



A Day on the Teme

Any visit to the river is welcome and when John Found suggested a day on the lower river following our Barbel Society Committee meeting early last season, there was no lack of enthusiasm on my part.

I am still young and fit enough to almost relish a long slog down to the favoured swims and this walk was no exception to the route marches that always seem to typify the days I have spent with John. He likes to get away from the crowds as much as me and I was nonetheless pleased to stop at regular intervals while he extolled the virtues of several swims he had caught from in the past as we trekked to the area he thought we would do well in.

The Teme is not really a pretty river in the lower reaches, hidden from view much of the time by tall sandy cliffs and the inevitable beds of Himalayan

I do not fish the Teme often enough. It is a river that has always been kind to me, yet I do not know it well enough to have lost that sense of the excited pioneer fishing somewhere new.

Balsam that is even starting to take hold in the Avon Valley in Hampshire. I destroy it whenever I come across it, but unless there is a determined effort at control and eradication this accursed stuff could blight most riversides soon; however, back to the Teme.

We arrived at the hot swims, which were really too many to count! Every bend of the river seemed to scream barbel, with beckoning holes and the nicely under managed, overhanging or fallen trees. This cover is essential, I am sure, to the sustainability of a coarse fish population on

the river, but so often removed by tidy-up work parties or zealous EA flood defence engineers.

I have never been very decisive when choosing a barbel swim and today was no exception. John was bemused as I wandered back and forth between swims; all looked equally inviting and clearly all held barbel. There is certainly a goodly population in the river and I was going to feel disappointed if I did not have at least half a dozen fish in the day if my past experiences were anything to go by. I have always said to anyone considering fishing

the river to find a nice snaggy looking tree over the river and you will find a dozen or twenty barbel under it.

I was stuck with a choice of three swims I fancied, all in a line and upstream of a really mysterious hole on a bend. They all had a good bit of woodwork on the opposite bank and all had plenty of cover to draw fish from.

John advised that these barbel were relatively unpressured and unlike some of the fish on the Ouse, Kennet and Bristol Avon which were subject to twenty four hour fishing and reluctant to leave their safe

snags, these Teme fish could be drawn to open water with only a little persuasion.

I walked up and down, scratching my head and wondering where to fish for the best chance of most fish and also least chance of interference from anglers that might arrive later. The swims on this river are often dictated by where you can physically get down to the water, with near vertical, slippery sandy cliffs quite the norm. Some of the swims are close together and I would not welcome another angler plonking himself on top of fish I was trying to lure up to my baited patch.

John soon got bored of my indecision and set off upstream to fish his chosen swim.

In the end the sight of a fisherman on the horizon prompted me to make up my mind. It was to be the middle swim. The upper looked the business, with a long fallen tree over a slightly deeper looking channel but my selected swim was close by, barely ten yards downstream and also comfortable enough for somebody to drop into, either out of rudeness or simple ignorance. The heavy bankside growth and steep banks meant that a thirty peg match could go on in this meadow and no anglers would be at all visible from the fields or to each other.

I took the trouble to set up a rod with a float and small lead to plumb the depth and found that there was a nice deep run under my far bank snag and still plenty of cover downstream to draw fish from.

I ferried the tackle down to the muddy, uncomfortable swamp at the bottom of the cliff, only falling twice, cursing the gritty Worcestershire clay and the slimy covering of the evil Balsam on the roughly hewn steps on the slope down to the waters edge.

In went ten droppers of

hemp and caster, with two or three more tasters of bait droppered in downstream to hopefully draw up fish from the tangled mass of fallen trees between me and the big hole on the bend. I put in another six or seven droppers for good measure, sat back and had a cup of tea. A salmon crashed out a few yards below me, followed by a chub of about four pounds directly over my baited patch. I looked down at my feet and the lump of driftwood that I had mistaken for same materialised into a dead sea lamprey, possibly two feet long. I poked it with my landing net handle, ushering it into the main flow and away. I did not like the idea of the foul thing sitting in my swim and remembered once seeing a specimen as thick as my forearm swim past me on the Stour at Throop.

These things seem quite common on the Teme and along with a seemingly healthy salmon run; the river appears to be in better order than some of the Southern rivers. Certainly there are more barbel in a hundred yards of the Teme than half a mile of the middle Avon, from my observations and catches in the last few years.

John rang to say he had already taken two smallish barbel in the first two casts. I replied that I was taking my time and specimen hunting, never had a Teme double, I said, and not interested in his tiny barbel. Not strictly true; the Teme is a place to visit to get your rod bent and enjoy catching lots of fish in

intimate surroundings, where the roving approach can work as well as the bait and wait and shoal building method that I prefer. There are some bigger fish to go for and I would have been well pleased with a double on this visit.

More tea and a leisurely set up of the nicely forgiving Drennan Specialist and the new pin from Ringwood Reels with the drag feature I had suggested. I had loaded the reel with twelve pound ProGold, no sense in taking risks with ferocious Teme barbel in close proximity to sunken trees.

I had decided to leave the swim for an hour, adding another six droppers before fishing, but impatience got the better of me and I plopped a nice heavy feeder of hemp and caster, with a nice long tail and a three foot backlead as close to the far bushes as I could manage,

barely thirty minutes after the initial baiting.

The drag was set to maximum and the rod top adjusted to just below water level on two firmly embedded rests.

The rod walloped round and the reel screamed sweetly within seconds and something surged off down the middle of the river, boiled on the surface, and came off.

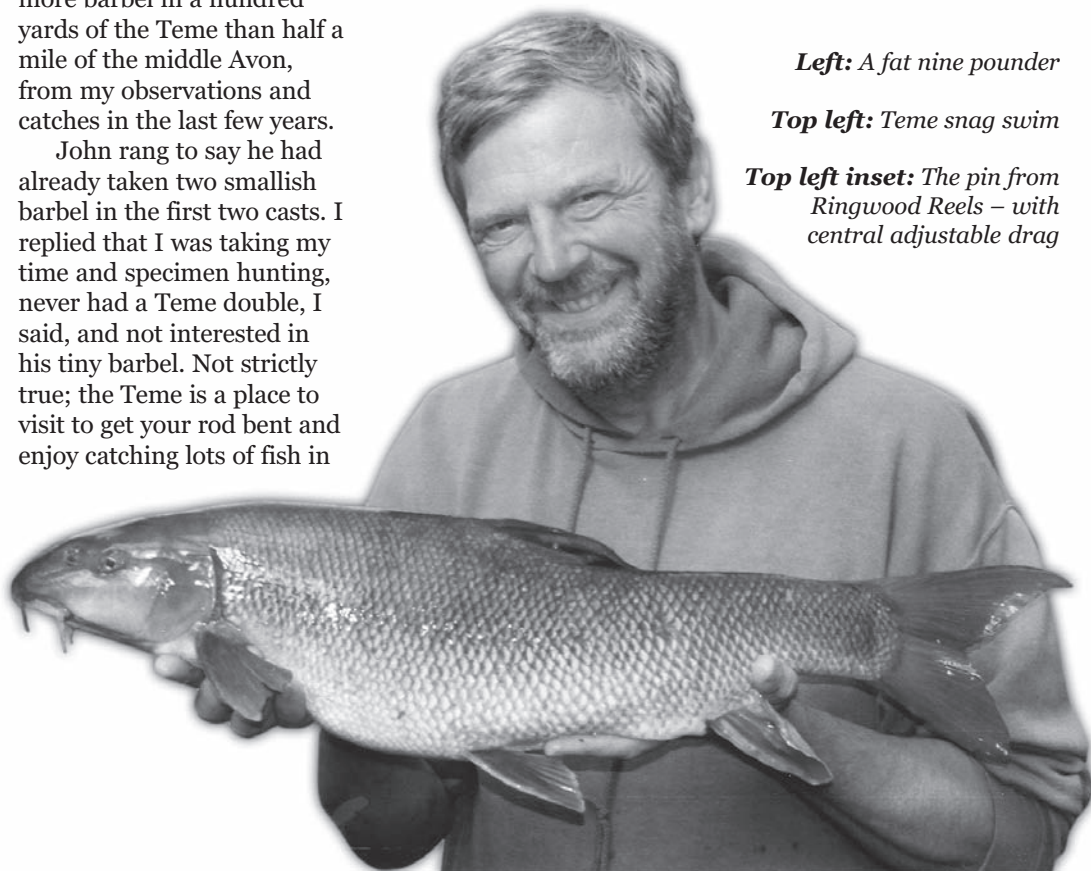
Almost too fast for a barbel, it was the salmon, I tried to persuade myself.

Rare for barbel to come unstuck, especially on a size ten and a hair rigged bait.

I tested the hook and it was still needle sharp.

In went six more droppers and the feeder plopped in a little further downstream this time, mostly because of poor casting. I am still poor at casting with the centrepin, but absolutely devoted to its

“The Teme is a place to visit to get your rod bent and enjoy catching lots of fish in intimate surroundings”



Left: A fat nine pounder

Top left: Teme snag swim

Top left inset: The pin from Ringwood Reels – with central adjustable drag



A dozen barbel under this bush

Right: 11lb 7oz

use in small river fishing, where the ultimate in control of fish in snaggy swims is combined with pure pleasure in the playing of them.

This new reel is as robust and reliable as the original Swallow, but the silent drag can be either employed on its own or in conjunction with the ratchet and it ensures that there is plenty of resistance on the bite. Some of the harshest ratchets can cause overruns on particularly vicious bites and I have had some fish drop off on the bite due to that momentary instance of slackness in the line.

A few minutes later the rod went firmly round again to the accompaniment of that lovely ratchety noise and a powerful Teme barbel was thumping about under the branches. Most of these snaggy looking swims are less dangerous than they look, as long as you keep your head and the rod tip well submerged, the fish are usually safely persuaded out into open water and played

out in comfort in a short space of time.

The heavy backlead actually helped with two of the smaller fish that became snagged later in the day because when I gave them slack line, I felt it drop out of the branches, followed by the barbel, which swam most considerably into the middle of the river where I could continue the fight to its conclusion.

John was happy to come and photograph a couple of nine pounders as my first two fish, clean fresh solid gold specimens with no hookmarks and with every indication of going on to doubles. We both continued to catch steadily throughout the day, although his fish dried up late afternoon. I kept on going, ending up with a total of eleven fish at regular intervals that day and the most welcome icing on the cake was an eleven pounder that was to be my first Teme double.

In the end I think I was actually catching fish that

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had come from upstream, because a couple of the bites found me connecting with fish that had hooked themselves, as they invariably do, and then had swam at a rate of knots upriver to the next snag! There was the usual wallop on the rod, then me picking up to find myself attached to firstly slack line, then almost instant surging barbel going in an unexpected direction! The eleven pounder just plodded around interminably, in the slow, almost relaxed way the bigger fish often do and actually had the frame of a fish two pounds bigger.

I vowed to return in the autumn and try for him when he had filled out a bit, but when you consider how many fish there are in the

river and how much they move about, the chances were slim of meeting that fish again. There are plenty more fish in the Teme to aim for and it certainly affords the chance to enjoy a long pleasurable and exciting day's barbel fishing, with a good bag of fish on the cards and the chance of bigger fish too. John and I reckon to take four to five pints of caster and a little more hemp for a days fishing, although I must admit I beefed up my feed with some 4mm trout pellet as well. It is not so heavy to carry either!

If he invites me again, I shall certainly be looking forward to a day or two in the Teme in John's excellent company next season, but this time I will allow him to catch the doubles!