

A Changing Angler

“Where do you go to catch big barbel?” This is such a loaded question and one I hear so often now. Barbel are the new superstars of the angling world. They inspire passion which unites and divides anglers in equal measure. Wars have been fought over lesser issues than “Where do you go to catch big barbel?”

So I ask “Where do you go to catch big barbel?” Not because I want to nick your swim but because where you go affects everything from your tactics to your overall philosophy on the subject of catching Barbel.

Well, if like me you live in South Yorkshire or the East Midlands, you would probably fish the river Trent, like me.

The river Trent, what an immense river it is, it makes the rivers of my home town of Sheffield look like tiny streams in comparison!

The River Trent...That’s where I go to catch big barbel...But there is more to the Trent and me than the ubiquitous big Barbel, it is the river itself that has shaped me into what I am today more so than the fish that swim within.

My fishing life has been interwoven with this river for as long as I can recollect; the Trent was the first river other than the River Don that I can remember seeing as a child, going over Dunham Bridge en route to the families summer holidays in Lincolnshire. It thrilled me; it was truly an awesome sight. When I was old enough to actually fish (but still in truth a very young boy) I did all my

fishing in stints of five hours, five short sharp hours on the banks of the River Trent.

You see like most Sheffields I was raised up within the match fishing world, a world where everything was given merit via the scalesman and the number he quoted to you in pounds and ounces at the end of the match. Everything revolved around having more than everyone else at the end. Tricks and stunts were played, cheating occurred from time to time and quite often the scalesman wasn’t always to be trusted.

Not really that much different to specimen hunting then...Fishing is after all just fishing.

I came into specialized Barbel fishing at quite a late age; I was in my very early twenties when I hooked into my first barbel and I can still feel the exhilaration as the rod hooped over and a fish of no more than three pounds gave me a scrap the likes of which I had never encountered before...I was hooked instantly.

After that...Match fishing had nothing more to offer... Except the occasional bit of fun with the lads, as far as fishing was concerned it was finished.

Every Monday I would

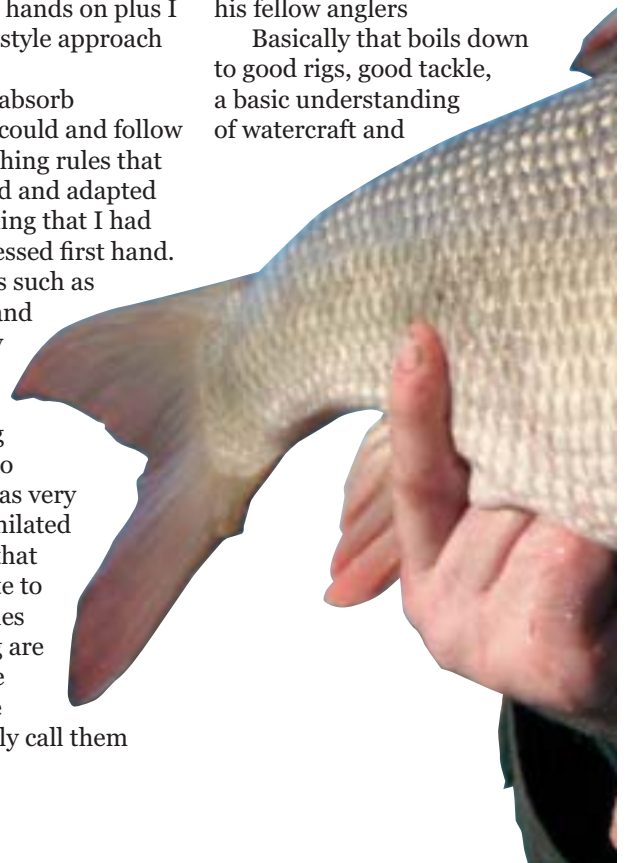
drag my gear down to the beach pegs at Clifton Grove and try my luck...And I found that after a short while I became rather good at the catching of Barbel...You see, I had an advantage over the locals...I could actually fish a bit . That sounds really condescending but it was the truth of the matter. Week in and week out I would see the same faces in the same swims fishing with the same baits and struggling just the same as they had struggled the week previous! Whereas I was reading everything I could get my hands on plus I had a match style approach to angling.

I tried to absorb everything I could and follow my match fishing rules that I had adopted and adapted from everything that I had read or witnessed first hand. Great anglers such as Ivan Marks and The Barnsley Blacks were my heroes and anything that went into the papers was very quickly assimilated into a brain that was desperate to learn. My rules about fishing are pretty simple really...Some would actually call them

common sense:

- 1) The successful angler is the one that can quickly understand what is occurring beneath the waters surface...Identify a method that is most applicable to the situation...And apply that method competently.
- 2) The successful angler must be able to locate the fish and prompt them into feeding without in turn giving rise to suspicion.
- 3) The successful angler is the one that is armed with a bait that is wanted by the fish but slightly different to his fellow anglers

Basically that boils down to good rigs, good tackle, a basic understanding of watercraft and



on a Changing River

*Right: Thinking time
Far right and below:
Big barbel!*



high quality bait.

If anyone can sort those out then they are quite frankly “on the money” week in and week out and I think that I sorted them out very quickly and reasonably well, too well at times perhaps as very soon I had attracted a little fan club of lads who would come down after school (and sometimes during) and fish with me almost every week...Which was cool but when you have five rods stuck out over your keep net, it can get a bit crowded.

Time flies when you are having fun and soon the eighties were gone and I was into the nineties and the average sized fish that I was catching was now usually a little more than 4lb's but there were bigger fish of between 7-8 1/2lb showing up with increasing regularity and very rarely I had a scraper double!

Time passed on and things began to change...The controlling club let the water go because of the increase in hooliganism and the drop in revenue as the regulars started to pursue their

hobby within the relatively safe confines of the local commercial fisheries. Left on my own with just the local inbreeds I stopped feeling comfortable on the beach pegs as it is an unwritten law of fishing that weir pools attract morons and cretins like a good splatter of fresh dog droppings attracts flies. Yes it was sad but the kids that frequented the “Grove” were growing up and their games were getting a little bit out of hand.

So I decided to try pastures new...I would also say that it was at this time that I realised that I was changing as well, as I have already said my match fishing was all but finished and my barbel fishing was getting a little bit more serious. I was starting not only to target the Barbel but the bigger Barbel...I wanted to catch some “doubles” by design.

Doubles were what made the “press” and that is the direction that I had decided that I wanted to take, I loved reading the papers and seeing the amazing fish that the likes of Stef Horak and

Phil Smith were catching...I wanted some of that!

So I set about changing the way that I fished, I still kept the match mentality and aggression but pretty much everything else went out of the window...

I upped the power of my rods from basic heavy feeder rods to all out carp gear and as for the alarm clock...Well that got thrown in the bin! I became a session angler!

The session angler aka “Time bandit” aka “Dope head nuisance” aka “Lazy bugger that needs to get a job”...aka... “The Bivvy Brigade!”

Session angling does suffer from the abuse of the minority but there are many misconceptions about the long stay angler. I hope that anyone who has ever fished with me wouldn't class me as anything other than a bit mental. I don't use drugs and I hold down a job that pays for my hobby but yes I do possess a bivvy and I cannot for the life of me see the difference between a broolly with storm sides and a bivvy, I can quite comfortably sleep in both ...But that doesn't

make me a bad person, honest!

Anyway less of that and more about the night fishing

I quickly began to bulk up my Pb list with a very nice 10lb 13oz fish falling foul of my trap during my very first overnighter... I like this fishing in the dark malarkey, I had managed to catch some doubles previous to that one but I discovered that night fishing suited my style.

And so I went completely nocturnal but not being satisfied with becoming a “nocturnal”...I also became a glory seeking truffle hog!

Multiple catches of bigger barbel were common place and almost everything of merit I caught was reported to the press, I sniffed out then chased and caught almost every competition that has ever been devised by our angling weeklies and monthlies. The only exception being the Drennan weekly award, god I would love to catch that one! Although I did win the Drennan weeklies predecessor twice and still have the badges to prove it!

Chasing publicity may



“The simple pleasures of catching what some would class as nuisance fish far outweighs the pain of not being able to fish at all”

not be for everyone but this is something I would advise every junior in the BS to do! Why pay for a rod when you can have one given to you and have fun along the way! And let's be honest Angling needs its new blood...When the current crop of writers have all but flogged the dead horse into oblivion, who else will write the next generation of books or appear on the next generation of DVD's?

Saying that, how you deal with the publicity side of having your catch in the press is also interesting conundrum as it is very fine line between being an open book that is willing to share knowledge and being a liberty that attracts unwanted pressure to a water causing a decline in the sport for everyone concerned. I tried to never give exact swim details but the honesty and openness I showed coupled with my blunt observations and no nonsense style soon had me writing for the local angling paper the Angling Star. I think the Editor Jim Baxter enjoyed having somebody onboard that didn't know when to keep his mouth shut. It certainly increased the letters page on occasion.

No more so than when I was seen using a keepnet...It was three keepnets actually... Three nets with three fish in. The argument that it raised was vociferous to say the least but I learnt something from it. I took on board the advice and have moved on a better angler...I realised that I do not need to retain fish to prove my worth as an angler... I no longer needed multiple catch shots to boost my ego...But on rare occasions I would still keep the ability to retain a fish I

thought was exhausted or exceptional and so I carry a Queenford retention tube (a smaller version of a keepnet...I don't get the difference but it keeps people happy)

And happy is what it is all about at the end of the day, anglers change and evolve... Every single one of us is a work in progress. There is little point in playing the witch hunting game and castigating everyone and everything. It is far better to educate and display good manners to those that may not display behaviour that isn't conducive to good fish handling or management. I know that I am changing all the time. Something that I have now begun to rethink is the “numbers game” It is starting to leave me ever colder by the day.

That isn't to say that I don't still specifically target big fish because I do but I now realize that life is extremely short and the simple pleasures of catching what some would class as nuisance fish far outweighs the pain of not being able to fish at all, of this I am quite sure!

One day I will be old and knackered and when I sit there in my high backed chair, peeing into a bottle and leering at the nurses as they spoon feed me a sloppy milk pudding. I am quite sure that I would swap all the medication in China for a 4lb snotty on the tidal. Sometimes I think that we do not value what we have and become too preoccupied with what we quite erroneously think we need...I know what I need, I need to go fishing.

“Now where is that bivvy?”

Peregrine



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Peregrine Barbel Rods

For the last ten years our core business has been to build high performance fly fishing rods for the discerning. However, as barbel anglers ourselves, we have recognised the need for true specialist barbel rods for some time.

The market place has been flooded with ‘off the shelf’ rods many of which are lacking in one respect or another and the real specialist demands the need for performance without compromise. Hence the demand for our custom built rods.

The Peregrine GTi 11 ft, 2 piece, 11b 12oz T.C.

This rod is certainly one of the best all rounders money can buy. Sensitive, yet at the same time powerful enough to subdue any barbel. **Price: £175**

The Peregrine SU Avon 12 ft, 2 piece, 11b 10oz. T.C.

The SU has a powerful, smooth, progressive action that makes playing big barbel a breeze. This rod is at home on virtually any river, big or small and will handle leads from a single swan shot up to and over 3oz. **Price: £175**

The Peregrine Flood Rod 11ft 9ins, 2 piece

No test curve on this one! This is a real floodwater specialists dream come true. A soft (?) top to allow the build up of debris without prematurely displacing the lead, but this is no quiver tip! This rod will cast up to 8 ounces! Yet again, by choosing the right materials the rod, is powerful yet still has the right ‘feel’ for playing barbel. We are indebted to Chris Ponsford for his help in developing this unique rod. **Price: £185**

11ft 4 piece Avon, 11b 8oz T.C.

Slightly more powerful than its 2-section counterpart, but still retaining that lovely sweet “Avon” action. Versatile, smooth power, four section portability and not a flat spot in sight! **Price: £175**

GTX 12ft 11b 8oz T.C., 2 piece

Made from woven graphite, this rod is as stunning to look at as it is to use. Power, sensitivity and lightness all add up to this new concept in rod design for the specialist barbel angler. Finished in black with subtle gold trims and available with full cork handle or abbreviated style. **Price: £185**

The rod fittings described below are incorporated on our ‘stock’ rods, but we can finish your rod to virtually any specification.

Full cork handle with Fuji DPS reel seat. Seymo 247s three leg rings tied in black, tastefully trimmed in gold.
Hook keeper fitted as standard
Black Aluminium Wye Button fitted as standard.