

Whacker wh *with weather warnings*

The start of the season was once again upon me and now was a time for me to get back on track with my barbel fishing.



riskers

I decided on fishing the River Ouse in Bedfordshire where I had managed a personal best barbel of 15lb 9ozs in September of the previous season.

I returned several times up until the end of the fishing season but I never

seeing a large river let alone flooding.

Turning around to go home I also was faced with a flat tyre! The "big man" upstairs just didn't want me to be fishing..! "You couldn't have written it better" I said to myself."

It had totally mucked up



landed another fish. I was looking forward once again to the new open season as I took the long drive to Bedford.

When I arrived I was faced with a swollen river, which was up at least twelve or more feet! This straight away put to rest the three day fishing adventure I had in mind. The river had flooded a nearby village and surrounding roads..! It is quite frightening for me to see a raging river especially as an urban Tottenham angler. I am not used to

the good fishing to be had. I was gutted, as I love fishing the River Ouse.

Night time barbeling is so exciting -- being miles away in fields with no street lamps to mask the darkness and just seeing the glow of your tiny night isotope on the end of your rod tip and waiting for a rattle is just something you can't beat. Out in the elements with all that's wild and with the day time fun fishing for the big perch under a chubber float and pin is a joy to behold....! It is angling at its finest. Sadly,

all would have to wait now for the water to settle and get back to anything like normal fishing conditions and that could take weeks.

Shortly after this saw me back on my local club stretch on a River Lea in Hertfordshire at 5am, searching for the elusive barbel.

Half the willow trees and likely holding spots along the stretch were investigated until I found myself in the middle of a willow that stretched out over the river where I could see a shoal of sizeable looking barbel and smaller chub, the barbel rolling and turning on a gravel slope just in front of a large bowl area of deeper water.

I got myself on the opposite bank with the group of trees to the right of me 20 yards up stream of the shoal and began to catapult out half a kilo of 6mm pellets and six handfuls of my 16mm hook baits into the swim. Job done and fish found, I was a happy bunny.

The next day, I arrived at the swim around 7:30pm with bait dropper rod in hand, some more 6 and 8mm pellets and another half a kilo of my 16mm baits and proceeded to bait up for the next thirty minutes about 20 yards from the willow tree to take account the flow of water.

I spent the first 3 nights pre baiting and on the fourth night decided to investigate the shoal inside the tree and found it was now twice the size, with some very big fish among them.

Unfortunately, I did not have my gear and immediately headed back home to fetch my equipment and returned quickly to the swim around 9pm where I baited a little more and got a rod out on the spot.

Strangely, I couldn't manage a bite. A feeling of discouragement and completely mucking up infested me – where was I going wrong?

Back to the drawing board, a whole day searching

my diaries from previous seasons captures came to my rescue. It seems I really had been messing up!

The culmination of fishing different venues had made me forget all I had learned on this hard knock place, I had easily forgotten that it had taken me six seasons of fishing to get it right and having regular catches.

I now knew I was back on the right road and fancied a new session, so back at my willow tree swim and getting it right this time, my baiting approach was spot on.

Arriving in the swim at 7pm I began a 3 hour baiting technique that had never let me down in the past. I did not make a cast till the light had completely faded which once again worked in my favour. Shortly after my first cast my tip arched over in a fashion like only barbel can achieve.

The best fight of my barbel fishing career had now begun, some half a dozen heart stopping

moments later my nephew slipped the net underneath her and I knew that I had got it right once again!

My new personal best barbel for the Lea was now lying on the unhooking mat. That I knew for certain.

My first fish of the season and it was a whacker. I was overjoyed when she came in weighing 14lb. 10oz which beat my old Lea record by 1 lb. With a smile on my face, I slipped her back into the river knowing this was just the start to what could turn into a very good season. I returned home later that evening feeling a sense of accomplishment and thinking "Oh happy days!"

Having caught a 14lb10oz barbel on my last session, I saw myself back a week later on the stretch knowing for sure deep down a second big girl could grace my net. I once again baited a couple more times without fishing and witnessed a shoal of fish of very large proportions. I couldn't wait for my next session.



This shoal of barbel was indeed a freak gathering of sizeable fish. The stretch of river is known for doubles but in over 15 years of fishing, seeing two large fish together at one time was a rarity for me. Half a dozen of the bigger fish in the shoal were of epic proportions, the size of which was so unusual to me.

Arriving at the swim about an hour prior to dusk which is later than I would normally do, I began to bait up for two or more hours until all was dark. Biteless after the witching hour, and not even a sign from the chub, I started to doubt the fact I was going to catch again, and that a blank was due to me. The fact that I had been blessed with a good fish the week before from old Izzak Walton was good enough for me after all.

A sudden thought entered my head that made me think that since I had arrived late and not fed long enough it had not worked in my favour. Realising this I reeled in and started baiting slowly again for the hour I had missed and then cast out a fresh bait.

An hour or more passed with not so much as a rattle on the tip. Halfway through rolling a smoke and star gazing, the rod began to drag around in a slow unbarbel like fashion just like a huge branch had attached itself to my line. I struck but had no initial run, the fish stayed still.

I wound down on the fish again and heaved a little more and then the fish realised she was hooked. A twenty minute battle ensued uprooting the entire cabbage weed in the middle of the river for 80 yards down stream. Thankfully I became the victor.... phew!

Looking down into the net with my head torch glowing I knew it was another huge fish about the same size as the week before but slightly longer in length.

After a weigh up and some photos, a 15lb 5oz barbel left me with a large lump in my throat. This was an amazing fishing I thought to myself, nearly two decades of fishing this place and I felt I'd now done it all. Or had I?

Since a child, I had never

not be used as the water was far too fast. To overcome the bait drifting, I brought a kilo of fish-meal ground bait and mixed it with half a kilo of 6 and 8mm pellets and half a pint of maggots and proceeded to make up some very hard balls and laced

bait could well be off. I didn't recast for the next twenty minutes just in case, for fear of spooking the shoal. Adamant that I was fishing with no bait I reeled in, and sure enough one hookbait was in half the other had been pulled off. A recast

“The trap was set again, I sat on my hands until an hour after dark, to cast in the light hours would be the worst thing I could do. These fish do not like lines in the water when it's light, so a cast near a feeding shoal in daylight can spell disaster”

felt such enthusiasm! The urge to get back down the river was gripping me with a vice. Another two days of pre-baiting began, only this time the weather wasn't on my side. Rains swept the length and breadth of the country and the river had risen two and a half feet or more in two nights.

Soaked to the bone and back in the swim, I stood trying to spot the shoal of fish but could only make out shadows as the river was changing fast from clear to a grainy pea like colour. I came away happy that I had still seen fish but knowing the situation could soon change fast, as the rising water could push the fish out of the swim in an instant as I had witnessed with a similar event in the past.

It rained and rained for two more nights but I wasn't prepared to sit in and wait for the change in weather. I got back down to the swim in heavy rain around 8.30pm. Quickly setting up my shelter I could now relax as the heavens unleashed their fury.

I baited up as soon as I had set up camp, just in front of the willow up stream of the shoal of fish, having to now adjust the baiting to the new volume of water which meant feeding 10 yards further upstream.

The bait dropper could

them into the swim together with about six of my 16mm pellet hook baits.

The trap was set again, I sat on my hands until an hour after dark, to cast in the light hours would be the worst thing I could do. These fish do not like lines in the water when it's light, so a cast near a feeding shoal in daylight can spell disaster.

Thunder, lighting and a tropical storm battered me for the next three hours.

I managed to make my first cast around 11:30pm to the front side of the willow tree slightly upstream from the baited spot and well away from the shoal of fish. Sat back in my chair, I tried to relax, as this is the best time, fishing the night through to the wee hours of the morning. The wildlife awake around you, the noises of foxes, owls, and the cry of muntjack deer seem to make it all the more meaningful, although a few noises in the past have been enough to make me spill my coffee!

The rain was still hammering down, I could see a gain in height to the already swollen river. Was I sitting here for the hell of it? Thoughts of a fishless session began to infest my brain, but at around midnight the tip slammed over and came back from a chub bite I felt that my hook-

back out to the spot saw me fishing again very quickly to avoid a soaking from the relentless rain.

Time was now ticking by and I'd got very hungry as the damp weather was taking its toll on me, it was just gone 1am and with no more bites or even a twitch on the rod tip. I laid back in my chair with a cup of tea in one hand and a smoke in the other and was pondering about putting more bait out on the spot. Not wanting to disturb the swim anymore, I decided on waiting it out.

The river now inches from my feet, it was 1.40am and a sudden shake on the tip alerted me to the rod, I sat up ready for what I knew was a barbel interested in the hook bait.

Ten minutes later and with my back turned for only a moment, the tip dragged around again, very slowly not like the fast barbel wrap arounds you would expect. I waited until the rod was fully arched over then bent into a fish.

She ran straight for the willow roots and the rod went solid. I pulled back but was snagged, so I took the pressure off the rod just slightly and felt her take more line, I pumped back for dear life.

Back in control a little, I rolled her on the surface and again she battled for

the roots of the willow. Not wanting to lose her, I held the spool with my hand and didn't allow anymore line off the already tightened clutch, and tested the whole of my terminal tackle and my 2 1/2lb test flood water rod to its limit.

The fight continued, and after two failed attempts with the net because of the force of the current, somehow on the third time

around and did indeed empty my stomach over the bank behind me. The sheer excitement of it all must have been way too much. I looked down at her again and couldn't believe the size of her.

On the unhooking mat I took the hook out and couldn't believe the state of my 10lb hook length, it must have worn down to around 4 or 5lb through the line

on the bank so big and did indeed think she was a hell of a lot bigger than what she turned out to be in the end. This barbel was so wide around 13 to 14 inches girth but not that long.

I weighed her and retained her in a larger net then made a phone call for a friend to come down with another set of scales and to help take the photos.

Two weigh ups later we

a fair chance against threats and the shock of being caught.

Eventually, before giving her a big kiss on the whiskers, I released her into the raging water.

What an amazing time in my barbel fishing, three fish in just over two weeks, a 14lb 10oz, 15lb 5ozs, and a monster at 16lb 7ozs. Just how much further could I now go with my barbel fishing?

Do I in fact, care? I had done it now, beat my personal best and, had a once in a lifetime fish!

Still deep in my blood I know the pursuit for the elusive big barbel will continue!

My tackle set up . A one and a half ounce homemade flying inline back lead, 12lb fox bar buster main line, 2oz to 3oz ruff stone homemade weight with large run ring, 18 inches of 10lb flourocarbon hook length to a size 6 barbel super specialist hook. Two 16mm pellets hook bait.

“Gazing at her with absolute joy deep inside I knew somehow she was my new personal best. I had never seen a barbel on the bank so big and did indeed think she was a hell of a lot bigger than what she turned out to be in the end. This barbel was so wide around 13 to 14 inches girth.”

she was mine.

Knackered from the fight, I tried desperately to turn on my head torch , gazing down in the net at her. I could not believe my eyes!

Overwhelmed and adrenaline pumping I felt very, very sick. I turned

grating on the snag!

“I was so lucky not to have been broken up by her” I thought.

Gazing at her with absolute joy deep inside I knew somehow she was my new personal best.

I had never seen a barbel

had a confirmed weight of 16lb 7ozs. I was a total wreck, numb and speechless. I retained her in my larger 50inch catfish net for a further 30 minutes to let her regain her energy levels. This is otter territory after all and I believe in giving all barbel

