

Barbeeldag

"Cees informed me about an event that he had created last year that was basically designed to help promote barbel fishing in Holland"



Now there's a motley crew!



Report

This trip was really born on the banks of the river Severn, at Pixham, earlier in the year of 2016 when Cees Van Dongen had arranged his very own barbel fishing tour of UK rivers. I remember meeting him for the first time: I was graced with a big, friendly, Dutch smile and continental man-hug.



Cees is a fabulous man; highly intelligent and glows with a passion for river angling, he has the frame of a racing whippet and a hair-do that can only be matched with the silveriness of Philip Schofield's barnet – if that is at all humanly possible?

We spent two great days together, along with my good friend Rich Garner, in search of those ever-elusive lower Severn barbel. Unfortunately, with the very cold weather front that had decided to creep over the British Isles that week, it became nigh-on impossible to hook a plump winter Severn barbel. It was so dire, I dug out some of the spare

lures that I had stashed in the "Barbel-Bus" and tried my best to hook a pike. This turned out to be a good decision as I slipped the net under a delightful, fat Severn pike later that day.

As the gruelling, bitter, hours passed by and the sun started to kiss the horizon and slide below the infamous 'Green Door' swim, I came to the decision to waddle back to the campervan and spend the evening with Cees, drinking wine and talk about all things fishing.

That night, Cees, informed me about an event that he had created last year that was basically designed to help promote barbel fishing in Holland, as it is still, relatively speaking, in its infancy. Obviously, I

thought this was a bloody fantastic idea and accepted his invitation to make the journey over on the continent to represent the Barbel Society at the event. The seed was planted.

Emails were circulated and many discussions were had, the adventure was planned, and my companions for the road trip came in the shape of Rich Garner and Dan Whitelock – and those two are funny shapes, that's for sure! Prime male specimens nonetheless.

The 14th day of September came around fast and before I knew it, I was chugging over the Welsh hills on my way to collect Dan from somewhere in near Peterborough, or thereabouts. We had come

up with the sneaky decision that if I left a day early we could squeeze in an afternoon fishing session on his local river – the Nene. Yet another decision that turned out to be a good one as we hooked into the barbel that day. Unfortunately, I lost a rather big fish that I had spotted feeding just a few metres downstream when I walked over the bridge at the bottom of the fishery. Life wasn't going to be cruel to me that day though as I was rewarded with a lovely small barbel whilst leap frogging swims on my way back up to see Dan before sundown. Before I had the chance to get there though I had a phone call from a rather excited individual,

so excited he had called me whilst playing the fish! The perks of using a modern, state of the art coffee grinder for a fishing reel I suppose – you’ve got the time and comfort to get your phone out of your pocket. On approaching the swim, it wasn’t just the lifting of the net that confirmed he had landed a beautiful specimen barbel but the beaming smile on his face also. The adventure really had begun.

We swiftly shot down the motorway back to Dan’s home to be greeted by his lovely wife and some man sized portions of food - a bottle of wine was devoured and it was time for the sack. It would have been a lot nicer to blame the heat for not sleeping well but I’ve

come to the conclusion it was the bait I had on board the campervan; Adam Sheriff from Severn Valley Barbel Products had very kindly sponsored our journey to Europe, so there were kilos and kilos of bait that had been simmering in the southern sun all afternoon - I could have come out of my camper at 4:30am smelling a lot better if I had spent the night sleeping with my head in the toilet, I reckon.

We made our way cross-country and were both treated to a fantastic sunrise as we arrived in Harwich. All seemed to be going smoothly until customs pulled us over for a spot check. Myself and Dan did jokingly pre-warn the officer about the stench he



First Nene barbel

was about to be faced with, but he kept a stern face as he went for the door handle. Needless to say, he took two steps back as the wall of stench collided with his face. hilariously, his cheeks

puffed up and it seemed he lost the power of speech: I’m fairly certain he asked if I was carrying any meths! Dan assures me it was ‘knives’!. He hurriedly closed the door and couldn’t shuffle



Sunrise on the way to Harwich

“It wasn’t just the lifting of the net that confirmed he had landed a beautiful specimen barbel but the beaming smile on his face”



Dan's 9-12 from the Nene, a superb start to the adventure!

us back in the van quick enough! We laughed and laughed and laughed, right up until we heard there was a malfunction with two of the four engines on the ferry. We were going to suffer a slight delay: the captain had to radio in a tugboat to pull us out of port as the boat had lost all side thrust and could only go backwards or forwards - thankfully it wasn't too long before we were going forwards and we were debating whether we were embarking on a fishing journey or one of those Top Gear road trip specials.

The voyage across the water was a long but enjoyable one and we finally connected with the dock in Hoek Van Holland. Still debating the ridiculous price of the breakfast on the ferry, we cruised through the lanes of Holland and arrived in Veessen around 8:30pm. By then we weren't debating breakfast anymore but my dodgy driving on the wrong side of the road and navigational skills of the stupid roundabouts! It was dark as we pulled into town and as we did, a wily, silver fox crept out from the bushes ahead. We were greeted with wide open arms and big smiles; it was Cees. As we decided on our camping spot for the week Cees filled us in on the area and fishing. By now I was pretty knackered though and thought the better of going fishing, so I grabbed a bottle of dodgy Shiraz and joined the Dutchman on the riverbank for a chat whilst Dan got straight into tackling the river in the dark.

Waking up Friday morning feeling refreshed and with a bounce in my step, I was greeted by Dan rolling out of his bivvy; unfortunately, there were no fish to report.

So, a morning of smoking far too many cigarettes and scratching the backside plodded on by. I forgot to get the red carpet out for

the TV stars' arrival, but Rich rolled on in by midday and the usual micky-taking and laughter preceded for a short while, before he pulled the fishing tackle out of his pristine new motorwagon and got involved with the river. More and more anglers were now turning up for the big event taking place the following day and with that there were plenty of handshakes and introductions going on. Naturally, it didn't take too long before someone

mentioned 'zee bar' and as the fishing was very slow, plus being the sociable man that I am, it wasn't long before I found myself with a nice cold beer in hand and enjoying the Dutch sunshine. The hours flew by and as we exchanged fishing tales and trophy shots it became apparent that I was amongst some very fine European anglers.

The friendships formed that night over food and a few drinks were a perfect example of why barbel

fishing is very dear to my heart. English, Italians, French, Belgian, German and Dutch; every one of them "a brother of the angle" as Izaak Walton might have once written.

THE EVENT

The big day was upon us and after a good few coffees and plenty of paracetamol we were in Society mode and looking fresh and dare I say, professional!

Cees and others have created a great format,



the Barbeldaag event is something they should all be very proud of. Rich, Dan and I were very impressed and as the day went on I believe there were as many as eight hundred people walking the banks as the demo anglers tried their best to catch the Ijssel barbel and display their preferred

techniques and tactics. Mr Magazine Editor was looking a little nervous in the morning as he was due to make a presentation about the Barbel Society and all it has achieved over the last twenty years. To add to that, there were some serious tech issues and I was needed for a couple of hours to help

rectify the problem. A quick bit of jiggery-pokery and we had his presentation looking great and ready to go again. The BS membership can be proud of Dan's performance knowing that he delivered a fantastic slideshow and done us all a top service. I was certainly proud standing there at the back listening to

it all, whilst having to press all the buttons and move the slides for him! The handling code video went down a treat in the middle of the talk, too.

With the important piece out of the way I was free to go about my fishing again and spend the last couple of hours on the bank befriending passers-by.

"I believe there were as many as eight hundred people walking the banks as the demo anglers tried their best to catch the Ijssel barbel"



Better late than never to the barbel party!



The relief of that first fish soon developed in to a beautiful romance



Waiting on the Ijssel

The fishing was slow all round with just a handful of barbel being landed on the day, but it didn't matter to me too much as I was busy teaching people how to cast a centrepin at range in the field behind, plus, I probably had a better chance of catching a cow rather than a barbel anyhow.

As the event slowly came to a close and the anglers packed away their gear for the day, a few of us convened at the restaurant for refreshments and to say goodbye.

I'll say it again: Cees and the others have created something they should be very proud of.



Later that evening we settled into some serious barbel fishing time; we were two days in and yet to catch any barbel and that dreaded thought of blanking was starting to fester in my mind. I had planned out a route all the way across the continent and over in to Australia if we failed to catch. I couldn't have faced the embarrassment of coming home without catching any barbel - can you imagine?! The thought didn't last too long though as in the distance, around 9pm, I could hear Dan's bite alarm sending some form of Morse code. What a relief! It was the sound we'd all been waiting for: the sound of a barbel screaming off downstream. Rich and myself brought the rods in and legged it to Dan's krib for assistance. As we made preparations for photographing the first fish of the trip, Dan set about weighing the barbel. Amazingly, but not surprisingly, it just crept into double figures by two ounces. What a fantastic specimen to get us going it was! Shortly after, I landed a fine looking barbel myself followed up by another

smaller one from Dan's swim. Now, I've tried my best not to mention the countless big snotties we banked in between and before these barbel were hooked, but, for Saturday at least, Dan was certainly the "Bweam Machine", "King Of The Snotters" - he even weighed one of them as he was that impressed with those Dutch bin lids! The laughter erupted and no doubt was heard for many miles upstream when he declared it out loud "six pound summit".

Now, I'm not sure if it was the laughter that made the river police aware of our presence or just the sheer smell of Dan and his bream infested landing net, but it must have been around midnight that Rich popped off to the ladies room that was situated on the campsite not too far way. Rather disturbingly a jet black rubber boat containing three men in army gear eerily made its way upstream with no lighting and a rather stealthy engine, that is until they arrived opposite Rich's krib. On came the lights as they opened up the throttle, gave a sharp 90 degree turn and hammered



it towards the swim. I peered downstream in disbelief and came to the conclusion Mr Garners gear was getting 'alf inched! I sat there for a split second wondering what kind of mushrooms I had put in the spaghetti Bolognese earlier, but it was actually happening. Quite a lot of running and swearing took place on my way to the swim in the hope that they would bugger off before I got there, yet, they just stood, and waited with the torches. As I slowed down thinking this wasn't going to go well, I could just make out their uniforms, much like EA officers back in the UK! They still hadn't replied to my barrage of expletives but by the time I made it

over the rocks I could see one of them waving around his ID. The relief I felt as he asked for a permit is unexplainable. Seconds after, Rich arrived slightly out of breathe wondering what the hell was going on. All was sorted rather quickly and as they could see we weren't poachers they made their way back onto the boat. That was until Dan piped up asking why they didn't want to see his permit; their reply was something that makes me laugh even now: "you have an honest face Sir, we don't need to". Now, if you know of Dan, an honest face he has not! We all laughed

out loud as they continued with their journey upstream whilst engaging in a bit of banter with our Danny waving around this permit in the pitch black.

With all the commotion over, the lads turned in at around 1am, but I just about had enough in the tank for another two or three hours. Annoyingly, the curse of bream continued during those three hours and filled my landing net with layers of snot. I had seen enough as it approached 3am and began to pack down my tackle. I had left one rod out just in case of a late take...wallop! She screamed off upstream!

I lifted into something that felt quite special, the fish had gathered pace and was proving very hard to turn so plenty of swearing and kicking stones filled the night as the fish took me around the krib and we parted ways. After a nice lay in, I woke up on Sunday to find the guys were up and at it on the banks already. I joined them a tad later in the afternoon as I was taking things at more leisurely pace now that we had got stuck into some fish. Rich was still struggling to locate the barbel, whilst our Danny had three within quick succession. It was a glorious day with blue skies

and bright sunshine, the fish were feeding and we slowly made our way through the ide and masses of bream. All attention was beginning to shift on to me though as I started to haul out more and more of those snotty, smelly bin lids.

Cees and the others were now regularly connecting with barbel and it seemed as if the river was waking up. The day ticked on by with plenty of action, I made another concerted effort into the evening in the hope of a big one coming by again but could only muster up two smaller barbel. Poor old Rich was having a nightmare and



It was all too much for Rich and Dan



Rich being patient

still couldn't get a bite!!

Monday came quick enough, and today had to be Rich's day, I feared for his sanity. We had a lovely BBQ breakfast and set off to the shops to stock up on supplies whilst Dan stuck some more fishing hours in. Now, I would have hoped we returned back to the fishery earlier, and I've heard of taking the scenic route before, but thanks to Rich's satellite navigation system, or his Google inputting skills, we ended up driving 20 miles in the opposite direction of where we wanted to go. This felt like it wasn't going to Rich's day after all.

After stubbornly refusing



Cees with another perfect IJssel fish



Catfish anglers of the IJssel

to move from his krib over the weekend, Rich finally, and thankfully, gave in on the last day, there was no choice about it; he was sitting on a right duff one and slogging it out there again would have surely resulted in a few weeks in a padded cell. I joined him on his krib for the afternoon as my fishing was now done for this journey; it was all about relaxing, taking a few photos and enjoying the company I was fortunate enough to have on the banks

with me that afternoon. The sun beamed down on us all day and it really was a great one for kicking back and doing nothing before our mammoth journey home. The clock struck 2pm and just as I was starting to fear the worst for Rich, something truly wonderful happened: Garners rod doubled over and the reel started singing - it was a bloody barbel! Rich was in to one! For me, this was the fish of the trip, a beautiful fish too, but the

relief that came with it was, and is, unexplainable. We all gathered round to congratulate him, I snapped some photos, Rich gave it a kiss and slipped the fish back into the IJssel. Phew, mission accomplished!!

Cees mentioned that as it was our last day, he would like to take out us for dinner, a farewell meal. Naturally we took him up on his very kind offer and found ourselves in the restaurant later that day scoffing the finest pieces of beef that I've tasted in a

long time. Another evening of fishing tales and laughter unfolded. That was until Dan offered to show the waitress his chicken recreation out of napkin. Thinking it was going to be a quick trick the poor girl agreed to be entertained for a moment. I recall it going on for around ten minutes as Dan ran into as spot of bother in the technical stages of chicken building, when he did produce his fine work of art the lovely waitress gave him the most delightful of acknowledgements and politely slipped away. I don't think that there was one person not laughing in the restaurant and I hope to see that very chicken on the bar wall next year.

We made our way back and as Rich now had a taste for the European barbel he decided to have a few more "one last casts" – the curse was well and truly lifted as he managed to stick another couple more lovely fish in the net! We celebrated a little back at camp with some wine and made sure we got plenty of beauty sleep to stand us in good stead for our looming journey.

We set off the next morning, albeit on the wrong side of their roads again, after saying our goodbyes. It was quite a pleasant journey right up to the point we approached those horrendous roundabout things within roundabouts again – I still can't figure

them out now – but after a few wrong turns we finally got to the check-in gates. Dan with his "honest face" seemed to attract the attentions of customs again as the officer climbed in the back of the campervan to check we weren't carrying anything or anyone we shouldn't be. I was mightily impressed that this officer actually entered the van this time; a swift 180 degree turn, mumble and deep breath of fresh air outside confirmed he got a good waft of the pungent pong, except that this time it was the aroma of warm bream nets and unhooking mats. Needless to say it wasn't too much longer before we were sitting on deck in the sunshine and as I watched Dan enjoy his pickled herring sandwiches, I thought to myself, should that even be a sandwich?

I can't thank Dan and Rich enough for coming with me on this journey. You're

both stars and it wouldn't have been the same without you. Or half as funny! A big thank you must go to Adam Sheriff and Steve Musset for sponsoring our trip with kilos upon kilos of bait. www.SVBP.co.uk. Please check them out, a fantastically potent bait that served us very well in the hardest of conditions at times. Thank you guys. And finally, a massive thank you must go to Cees Van Dongen – an absolute gentleman who made sure we were well looked after from start to finish. A magnificent man.

If any of the Society membership wish to take a trip over to Holland and beyond in the future, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We can put you in contact with the right people to help ease your planning and make the experience a great one.

Here's to next year!
Tight lines.

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Another one for Rich on the last night

