

Be careful what you



ou wish for!



patience.

My goals for season 2012/13 are to catch more barbel but not bigger, I would like to just catch and enjoy the pleasure. Finding a stretch of water where there are shoals of smaller fish to fulfil a desire to end a days fishing with a smile on my face, not going home frustrated and sometimes

Taken from What is confidence? by Paul Rogers in Barbel Fisher 34 (Autumn 2012).

When I typed those words sometime in the close season, the emotion was meant and heart felt, I believed that to enjoy my limited fishing time catching fish is more important than size.

Well eight months later as autumn turns toward winter, I acknowledge that even though it has been achieved, all the while the addiction of the adrenaline rush of landing a big double is hard to withdraw from. Each capture has lifted my spirits, yet inside my thoughts are yearning for that next bite to be from the biggie.

What follows are some of the highs and lows of an interesting summer/autumn's fishing, learning about the new stretches of river I had chosen to fish. The lessons learnt, the heartbreak of loss after a couple of stupid mistakes and the joy of a new fish from new stretches, whatever the size.

June

My first week was spent on the Upper St Patricks Stream, a beautiful piece of water meandering through the Thames valley meadows in Charvil, Berkshire. As

with most of England it was buckling under the strain of the floods, chocolate brown and uninviting to the new member who was full of confidence and with the expectation of catching sooner rather than later. The club members I had spoken to had all said that the upper stretch was hard, populated to a lower level than downstream where the St. Pats joins the river Loddon. They all told me that few fish come out in day light, which just made me more determined to do well. But apart from a reasonable eel within an hour of the first short trip, and a couple of 4lb plus chub later in the week, the feeling of failure crept in after eighteen hours fishing. Despondent, with my tail between my legs, I retreated to a Thames weir pool for the next weeks fishing.

Sunday 24th. 6-9PM.

I was greeted by what could only be described as a giant boiling pot of coloured, fast flowing water. After walking the short stretch of seven swims the club can fish, it became obvious that two areas could still

be fished effectively so the decision was made to try. After twenty minutes in the first choice swim, being bothered by a feeling, a sixth sense of needing to move, I collected the tackle and strolled across a side stream bridge to an area which gave some opportunity to ease the pressure of the season's first capture.

I found it easy to roll a 1oz flat lead into a slower piece of water on the edge of a deep, near bank channel. Baiting with a small piece of luncheon meat, the tip rattled after only five minutes and my first barbel of the season was on. The fight wasn't prolonged, and in twenty seconds a fish of about twelve ounces slid into an oversize net! Buoyed by the capture a fish however, I soon had a bait back in the water. The tip was continually being moved and half an hour later, I landed a roach/ bream hybrid of about half a pound, which I believe were the culprits of the constant movement.

Changing over to a boilie, in this case a Wraysbury baits Fifth Element 14mm, and a stringer of four baits, I hoped that the hybrids

would be less of a problem. By this time it was 8.30PM, and as I had promised Marie, my wife I would pack up at 9PM to get home at a reasonable time, the clock was ticking. Getting ready to pull the bait in, I stood next to the rod with all the other tackle dismantled, apart from a landing net of course and my mobile signalled a call from my wife. I never got a chance to answer it as the centrepin gave off its battle cry.

Lifting into the fish the realisation quickly hit home that this was a good fish, holding solid and deep the fish wouldn't come off the bottom. In front of me were two large reed/bulrush beds so I held the fish off in the current while I struggled into the waders that should have been on already. It behaved itself as I slid down into two feet of water where the swim should be, and slowly edged myself out to a position where netting would be possible. As the fish came over the rim of the net, my arm was lifted in victory, signalling the first decent fish of the season. At 11lb 13oz, it was unbeknown to me the only double figure

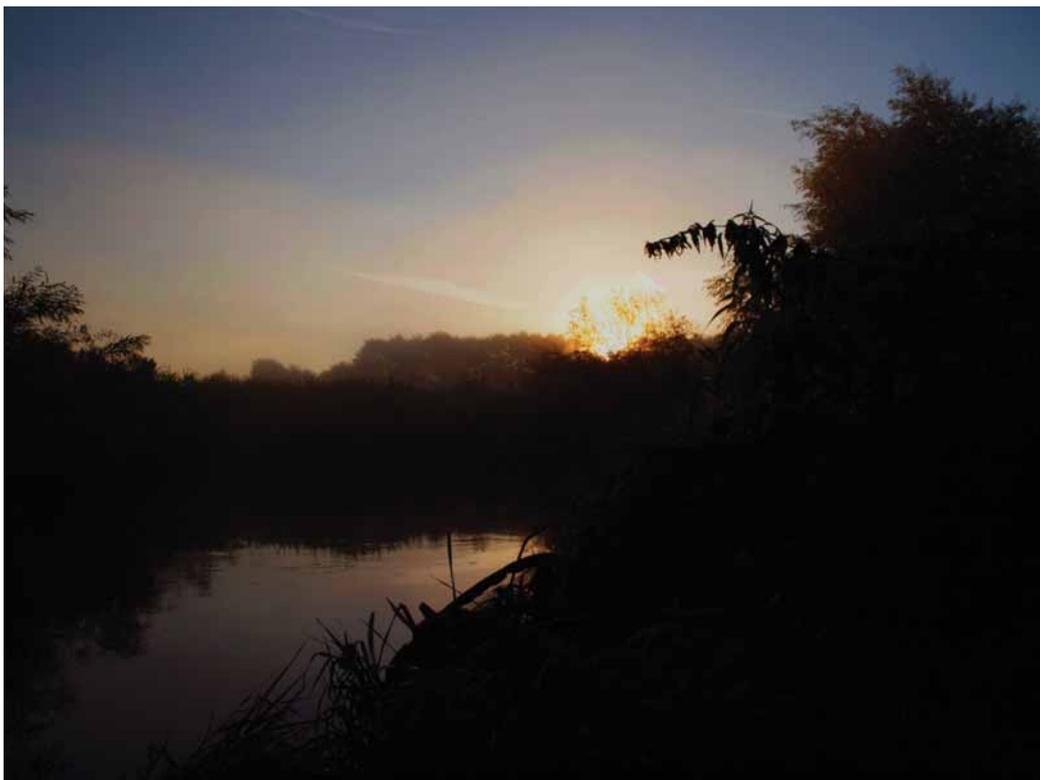
barbel I would land over the summer/autumn period. Unfortunately in the rush of excitement to get the photo, I didn't check the settings on the camera and the picture was taken on a bad aperture and/or shutter speed, so I am left with a picture of my first River Thames barbel which is too dark to see.

**Tuesday 26th.
Same swim, 6-9PM.**

Only one bite this evening at 7.20 PM. A small judder on the rod tip to a boilie fished on the crease, striking on a hunch the rod collapsed, being pulled round into a full loop by my adversary. Luckily the waders were already on and I slipped down into the water as the fish moved deep and fast downstream. This is where my luck started to change, as the fish moved downstream under the trailing branches of a big willow.

Under normal conditions these branches would be three feet above the surface, today they were struggling to keep out of the flow. One in particular, larger than the rest dipped deeper into the mucky layer below. The fish appeared to change direction, however the only way I knew this was to watch the branch start to move across the current. The pressure was immense and even though I could still feel the line moving it became harder. I believe the line had begun cutting into the wood and became lodged, and as the pressure increased more the size 10 hook pulled and the end tackle flew past the branches and came free.

The stretch of water fished does regularly produce large carp, many could be seen in the mouth to the side stream mentioned earlier sheltering from the flood water, some of which were in the low 30lb weight bracket. So could the lost fish have been one of these, or a big barbel? The fight lasted three minutes before



the hook pulled, so I will never know.

July

The decision was made to move onto a new stretch of the river Loddon. This particular piece of water was approximately three hundred yards long and being overgrown, there were only four recognisable swims. However, being careful to not make it look too obvious, I created five more in amongst the reeds and nettles. On my first visit (7th July), I met a club bailiff fishing who appeared to have very fixed views on the fishing. He told me that it is almost impossible to catch in day light and that the head of fish present was low. Well, being one to take a different path from others, I made it a challenge to try and catch a few. On that first trip I fished five different swims, more to find out the lay of the land than to catch.

Tuesday 3rd

One capture from the lower St. Pats on a wet, miserable evening. This stretch of water is a more heavily fished section and I ventured here just for a look before heading to the intended upper reaches for a short trip after work, but as the weather closed in, a decision was made to fish a likely looking swim. Quickly it produced a 6lb 9oz fish within five minutes of my arrival. This fish only stands out as a first fish from the St. Pats. It was caught more by luck than judgement and I wanted to catch because of knowing why and that would wait.

Tuesday 10th

After another four hour trip on the 8th a decision was made to spend the same amount of time in the first clear swim of the stretch. The weather was hot and sunny, and the river had dropped nine inches from two days earlier. A few loose



baits were thrown lightly along the leading edge of the big willow, and a 10z lead and hook bait followed into what felt like about five feet of water, against the branches. Every so often the rod tip would move slightly and quickly suggesting fish interest, but it wasn't until 8.25PM that the tip flew round.

Prior to this season I have lost very few barbel (according to my records only two in the last five seasons), so when this fish went solid I wasn't overly concerned and believed it would come free. But after fifteen minutes of coaxing, it dawned on me that this particular battle was lost. Any loss is painful, and the first fish from a new river was even more so.

Tuesday 31st

Do you ever get the feeling that your luck may have changed? Eight more trips have taken place since and only another lost fish to show for it. The fish had battled underneath a

hawthorn bush for three minutes and neither of us would give an inch, so when the fish came out into clear water I was gutted when the hook length parted an inch above the hook. Inspecting the mainline, it was almost destroyed to destruction. For over ten feet, it was frayed the worst I had ever seen a line. Even so, I believe there would have still been the strength to land the fish had I been given the chance, as I have full faith in the brand of line I use (Berkeley XTS 10lb, as reviewed in Barbel Fisher 34).

My confidence had taken a battering and I dearly needed to land a fish to get into the groove, so another four hour trip after work saw me settle into what I had called the 'Willow' swim at 8PM, after spending some time in the 'Stump' for a 4 3/4lb chub. The bait was swung into the deeper water along the margin, and fifty minutes later the tip moved slowly round. The strike met little resistance; however it didn't feel like a chub, so a

smile came to my face as a beautiful, small, perfectly conditioned barbel slid over the net.

August

I chose to continue to fish the same stretch of the river Loddon, feeling that I was getting to grips with it. The challenge was still in my reach. Fishing conditions changed as the rivers became gin clear and flowed at their normal summer levels, filling with masses of weed both streamer and cabbage, choking some swims to a point that finding a clear hole became difficult.

Sunday 5th

My first trip of the month and my confidence was on the up. Dropping into one of the smaller, out of the way swims at 6.45pm on a warm, sticky evening, the bait was lowered over the reeds, by the undercut in six feet of water. Sitting back from the rods in the shade of a small tree, the waiting game began. As it approached 8.00 PM, I was getting itchy feet trying

to decide if I should stay or go. I collapsed the chair and stood back a little while, pondering, lost in thought. A screaming reel brought me back to the moment. The fight wasn't what I expected and within a minute a large looking barbel hit the net.

As I lay the barbel onto the mat it became obvious why it had performed so badly. It had the size of a twelve or thirteen pound specimen, but its appearance was of an old fish, ragged fins, its colour was almost white/grey and the belly was empty. I felt sorry for having caught her as she looked like she was on her last fins. Weighing her quickly, and taking one quick picture, I slid a 9lb 15oz fish back to her watery home.

Tuesday 14th

Fishing the same swim I decided to fish two rods, feeling that it wasn't too cramped; one rod was fished to the position of 5th August, and the other against the reeds on the right hand side of the swim, with a bait cast along the margin towards the willow. I sat concentrating on the upstream rod thinking that would be the one to respond first, which as we all know is bad angling, and I woke up from a daydream as the pin on the other rod brought me back to reality. Upon lifting into the fish, it quickly dawned that it was a good fish, but as I was holding it hard to prevent it running into the roots below, something happened that left me sick. It has been many, many years since it has happened, so when the tackle came back without a hook length and a curly ended main line, I knew the knot had slipped on the swivel. I test every knot I tie so have no reason why this occurred and simply had to accept the loss, however bad I felt.

September

The summer water levels

remained for the month of September and I continued to plug away at the river Loddon stretch until the third week, when I felt it was time to return to the upper St. Pats. which had treated me so badly during the first week of the season.

Saturday 22nd

I didn't know what drew me to the chosen swim, every time I had looked at it earlier in the season it felt as though my name was on it. Hidden away from the swims either side, a bank hardly trodden, and a bank of nettles and other weeds to hide you from others walking past. Arriving at 4PM, I took fifteen minutes or so to check how the current moved and to guess the placement of any snags. There was a pronounced crease as the weed became less dense slightly downstream which I felt would be the best bait position. I was able to use a four swan shot link, helping me to create a slack line over the tail of the weed without dislodging the bait. Sitting back, hidden from view all was right with the world as I watched the rod tip for signs of life. Thirty minutes later I was disturbed by a group of fighting swans coming through the narrow stretch of water in front of me. "That's my fishing gone for the day" I thought but that lasted only a micro second as the rod tip pulled round. Not a massive fish but as it was my first from the upper St. Pats, weighing 6lb 9oz, I was still pleased to have caught so quickly, however no more followed that day.

I didn't return to this stretch for seven days, blanking on the Loddon, so landing another barbel and two nice chub in four hours fishing kept my spirits up.

October

A month of high hopes, confidence at its peak and belief the fish will continue to come. It was a month of

being unsettled however, not sticking to any one stretch and with an ever decreasing number of hours to fish, I was up against it. As the evenings started to draw in, the time spent on the bank became more precious, as not being one who enjoys after dark fishing, I normally pack up just into dark or at the most an hour being the longest spent on the bank. So, apart from the Barbel Society fish in on the river Kennet's Lower Benyons' at the beginning of the month, no session lasted longer than three hours.

Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th

I had been asked by Pete Reading to support John Found and Phil Smith over the weekend, as he was away fishing at the Avon Project fundraiser. The two days passed quickly, and it wasn't until afterwards that I realised that I only really fished for no more than four hours each day. The only fish caught were on the Saturday, and I was fortunate to land one of 5lb or so from my second swim. I had been forced into a move by the rising river flooding my swim, and foolishly I was wearing short boots. I decided to go to the top of the stretch, and whilst sorting myself out, I dropped a bait fifteen feet out on a gentle crease. I was still busy sorting things out when the tip pulled round softly. A short fight saw me landing a beautiful small fish, giving me hopes for more. Over another three hours, small knocks were shown on the rod tip, but nothing which suggested a pick up, so I spent the rest of the day socialising.

Sunday 14th

Another quick fish from the upper St. Pats. I had only been fishing for an hour, when an 8lb 2oz barbel gave the three foot twitch we all love. I was pleased with the

capture, as the size was on the up. I was hoping for the doubles to appear.

Several other fish came out throughout October but nothing of real interest.

November

The time of year when personal bests have graced my net on two occasions, and I so wanted the same to be this year too. Well, only getting out for twelve hours over six trips in the first two weeks, my feet haven't been near a river bank since. The nearest was on the 25th to look at the rising torrent that the river Loddon had become. If I had been feeling brave, a short stretch was fishable at lunch time, but in hindsight the right decision was made as the river continued to create a lake of the cornfields, flowing too powerfully to wade to safely. So, no fish came my way and at the time of writing in early December, the hard frost on top of the high levels are not too promising for at least a few weeks, including for chub too as the water is so coloured .

So where has this left me? The results are what I wished for but I wanted more.

Looking ahead to the coming winter my thoughts have taken a heaviness, as though a fog has descended, the chill in the air slows the mind and motivation needs to be stoked like logs on an open fire. There is the satisfaction that I have achieved, yet still more is called for and the struggle to go out in weather conditions will be there until mid-February when the prospects are better. However I won't get much time then either, as my wife has booked our annual trip to Goa from 23rd Feb to 8th March, so I just have to hope the last week of the season will come good. I will tell you about that maybe at another time.