

*Dusk at Evesham*



# Ambling Along The Avon

**T**he obvious choice for me being no more than twenty miles away, was the Warwickshire Avon, the question to be answered was where to start?

There had been a few reports in the Angling Press of barbel catches but few details so a bit of detective work was needed.

I decided to do the rounds of the local tackle shops and the names of one or two venues kept cropping up so these would be the obvious places to start.

The evening of the second day of the '99 season found me on the banks of the Avon full of enthusiasm and anticipation. The middle river around Stratford is a delightful place, a real picture postcard scene in the summer.

Tackling up in a likely looking swim, I threaded the nine pound Dyneema braid through the rings of the

After eleven years of enjoyable fishing on the Severn and Teme, I decided it was time to try somewhere different; a new challenge was required to keep me on my toes.

pound and a quarter rod and baited the size four hook with a plain piece of luncheon meat.

Casting out, I settled back to enjoy the fading light of what had been a beautiful early summers day. As dusk approached my senses heightened, I simply willed the tip to fly round and just as the sun started to dip behind the far bank willows, it did!

With the possible exception of the Teme, the ensuing fight was the equal of any barbel I've caught from other rivers and as I slipped the net under my first Avon barbel, a fighting fit sevenpounder, I thought

to myself, just what the doctor ordered!

Always important to succeed quickly on a new river to give you the confidence to mount a sustained campaign.

As darkness fell I made the acquaintance of a gentleman who politely described himself as the bailiff, this fellow was to become a real pain in the backside but for the moment he simply informed me that he did not allow night fishing. I left a happy and contented man and as I drove home the next trip was already being planned.

However, the next couple of sessions proved to be

uneventful save for one lost carp, but I was beginning to get a real feel for the place.

The first week of July found me in a new swim and as dusk approached I felt confident something was going to happen. Bang on nine o'clock the tip wrenched round and I lifted into a powerful fish, no need for a strike on this one. She tore off downstream and I realised I would not be landing this fish from my initial position, the barbel was hugging the bottom on the nearside bank and there was a huge bank of reeds between us. Only one thing for it, so I plunged into the reed bed holding the rod

## *Ambling Along The Avon By Graham Tremble*

high and hoping that I wouldn't disappear without trace! I managed to squelch through the tall reeds until I was in position to net what was obviously a good fish. As I drew the barbel over the net I saw she was a cracker, the scales confirmed nine and a half pounds and I was over the moon.

Before she went back I carefully removed a couple of hooks from less well-prepared anglers, my Dyneema had done its job. I managed a five pounder that fought all of its weight before calling it a day. As I made my way home I couldn't help but wonder if I had stumbled on to a barbel fisher's goldmine.

My next session was memorable on two counts, the weather and a ten-pound carp.

After what had been a lovely summers day, the sky darkened and a storm of biblical proportions broke out with hailstones the size and constitution of marbles, and thunder and lightning crashing all around me. After ten minutes or so the storm abated and I returned to my rods having hidden away from the assorted lightning conductors that had previously been brought in. I continued to fish only after a hasty re-arrangement of my underwear having been scared to death!

Soon my fortitude was

rewarded with a small carp closely followed by an altogether different scrap from a mirror that weighed in at just over ten pounds. As usual the session ended prematurely as I raced back to the car park in an effort to beat the pain in the butt bailiff.

Over the next few sessions I tried another venue with little success, fell down the bank trying to beat the bailiff again and was lucky not to drown as a consequence, and caught a nine-pound common.

I continued to catch barbel from my favoured venue but they were averaging five pounds or so, my heart was set on a double, something I was sure the venue was capable of producing. It was just a case of continuing with the short evening sessions and ringing the changes with tackle and peg.

The end of July saw me settled in what had become a favourite swim on The stretch hair-rigging a piece of meat for a change on the assumption that sometimes changes can do the trick. Immediately I caught a two pounder, quickly followed by a nice seven, and to cap it all a barbel weighing 9-11 finally graced my landing net!

Not unnaturally I thought this hair rig caught beauty would lead to a procession of monster barbel that required



*10-02 from Evesham*

just that little more finesse than my usual hook buried in meat efforts. If only fishing were that simple.

Almost immediately after I began to struggle and a good many blanks came my way. I started to push my luck by staying well into nightfall, not only risking the wrath of Mr Bailiff but getting pestered by the eel population.

In need of a barbel tonic I reverted to my first love, the Teme, and as ever she did not let me down.

This lapse was relatively short-lived and as the summer of the new millennium approached I was making plans once again for the Warwickshire Avon.

The new season started very slowly with just a few small barbel and a rather large carp that slipped the hook as I was about to net him.

By mid July I had decided to try a day ticket stretch further upstream as it was really slow at Stratford.

This turned out to be an interesting choice in so much as I was catching plenty of small chub and barbel but no big ones. I was thus being drawn back to the Stratford venue where I was sure a biggie had my name on it!

My first trip back resulted in a nice fish of 8-12, and subsequent visits produced a seven amongst the smaller barbel.

One interesting moment

saw a double figure carp swim directly under my landing net totally oblivious to the fact that I was landing a barbel at the time, strange creatures!

Mind you the amount and size of the carp in the Avon might surprise the most seasoned of carp anglers.

Once again action began to slow and a pleasure-fishing friend of mine suggested I try a new venue nearer to Bideford, he swore a friend of his had taken two doubles there. I usually treat these tales with a large pinch of salt but when I checked the place out it did look the part with a lovely weir, tree lined banks and a mixture of deeps and shallows. Perfect barbel territory.

Five blanks later and I threw in the towel, beautiful place but I could not get to grips with it.

My friend had another suggestion; I really had to try this place near Evesham. Much against my better judgement I gave it a go and was pleasantly surprised to net a seven pounder first time out. This was slower moving water and bream were present in big numbers and I caught a good few.

While fishing I was advised to try a particular meadow and made a mental note to fish there next time out.

I was glad I did, my first evening session produced five nice barbel, topped by



*First barbel from Tremble's Meadow*

an 8-12 from a snag free swim. Once again the Avon carp made their presence felt in the form of a really big fish that had picked up my corn bait.

Unfortunately after a long battle the massive carp slipped my small hook and that was that.

Barbel were caught regularly from the swim until the October floods arrived, which seemed to scatter the fish. Once again as autumn set in I was drawn back to my beloved Teme.

During the 2001 close season I managed a good deal of bank walking, checking out prospective venues on the Avon, always searching for that certain swim that evoked that special feeling, barbel live here!

Strolling along familiar territory at Stratford and gazing into my favourite swim I wondered to myself just how much easier it would be if I could access the far bank. Having time on my hands, I crossed the river at Stratford and set out to locate the overgrown and unfished meadow on the far side. After an hour following false trails I found the

correct farm track and found myself looking down on to my coveted piece of real estate. The bank side was virtually impenetrable; no one had fished there for years. If only I could obtain permission, I would have one of the best barbel swims on the Avon to myself!

I looked around for the farmhouse to no avail. So I set off to find one and twenty minutes later I found myself outside a likely looking dwelling.

Trying to make myself look respectable I knocked on the door and was greeted by an elderly lady who informed me that the person I needed to speak to lived in the next farm house and she pointed me in the direction of a fine Georgian dwelling half a mile away. Back in the car I drove down the lane and prepared myself for some serious grovelling, at the house I ignored the two large Alsatians who accompanied me to the front door!

Feeling like a cross between Oliver Twist and Uriah Heep I unashamedly begged the question, even offered money,

the stakes were high.

Driving back to Shirley I was in a daze, not only had the owner given me permission to fish, he wouldn't take my money, someone was smiling down on me for sure!

I put in three trips to open up three swims in my favoured area which was quite a feat for an old scrote like me, I named my new haven Tremble's Meadow.

Four days into the season and my first trip to TM was unexceptional save the

twenty-minute walk laden with my usual mountain of gear that nearly killed me.

Tackling up on the heavy side having convinced myself this was the place for my Avon monster I proceeded to baitdropper partblend close in. An hour passed by with one lost fish in a snag, two hours later and still no barbel on my new personal stretch, an ignominious blank was on the cards.

I changed from a ten to eight pound hook length and decided to fish an Elips



*Above: Typical Avon Torpedo!*

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*10-05 from Evesham*



pellet banded on a No.10 Super Specialist.

Immediately the rod hooped round and the heavy gear made short work of a feisty sixpounder. What a relief, no longer a barbel virgin on Tremble's Meadow!

The next day I was back at the Meadow, heavy gear again, pound and three-quarter rod, 10lb Fireline, 8lb Trilene hook length, Drennan size 8 specimen barbless hook with elips pellet attached to the shank via a John Roberts bait band. The partblend in once again with the dropper and an hour into the session and the tip pulls round and I find myself striking into thin air. The pellet had been nicked from the band! Over the next hour this happens four more times. No way could I put four missed bites down to bad luck, so I stopped fishing and put my thinking cap on. I concluded there had to be something wrong with my hook length or more to the point unhooking length!

The fish were sucking in the pellet, turning away which registered the bite and my resultant strike pulled the bait free of the band, that's what I reasoned as the

found myself attached to a powerful fish. This fish went off like a rocket to signal the start of an epic battle that ended with an eleven-pound common carp firmly hooked in the tail in my net!

Frankly that was about as exciting as my sorties to the Avon got in 2001, catching regularly but nothing over seven pound in weight except the carp of course.

I gave the river a miss in 2002 deciding on an Ouse campaign that was spectacularly unsuccessful, but I'll be back

The next year saw me spending lots of time on the Lower Severn where I had some brilliant times as the river fished its head off!

But June '04 arrived and I was ready for another effort on the Avon.

Since my last visit the Angling Press had reported a number of big barbel from the river and I decided to target the Avon for the first two months of the season. With the knowledge and experience I had gained previously, I reasoned that if I focussed hard and was not distracted by the Teme then either the Stratford or Evesham areas should reward me with that elusive

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### “Since my last visit the Angling Press had reported a number of big barbel from the river”

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hook was obviously not finding its way into the fishes mouth. So what was the answer? Obvious, the hook had to be embedded in the bait to improve my nil hooking percentage. Rummaging through the rucksack for some long redundant paste I came across some dodgy luncheon meat, no paste so the meat would have to do.

Embedding my hook into a cube of this meat I cast out again. An hour passed by, one or two knocks on the rod tip then I hit the third and

double I was after.

My first two trips ended in blanks, but third time out at Stratford and success came as three small barbel fell for the halibut pellet that had given me so much success on the Severn.

With more barbel anglers on the river information was easier to come by and I heard that some very big fish had come from my target areas. Success could not be too far away, just a matter of maintaining patience and sticking to my game plan.

My next session at



*My first Avon barbel*

Stratford provided a lively sevenpounder that put up a great scrap in the fast water below the weir pool.

My next trip to Evesham brought me a six-pound barbel but one of the carp lads told me he had caught bigger barbel accidentally at night.

I noted this information but it did give me a dilemma, as there was no night fishing on the stretch, a point the carp angler had chosen to ignore.

I was reluctant to flout the rules and risk losing the fishing, so opted for an earlier start, the following morning I was on the bank at 5-45am.

The early start gave me the pick of the swims and I settled into my favourite that had a huge fallen tree on the inside line. My free lined hair rigged halibut pellet was positioned close to the tree as the underarm cast disturbed the early morning silence.

Ten minutes passed before the rod tip registered that slow deliberate pull that all barbel anglers recognise as a big fish!

In the net she looked all of nine pounds but when the scales read 10-02, I nearly fainted! At long last I had done it, my first Warwickshire Avon double!

What a fantastic feeling, and after a few photos I was fishing once again, it was

only just after six in the morning!

Half an hour later and the rod responds to an identical pull that ends with barbel number two weighing 10-05.

I'm now floating on cloud nine, two doubles in half an hour after the hours and hours I had spent on this river searching for one, it's what fishing is all about I suppose, that great uncertainty.

At nine am. I decided to call it a day after landing two more barbel including a fighting fit fish close on nine pounds. A fantastic session.

The season progressed well for me with many more good-sized fish but unfortunately no more doubles; I must have exhausted my quota on that early morning session.

So in conclusion what is the potential for the Avon?

Well the increase in numbers of both carp and barbel anglers has meant that more information gets through and it is relatively easy to pinpoint productive areas, as for size, well a fifteen came out last season.

But there are still long stretches of this lovely river that have seen very little attention from the specialist angler and that's where you should head for.

It's all there to enjoy, so give it a go, you won't be disappointed.