

Season
2003 - 2004

My Mistress, My Season

After the long awaited build up to the new season, I was busting a gut to get back on the rivers again.

During the lay off, I visited several stretches of the Wye, which were new to me, and found some exciting areas that I promised myself a return to after June. One in particular caught my eye and I found myself returning on a number of occasions to enjoy the peace and quiet of what appears to be a very promising stretch.

June soon arrived, and the sixteenth turned out to be a glorious day. The sun shone, the banks were covered in dense nettle beds and tall Himalayan balsam and the heady aroma of wild

garlic added to the overall feel of a new season about to begin.

I arrived on the banks of the Wye, around 9.30am, and found Ray, John and Silk lazing in chairs in the margins, basking in the early sun. The river was still carrying extra water from the heavy rains that preceded the arrival of summer but was clear and looked in good form. I found myself in a slight quandary and opted to fish with the lads initially as it was good to have a social after the lay off.

I soon found however,

that I was over excited and couldn't get into the swing of things, so left them to it to search out some barbel in a swim I had never fished in the summer. The day was to be a short one due to family commitments and after a few hours staring at a motionless tip I tackled up with the new trotting rod and centrepin, I had chosen as replacements for the tackle I lost at the end of last season and waded out above the swims the gang had been fishing earlier. Things had become a tad boisterous on the arrival of Mike and a gathering was taking place on the bank, so I made the most of the opportunity to plunder the top of the swim whilst no-one was looking. It didn't last long before the calls of "poacher" were heard from the Wye fishers lounging in the sun and I was heckled about my apparent lack of

fishing ability!

After ruining what was a perfectly good swim, I made my way ashore and headed home biteless but happy to be angling again.

The next day saw me back on the river again this time with an old friend who I hoped would be catching his first barbel. By lunchtime though disaster had struck as my Insight rod called time on the session by snapping clean in two! The sound of the rod breaking raised heads all around me and I looked on in amazement. How I do these things I don't quite know but its getting to be a worrying habit.

A pub lunch was in order and after a pint of Guinness in the Saracens Head I got back into things with Mike very generously lending me one of his precious hand built Peregrine rods to fish with. Things looked up

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slightly after that and I opened my account with a barbel of about 4lbs. My mate Wayne also landed his first Boris, with a whopper of about 100zs! As good a place as any to start I reckon, even if we didn't know it was hooked.

The next session saw me fishing alone and land a chub which was on steroids

when he later found me to tell the tale.

I ended the session with one lost fish which inexplicably fell off and one eel that took a liking to my Meaty Fish Bites. I can only put this capture down to the very high fish oil content that the meat soaks in but despite its eel attracting qualities I shan't give up on

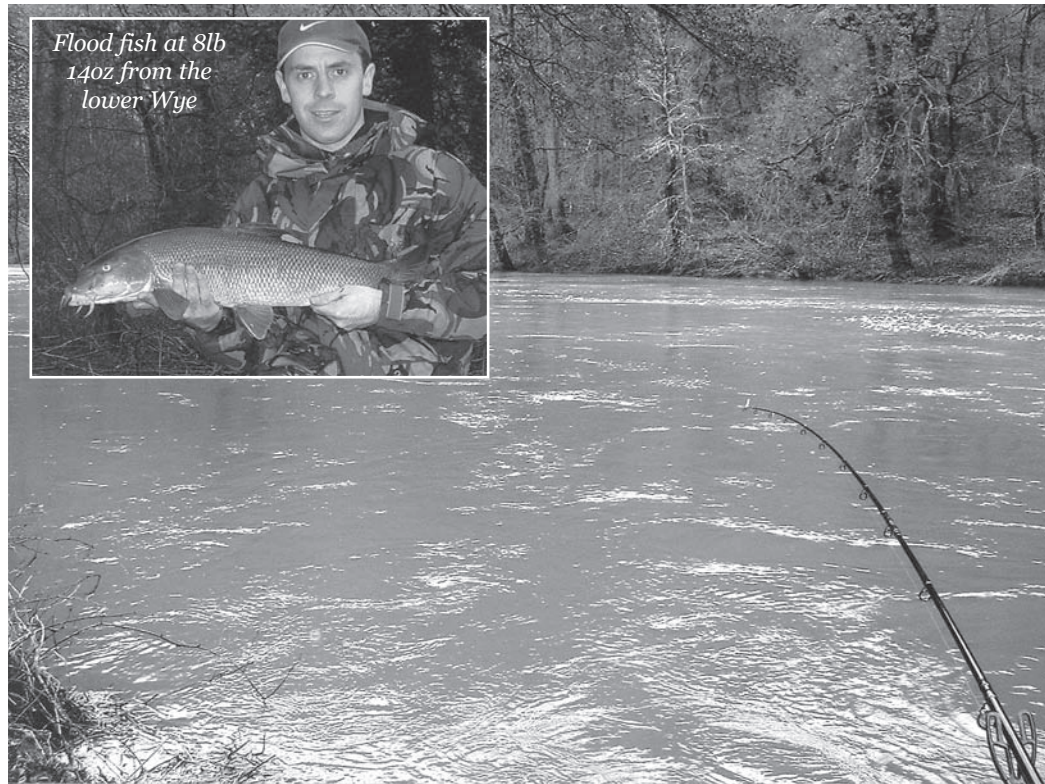
When they eventually got their heads down on the bait I had introduced a couple of hours previously, I still couldn't entice them to take my bait. The best thing about this method though, is that even if you don't catch, it's a great way to spend a few hours.

Soon, it was time for the main event, one which I had

flow very clear and in parts was almost lifeless. I admit to feeling very sorry for it, as it barely trickled in some swims and resembled more of a stillwater than the wonderful river I am so intrigued by. So much so, that one of the northerners (lovely blokes those Trent men, I wouldn't hear a bad word said against them!) wanted to complain that Ray had organised a stillwater barbel weekend and that it wasn't really cricket to do such a thing.

I finished the day down the pub with the majority of fellow BFW'ers, and drowned my blank sorrows with a few pints of the black stuff. Up early the next morning and I set about the river like a whirling dervish, without the whirling! Five a.m. did seem a tad early and it was a very tired angler who sat and enjoyed the beautiful morning that would herald another bright sunny day on the river. After spending most of the morning trickling the feeder fished bait into the pool at the end of a deep glide, I finally connected with a couple of fish. The first being the most amazing chub I have seen. About a pound in weight, it was in mint condition and had the most wonderfully red fins. Both Ray and I were in awe of such a beautiful fish and came to the amateurs agreement it may have been a hybrid but nonetheless it was a fish that I will remember for a very long time. The second turned out to be a barbel and was again a wonderfully coloured fish with very deep gold and brown flanks. The barbel put up a very spirited fight and drew a few meters of 10lb line from the clutch before being netted by Silk. Not my biggest but again I felt I would remember it for a long time as I believed I had caught through hard work and consistency.

I left on the Sunday



*Flood fish at 8lb
14oz from the
lower Wye*

The lower Wye – 16ft above normal levels

and took me ages to extricate it from a bank side weed raft after it plunged headlong towards my feet and stayed there sulking for five minutes until I netted it.

The following Sunday, armed with a new rod which had arrived a few days earlier, I returned to find the forestry gate blocked by a parked car. Whilst venting my spleen at the unattended vehicle I made the acquaintance of Martin, who had turned up, no doubt following my cloud of dust to the river!

A chat revealed we had mutual friends and that Martin intended catching his first float caught barbel. This he successfully did and had a smile as wide as the Wye

it just yet.

July arrived, and with it so did the hot weather. Temperatures began to soar and the river started to lose water at an alarming rate. The coloured water soon flushed through and the fishing (mine at least) became difficult. I persevered in a particular swim but failed to attract any fish whatsoever.

With the river conditions as they were, the next session saw me opting to trot a float through a few pools where the water kept moving at a fair pace but due to my poor technique (which can only get better!) and the large amount of people out enjoying the heat wave, the fish didn't want to know.

been looking forward to with ever-increasing anticipation for a long, long time. It was time for the BFW fish-in. I arrived early on the Friday morning to find Liam and Mark ensconced in a likely looking swim along a set of rapids and pools, which mark the halfway point of the stretch. I quickly moved into my 'chub' peg and with the aid of a bait dropper, put a large bed of bait two thirds of the way out where the water was moving through an otherwise motionless swim. The tactic wasn't to work for me though and I moved down towards the faster water later in the day without so much as a sniff of a barbel.

The river continued to

morning feeling very refreshed and knowing that despite the lack of barbel caught, I had enjoyed the very best of company and had caught a barbel in somewhat difficult conditions. I had even spent some time in a rarely fished swim observing a very large barbel feeding no more than three meters from the bank in very shallow water. This was yet another sight that will remain in my memory as one of those rare moments that allow you to observe the

remember the last time (if ever) I saw barbel behaving like this, and put it down to the change in conditions. One thing for sure, I felt confident as during my carp fishing days, I was a fully paid up member of the "Always cast at showing fish" club. However, after an hour or so of watching the Biblins Barbel Display Team I remembered my plan and hot-footed it to my winter swims. After introducing some feed with the dropper into a channel running fairly

of enduring the obvious signs of fish feeding over my bait, the tip pulled round and I lifted into a fish. My first thoughts of 'chub' were soon challenged as the fish decided to strip some line from the spool and proceed away from me at speed. I enjoyed the short fight and netted a pale looking barbel of around 4lbs a few minutes later. Even on 10lb mainline and a progressive actioned rod, the small barbel insisted on behaving like one of his much bigger brothers and

barbel. It was however, nice to fish a flooded river again and enjoy the confidence that I find comes with the extra water.

A few days later I returned to the same swim and baited up on a similar line. My plan was to give them a fair bit of bait and let it settle, whilst going for a wander to seek out the 'biggun'. The river had been dropping off slowly since my last outing but was still over her usual summer levels and was still coloured to a degree. Again I was full of confidence and set about my plan with enthusiasm. With ten droppers of bait safely deposited, I set off to the home of the monster.

Earlier that week I had prepared a bait the recipe of which Chris Ponsford had kindly shared with me. I was now armed with this and was looking forward to witnessing any reaction from the monster, if she was home that is. Although the water wasn't particularly clear it was fining down enough to allow the bottom to be seen through the first few feet of

"I enjoyed the short fight and netted a pale looking barbel of around 4lbs a few minutes later . . . the small barbel insisted on behaving like one of his much bigger brothers"

behaviour of our magnificent fish close up, which in itself is a very rare occurrence on a big river such as the Wye.

Its typical isn't it, no sooner had I clapped eyes on a barbel fit to grace my net, than the heavens open for seven days, and seven nights, (well not literally of course) and the water goes coloured. That'll be the barbel gods, displeased with me for telling all about 'my' monster. Anyhow, I can't see it now, so instead, I will continue with plan B which is.....erm!

Leaving the monsters to one side, I returned to my beloved river a week later and decided that with the water levels up I could do worse than have a go in one of the winter swims. So ignoring them for a bit (don't ask me why, because I really don't know), I headed to a swim I have yet to fish this season, in the vain hope I could bag a couple. Steve (Juninho) was already ensconced in a peg, which is known to produce a double or two, but was bemoaning the lack of bites. Whilst sitting with him and having a chat, I realised why he was so annoyed. There were barbel leaping clear of the river all over the shop. I can't

close in, I had a wander and continued to marvel at the amazing site of the BBDT, which was performing all over the river.

I returned to the swim a couple of hours later and started having knocks and taps straight away, not to mention the odd liner which had me sitting on my hands in anticipation. After an hour

after removing the hook (barbless) and resting him in the net, without removing him from the water, I slipped him back none the worse for wear. The rest of the evening was spent with me sitting on my hands again as fish after fish hit the line but despite all the activity I packed up as dark began to fall without connecting with any more



A season's best at 9lb 7oz

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water which was all I required. Upon arriving at the swim I could see the gravel bed but no fish. I threw a few pieces of bait into the margin and wandered further upstream, continuing the same process in each swim I came to. I returned to the main swim to find two small chub digging into the gravel trying to locate the bait. I knelt behind some nettles and watched with interest as they enjoyed the freebies I had supplied. Hoping that other fish would appear, I remained hidden and continued to supply further food to the chub that were now gorging themselves on my new bait. This gave me further confidence but I had to keep reminding myself that most chub will eat anything if they feel safe. Hoping this principle would apply to monster barbel, I carried on with the feeding. Despite the obvious attraction of the bait to the chub, no other fish appeared and I left after an hour and returned to dropper some more bait into my swim. I then left this for a further hour and returned to the swim to fish, after using the facilities of the Saracens Head.

About two hours into the session the rod top shot round and a barbel began tearing line from the spool. It was an absolutely



Watch out for snags! **Inset:** Returning a 5lb to the Teme

screaming take and with the fish well hooked I lifted into it and another very spirited barbel was landed. I had to weigh her as she was very long and although appeared lean, the fight she gave belied her size. Five and a half pounds, which I double checked, was the weight. I returned the fish and wondered if she was taking performance enhancing drugs! She was followed by three other barbel of around the same weight, all of which fought much harder than their size would seem to allow.

I left as darkness fell over

the valley, a very happy angler. I had gained a valuable insight into the behaviour of chub, caught more than one barbel in a session and proved to myself

that the new bait mix works, just as I was told it would. Thanks bait guru; I'll keep you informed of my progress. Now where's that monster gone?



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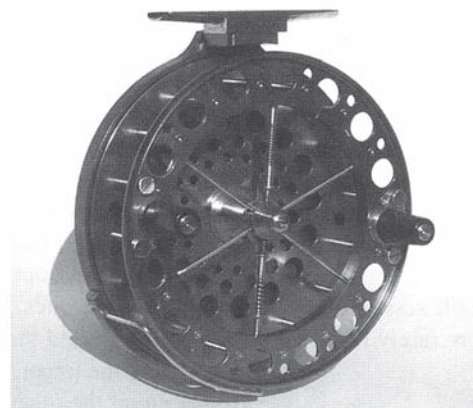
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