

A 12lb 8oz from  
Wallingford B in  
January 2017



# FROM ETERNITY HERE AND BACK AGAIN

*Ramblings of a frustrated barbel angler*

**OVER THE YEARS OF WRITING FOR BARBEL FISHER, APART FROM THE FIRST ARTICLE SUBMITTED, THE WORDS SEEMED TO FLOW EFFORTLESSLY; A FINISHED PIECE WOULD BE COMPLETED IN A COUPLE OF DAYS IF NOT ONE.**

The easiest have been those related to reasons for captures, yet the motivation to write from the heart has frustrated me to return to the why.

Why do we fish, what are we trying to achieve, is there a common goal for us as fishermen?



# Y TO GAIN ? angler?

It seems like an eternity since I was birthed into this world, with no thoughts discernibly my own, unable to communicate via word, getting attention with screams, crying and production of bodily waste! What is it that gave the individual human being the capability to have a brain



which thinks too much or just carries on with the same old same old? From nothing we came yet to everything we become! When we think of barbel fishing it is no different to life and its bewildering confusion, each and every one who participates in the pursuit of barbel as quarry suffers the same fate as those who chase other dreams, fishing or otherwise.

As a young man, my mother constantly complained that I was seeking the meaning of life in my navel, wanting to know who I was and what my purpose in life was. I spent hours gazing into discussion that created the centre of the universe as a puddle outside the front door. Fishing somehow kept my sanity and somewhere in the far distant past I caught my first barbel, a fish that kept beckoning me, a fish that rescued me from the personal hell of the loneliness of the carp angler.

No dig intended as those who knew me as "Creeping Jesus" will testify I didn't spend days on the lakes (never owning a bed chair or a bivvy), I would rove about in the Colne valley catching fish I never caught (I never



did catch a 36pounder from Broadacres!) and of course some I did. I acknowledge that all styles of angling have their own rational, each angler following their dream. The wish to achieve the goal of reaching the heights of personal bests or even a national record. Which is the more important, my dream or yours? My goal isn't important to you, should I really care about yours.

As Hobbes states in his writing Leviathan Part 1-of Man in 1651, "If two men desire the same thing, which never less they cannot enjoy they become enemies". The difficulty we are faced with is that to achieve a personal goal we may need to be selfish, looking at a narrow view of the world only included within our self.

With this article I am

returning to the themes I vented in past Barbel Fisher magazines, what is our motivation in what we do? Are we seeking to catch the biggest with no regard for others or are we attempting to improve our fishing for self and others? This thought process came about from looking at my past writings and of others discussing what is the perfect bait. We all spend time trying to find the answers only to end up gazing into our own navel again! Is there a perfect bait that will catch anything that swims? Would we want such a beast anyway?

Over the first four weeks of the 2016/17 season I hooked fish on three different baits, all good in their own right, yet would I have not caught on any of them on the same day? Did I



**Can't we smile for the small ones too**

**"I fished two different stretches of river, each with a character of their own affected by the numbers of fellow anglers present"**

need to be using the specific bait on the hook. Which is the common denominator, being on feeding fish which will eat any bait presented correctly, or being a better angler than the next man?

Man seeks the impossible, and for those of us old enough to remember films "The Holy Grail" and "The Meaning of Life", the memories of the laugh at ourselves humour created by writers of "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and "Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy" help us realise we take ourselves far too seriously. Is finding, as quoted in "Hitch Hikers of the Galaxy" the answer to be "42" and that mice have been our superior beings ruling the universe all along really that stupid after all? There is a risk of BURN OUT in our quest to obtain fulfilment in any action we take, a painful realisation that purpose has been torn out of our belly, leaving us empty, devoid of the

happiness that we achieved catching the fish of dreams.

Recently while fishing a small club lake, I entered into a discussion of rambling with a fellow angler and he informed me of another named local angler who has now given up fishing for barbel, even he is finding it difficult and has started fishing for roach instead! This is a contradiction as in our neck of the woods roach, better stamp ones anyway, are likely to be harder to catch than barbel! However, is a change as good as a rest? Or is variety the spice of life that flavours the quest? Are we too inclined to become obsessed with one goal when seeking achievement in several may be the moderator that keeps the mind sane?

Fishing has been a big part of my life since the age of nine, detours have been taken through the years however, always staying relatively close to

return, yearning to drink the spirit of the time spent at the waterside. Having mostly spent those hours in solitude, not being a social angler, I was able to gain access into a world full of wonderful creatures that if patient, allow us to watch and breathe in their beauty. The rabbit sitting under my rod only feet away from me, the voles and field mice eating dropped grains of hemp at my feet, many more including watching our quarry gliding effortlessly in the watery depth. At times it would feel evident that catching fish was the secondary gain, just being there engrossed in the magic of the moment, with the creatures, the sounds of nature (not always there being obscured by the human made noise nearer than we would like) and primarily being at peace with the surrounds matters more.

During the summer of 2016 I fished two different

stretches of river, each with a character of their own affected by the numbers of fellow anglers present. My preference would be towards the quieter piece of water as in numbers of anglers, where so far this season only one other angler has been seen and all the majority of my barbel have come from. However, there is a downside caused by idiots riding scrambling bikes in the fields behind and generally making a nuisance of themselves. Do we need to make sacrifices to score the goal and win the game, or do we go elsewhere?

The other water is closely guarded by those who fish it and is bathed in its past glories; however it has done fish of over 16lb this season already (August 2016). But being a short stretch the numbers of anglers wanting to get into the three or four "going swims" makes it feel like a circus. I don't feel as though I can relax, always looking over my shoulder and making a mad dash from the car to get into them makes it appear more like a race than a pleasant day by the river!

Do I give up on stretches like these to find my Holy Grail found in my imagined world of perfection? A piece of water so pure, so clear, no sound of planes or cars just the singing of birds and wild creatures. It does exist but it is not unknown, it is part of someone else's reality or dream, continuing to be so as others find it also. In this modern world, the chances of finding unfished and untouched rivers is but a pipedream to be unrealised as making a perfect cup of tea! Destiny clouded vision will delude each of us to believe that we are able to keep "our" swim or swims to ourselves, when in the heart, it is known this is not so.

If fishing is a numbers game, who do we compare ourselves to? If one angler is fishing the River Wye

all season catches several hundred barbel is that comparable to another fishing the harder stretches of the River Loddon in Berkshire who catches on average one fish each month? The Loddon fish are likely to all be double figure fish approaching 16lb (or more), the Wye fish average high singles!

My fishing is done in daylight on small rivers, all of which if you listen to the grapevine fish best at night. There is little contact between myself and those nocturnal anglers so information of captures are difficult to find out, however is it important anyway? If the reasons for knowing are to understand size and health of the barbel population that would seem good, but if it is for self-gain in catching the biggest at all costs with no thought for the fish or others fishing, we are becoming another part of the problem our rivers are suffering at the hands of man!

**Before starting the closing ramble I feel a header note is required:**

*Each individual has the right to express their thoughts, all need to be responsible and able to appreciate the responses given if different from our own; so below is my own personal take on a very emotive subject and I accept many will disagree with what I have written, however may I ask that it is not taken as a personal attack upon your views and if it does create discussion may it take place in a non-threatening manner.*

One of the wild creatures that I find beautiful is the otter, an animal that takes a lot of bad press from us as anglers. It is acknowledged that semi-tame otters have been released into the wild and have caused havoc on rivers and lakes across the country. As a group anglers have been portrayed

as being anti otter, and generally behave in a way that would strengthen that argument. However, have we tried to look at the full picture of what is causing the difficulties our fishing suffers from, not blaming a creature unable to answer for itself?

Why are otters attacking large barbel and carp, and is it happening as much as some suggest? In historical times, a couple of decades ago, their favoured food source was eel, a fish that many anglers aren't too pleased to catch, however there has been a major decline in their population. This has meant predators such as the otter (and inland cormorants) have had to eat something else. So what became the next easy prey? Large fat carp and barbel fed on diets of unhealthy pellets (this is still unproven to many anglers, however the use of food stuffs meant for captive fish for the table needs to be addressed), are one of the new sources alongside birds and rodents.

I know the previous paragraph has upset a few reading this, so to balance the argument may I list other reasons I believe are relative to the decline of our favoured species :-

- a) Overuse of phosphates and other farming chemicals running off into the rivers.
- b) Over abstraction of water from our rivers.

- c) Bad flood planning (local or otherwise).

- d) Plastic particles in washing and cleaning products entering the watertable and entering the food chain via the small invertebrates.

- e) Bad handling and return of barbel by a (I hope) minority of anglers – I will acknowledge this is not a blanket cause however education does still need to take place to protect the barbel and other hard fighting fish in British waters.

- f) Silting of the spawning gravels.
- g) The introduction of signal crayfish.
- h) The invasion of European inland cormorants.
- i) If there are other causes please feel free to complete the list, it is I believe endless...

May I suggest that **no one** problem in itself is responsible for the decline in barbel numbers, but it is a combination of all or some of the factors that equal the sum. We all in some way or other are part of the answer and the cause, yet how many of us will acknowledge it? Unfortunately, human nature is, and has always been selfish, even before Hobbes, man has found reasons to hate and fight, excuses for our own failings, not wanting to take ownership of their lacking, always wanting to be seen as the strongest, the best.

The difficulty of writing

an article such as this won't make me friends, it may appear that I am preaching on my little soapbox, however the purpose is not to attack, it is to create positive constructive discussion. Looking for a way out of the box, not a way to become more tangled in the packaging.

There will I fear never be a mindset of joined up thought, yet we have to accept the difference of opinion, the right to freedom of speech without fear of reprisal. Having a Society that pulls individuals from all walks of life, political and religious beliefs towards a common interest that is fishing for barbel; gives an opportunity for us to work together and not against others. Our voice is important in the grand scheme of life of Britain, is it possible to drop the differences and fight a good fight together.

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