



Childhood Dreams... To Catch A Monster

“It started with a fish; I never thought that it would come to this”

June 16th 2000

June the 16th is always a very special day for me, it's my Birthday but equally as important, it's the first day of a new season. June 16th 2000 was even more important as Alex was going fishing for the very first time. He was now five years old and at last was big enough to hold a fishing rod. After listening to endless stories about dads fishing adventures and dreaming of catching monsters, he was at last going to catch one.

A small pond near Queniborough in Leicestershire was the chosen venue because it held a good head of mixed fish with carp up to 4 lbs. After setting up at the top of the bank, away from the waters edge, Alex tip-toed down to a special swim at the side of an old willow tree. It was his Granddad's favourite, where he would sit and watch the

the same spot and again the float dipped. This time though, there was some resistance on the end and after what seemed for-ever a small perch was on the bank. Good old stripey! Alex too, was hooked! He went on to catch quite a few more fish that day.

Alex had had many fishing trips with me but he had never been allowed near a river to fish until a few years later...

June 15th 2003

June 15th 2003 was Alex's first big adventure. He was now eight years old and we were going fishing on the River Dove. It was going to be his first night under the stars. The farmer at Scropton had given me permission to park right next to the river, so Alex could sleep on his airbed, in the back of the car, if he wanted too. He managed to stay awake until



Alex and his 11lb 10oz Barbel

easy swim, but nearly always produced a fish or two. Fishing proved to be difficult that first morning and at lunch time a change of swim was required.

Two hundred yards downstream was the next

sign I said.

Almost on cue, Alex's tip dipped ferociously, the rod butt almost hitting him under his chin. He grabbed his rod as if his life depended on it as line tore off the reel. Alex held his rod high and proceeded to walk along the top of the bank after his quarry. This was tricky because the river bank was covered in huge stinging nettles. Not good for an eight year old boy stripped to his waist, being dragged downstream by a fish. I had Alex secured by the waistband on his trousers. No-one was going to touch that rod. It was Alex's fish; he had to catch it himself. The fish was still running but 100 yards downstream the bank gave way to a cattle drink and it was there in the shallower water Alex saw for the first time his first Barbel, a beautiful fish of 6lb 13 oz. Alex was shaking now, physically drained after a fantastic battle. The fish was weighed and photographs

“He grabbed his rod as if his life depended on it as line tore off the reel. Alex held his rod high and proceeded to walk along the top of the bank after his quarry. This was tricky because the river bank was covered in huge stinging nettles. Not good for an eight year old boy stripped to his waist, being dragged downstream by a fish”

world go by. Alas, his last day on earth was spent fishing in that very swim. He died suddenly, just before Alex was born.

Assisted by myself, Alex cast in a small float, with a single maggot on the hook. After a few seconds, it dipped under the surface. Alex lifted his rod and to his surprise, there was nothing on the end! Another cast, in

eleven o'clock but then he fell into a deep sleep, dreaming no doubt of catching a Monster!!

He woke up to find I was already fishing; Alex's rod was sitting in the rod rest, a lump of bacon grill ready to be cast into the “Animal Swim”. This particular swim was so named because it had a fallen willow tree growing into the water. It was not an

swim. It was on a high bank, eight feet up with a pebble beach below, just under water. The far bank though was running quite fast and it was here that Alex was to cast his bait. The sun was now high in the sky, it was a beautiful day. A kingfisher flew quickly past, just skimming the top of the river. This was Alex's first sight of a kingfisher, a good



Childhood Dreams... To Catch A Monster By Richard Folwell

were taken before Alex waded into the cattle drink to release his fish, gently and safely back into the depths of the river.

Alex didn't catch another Barbel in 2003. He did work hard fishing the Dove, the Hampshire Avon and the Severn on junior day with Howard Maddocks but it was not to be.

June 15th 2004

Once again we were back on

now getting to know a few of the Barbel Society members, mainly through the junior days, and learning a lot about our chosen quarry. Surely with all this knowledge Alex would soon catch his Monster!!

October 25th 2004

We both fell in love with the River Kennet and a season ticket was purchased. Two weeks later we headed south again to fish the Kennet

over ten pounds. They must be feeding “.

Another great day was had, with lots of banter, and great effort from Graham who spent almost all day with Alex. Paul, Martyn and Leicester Paul, fishing the Kennet for the first time, all agreed that we fished hard and long. But, once again, the barbel decided enough was enough.

Alex slept most of the way home, still dreaming of

young boy. I reluctantly decided not to wake Alex. He woke me at 06.30, panicking because we had missed the alarm. I asked him to look outside at the trees and listen to the storm.

He was naturally upset, but soon went back to bed, this time dreaming of what was not to be.

March 14th 2005

The last day of the 2004 / 2005 season came and went. Alex did not catch his second Barbel. He would have to wait until the new season. It would be two years exactly, to the day if he was to catch a Barbel on June 16th 2005. We would have to wait and see.

June 15th 2005

At last we were going fishing. Our destination was the Barbel Society water at Bransford on the River Teme. We had a day trip to the Teme at the beginning of June and the sight of Barbel in the clear waters was enough to drive a grown man crazy, let alone a small boy. Leicester Paul was with us and we had planned to meet up with Martyn Pears at the Fox Inn for supper.

All the talk was about how many we would catch. After all this was the River Teme, probably the most prolific Barbel river in England.

As we headed for our chosen swim, the light was beginning to fade. We had decided to fish the big pool just below the railway bridge. It was deep with a good flow, the bank comfortable and due to the steep bank and the bushes behind us, offered adequate protection from any wind.

As we counted down the last few seconds of the close season, we lit a huge rocket that flew silently up at great speed, in to the night sky. Alex was looking for a cascade of bright lights to welcome in June 16th. Opening day and Dads

“Surely we would catch a fish this time. We arrived on the bank that Sunday evening, with half an hour to go before dark. As we walked down to have a look at the river a fellow angler was coming towards us. He had just caught a twelve pound Barbel. This was a Monster!! We quickly ran back to the car and set up a rod”

the banks of the Derbyshire Dove, setting up our rods in great anticipation of the following dawn. The evening air was quite cold for June, unlike the previous year, which was warm and clear.

Opening day proved to be a difficult one without a fish to reward us for the twenty four hours we spent on the river bank. Was this a sign of things to come?

Summer 2004

The Dove of course was fished, often, the Hampshire Avon again in the summer, the Severn on junior day and finally the Kennet in Berkshire, again on junior day. It was on this occasion that both Alex's fortunes and that of mine too, would change, but it would not happen over night. We met Martyn Pears, the Bournemouth Barbell Machine!! Martyn was to tutor Alex and had arrived very early that morning to get a swim on the weir at Upper Benyons. Alex did not catch that day, but lost a Barbel at the net and had the rod pulled out of his hand, only to experience the fish breaking the line. We were

during half term. Surely we would catch a fish this time. We arrived on the bank that Sunday evening, with half an hour to go before dark. As we walked down to have a look at the river a fellow angler was coming towards us. He had just caught a twelve pound Barbel. **This was a Monster!!** We quickly ran back to the car and set up a rod. Alex fished into dark, without any success.

Two days of fishing dawn till dusk and not a bite between us. For a nine year old it was beginning to prove a most daunting task. Would he ever catch another Barbel?

November 3rd 2004

Alex's endeavours were now getting interest from Barbel Society members and when Graham Elliott offered to assist Alex should he want to go back to the River Kennet, the answer was a resounding “let's go Dad “. So we rose again at 04.45 and were greeted three hours later by a very excited Graham.

“Quickly, Alex, come with me “, said Graham, “Martyn Pears and Paul Hale are catching Barbel, big ones,

catching a monster.

February 11th 2005

A new year was upon us and we just had to go fishing. The conditions were good, so we had been told. Big Barbel were being caught on the River Kennet. We decided to head south again and have one last go to catch Alex a Barbel.

The car was loaded up with gear, baits prepared and the sausages, bacon and rolls packed up. Alex got to bed early and was soon fast asleep. I was a little concerned as the wind was picking up and the rain was starting to fall, quite heavy.

At 03.45 the next morning, I woke up to hear the wind and rain hammering against the bedroom window. There was one hell of a storm outside, a lot worse than the previous evening. I had to make a tough decision. The Kennet was a good 3 hour drive in these dangerous conditions, and, on reaching the Kennet, the wind would cause havoc, the rain would soak us and the banks would be very slippery. It would be difficult for me, impossible for a



Birthday was once more upon us. Nothing happened for what seemed ages, then suddenly the loudest bang shattered the night sky. Leicester Paul knew what was happening as he was put in charge of the rocket. Alex shot down the bank and cast in. He was now really concerned that the local farmer (or everyone within a ten mile radius) would appear and throw us off the river bank! It was that loud!

Nothing happened for the next hour or two. We did not get thrown off the river bank. In fact little happened that day. Martyn had three fish roving, Leicester Paul had a fish from the shallows below the bridge and that was it. In total at least a dozen anglers came and went that day, completely frustrated as never before on June 16th.

June 17th 2005

Not to be outdone, Alex still had all his enthusiasm to catch a Monster, so we headed up to the River Dove for an early evening session. Again we were fishless.

July 15th 2005

Due to family situations as well as a heat-wave, Alex was

The temperature was as high as it had been for a long time. The river was recorded at 73 degrees Fahrenheit at lunch time. The fishing was really hard for the experts, let alone Alex. Alas it was not to be again.

July 17th 2005

We headed off Sunday morning with great hopes of finally catching that elusive second Barbel of a lifetime. Alex was going to fish the river Severn, river number four in as many weeks. The river temperature was recorded at 75 degrees. The signs were not good, though on approaching the river bank, two anglers admitted catching seventeen Barbel two days previous. Maybe this time...

You've guessed it. Not a Barbel to be seen. Steve Hitch could not believe it. He thought Alex was definitely going to catch his monster, but it was not to be.

July 23rd 2005

It was junior day on the River Dove and Alex had been paired with Trefor West. Alex had read about Trefor and therefore knew he was a great barbel angler. I



Alex and his 8lb 3oz Barbel

fishing alongside him, he had caught his first fish in over two years and I was not there. I did see the photo shoot, and the safe return of a very special Barbel that weighed 6lbs 15 oz. A new P.B.

Trefor West had done it, I could not thank him enough. Maybe, just maybe, Alex would catch a few more, now that second fish had finally slipped over the landing net.

July 29th 2005

Alex was on holiday for two weeks with me and we were going to spend as many days

We reached the river bank after what seemed to Alex a life time of preparation (I was doing exactly what Trefor had shown us). I gave him his rod and cast in to the deep water below. Before I had tied my hook on, Alex was in to a Barbel. I could not believe it! Ten minutes later, a fish of 6 lb 12 oz was weighed, photographed and safely returned to the water. What a start to our adventure.

I managed to catch a Barbel too, but only a four-pounder.

August 1st 2005

We met Martyn in the car-park at the Fox Inn on Bransford Bridge for bacon butties and a cup of tea, before heading up the river. Day two and the River Teme was our choice of venue.

The morning was quiet. We had set our base camp in two swims, either side of a large bush that overhung the river. Willow trees were in abundance, with two on the opposite bank. If ever a section of river oozed Barbel, this one did.

Martyn decided after lunch to go roving. He knew a couple of good swims and was determined to get Alex his first Teme Barbel. They had only been gone a few minutes when the walkie-talkie burst in to life. "Alex is

"We had an adventure planned that would result in the most fantastic period in my fishing life. We decided to try and catch six Barbel from six different rivers in the space of the next two weeks. We would start off with a trip to the River Dove and the very same swim where Alex had caught the previous week with Trefor"

not to get on the river bank again until the Wye Fish-in at Bredwardine. This would be his third river of the season. Martyn Pears had already caught his first Barbel and as we arrived to meet him he caught another. This was good news. A few other Barbel were caught that evening but Alex was not in luck.

July 16th 2005

was keen to watch the master at work and soon realised that he was a perfectionist. I had never known Alex to be so still and quiet, but he had to be, or else Trefor would tell him so.

After a couple of hours I walked back to the car and on my return was greeted by calls of "come quickly".

Alex had caught a Barbel. I could not believe it. After all those hours spent

as possible fishing. In fact we had an adventure planned that would result in the most fantastic period in my fishing life.

We decided to try and catch six Barbel from six different rivers in the space of the next two weeks. We would start off with a trip to the River Dove and the very same swim where Alex had caught the previous week with Trefor.



Childhood Dreams... To Catch A Monster By Richard Folwell

in to a Barbel "called Martyn, so off I shot, camera in hand to record the event. A lovely fish of 4 lb.

Within an hour, Alex was into a big Barbel. This fish was in superb condition and tested Alex for all he was worth. We eventually weighed it and photographed it, a beautiful fish of 8 lbs 3oz. Alex was worn out. We carefully returned the Barbel and retired to our base camp

placed on the unhooking mat we realised it was indeed a big fish. Alex no longer had to dream. He had caught a Monster without assistance from anyone else. We held our breath as the fish was weighed. As the indicator on the scales moved clockwise around the dial, 10 lbs was soon passed, then 11 lbs, eventually settling at 11 lb 10 oz.

We then experienced a

day, Alex would be fishless.

August 7th 2005

We were now in The New Forest, at our favourite campsite at Bransgore. The weather was perfect for camping but not fishing. It was really hot during the day so we spent it on the beach, but by early evening we were on the banks of the magnificent Hampshire Avon, home to the Royalty

to have to fight the fish with all his skill and knowledge. He was fishing in a deep channel where the water was rushing through, there was a lot of thick streamer weed and my rod was only 11 ft long with a test curve of 1 lb 6 oz. It was bent double.

The fish was running hard and fast downstream. It then started to head back up stream, keeping deep down, probably close to the bottom

"This was more than a good fish. We had not seen it yet, but after what seemed ages, a shimmer of gold was observed and it was guided in to the net. Martyn decided we should rest the fish in the net for a few minutes and so we both congratulated Alex on his capture. We had still not seen the fish properly"

for a rest!

Later, we were in a most beautiful swim on the river, with Kingfishers in abundance, the odd Heron and a Barn Owl that had been disturbed by someone or something. There were Mallards, Coots and Swans too. The river was alive!

Suddenly, without warning, Alex's rod bent in a huge arc. He was sitting back in his chair holding the rod, so was in contact from the very beginning. I called Martyn, who was on the other side of the tree. We watched in silence as Alex played his fish. We soon realised that this was a good one. It was not going crazy, just cruising up and down in the channel. I noticed the angle on Alex's 1 3/4 lb tc rod.

This was more than a good fish. We had not seen it yet, but after what seemed ages, a shimmer of gold was observed and it was guided in to the net. Martyn decided we should rest the fish in the net for a few minutes and so we both congratulated Alex on his capture. We had still not seen the fish properly.

Martyn lifted the net out of the water, and as it was

truly magical feeling, total shock and extreme happiness. It was almost indescribable. Photographs were taken, handshakes all around and finally after completely resting the fish we carefully returned it.

August 2nd 2005

We had stayed overnight in Clifton on Teme so after a good breakfast, we headed for the River Severn. Once again conditions were very good. It was not long before Alex was into another Barbel - this time a superb fish of 5 lb 5 oz that fought like a demon. He followed it up with another that weighed 5 lb 8 oz and then capped another memorable day by catching one of 8 lb 4 oz.

Alex's adventure now encompassed three rivers and seven Barbel.

August 3rd 2005

Back to the River Teme and down to earth with a bump. Not a fish to seen.

August 4th 2005

The River Avon in Warwickshire was next on our list, but like the previous

Fishery. It was here in 1972 that I caught my first Barbel. Alex had fished here in 2003 and 2004 without a bite, so it was third time lucky. It was also the day my dear old Dad had died, so maybe he would help us this evening. I told Alex his Granddad had fished here and that he would be watching him!!

We headed for a swim just past the boathouse where I set up my rod. I put Alex just behind a tree that covered a deep hole and there below Alex saw his first Hampshire Avon Barbel, a big female, with two attendant males, feeding on the gravel bed, 10 feet down in the crystal clear water.

He never moved for three hours. Dusk was now upon us and at 21.10 the light was switched on at the bailiff's office, indicating the evening was almost over.

I suggested to Alex that he bring his rod to me to break down and that he could fish the last five or so minutes with my rod, whilst I packed everything up.

Within two minutes of sitting down, Alex was almost pulled in by a big fish. This time he was really going

of the river. It eventually started to tire, but so did Alex. It proved very difficult to get Alex, the fish and the net close together but eventually I was able to achieve all three !

We were being pressured to get the fish back in the river because the bailiff wanted to go home. It was after 21.30 now and rules were rules. I insisted we weighed the fish and photographed it because it was a beauty. The scales bumped round to 11 lb 4 oz. Alex had caught another Monster.

We fished the Royalty again before heading back home. We also fished the Warwickshire Avon again but failed to catch another Barbel.

Alex's adventure had taken him to six rivers, the Dove, the Warwickshire Avon, the Arrow, the Teme, the Severn and the Hampshire Avon. He failed to catch a fish from each river but was rewarded with eight Barbel that included two eleven pounders.

He would never have to dream again about catching a Monster.

Barbel Society Conference 2006
Sunday May 14th 2006 • Hinckley Island Hotel • Hinckley • Leicestershire
Same venue as in the past, now under new ownership. Contact Phil Betteley for details.