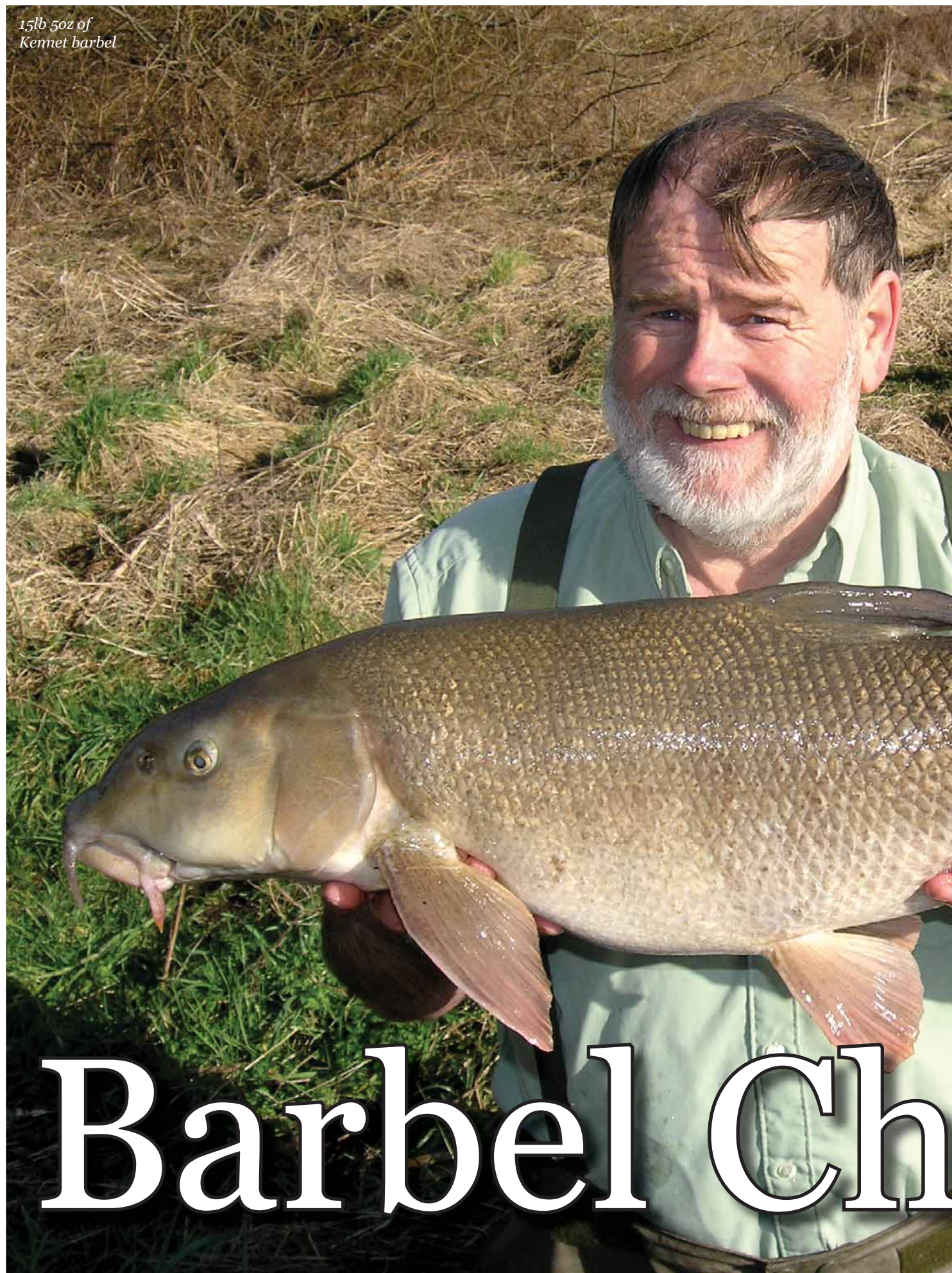



15lb 5oz of
Kennet barbel



A large barbel fish is being held horizontally by a person whose arm and hand are visible on the left. The fish has a silvery, scaly body and a large, slightly downturned mouth. It is being held against a background of tall, dry grass and some green foliage. The word 'challenge' is written in large, white, serif font across the bottom of the image.

Phil Smith a Founder Member of the Society, has kindly allowed me to make use of the first chapter of his new book, with a working title of ***Targets set and achieved***, due out in time for Christmas. This chapter covers the first two seasons of his quest to catch a double figure barbel from 10 rivers.

It all began with a thought 'how many different rivers would be reasonable to catch a double figure barbel within a season.'

After some consideration I decided on seven that seemed quite fair bearing in mind my results in the preceding seasons leading up to this time. With that target in mind I began the challenge.

The idea had been to set a target for myself, I little realised how much time or how many seasons would pass before the challenge would be met. That said, I did quickly change the seven total to eight and then finally settled on ten as the challenge that I thought was both worthy of the name and attainable with effort.

Previous years fishing on various rivers up and down the country had given me a starting point with knowledge of many venues. This would form the grounding for the attempt and over the coming seasons I would expand that knowledge by many factors.

It was the start of the 2004/5 coarse season that saw the beginning of my barbel odyssey with sessions on a number of rivers capable of producing that elusive double.

The main effort would be placed on the Great Ouse.

Since I was a member of the Adam's Mill syndicate it was there that I concentrated my effort. A lot of rubbish has been written and spoken about the Mill, 'easy fishing for tame fish held between two weirs, just a few hundred yards apart.' Nothing could be further from the truth, the fish can and do run between the two weirs but they are the best part of two miles apart.

When I first tried to catch these barbel the water was a normal club ticket at about £25 per season, that first year I took a total of one barbel for a lot of effort, easy

challenge

they are not.

Then the owner realised what a gold mine he was sitting on, and in the way of life he maximised his profits by offering it to the highest bidder at the first opportunity.

That led to the controlling club retaining control but setting up a 40-man syndicate on the water. There was an eight-man limit for anglers fishing on any given day but this was rarely, if ever achieved, and the fishing settled down to a very relaxed style of obtaining a blank. Over the following season I developed both my skill in catching difficult fish and also my knowledge of the water, giving me more chance of locating the fish.

By the 2004 season I was well able to find and entice these giants, hence it made

a good choice to begin the campaign.

I arrived at Adam's at about 11.00am on 1st July and although the start time was quite late there was only one other angler on the venue. Fortunately he was fishing for chub and did not interfere with the choice of barbel swims I would need to make.

From the car park there is only a short section up to the top weir, I had decided to fish in this length and only needed to choose between the three or so known holding spots it contained. Probably the two best places were The Top Hole and the Weir Pool itself.

A quick check showed that there were barbel in the weir but the other swim appeared empty although that could change very quickly.

With no one waiting to move into either swim I decided I would take the chance and bait both areas, fishing one and leaving the other to see if fish would move in.

Should an angler come who wished to try it then he would have the advantage of going into a ready baited swim.

A favoured method for barbel is the so called 'bait and wait' idea, where one will bait up a swim without fishing for several hours in order to gain the fishes confidence.

Of the two swims I prefer the Top Hole, and have considerable success from it I would use this approach today using caster and hemp as the bait.

Having mixed three pint of casters into two pint of hemp I introduced about

half of it via a bait dropper and left the swim to mature. Over the next several hours I fished the Weir but kept a good eye on the Top Hole returning at regular intervals to add more caster and hemp mix via the bait dropper.

Each time I also looked to see if the barbel had moved in, but so far no fish were showing. Not to worry, back to the Weir and those barbel feeding there.

Although I have made reference to fishing the Weir it is only in the sense of using those same bait and wait tactics, here though the barbel and chub had moved in with a vengeance.

The time had come to try and catch one of those big fish that could be seen with their tails waving as they scoffed the feed I had put in.

My tackle comprised of a Drennan Power Barbel rod with a 1.75lb action. This was teamed up with 10lb Pro Gold main line and a 15lb Powerbraid hook link; a 2.5oz lead fixed onto a safety clip would then give the bolt effect I was looking for on the set up.

Barbel, more than many of our coarse fish species, are not tolerant feeling the fishing line across their body when over the feed. In order to alleviate this problem I used a half inch round bullet stopped three foot up the main line. This ensures that the line will lie on the bed of the river and hopefully the fish will be less aware of its presence.

A size 12 Drennan Super Specialist hook tied with a knotless knot to leave a hair completed the rig. Three casters were then superglued onto the hair in a torpedo fashion, this style also helps to make the set up a little more resistant to the attentions of the small fish, such as dace and minnows.

My baited area was at the head of a clear channel amongst the streamer weed that waved about in the flow. The cast was a simple

Baiting Adam's Top Hole.



requirement of laying the baited hook at the upstream end and allowing the line to settle along the channel downstream of that position. This was accomplished in one of the spells while the fish were on their guided tour of the weir and I settled down to await their return.

As is so often the case with bait and wait, the bite came quite quickly once I had cast in.

With the rod wrapped round in a great attempt to snap it, I struck into a good fish that definitely was annoyed at being hooked.

One big advantage of barbel fishing, compared to chub or carp, is that once hooked the barbel will not consciously make for a snag. Those other two species head for the nearest safety.

Unfortunately that does not mean that they never get snagged, and this fish proved the point as he charged through a cabbage bed and almost by chance found himself wrapped around one of the stems.

I could see the fish and estimated him at about 13lb but as is so often the case with this situation, although I got him free of the stem, the fish threw the hook as he came towards the waiting landing net.

Very disappointing but you win some and lose some, just make sure the first option beats the second by a considerable margin.

The battle with that fish prior to it getting snagged, had been over and throughout the area of the swim, this had spooked the other fish away, but they would return.

Though it was getting late, I had another baited swim waiting, time for a move.

This time when I returned and again bait dropped into the Top Hole, it was in the knowledge that my last visit here had shown barbel to be present.

Pressured barbel can



be quite spooky, and I still needed to get their confidence in feeding freely. They would come and go from the swim, but each time they returned their stay would be little longer.

I would bait drop each time they left putting just caster in the swim feeder, no need for hemp as it had done its job of bringing the fish into the swim. Having decided it was time I bait dropped yet again but this time I laid the baited hook down and back across the swim to my position.

Because of the nature of the swim I needed chest waders to get to the front of the rushes in order to bait up and cast the baited rod out.

Having put the rod on the rests whilst I was still in the water, the reel was spinning in response to a take before I could get back on solid ground.

Total panic just about sums up the next few minutes as I scrambled out of the water, and tried to get control of the fish. He had torn off downstream into the streamer weed that flourished there, I would have trouble bringing him up to my position through that jungle. Standard practice when dealing with this situation is to get downstream of the fish and

pull him down out of the streamer, this I did but once out into the open he just shot off back upstream into the hole he came from.

I went back upstream and he moved back downstream in parody of a dance routine.

Some fish you can bully into doing what you want but not this one, at the moment he was in charge.

This dance went on for some minutes, with my worry that he would come off as with the last fish, obviously with their extra strength and power it is the bigger fish that are likely to gain their freedom.

As the minutes passed it became obvious that my efforts were having an effect and his runs became shorter as he spent more time in front of my position instead of forcing me to follow his.

Then at last he slipped over the net and the Adam's monster was mine.

Stef came along the bank in response to my phone call, and soon had it on the scales giving me a weight of 16lb 14oz, a very good day's result.

It is the second time I had caught this fish, the previous capture still stands as my personal best at 17lb 10z, well short of the best weight it recorded when it took the record at 21lb 20z. That was

it then, one down with nine to go, but as with all plans it did not work out that way, and I finished the season with seven different rivers completed.

The following season 2005/06, I set out to do exactly the same target of ten rivers, but again I failed with just six completed.

Probably the barbel that stood out from this seasons catch was that taken from the Kennet, a beautiful river in picturesque surroundings.

It was the middle of February 2006 and the intention had been to go down south to fish for chub on the Dorset Stour.

One of the problems of travelling good distances for your fishing is that of changeable weather. It had been quite mild but the south-westerlies had brought rain over the country.

A call to Terry Lampard confirmed the upper river was coming up fast and the extra water would be down to the Bournemouth area by the following morning.

With the plans to travel already made it just meant a change of venue, a discussion with Stef soon came up with the option of the Kennet, and the choice of Burghfield put the final stamp on the plan.

The Kennet is a slightly

different river, in that for much of its length it runs in conjunction with the Avon canal, the normal towpath going along side its path but this disappears as the river and canal diverge.

The section to be fished was one where the river came through a weir as it left one of the canalised lengths.

Stef had said he would be going downstream to a swim he had previously had some success; I decided to fish the weir.

The first ever barbel I caught was taken from Rushy Weir on the Thames, and I think these features have held a special interest since that date. Although they all have the same basic function, that of allowing a water level change, they are all different and even the same weir changes day to day as the flow rate changes, or different weir gates are left open.

Today, with flood water coming downstream, the gates are open, and the weir looks like a whirlpool, with flows charging through the open gates to swirl around and finally join together into one flow leaving the weir to continue its way downstream.

Having walked along the

towpath I arrived at the weir and stood looking to decide on the flows and currents in order to pick the most advantageous place to fish from.

At this time the open gate set up had given a heavy flow under the nearside bank, but the far side appeared to have far less current passing it. Moving to that side I could see the flow coming through the nearest gate going down the middle and then turning back in an eddy.

My interest fell on the dead water left in the middle where the flows separated to go their different ways. I decided that would be my pitch for the day.

First order of the day was to lay the table, out came the bait dropper and I began to drop the hemp and maggots I had brought along.

With the water quite coloured I would not normally use maggots, but these had been left from a previous trip and would change to caster quite quickly, might as well use them up and hope the barbel would come across the meal they would provide.

One rod would be fished with maggots and a swimfeeder; the other would be on my usual Dynamite

Monster Crab shelf-life boilie fished in conjunction with a PVA bag of mixed pellets.

Tackle was fairly standard, comprising of Drennan 1.75lb Power Barbel rods combined with my preferred Mitchell 300 reels loaded with 12lb Pro Gold line.

The hook link is about 10 inch of 15lb Pro Gold with a 3inch end link of 15lb braid going to a size 8 Drennan Continental Carp hook.

With the rods cast out I could sit behind the brolly and soak in the winter sunshine, waiting for the typical slam round of the rod top that signals the barbel bite.

That said, I could foresee with the different flows it might not happen like that.

Having cast into the slack water the flow was actually coming straight towards me, in all probability this would result in a slack line bite, as the fish picked up the bait and moved off in the direction of the flow.

Throughout the morning I kept up the feed, by the simple method of recasting at regular intervals, the swimfeeder would be filled with fresh maggots and the other rod would have a new PVA bag attached.

Then, at last, I watched as the boilie rod line fell completely slack. I jumped up, and reeled in as quickly as I could, and struck time and time again as I was still reeling.

The fish was moving across the flow quite quickly, but I caught up with him and the rod bent over as I at last got into proper contact.

The power of big barbel never fails to amaze me and this was no exception. I hoped it was a barbel since at this stage there was always a chance it was a carp, the power was certainly enough for that to be the case.

After a good 5 minutes of the fight I called for Stef, by the time he arrived the fish was cruising back and forth just in front of me, then his back broke the surface. I could at last confirm it was a barbel.

The fight was almost over by that time, and shortly after I was bringing a large barbel over the net, I had thought it would be a double, but when I saw the depth of it, I knew I had a new Kennet best.

Once he had been unhooked, I put the net back in the water while I got the camera and scales ready for the exciting bit.

Stef and I often play the guessing game at this stage, and this time Stef won with his try of 14lb, maybe 15lb.

At 15lb 5oz it was, and still remains, my equal second best river fish behind The Traveller, off the Great Ouse.

Yet again fate had stepped in. Instead of fishing for chub on the Stour I had taken a magnificent fish off the Kennet. I'll take those presents any time she wants to pass them out. That fish gave me a total of six rivers completed for the year, it was a figure I did not improve. Not a failure, but disappointing not to have improved on last seasons result.

