on January 21<sup>st</sup>, there was a spell of prolonged rain showers and conditions were good with the river about 4 feet up and a water temperature of 7C (really good conditions for the Wye in winter) I settled into a swim that I hadn't fished at all during the season. Again I used boilie and paste with a small open

ended feeder filled with a few small pellets and broken boilies. On the second cast into the swim I had a good firm pull on the rod end which resulted in a hooked barbel that plodded about on the bottom of the river bed for a while, it then woke up and made a couple of runs before I managed to get it to the surface and get a first glimpse of it. That's when the panic set in, bloody hell it was a clonker, it looked a definite personal best. The barbel dived for the bottom of the river again but it wasn't long before I was in control and managed to get it in the net. Relief at last! I lifted the net for a quick look at the fish before I secured the landing net in the margins to a bank stick to rest the fish.

While the fish was resting I got everything ready for weighing and photographing the fish. Unhooking mat, scales zeroed with the weigh sling and got the camera

ready. I lifted the landing net from the water and climbed up the bank.

On weighing, the scales went round to 11-08, two ounces off my PB. I was a bit disappointed that it wasn't a PB. (How sad is that, being disappointed with an 11-08). My disappointment didn't last long as I was grinning like a Cheshire cat for the photos.

I fished on for a few hours but the swim went quite after the 11-08, so I moved to another swim in the afternoon. I managed two barbel from the swim, a 6-14 and a 9-15 using boilie and paste with the small feeder.

It was a cracking session 3 barbel from two un-fished swims catching Wye winter barbel, I was well pleased with myself, and the bait. I went on the Wye again two days later with a mate; the fishing was a bit slower. But we both caught. My mate had a barbel around 6lb, I

had a small barbel about 4-08 in the morning, but managed to catch a 9-07 from the same swim as the 11-08 in the afternoon, again using boilie and paste combined with a small open ended feeder.

To summarise, the Wye in winter is a tough nut to crack, you have to put up with lots of blanks (of which I have not mentioned in this article, but there have been quite a few). You need everything in your favour, weather and water conditions have to be right, you need to fish with decent bait, have lots of patience, have barbel in your swim that are willing to feed and a large slice of luck.

Has it been worth all the effort and blanks this last winter? I have to say "yes", just.

Would I concentrate on the Wye again in winter? Probably not, but I might, just might, give it one more go!!



Proprietors: Roger & Joan Cramer

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***See you at the E. Midlands regional meeting on 28th October (guest speaker: Bob Roberts)***