

The season of 2008-9 saw me embark on a new adventure, I decided it was time for a new challenge and to try a new river.

For the previous six or seven seasons I concentrated on a small but well known river near me. When I say river, it is a stream really hence the name The St. Patricks Stream.

Fishing the Pat's was never easy for me, I never seemed to do as well as those around me, and remember



It's time to find . a new river!

taking pictures of twelve doubles one season . . . all for other people!

I caught fish, but I never seemed to get anywhere near the big girls that swim the river. Saw plenty of them on the bank, but never in the bottom of my net!

My last season on Pat's saw me having some of the best fishing I have ever had, the 2007-8 season was something else.

Until then, I had never had a double from the river, but banked eight in a little over a month.

Forty fish in twelve or so weeks, I was walking on water, my ego was so over inflated, I couldn't do a thing wrong.

One day during the floods, after so very nearly

drowning my van, having to turn back to park on the A4 and wade down the lane to the river. Standing up to my waist in water on the Borough Marsh swim, I caught three fish on consecutive casts and was going home within half an hour. Job done!

But the wheels soon started to fall off, catching was to become more and more difficult as the river settled down after the floods.

I was becoming tired of fishing the same old swims with the same old people, nothing against those people, I needed to see new faces.

I wanted to fish new swims, so finishing the season, I opted to leave the club and find pastures new, to find a new challenge, to

TOM HERBERT

TOM HERBERT IS 40 AND LIVES IN BAGSHOT WITH HIS WIFE TARA AND HAS 9-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER. HE HAS FISHED FOR BARBEL FOR OVER FIFTEEN YEARS NOW AND CLAIMS THAT HE IS STILL NO GOOD AT IT, BUT TALKS A GOOD FISH . . .

TOM LIKES FISHING ALL OVER THE COUNTRY AND TRIES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AS MANY INVITES AS POSSIBLE, BUT HIS FISHING HOME AT THE MOMENT IS THE LOVELY RIVER LODDON.

HE ENJOYS MANY FORMS OF FISHING. BARBEL IS AN OBSESSION, AND PIKE FISHING IS A WELCOME DISTRACTION WHEN THINGS ARE NOT GOING WELL. TOM HAS MADE MANY GOOD FRIENDS THROUGH HIS FISHING AND HOPES TO MAKE MANY MORE.

find my sanity.

Asking around for a while, and talking to a good few people before deciding, I joined a new club for the 2008-9 season. The club had several good stretches of the Loddon and several bits of the Wey.

The Wey was particularly important, as it would serve

as a welcome distraction in the winter months, when it is too cold to fish for barbel.

Grayling and roach were to be a target, as would the chub, no more sitting there in the dark with a landing net frozen to the bank waiting for a barbel to feed at 3.00am.

This new river was

similar in size to the Pat's, but much longer and several different sections were on offer to me.

The new season was soon to start and I decide to do a few carp fishing sessions before heading off to the river.

Why? Well, without knowing the river I did not like to fish blind. I was not allowed on the river during the Close Season to have a look around, so I thought I would let the regulars show me where to fish. I would let the members who know the river make the swims, and I would then have an idea where to head for.

The carp fishing was a distraction that didn't last too long,

On the 25th of June I headed for the river. The postcode was programmed into the sat nav and away I went, no idea what to expect and no idea where I was going either, thinking about it.

I eventually found the car park, which was full, and parked up.

This was exactly what I wanted too see, so many people on the river would mean that most of the

swims would be fished, more information for me to use.

I wandered around for a while, noting where people were fishing, and more importantly, where their lines were pointing. Just because someone is sitting in a swim don't ever think they are fishing the obvious areas. I usually carry a small note book with me just to jot down stuff, I have a memory like a goldfish, so if I commit it to paper, I can usually remember what I was thinking at the time.

That evening I sat fishing behind a large bush, somebody had kindly made a small swim for me.

After a few exploratory casts I soon found the feature they may well have been fishing too. A small depression in the river bed a few yards below the bush.

Out went my bait and I caught a small chub, that was it for the evening, not too bad a small chub, a new swim.

I was entertained for a few hours by a barn owl quartering the meadow behind me, they are such

graceful birds, large and powerful but silent.

I left for home that evening happy.

My next visit was on the 29th of June, the previous evening I was fishing my carp lake and was disgusted to land a 6lb bream (only kidding) They go much bigger in there, I have caught several to double figures from the lake, never by design though. So tonight I was hoping to make up for it with a barbel.

Settling into a different swim to last time. A swim that had been fished before. Judging by the amount of flattened grass, I would say a large circus tent had been erected there before!

I dropped a small lead into the swim and had a little drag around, finding weed and gravel and a small drop off, in went bait.

I was hoping to see the owl again this evening, they are such enjoyable birds to watch when they are hunting. I did see a flock of Swallows, or Swifts or possibly Martins, combing the skies above me, homing in on some hatch or other. A Kestrel had something in its sights and was hovering menacingly, and a flock of fledgling tits where doing their worst to the seed heads around me. Such an abundance of bird life, so good to see. No owl though, I heard several, but I did not



A Loddon swim



A proper barbel swim on the Loddon

see one that evening.

I moved after a couple of hours and dropped in to a completely different type of swim.

Up until now all the swims I looked into, or cast into, where above the water, this swim was just level with the bank and well fished by the looks of it.

I did my usual dropping of the lead to try and identify any features, and soon found a very interesting area.

I placed a bait into the area and sat back and waited and waited and waited. This area was to provide a very good evenings fishing later in

the season.

My next session saw me fishing a part of the river that is sadly out of bounds now. It is a 'S' bend with a deep hole on the opposite side to me, and it looked so good I could hardly wait to put a bait in.

The afternoon progressed and I had no action, it would soon be time to move as I could only fish up to 6pm. Just then the barn owl came out to start her evenings hunting. The old mill building opposite was where she was nesting. She flew so close over the top of me I could almost pluck her out of the sky.

I stood in the water for a couple of minutes, trying to see a little better into the river, when I noticed something crawling towards my boot. An American Signal Crayfish! It is as big as my boot, blimey, I cannot ever recall seeing one as big in a river that was not in a trap. These horrible invaders have colonized many of our waterways, killing our native White clawed Crayfish as they go. They carry a fungus that is deadly to the native crayfish, but it does not harm them. I understand that is why you are not allowed to make a bait using them, or their flesh. That would be some bait!

"These horrible invaders have colonized many of our waterways, killing our native White clawed Crayfish as they go. They carry a fungus that is deadly to the native crayfish"

Missed a screamer of a bite, watching the Barn Owl!

I returned to the river a couple of weeks later, I had been fishing elsewhere with some very good friends, but now I am back on my river.

I have found the 'Lower' section of the river, and a different car park and head off over the meadows towards the river. This section is different to the 'Upper', so much smaller and more intimate. A lot of the

river you could hop across, ok then you could jump across if you were fit enough, just like my good self, ha ha!

There are lots of narrow runs with deep glides over gravel, rushes line most of the runs and the car park was empty . . . heaven!

Where to start?

The 'car park' swim is always a good starting place.



Why are almost all car park swims producers? I have never figured that out, maybe it is something to do with all the bait that goes into them! Anyway, I have a little feel around and settle on a spot under an opposite tree.

In goes a large chunk of meat. Two minutes later

on this section for my liking, I moved back to the 'Upper' section.

I used to drive past the car park to see how popular it was, there where several cars parked in the car park most evenings, usually they where the same vehicles.

After several visits to this part of the river, I was

the rod tip flies round, the rod butt all but knocks my glasses off, and I miss my first bite on the section.

I move swims.

The next swim looks well fished, a corner swim with gravel on the inside, and a small shelf where my bait ends up.

I have fished this section many times and had just the one real bite. I missed it.

Finding that the Crayfish where just a little too active

beginning to build up a mental picture of the swims I was fishing.

Most had gravel runs, usually on the inside run with either bushes or reeds along each side. One swim I fished I had my usual little 'drop' around with my lead. When I say drop, I mean I tie a lead directly to the main line and with the rod tip over the water I drop the lead into the swim and let it touch bottom. Lifting the rod



tip up without reeling in any line I measure the length of line along the rod. Doing this at regular intervals along the swim/glide to build up a picture of what the depths are. I use the longest rod available to me, a 15-foot float rod, which usually gets me to the other side on most swims, or certainly into the areas I want to place bait.

On a few occasions I have just 'dropped' about for the evening, mapping things out, but not very often!

Anyway, the swim did not produce on several attempts, and while talking to a friend who has echo sounded the stretch, he mentioned the 'hole' on the other side of the swim,

"What hole?" I asked.

"The five or so foot hole along the other side of the bank".

"I have not found that" I said.

"Oh, well it's there".

I found the hole the next time I went down to the river, its there all right, strange how I never found it when I 'dropped' around the swim. Maybe I had found a feature and was happy to fish to that one, missing the better feature all together. A lesson learned some would say.

My method of 'dropping' a lead into the swim works well for me, as I don't like to fish to far away from the inside bank. I seem to catch most of my fish from these

areas, just dropping a bait into the margins causes so little fuss, and it must help with presentation as well.

I was really enjoying my new river, seeing different people and fishing different ways in different areas.

The bird life is fantastic, as is the wild life. I have seen deer, foxes, hedgehogs, I am sure I heard a badger one night shuffling along.

One thing I have noticed though, the fishery is one of the cleanest I have been on, yet there is at least one rat in every swim, and not just a rat they are enormous great big things, with hobnailed boots on. The amount of noise they make while foraging in the bushes is un-believable .

One was sat watching me one night, it made me feel uncomfortable and I ended up turning my back on the bugger hoping it would take what it wanted and go away!

Why are there so many rats on a clean fishery? I really don't know.

I caught a few fish on that first season, culminating with a new personal best of 13lbs 12oz , two weeks before the end of the season. It came from my favourite swim on the river, fairly late at night. I had caught a chub earlier in the evening, and should have moved. One thing I did learn at an early stage of the season was when you caught from a swim you usually moved, as it would kill the swim dead and a second fish was not likely.

Anyway on this evening I could not be bothered, I think I was in the 'end of season wind down mode', even though we had a couple of weeks left, so I stayed put.

When the rod tip gently nudged round I struck and hooked the fish, it struggled but not as much as I would have thought. When I netted it I was laughing, not humorously, but with nerves. What I had in the net was much bigger than anything I had ever caught before.



The fish was rested while I sorted myself out, why is it you can never find anything when you are in a panic?

The scales were zeroed and I unhooked the fish. I weighed her three times and settled for the lowest weight of 13lbs 12oz, a new pb after ten or so seasons, and a good few rivers to boot.

A bloke fishing a few swims down kindly took some pictures for me.

When I put her back in the river, I sat for a while with that stupid , 'I've caught a monster' grin on my face.

I sent out a few texts and called the wife, yep I know but, when I told her I had just caught the biggest barbel of my fishing career my daughter shouted out in the background "great, I will put the chips on", she is nine!

A new river has been found!