

Edition 4
Spring 2014

riffo

*Official magazine of the
Association of Barbel Fishers*

HNV Baits for Barbel



Indian Adventures



Association of
Barbel Fishers

0844 2724904

info@wlm-baits.co.uk



**HIGH QUALITY BOILIES PREPARED BY HAND
FRESH BAITS ARE ROLLED TO ORDER
TRADE ACCOUNTS WELCOME – MINIMUM SPEND £100**

**VISIT OUR SHOP AND BROWSE OUR RANGE OF BASEMIXES,
POWDERS, FLAVOURS, ADDITIVES & OILS**

**WE ALSO SUPPLY A VARIETY OF OTHER BAITS INCLUDING
PARTICLES, GROUNDBAIT, CASTERS, MAGGOTS & PELLETS**

OFFICIAL CC MOORE STOCKIST

<http://www.wlm-baits.co.uk>



Book a stretch of the beautiful river Teme, near Worcester, for the day.

Choose from The Haven at Cotheridge or The Bridge fishery at Knightwick.

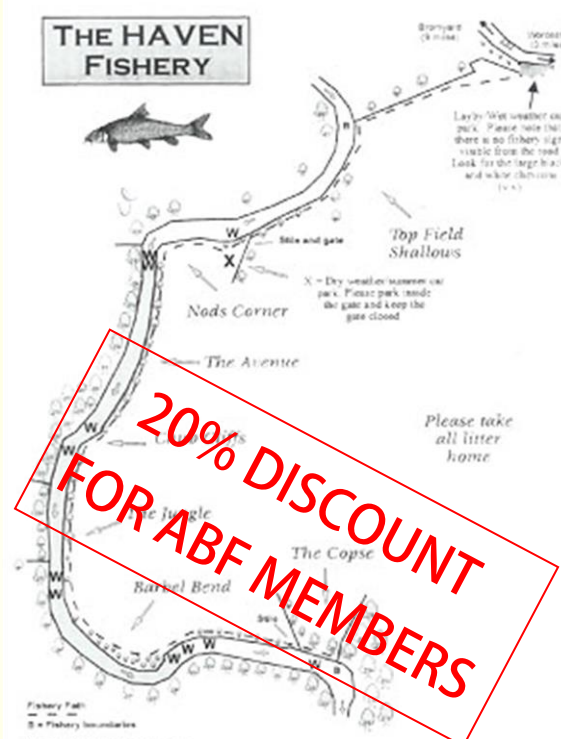
**BOOK THE ENTIRE STRETCH FOR YOUR USE -
JUST £53.00 PER DAY**

**ONLY FOUR ANGLERS AT ANY ONE TIME – WHY
NOT SPLIT THE COST WITH FRIENDS?**

CAMPING ALLOWED BY PRIOR APPOINTMENT

Tel: 07966 885562 Email: havenfishery@aol.com

<http://havenfishery.org.uk/index.html>



Design, Layout & Editor:
Jonathan Cotty

Tel: 07804 648925
<http://www.barbelfishers.com>

Cover Photo & Additional
Photography:
Chloe Hirst

Copyright 2014 – The
Association of Barbel
Fishers. No part of this
magazine may be copied,
reproduced or
distributed in any form,
or by any medium,
without the written
consent of The
Association of Barbel
Fishers.

The articles contained
within this magazine are
contributed by members
of the Association of
Barbel Fishers and do not
necessarily reflect the
views and opinions of the
society.

All articles are submitted
free of charge and the
ABF reserves the right to
reproduce any
submission received
either via its website
(www.barbelfishers.com)
or any alternative
medium.

Association of
Barbel Fishers

Contents

Editorial

Small Baits, Big Fish?

Graham Young reveals how small baits led him to success

A Tribute to Fred Crouch

Paul Whiteing reflects on the passing of an angling legend

Winter Barbel in Small Rivers

Jonathan Cotty gives his thoughts on barbel fishing in the colder months

The Swollen River

Nathan Walter recalls a fateful fishing trip

What makes a good barbel bait?

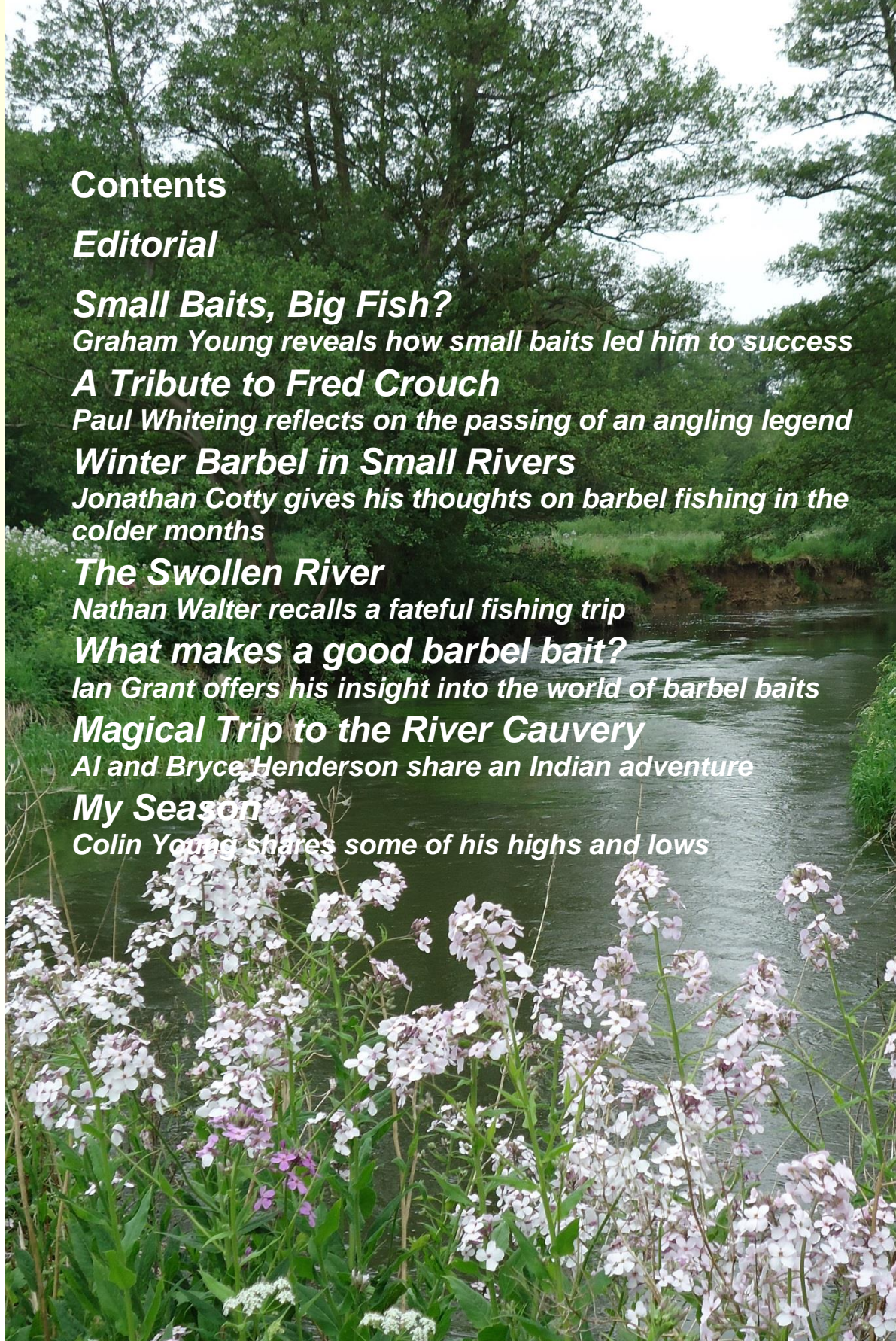
Ian Grant offers his insight into the world of barbel baits

Magical Trip to the River Cauvery

Al and Bryce Henderson share an Indian adventure

My Season

Colin Young shares some of his highs and lows



The frustration and puzzles that fishing presented to me in childhood kept me returning the bank to 'try again' and I hope that is not lost nowadays. Do most people now reach for their iPhone or laptop before they try to solve problems using their own ingenuity? I have no idea, but I expect so – I guess times move on. Some constants remain however and fortunately the old adage, that 'there is no substitute for time spent on the bank', remains as true as ever.

The ABF enjoys a range of ages amongst its members, both young and old, and I first became involved when I went to an ABF 'Meet the Experts' event in Basingstoke last year. I went primarily to meet one of the invited guests, but also to meet and drink with a few fellow anglers. Now thirty-five years old, two books I have owned since childhood include the excellent 'Carp' by James A. Gibbinson and the equally interesting, 'Catching Big Tench' by Len Arbery. Upon learning I would be able to meet and chat with Len Arbery at this event, I was genuinely curious to meet the man who had inspired me and, unbeknown to him, assisted me as a youngster.

The event was very informal which suited me and I would highly recommend that you get along to the next ABF event near you and enjoy the evening. All the ABF events are arranged by members, who (free of charge) invest a fair amount of their own time and effort to make them possible and I hope that, if nothing else, you can support their efforts by turning up and enjoying a drink!

Len Arbery arrived, as promised, and I chatted with him for quite a while. He also very kindly signed my book, which is a first edition apparently. Unfortunately, I later fainted for no apparent reason and spent the rest of the evening feeling very wobbly! Nevertheless, I still found the various talks very interesting and informative and there was a great atmosphere in the pub, as various well-known anglers turned up with some great stories. I left a little earlier than I would have as my brief fainting episode had made me feel exceptionally tired. I had never fainted before and I never have since.



Maybe it was the shock of meeting Len! Slightly concerned and a bit puzzled, I thought it might be Lyme's disease, as I had been recently bitten by a tick, so I went to the doctor who proceeded to do various tests. As it turns out, he has no why I fainted either. I blame you Len!

Most people reading this magazine will already be able to put a few fish on the bank, however I hope that there may be a few salient points contained within this edition that may give, even the more experienced anglers amongst us, a bit of food for thought. I always feel that if I can gain one idea or insight from an article, then it was worth the time spent reading it. Most of us also enjoy a good fishy tale in the close season; it serves to remind us of what we love and that we will soon be back on the riverbank, writing our own special memories. I hope that you may gain something new from this edition, whether it be the truth about schreckstoff, a technique or idea or, maybe, you just enjoy a good story?

I can only hope that it may encourage more of you to put pen to paper (or more accurately, fingers to keyboard) and contribute something to the next edition. We are all amateurs and volunteers, so please remember that without the contributions sent in by our members, this magazine would not exist at all.

On behalf of everybody involved with the running of ABF, I would like to extend our genuine and warmest thanks to all the contributors to this edition of Riffle. May the biggest of barbel grace your landing nets in the coming season.

Jonathan Cotty – Editor

About eight years ago, I decided to go back to a stretch of the river Trent that I had fished in the early 1970's. The fish along that particular stretch during the 1970's were not big, but there were plenty of them and I was happy just catching whatever size came along (as I am now); although bigger fish are always very welcome.

I decided to wait until the season had started before visiting the stretch and, as I later found out, visits to the river outside of the season were not allowed anyway. On my first visit, there were around six anglers fishing with around half of them catching, one of them being an angler that I had not seen since I had last fished the stretch. He carried on fishing while we talked about how things had changed since we had last met, both with methods and with the size of the fish that now inhabited the stretch. The size of the fish had certainly changed as he had a fish of around 9lb's while we were talking and he told me that there were much bigger fish in that piece of river now, although not as many individual fish as before. My appetite was well and truly wetted and I decided to fish as soon as I could. This turned out to be two days later.

I arrived at the river early on the day of the first trip, in fact it was still dark, but then I have always been a bit over eager. Still, it gave me a chance to settle into a swim that I had fished previously and I soon found out that the swim had changed a lot since I had last been there.

Due to the snaggy nature of the river Trent, I fished with 12lb sensor straight through to a size 8 hook, with a big Drennan feeder attached to a small link swivel running on the line and stopped by a couple of beads above the hook length swivel. It was nothing special at all and the bait was to be two 12mm pellets on a hair, with 10mm pellets in the feeder, which had the holes opened out to allow the pellets to escape.

First cast found me snagged up but, after hand lining, it came free. The link had opened up allowing the feeder to come off the line (I use small link swivels as a sort of weak link to the feeder). With a new link swivel and feeder on, I cast to a smoother piece of water and let the feeder find its own settling place. Although I fished all day, losing more feeders, the only fish I caught were chub with no sign of a barbel. This was to be the pattern on my next four visits, fishing different swims each time. Only chub graced my net, which are welcome when I am fishing for them but not when I am after barbel!

On my sixth visit, I decided to fish further downstream than I ever had before. A change of bait was also called for, so I decided to fish the method that I had tried before (without success) on one rod, but now with 6mm pellets in the feeder; while continuing with meatballs on the other with just a running lead on the line. Both rods were in position by first light; the meatball rod was fished down the nearside, about five feet from the bank whilst the other was cast towards some very obvious (judging by the boils) snags. I suppose that the pellet and feeder rod had only been in the water for five minutes when I had what was obviously not a chub bite! The fish made for the snags, but I managed to turn it using a lot of pressure and eventually netted it went 10lb's 9oz. What a start, my first barbel from a new swim on the stretch and it was a double figure fish! At last, I had found some fish - or so I thought.



The rest of the day passed as others had, with only chub to show for my efforts. I was very pleased to have caught a barbel, but also disappointed that it was the only one. Still, I had found somewhere that I knew contained barbel and it was down to me to find a way of catching them.

Next session found me in the same swim, using the same tactics that had produced that first fish. It was during this session and whilst waiting for a bite that my mind was wandering (as it does, must be my age) and I thought that maybe, because I was feeding a lot of 6mm pellets through the feeder, the fish had become preoccupied on the smaller pellets. I had seen carp do this on small baits, such as hemp, in the past. I decided to try something different.

Using a thin bait drill, I set about drilling holes through some 6mm pellets. After trying on perhaps twenty-five pellets, I had six with holes through them (this process did get easier with practice) and these were threaded onto a hair of 4lb's breaking strain. The hair was then tied to a size 12, Mustad, eyed, barbed hook. I like these hooks as they are very strong and also cheap, at less than £1 for ten at that time (my Dad was from Yorkshire and something must have rubbed off on me). The hook length was still 12lb sensor, but I also decided to open out some of the holes in the feeder and tape over the rest with insulating tape to try to avoid pellets coming out on the drop to the riverbed. First cast in with this method produced a savage bite and a barbel, second cast the same...my hands were shaking as I drilled other 6mm pellets whilst waiting for a bite.

That day produced twelve barbel, six of which were double figure fish. I will not bore you with the sizes of each fish (as this piece is probably boring enough), it is enough to say it was, and still is, my best ever session as far as big fish go.



The drilled pellets lasted quite a while on the hair and stayed useable for several casts. I used this method exclusively on that stretch from then on and, although I never repeated that days results, I did have some very good days on it. Eventually though, as is the way, the more successful a method is the quicker the fish wise up; but I had two fantastic seasons on small drilled pellets and was more than satisfied. Although I tried other methods of fixing the pellets to the hair, I never found one that I was happier with than drilling them. In fact, I used to sit watching television whilst drilling pellets. I found that high oil pellets were the best to drill and that they also last longer in the water. I now keep these in a box for hook baits only. It is a method that I still use sometimes and, no matter where I am fishing, it often works as long as the water has seen plenty of small pellets - but like all methods, it is not magic and sometimes I fail to catch on it.

I have tried using artificial pellets, and caught on them, but due to using a light hair found that I was losing too many through the hair breaking. Another reason I prefer to use real pellets over artificial is that I am sure the fish can tell the difference. It may be down to the colour bleaching out of the free offerings and the hook bait simultaneously, with the end result that both end up looking the same pale colour - whereas the artificial baits obviously do not lose any colour.

The angling world in general, and the barbel world in particular, will be saddened by the passing of an angler often known as "Mr Barbel", namely Fred Crouch.

Much has been written, and much will be written, about Fred, and this is just a tribute of few words.

He will be sadly missed by those close to him and by the angling world.



Fred (centre) flanked by Lee Sinfield-Pugh (right of picture) and me, on a day in September 2012, where Lee and I thoroughly enjoyed the company of Fred on a small stretch of river.

RIP Fred Crouch

20-4-1937 to 19-1-2014

A few of my thoughts on locating barbel during the winter months

In summer, barbel will often seek out some kind of suitable holding area within a steady flow, possibly little more than a depression in the riverbed, thus allowing the bulk of water flow to pass cleanly overhead. To cut out a lot of hyperbole, barbel still prefer gravel under their whiskers and a decent flow even in the colder months. With the weed less prolific in winter, meaning cover is reduced and the light more intense in open areas, the barbel may need to move to a different stretch of water to pass the winter under some cover and this is where experience can help a bit. They also seem to prefer deeper areas in the wintertime.

Being cold blooded, barbel are less active in winter and therefore travel less. They tend to sit deep in cover and in tight shoals. Even on small rivers, accuracy is more important than in the summertime as the barbel may not be prepared to move very much, if at all, to pick up a bait. Barbel like to feed in eddies, such as those formed as visible creases where the water enters a swim with pace. They move in and out of the flow in these types of swim and spots like this often produce all year round. In addition, there is often a 'dead spot' in water that appears quite turbulent and this, also, is often a great spot for catching barbel at any time of year.

Another point worth remembering is that barbel may be forced to move due to flood conditions, particularly flash floods which can, literally, flush them out of hiding. This makes it a good time to be bankside as the fish are often back on the move, looking for another safe spot to lie up until levels subside.

This may appear quite unhelpful but it should help to start to narrow it down a little. In winter, the barbel are less likely to be found in the main flow of a weir, or on very fast stretches of river, as the energy required and resultant 'burn-off' would surely be too great to match the reduced

food available to them. River levels are generally higher at this time of year, as an average, than during the summer and therefore holding fast in some of their summer haunts would be much harder work. Combine this with the facts already understood concerning their cold-blooded temperament and this leads me to the conclusion that the faster stretches, often good in the summer, are not where I would initially search for barbel in the colder months. An additional thought is that the drop in temperature means that barbel have no need to seek out weir pools or very fast areas specifically due to low oxygen levels in the water (warm water contains less oxygen than cold water).

A pacey, steady flow over a gravel bottom in the wintertime, coupled with either holes or depressions in the riverbed is a great start. Also, look for some depth in the swim alongside some sort of cover, which may or may not be visible.



Floating rafts or thickset foliage overhanging the water are obvious, undercut banks and underwater snags are less so! Barbel holding up for prolonged periods will generally favour deeper holes and darker, shaded water where footfall on the bankside is at a minimum. Essentially, somewhere out of sight and quiet, where predators cannot sneak up on them very easily. If the swim is also packed with snags and if the bankside looks as if has not been trodden for months, then it is likely you have found a great spot.

Different approaches to catching barbel in the colder months

If the temperature has dropped quite dramatically, or plummeted from a steady, above average daytime air temperature for the time of year (for example from 11°C to 2°C), then personally I rarely bother going out fishing specifically for barbel. That is partly because where I fish there are not many anyway - if I was on a river where they are prolific then I would be more inclined to give it a go - but mainly because I have never, ever caught one in these conditions. They would seem to completely switch off and I am sure that at some point over the years I must have managed to drop it neatly on the nose of a barbel in these conditions - and I remain equally convinced that it just ignored it! Even the chub, which many people insist never fully switch off, do not seem to feed much at these times. I will never completely give up trying but my advice would be to try for a chub or grayling, instead of a barbel, on these types of day!

Although many anglers would state rising temperatures in winter to be best, do not discount stable temperatures as the barbel seem to feed even when it is very cold. The barbel will adapt, but it usually seems to take a while before they adjust to new temperatures and start feeding again, albeit sparingly. As a rule of thumb, the colder it is the less they move and therefore need to eat, so in practice this means the colder it is, the shorter their feeding spell

will probably be. I have heard various water temperatures bandied about as *the* lowest degree before they switch off completely. I remain unconvinced as ever and I believe that a stable temperature is the most important factor at this time of year. Despite the disagreements concerning whether they ever do stop feeding and at what degree this may be, most people I have spoken with seem to agree that a stable water and air temperature is far better than a fluctuating one.

Some anglers always take a water thermometer with them. I do not take a water thermometer with me to the bankside as I have no real interest in truth - by that point the decision 'I am going fishing' has already been made! All those that have done this kind of research, and kept detailed diaries, seem to disagree about their findings anyway! Although 5°C is the number around which most people seem to congregate, there are many confirmed reports of barbel coming out in far colder conditions, such is the power and knowledge the internet can now share.

I feel that a huge part of being a successful angler, pre-baiting aside, is simply down to a combination of being bankside and having some luck, that there are many factors that we cannot control and yet more that we fail to include within our own calculations and decision-making processes.

I freely admit that icy conditions are not ideal for barbel fishing and the first frost in weeks is often the kiss of death as far as sport is concerned. However, theory is great but the only way you will ever know for sure is by getting out there and having a go for yourself, whatever the weather and the water temperature!

Anglers also disagree on whether clear or coloured water is best, some state rising water levels are better, others insist a river fining

down is a better prospect. I believe there are other factors, many of which are rarely discussed, that have a far greater bearing on the likelihood of catching a barbel in the cold. For example, hail or freezing rain will cool the water very quickly and this could possibly be washing down from further upstream. A freezing cold rise in the water level is likely to have a very different impact on the barbel, compared to warmer rain that has washed down the river system. Therefore, it would seem to me that the most important factor is where the clouds have blown in from prior to raining and their surrounding air temperature. In simple terms, is it warmer rain from the south-west or freezing rain from the north-east? The logical follow on from this theory is that a river fining down after a freezing cold influx of water may be less likely to switch back on, when compared to a river fining down after a warmer, southerly rainfall. It also depends on the weather conditions over the period. In conditions that may appear identical to the casual observer, on a single day considered in isolation and when the river is 'fining down', in actual fact the river may be getting steadily colder on one day and yet on another day be getting warmer. This, in turn, would explain to me why anglers have different experiences in conditions they consider very similar and most people tend to form their views as a direct result of their own experience. In short, if I have not been keeping track anyway, then I will study the weather from the past few days, alongside the forecast and also check the air temperatures over that entire time period, before going to the bankside.

Numerous other factors may be a consideration throughout the year, such as farm chemicals washed in off the fields by the first rain in weeks. Barometric pressure is another minefield of conflicting opinions. I have even, bankside, had a deeper conversation relating to the fact that barbel have no pneumatic duct, unlike other species such as carp, and the likely bearing this would have on barbel in the context of deeper rivers, as surely the change in pressure is

more magnified at these greater depths. Not sure what that guy was smoking though...

I have found that when the air temperature has been stable, or rising, for the past few days and the river is falling back to nearer normal levels (after a flood or heavy rain), the barbel are often actively feeding and moving about. I will stick my neck on the line and advocate that you get out on the bank with some optimism in these conditions and especially if you have had a prolonged, mild spell. But, although often productive in my own experience, a river fining down in such conditions is certainly no guarantee of good sport, particularly if the rainfall has made the barbel colder and very lethargic as a consequence, in which case the river may fish better in a few days' time. No hard and fast rules unfortunately – or should that be fortunately?

Applying bait and methods in winter

There is no singular 'best' method to catch barbel in winter but there are a few theories most people seem to generally agree upon, most of which are common sense coupled with a bit of general fishing experience. I will try and cover a couple of these briefly before touching on a few deeper points.

When the river runs low and clear then a maggot feeder, coupled with finer tackle, is generally considered a good method, especially if you have found a really good-looking spot and are prepared to sit and feed. Conversely, when the water is coloured many people reach for something that smells to compensate for the fact it must be harder to see down there; therefore the barbel will surely be relying on sniffing out the bait and need a good scent trail to follow.

Luncheon meat is my preferred bait on small rivers but you can use halibut pellets or boilies if you prefer. Meat and cheese pastes are great as they eke out the flavour very effectively in cold conditions and most people will wrap a boilie in

paste these days, as this is now a proven method in wintertime. I have often privately thought it a little strange that frequently the paste and boilies will be completely different flavours, but it does not seem to matter anyway! Barbel still get caught!

Worms are a good bait in early winter but I get the impression that by January or February, after a few flash floods and lots of extra water, the barbel are sick to death of them. This is purely conjecture however, with no factual basis. A lobworm is a good bait for barbel and especially on small, under-fished rivers such as the ones I frequent. I just tend to prefer a big lump of meat as a first choice. I also have a habit of catching unwanted chub on worms as they seem to love them all year round. If the water has run clear for a while though, a switch to a fat, wriggling lobworm can provoke a reaction from a lethargic barbel and it is worth taking a few along in these conditions and trying this out, particularly if you have fed for a while and feel that the barbel are there, but not having it!

In the summer months barbel actively patrol a beat. I have seen no evidence to prove how large this beat may be, but I would expect it to be quite a long stretch in our smaller rivers. In the colder months however, they spend most of their time resting, shoaled up in tight groups within a small area. I believe this is partly in preparation for their next stage in life, reproduction in the spring, when they will move up together into the shallower water to spawn on the gravel runs. At this point in time however, it is possible they are grouped up together solely for reasons of security. I suspect a perceived, collective, 'safety in numbers' mentality prevails, particularly as the barbel are lethargic with cold and especially with all the otters now on the prowl! The point being that the barbel are less likely to be travelling and to either come across, or actively seek out, the bait; whatever it may be and whether the water is coloured or clear! Therefore, to maximise any chance of catching one, I feel that I really need to firstly locate them and then try to present a

bait to them where they are lying up. As I have stated, in the rivers I fish they are not exactly prolific, so for every twenty picture book swims, the chances are that maybe one of them may actually hold a barbel at the best of times! Any beds of bait also attract crayfish and in great numbers on my local rivers! All of these are factors which have a bearing on my own approach.

For me it is usually a fairly mobile approach in the colder months. I rarely sit in the same swim for longer than an hour, often far less - although I may bait up a few spots and return later in the day. If so, I use a bait dropper and prefer halibut pellets, meat and hemp. I never use much bait on small rivers, but obviously always use less in winter. Half a pint is about the norm for me and I only ever bait up one or two spots that I plan to return too. That is if I bother at all! My usual method is one that seems vastly under-used these days. Rolling lumps of meat down the riverbed.

Rolling meat successfully is a bit of an art form in coarse fishing. In my mind, it is a good example of where the science is definitely second to the art! I have read with interest that many people use plasticine as weight and prefer to use this as their 'rolling meat' method. I have never tried it, but it strikes me that this is more 'bouncing' than 'rolling'. I cannot picture a bait bouncing away down the current, before the plasticine



Keeping it simple on small rivers with a mobile approach...

finds some kind of underwater hold, until it is then bounced along again by the angler, being terribly effective in my minds' eye. I am sure it does work well and I dare say a heavy ball of plasticine would slow the bait fairly well and trundle it along the riverbed with practice. However, there is a simpler, older and custom-made solution that is surely far easier to control. The ball lead!

I have always used a drilled lead ball threaded onto the line to roll luncheon meat. A foot or so above the lead I have a rubber bead (stopped with a stop-knot) and below it I thread on two small, hard plastic beads and tie to a swivel. From there you can choose your hook length, material, strength, rig and bait. I generally use about 12" (30cm) of 8-15lb braid, hook size varies from an 8 to a 2, and a big lump of meat. It could not be much simpler but you will need to experiment a little before you get a feel for the size of ball lead you need in any given area and a few different sizes of these will be useful to match with the pace of flow. Using this method, you will immediately know if you have cast on gravel or sand/ mud and you can literally feel the ball trundling along the riverbed on the gravel (quite a satisfying way of fishing if you keep the bale arm open and get used to letting the line run out through your fingers). The bait will travel at a steady, even pace. With practice and experimenting on different lines across the river, the bait should, eventually, literally roll into one of the holes where the fish are lying. That is, of course, provided that there are any



9lb barbel on the rolling meat method

barbel in the swim at all! Sometimes I will, initially, gently roll the bait through a likely looking swim in order to get a feel for it, before switching to a heavier, flat lead to hold bottom in a deeper spot that has now been discovered. Then I may use a PVA bag of meat and small pellets and fish the spot for thirty minutes or so. I do not switch to a hair rig, simply cast the bait in the bag with the freebies and it has never cost me a missed bite yet. Bites remain savage.

Using this method, you can cover a good length of river and a great deal of riverbed in an afternoon session and then return to fish the early onset of darkness in your preferred, pre-baited and mapped out location. Remember that at this time of year, the closer you can

present a bait to where the barbel are lying up, the better your chances of hooking one! Some days you will need to bait up before the barbel will feed at all, however you may be surprised how many fighting fit, plump winter barbel will still savagely seize a decent sized lump of meat that trundles past their nose, even in the coldest of conditions!



Another barbel, just under 9lb, caught on the rolling meat method from a small river in January

Heavy clouds smothered the skies with a brooding darkness. A rumble of thunder boomed in the distance. The tap, tap, tap of raindrops on the windows indicated even more rain had arrived. They grew louder as they began to pound at the glass in a ferocious torrent, running down the windowpanes in ever-growing streams. The angler sat back on his sofa and peered out of the window at the relentless rain. It had been several days now since the storms had begun and there hardly seemed to be any respite in the weather. He was relaxed, nevertheless. He sipped his mug of tea and blew out a slow breath. His mind wandered. He was at the river. It was swollen and angry, a maelstrom of foaming, spewing water. Branches and debris were swept along in the powerful embrace of the river. It was too soon. Another day or two and she would be ready.

He retired to bed to dream, such sweet dreams. The following day he arose early. As he drew back the curtains, sunlight streamed in through the opening, lighting up the bedroom with a glorious exuberance of colour. At last the weather had broken. The storms had finally relented. He switched the kettle on and popped some bread into the toaster. As he sat at the breakfast table, looking out across the fields, he knew she was nearly ready. He would try tomorrow, if the weather held. A spotted woodpecker caught his eye and disturbed his reverie as it hammered at the peanuts on the bird feeder. It was a good omen, he decided.

The river would be high and coloured, and the banks thick with cloying mud. He would have to tread carefully. He opened a couple of tins of luncheon meat, breaking off large irregular lumps. He took a plastic bag and blew some warm air into it. He put in several teaspoons of his secret spicy powder mix and then dropped in the chunks of meat. He rolled them around in the bag, to cover them with the magical ingredients. He opened the bag and took a deep, nasal breath. The aroma set his olfactory senses



ablaze with tantalising possibilities. This was the bait. It was perfect.

After a long day at work, he eventually retired for the evening. Excitement coursed through his veins. He could barely sleep. He knew something special was going to happen tomorrow. He just knew it. After a restless night, he stretched and yawned the tiredness away. The kettle burst into life with a flick of the switch and the smell of toast filled his nostrils. The coffee hit the spot and he felt awake and vitalized. He was ready. He poured the hot water into his favourite flask and popped it in his bag with his lunch. Hopefully there would not be too much time to eat, he thought.

The car was packed and he was on his way. The river was not far and yet his expectation was at such a heightened state of arousal it seemed to take forever. Each bend seemed to lead to endless others as his journey progressed. He was desperately hoping there would not be any crowds at the river today. He had a few spots in mind and would be very disappointed to see them occupied by some usurper. The lay-by was empty. His luck was in. He hurriedly grabbed the tackle from the car and dumped it over the gate. He checked the car was locked, popped on his faithful hat and climbed over the stile.

There she was - the river. The water was still high and coloured as it lapped a foot from the

top of the banks. Despite the level, she had lost that angry, churning look of a rising river. The level was subsiding and the ferocity of the flow had abated. It was looking smoother and more inviting. The field was wet and slimy. The river must have broken its banks a few days ago and had left its usual deposit of silt, thick and slippery underfoot. There were a few dark clouds in the sky and a hint of rain hung in the air. The forecast was good. He took a deep breath. It smelt good, clean and fresh.

He headed to his first spot. He had decided not to put in any free offerings. He just wanted to offer a hook bait, on its own, in as many likely spots as he could muster. He knew the river well. She was a small, intimate, upland river. Steep banks covered in thick foliage acted as the perfect concealment for the hunter. Himalayan balsam choked the native nettles and the occasional 'pop' could be heard as a seed exploded from the Balsam's flower. He settled into a nice bend. The river flowed from right to left. The bank turned sharply to his left and offered an enticing crease and slack, off from the main flow. The river was still pushing through quite hard here, where the river narrowed. There was still the odd branch being swept along, but otherwise the river was quieter, friendlier. He set up with a simple rig. He used a fairly light leger weight; he intended fishing in very close and wanted the bait to naturally bounce under the banks. This was fished straight through to a size 2 hook. It looked big but that was essential. The pieces of luncheon meat were big and the hook had to match the bait.

He attached the meat with a baiting needle, sliding it onto the hook and then securing it in place with a piece of grass. He placed his bank stick at such an angle that it would allow him to point his rod towards the baited hook. He would touch leger when it suited, but in some swims he decided a bank stick would be okay. He swung the bait out onto the edge of the current

and let the line go. He paid some line out, placed the rod on the rest and waited. He was so confident of a bite that he was quite shocked when it did not arrive. 'Wasn't that always the case', he chided himself. After an hour, he decided to move.

Again, he tucked himself into a tight swim, this time on a small pool created by a little island in the middle of the river. There was a deep gully here and, again, a nice smooth flow. He dropped the bait in and let it swing round and under an alder tree. As he sat back to await events, he became quite captivated by a bustling flock of Long-tailed Tits, chattering and darting through the trees about him. They seemed oblivious to his presence, as wildlife so often does. He fumbled about in his bag and managed to lay his hands on the flask. Unscrewing the cap, he poured himself a cup of steaming hot coffee. He took a sip and sighed in relief. Since giving up smoking many years ago, this was his fix now and a much needed one at times.

Another hour drifted slowly by as the sun peeked out from behind the dark clouds. It was still quite warm, despite the weather. Steam began to rise from the field as the sun gently heated the wet mud. A car hurtled past the nearby lay-by at break neck speed. 'Why do they do it, down such narrow lanes', he thought? 'Ah well. It was time to move on'.

In fact he moved several times but all to no avail. Each new swim produced the same results; a motionless rod tip, except for the occasional tug from passing debris. Still, he had left his top spot until last. He felt sure this would produce something special. The banks were slippery here. It was a steep sided swim that fell away into a big, deep pool created by a bend. The river narrowed at its entrance, passed a beautiful weeping willow and flowed hard into the far bank. The river then turned at ninety degrees and headed off downstream. The exit too was narrow and ran over clean gravel to a

delightful riffle. Of course, that was obscured today by the extra seven or eight feet of floodwater.

The angler edged slowly down the bank. Slightly to the left of the apex of the bend was a small overhanging bush. That was the spot. He baited up and lowered the meat down and right under the bush. The bait swung into and under the bank. He angled himself, pointing slightly towards the bait and closed the bail arm of the reel. He tightened the line ever so slightly and looped the line over his finger. It was time to wait, to be patient and to hope. Suddenly he felt the line tighten on his finger and the rod tip pulled slowly round an inch or two. It was a definite bite, it was too full of life to be anything else and he decided upon an aggressive and positive action in response.

He swept the rod across his left shoulder and he felt an uncompromising force of resistance on the other end. As he bent hard into this solid mass, his exhilaration started to abate; nothing moved. It was solid, unforgiving. He realised he was hooked up on something. There must be a snag down there. It was definitely a bite, he was certain of that. He bent in even harder, hoping that something might come free. It was then that the 'snag' started to move. It headed upstream, slowly and purposefully. The immense power of this unknown creature was quite staggering!

The adrenalin coursed through his veins. He had to remain calm, stay in control. This was something special on the other end, he knew that. Then the fish stopped. He could not move it. It had snagged him this time for sure. Again, his hopes seemed dashed. He pulled into the fish once more, the rod arching as it approached it full test curve. Suddenly the fish moved again and this time it slowly but surely headed downstream a few yards and then, once again, it stopped.

He had to bend hard into this leviathan from the deep to get it moving once more and yet again it swam upstream, glued to the bottom and unmoveable. Maybe it was not a barbel? Perhaps it was a carp or even a catfish? It could not be a barbel, not this powerful. It was not possible. Yet again, the fish stopped and refused to move. The angler decided it was time for some decisive action. It was time to get brutal with this thing! He tightened up and put a good bend in the barbel rod. He then placed his other hand half way up the rod and heaved with all his might. The rod creaked and groaned at this ordeal.

Just when he thought the rod or line might snap and he would never get to see his adversary, something suddenly gave. The fish was prised free of the bottom with immense force.

Suddenly it burst onto the surface. Its golden flanks glistened in the sunlight. For a few seconds, at most, the fish just stayed there on the surface, its dorsal erect and proud. It was his. This magnificent, bronzed barbel had been beaten. Never before had he encountered a fish of such extraordinary power. She looked a good 15lb's or 16lb's, possibly more. This would make for a great story in the pub with a pint of the local ale and the lads listening intently. He relaxed slightly, knowing it was almost over. Then, in the blink of an eye, it turned and dived with the most breath-taking power. Then she was gone. The hook had pulled.

He slumped down to the ground in disbelief. Emptiness crept over him and a feeling of despair gripped him. He stayed there for a long time, unable to move, unable to do anything. Eventually he picked himself up, packed up his gear and returned to the car. He could not carry on, not after that. Today the fish had won and oh boy, what a fish! She was exceptional and what an incredible memory. A memory that will stay with him, or possibly haunt him, forever.

It is a question that I have been asked so many times! What is it that makes a good barbel bait? One that stands out from the crowd, performing time and again, putting barbel after barbel in your net? Saying it may be a lot easier than finding it.

I always think to myself that if the question is being asked, it is safe to assume that the person asking has not yet found such a bait! In addition, they are probably looking for something very individual, and maybe even looking to formulate their own individual bait.

That in itself is not too difficult; but arriving at a bait which will catch barbel time and again, inspiring complete confidence in it? I think people often struggle to find it. With most starting out on this road, a few blanks which may have nothing whatever to do with the bait are enough to destroy their confidence in any new recipe they try, and so many fall into what has been referred to as the 'bait trap'. I have been there myself and I can tell you it is not a nice place to be, on a never-ending merry go round of experimentation, never giving anything a fair go, and usually blaming the bait for the reason for blanking.

I have often said, 'There's no such thing as a magic bait! There is no single bait that will catch every time, even if your quarry is present, as there are far too many variables in fishing for that. What you can achieve though, by making your own bait, is something very individual, and hopefully highly desirable to a fish – or in the case here, barbel. It may surprise some just how simple and readily available the ingredients are to achieve a bait which barbel find highly desirable, without the need to go to any major expense, often (and sometimes much) cheaper than shelf life or freezer bait. What you must achieve is total belief in your bait; unfortunately, that cannot come unless it brings results! However, you must be willing to give your new bait a really fair go - in fact, this is

absolutely vital. Unless you do, then no matter what you use, you will likely never gain that vital confidence.

I would say your first task is to identify what you expect from your bait. Are you fishing for numbers or targeting big fish, are you fishing frequently or less than once a week, do you move from water to water or focus predominately on one? These are things that, in my opinion, you need to factor in when formulating a bait. There must be hundreds of food products out there, some made by bait companies and some intended for human consumption, that will all catch barbel. In this article, I will try to offer my views on what is most important when considering the vast array of bait available. I am far more of the opinion that it is not so much the bait itself, but what you do with it, that counts and although I also believe that quality counts, quality does not have to mean great expense.

So just what does make a really good barbel bait?

Many people consider a 'nice flavour' and 'a good nutritional profile' to be 'about it'. Well, in a nutshell, I suppose it is - but those two statements contain many facets on the subject. It is these that I will break down, and make sense of, in order to answer that question.

Signals

No, not those horrible things with red claws! I am talking of the signals that mean 'food' to a barbel! Barbel, like any creature, are attracted initially to a food item by the signals that it recognises as food. There are several and as I am talking about what we can offer the barbel in the way of food that is probably a mixture of processed food ingredients, I will confine my thoughts on the subject of attraction, to scent and taste.

What are these signals? They are the scents and tastes that leech from any food in a water

environment, which a barbel (or any fish) will use to home in on an item of food, with the promise of something nice to eat, the signal having triggered a memory of something it has eaten before that it found to its liking. It is not complicated to understand, basically it is the same feeling I get in my belly when I smell bacon cooking! Some of these scents I would suggest are inherently attractive to a barbel, and some I believe it is genetically programmed to recognise in its natural food. The most important of these are those given off by the presence of fats and proteins. If not actually detecting them directly, barbel associate a taste or scent with their presence in a food and I believe that, so far as bait is concerned, fats and proteins are the two most important considerations. Some signals may not be recognised until an item of food is actually eaten, which I believe is the case with protein.

The Feel Good Factor

This is, essentially, what I am trying to achieve with my bait and once again, it is not rocket science! At the bare minimum, for a long-term bait to be effective it must leave the barbel wanting more, to leave it 'feeling good', after having eaten it. This is where association comes into the frame, whereby a barbel recognises a scent that it will associate with a certain type of food, having eaten it before and found it to its liking, - the 'feel good factor'. Without these scents, and tastes, a barbel – in fact any wild creature really – would not be able to discern what is food and what is not, let alone know whether it will enjoy eating it.

Recognising scents, and tastes, are what attracts a barbel to what it is really after...that 'feel good factor' which comes from eating a food which is good for it. It associates that initial attractant, be it taste or scent, with that final satisfaction after eating it - it is nature's way of enabling a creature to identify a food item that is beneficial to it. The various natural foods that a barbel will

eat are likely to vary considerably in nutritional benefit, but I firmly believe that nature gives a barbel, in fact any creature, a sense of satisfaction after eating an item of food that has a good nutritional benefit to the fish. The more benefit for the volume of food eaten, the greater that satisfaction I believe, and so its appeal to the barbel to seek it out and eat it. This is the essential fact that we must keep in mind when thinking about what makes a good barbel bait. 'Pretty obvious' you may think, but it seems to me many anglers struggle to find that appeal in their bait, at least in the long term.

Labels

These are something I consider very important in my bait and which I change slightly over time so that it does not provoke caution, instead of the recognition of good food. This is why I believe a bait 'blows' - many think their bait has lost its appeal as their results diminish, when actually inherently it has not, and may still be a really good bait, but it has become recognisable to the barbel as dangerous. This is the point when many stumble into that bait trap, chopping and changing from bait to bait, in an effort to find that long-term appeal that eludes them.

It is at this point that I feel many anglers fail to realise the importance of recognition in a long-term bait and how this can work both for and against you. Firstly, the emitted signals act as an aid for the barbel to recognise a good food is present that it has eaten before and, dare I say, enjoyed! But the second point here is that many anglers do not realise that a barbel is capable of, eventually, associating the scent or taste with danger. However, this is something you need not worry about so much if you fish a water infrequently, or spread your fishing around many rivers or stretches. It is when you fish a stretch regularly that it becomes so important to change the label on your bait from time to time.

These changes only need to be subtle and the frequency will depend on just how often you fish.

In my view, I would say if you are out twice a week, and especially if concentrating on one small stretch of a river, then a little change every four to six weeks should be enough to prevent over-caution. You can do this by taking something out as much as by putting something in. A complete change of flavour profile is not necessary, and in fact may work against you in having to re-educate the barbel to accept a new flavour. Making subtle little changes is far better than dramatic changes to your baits flavour.

Continual reliance on one flavour profile will, I am sure, eventually become a danger signal. I worry that a fish caught previously, and sometimes more than once, will spook off at the now recognisable scent, in turn spooking other (uncaught) barbel present in the swim. These may take their cue from the spooked individual and leave. This will also happen more rapidly when over-flavouring your bait, the danger signal becoming all the more obvious in a shorter space of time.

I firmly believe many a good bait has been discarded an angler who is seeing his results start to drop; when all that was needed was a slight tweak to the flavour profile to see it perform again. I also believe it is just as easy to educate a barbel to something that is dangerous, as to something that is of benefit. I will give you this analogy!

If I gave a dog the choice of a nice juicy steak, or a bowl of beans every day, I guarantee it would eat the steak every time and I could have it

jumping through hoops in no time for its tasty meal. However, if I started to beat the dog every time it started to eat the steak, pretty quickly the dog would come to associate eating the steak with an extremely unpleasant experience! No matter how appealing the steak may be, it would certainly not go near it and likely opt for the safer option of only eating the beans.

That little analogy basically explains my thoughts on how a barbel, or any fish for that matter, will eventually come to associate tastes and scents. Initially with something good to eat but equally, in time, to become something it associates with an unpleasant experience. You may well say, 'Well, I'm not bothered about the one's I've caught' and fair enough! But just watch the birds on your lawn - when one sees or perceives danger, and takes flight, the rest do not wait to find out why they just go! It is the same with fish - spook one, and you spook the lot!

It is so easy to 'blow' a bait, by allowing barbel to associate the bait, even a very well constructed one, with danger. If something provokes caution in a fish, I am certain it will give off signals, even if it does not bolt, to other fish in the area. Maybe it is body language? Pheromones? Both? Who knows, but I am certain that it happens.*1

The bait

Leaving aside additives, there are two ingredients within the nutritional profile of any bait that I consider essential, I mentioned these earlier – fat and protein. How much of these to include in your bait? I would suggest comes that it down to what you want from your fishing. I

¹ *That is a scientific fact. *Schreckstoff*, the alarm substance in fish, is a mixture ► Chondroitin, a glycosaminoglycan, is a component of the alarm substance ► Skin extract activates the mediodorsal posterior and lateral anterior olfactory bulb ► Purified chondroitin activates the mediodorsal posterior bulb.

The chemicals emitted differ, indicating to nearby fish anything from mild alarm to actual, physical harm. Imaging

of neural activity has also revealed that *Schreckstoff* components activate the same region of the primary olfactory processing centre - the medio-dorsal posterior region of the olfactory bulb - which has been shown to detect fear signals in many fish species. [Editor]

opt for using an HNV bait that is very high in protein, because I use it for a very specific purpose - singling out big barbel. Important to that end is also the way in which I apply the bait, in order to maximise the chances of achieving that goal.

However when fishing a water for a one off session, or very infrequently, or even fishing a water regularly with the intention of catching as many and whatever size of barbel are in front of me, I opt for meat every time. There are many types of meat in all its forms, both processed and natural, I could not list them all here. All will appeal to barbel and all can be flavoured; meat in all its forms is, in my opinion, probably the most versatile bait available to an angler!

Probably the first signals that a barbel recognises from meat are the juices that leech off, carrying with them the fatty oils and immediately indicating to the barbel that it is smelling good food. Whether or not the barbel views the meat with caution depends on the recognition of that particular scent or taste, and obviously will depend on how many times it has encountered them at the same time as being caught.

Be in no doubt though, meat in any of its forms - processed or not - is one food about which a barbel needs very little (if any) education, regarding whether or not a good food source is

present. Its appeal is instant and our only problem is keeping it that way. Meat, especially the processed type, contains high levels of fat which a barbel needs for energy and the fact it also has a reasonable level of protein (at least as high as anything it can find naturally), means the barbel will certainly find it appealing. Meat, just as with any bait, whether by scent or taste, is capable of becoming recognisable as a danger and the resulting caution will override any appeal. This is what happened with luncheon meat in years gone by when, after being so successful, it ended up that you could not by a bite on it on many waters, the 'pink inevitable' was the popular term!

One of the advantages of meat is the ability to add flavours to disguise its basic flavour. I think it was sometime in the early nineties that people started experimenting with flavouring it and it took on a new lease of life, once again becoming the deadly bait that it always was. The barbel were not particularly eating it because this spicy flavour, or that, was particularly appealing – though it must have a degree of appeal, it was because they no longer associated the scent with danger. They still ate it because of its appeal in the nutrition it offered, which after eating gave that all important 'feel good factor' that comes after eating good food.

Barbel, though simple creatures, are driven by powerful instincts but, as with any wild creature, are capable of being educated to reject things that present danger, or to accept things that are beneficial. It has to be said that it is a fine line between the two – you, the angler, have to keep up or pay for it in your captures of barbel – simple as that! I guess most of us have been there at one time or another, I know in the past I have.



1997 – Caught on Spicy Luncheon meat

Other types of bait

There are hundreds! Leaving aside the many types of different meat, cheese for instance in all its varieties, another blindingly good bait for barbel, which if kneaded into a paste can be easily flavoured by liquids or powders to add a label.

However, even just using chunks and occasionally changing the type of cheese can be enough for that little change you need. There is one common factor though, which makes cheese as good as meat, and that is its' fat and protein content. As with meat, cheese having a high level of fat and a respectable protein content, despite having a scent entirely unnatural to a barbel, is instantly appealing and inherently signals good food to a barbel – many other fish too!



2000 – Cocktail sausage

Just as with any bait, if caught too much on it then barbel will become very cautious of accepting it. However, there are so many types of cheese available it is very easy to change without even needing to add flavours! Although, of course, you can if you wish - try onion or garlic granules for instance, which can be kneaded into the cheese – excellent!



1998 – Piece of beef burger



2003 – Cheese paste flavoured with onion granules and ground black pepper

Ingredients from bait manufacturers

There are many types of processed bait ingredients that we can buy from bait manufacturers and with which we can formulate baits to our own individual requirements. The combinations of them must be endless!

It is these that people often turn to when looking for a new and individual bait, but it is also often where many become lost in a maze of confusion! It is, without doubt, a minefield for those inexperienced in bait making. Making a bait without understanding the nature of the ingredients and how they react to each other can end in a mess, and failure, before they even leave the kitchen - let alone reach the riverbank! The mix will not roll, it is too stiff, or too sticky, dissolves in the pan, or ends up like little bullets!

All these things the novice bait maker will experience, and there is no way round it really. You can take all the advice on board, but still, at some point, you will have the odd disaster! All I can say is, you have to really enjoy the learning process or you are on a hiding to nothing! It will become a chore and, as a result, you will never do well at it. If this is the case you need to be honest with yourself and just stick to using proprietary ready-made mixes or baits. Attempts to keep the cost down can also result in an ineffective bait by using cheap, unappealing ingredients.

This is, I believe, the case with many proprietary baits – not all, but some telling you on the packet they are the business are, in fact, made from cheap bulk ingredients, with a flavour that the manufacturer hopes will compensate for its nutritional inadequacies. You may have the odd success, where I believe the fish pick it up out of curiosity – but will it perform week in week out year in year out? I very much doubt it; a stick of pepperami will out-fish them a thousand times over!

Our prime consideration when formulating our own bait, or using any bait for that matter, is out-competing the appeal of the barbels' natural food and unless we achieve that we are certainly going to have a very hard time catching them. Failure of our bait to deliver results leads to endless experimentation, trying to find that perfect combination of ingredients and consequently sliding down a slippery slope and into the 'bait trap'! Once you are in it, it is very difficult to get out. Total confidence in a bait is the only way out and that can only come with success and success will not come until you have confidence through catching - it's a chicken and egg situation, and, as I stated, not a nice place to be I can tell you!

The Essentials

Avoiding that bait trap is best done by not losing sight when making or choosing a bait to use of what we are trying to achieve, whether using an HNV or 'standard' bait. Feeding the fish when fishing, or pre-baiting, is only a means to an end to get that all important hook in its mouth, that is an essential we must keep in mind, many lose sight of it, and become wrapped up in unnecessary complexities in their bait recipes.



2004 – An early HNV capture

Trying to copy, by nutritional profile, the food a barbel eats naturally (a tall order in itself), is at best offering the fish nothing that it cannot find

naturally. If you wanted to do that, why not give them natural food and dispense with all the complexities? Worms, snails and so forth are very appealing to a barbel, and very digestible! I am being serious by the way! They are excellent options! The downside is they are most attractive when used in large quantities and they are not very selective.

The advantage to us in formulating our own bait is the ability to elevate the levels of those compounds within a food that the barbel find most attractive, giving such strong signals of nutrition that the barbel knows instinctively that it will do very well by searching this food out by following the scent, and then eating it; hopefully out competing its' natural food, not just in its initial attraction, but finally in what I believe is the nitty-gritty of it all, providing it with that all important 'feel good factor' that it will remember time and again.

I think many anglers get hung up on feeding the barbel a balanced nutritional profile, and trying to emulate that – would you even know what it is? Moreover, how you would identify it? To do so you would have to copy some very complicated protein structures. Factor into this that, in common with any wild creature, its diet is probably quite varied, alters from season to season, and even from river to river, and I very much doubt that it would be possible.

In my opinion, it is just unnecessary. Of course we have to feed them, but not to the point of forgetting the purpose of our bait, which is to attract a fish and convince it to eat it in preference to anything else available to it. And of course, to convince the fish that the bait is safe to eat! If I wanted to feed fish as a hobby I would take up koi rearing! A captive fish will eat what its keeper gives it because that is all it is ever going to get, the purpose of the food is to promote good health and attractive features, something that may concern us in the bigger picture as anglers, but certainly not to the point

of preoccupation. The fish we feed are not constrained to eating only what we may offer it and if it's nothing more than the nutritional value (using formulated bait) of what it can find naturally there's no real incentive to seek it out and eat it, other than possibly any curiosity value which likely will not last very long.

I would not state that by trying to copy the nutritional profile of a barbel's natural food you will end up with something totally unappealing, but I doubt that it would be a blindingly good bait. You must not lose sight of the fact you are not trying to feed the barbel per se', you are trying to catch them and to that end a bait is just that - a bait! Talking formulated bait, in my opinion we must consistently offer the barbel those compounds within its natural food that it finds most appealing, but in higher levels. Levels at which it could not hope to find in anything other than our bait, so making our bait something which is much more desirable to eat than anything it can find naturally.

These, of course, are the fats and proteins which are absolutely essential to its survival and why nature has given these ingredients such an appeal to barbel and all fish. Why just these two – fats, and proteins?

These two elements are the ones which are most valuable to the barbel. In the case of protein, it is absolutely vital to its survival and therefore I believe these two factors are absolutely vital to a good barbel bait.

Fats are used preferentially for energy. They are stored by their bodies for that purpose so the barbel has reserves to call upon, should they be needed. This is why I believe fat is so important to a barbel, especially with the onset of winter, and though far less food is being eaten because of its metabolism slowing down, it must maintain reserves for energy even though much less is being used. If no fat is available, and the barbel's reserves drop too low, protein will be



My PB 16lb 2oz – HNV of course!

utilised for energy. Protein cannot be stored by the barbel so in winter, though energy requirements may be lower, reserves of energy giving elements may become dangerously low if enough fat has not been stored. This is what will drive the barbel to search for food even in the coldest water.

So, although fat is not as essential as protein, it is still very important to the barbels' well-being. Yes, if stored in extreme excess it may be detrimental to its health, but nevertheless it remains a vital ingredient in its diet. However one type of fat – those called lipids (sometimes referred to as fatty acids), are as vital as protein, being used as a means of carrying the amino acids contained within the protein structures to the cells of the body and their subsequent absorption into the cell structures themselves. Without lipid fats barbel would be unable to utilise any of the essential amino acids which, as with all living creatures, they must absorb to maintain health and survive.

Proteins are absolutely vital to barbels' well-being and good health – true of any living creature, but fish depend on them to a far greater extent than most others. I will refrain from going into the subject of essential amino acids, which are contained within the various

protein structures within its food; suffice to say essential amino acids are those which an animal, fish included, cannot produce within its own body and they must therefore be supplemented through its diet. Their absence from a barbel's diet would quickly see it become sick and eventually die, that is as far as I will go on that subject.

These essential amino acids are plentiful within its natural diet and just because we deliver the barbel occasional bait, it will never stop it eating its natural food. I am certain, however, that most of what we will offer the barbel as bait, whether meat or a formulated bait, will provide it with much of its essential requirements and it is true there is no single natural food that will provide all of them anyway. It would be impossible, in my opinion, to deprive a barbel of these essential amino acids within a natural flowing environment and it is something that the river angler does not need to concern himself with. Therefore, we do not need to even consider trying to include them all in our bait, either from a point of view of attraction or providing the barbel with good health.

From our point of view, the essentials we need to consider are those which the barbel find naturally attractive, which seems to be protein in its raw form, and fat, which is unchanging whether in or out of a barbel!

So...coming to these two main essentials which prove to be so attractive to barbel - fats and proteins...do we include one or the other, or both, and in what levels? To answer that, it is back to that question again! You need to ask yourself what it is you want from your fishing, or at least, from a particular session. Fats and proteins are the two ingredients that, if included in a bait in high enough levels, will make your bait attractive enough for the barbel to want more, and more, and so keep them coming back. Their appeal, as I have stated, being because they both are so essential to the barbels well-

being and, in the case of protein, its very survival. However, I think they are both fairly different in the way they attract fish or barbel in our case.

Fats, from my experience, are fairly instant in their attraction, possibly because of their make-up they are instantly detectable without the need for the fish to actually eat the food, and therefore in my opinion are far more useful in a bait than high levels of protein for one-off or infrequent sessions on different rivers or stretches. Protein, it seems to me, is recognised only after eating the food. The more it is eaten the more the high levels (if present) become appealing as a result of that 'feel good factor' I described earlier; so appealing in fact, that if only small amounts of food containing these high levels are present, even only every few days but often enough to educate a barbel that it's little parcel of food will arrive, eventually a barbel will be willing to hang around and wait for it and is likely even protect the area from others trying to get in on the bait. Of course, that is until a bigger or more powerful barbel arrives and so it goes on. Given time, I am sure – in fact I know - the biggest barbel – or at least the most powerful barbel in the vicinity, will dominate the area.

To achieve that end, it is vital that a programme of minimal and regular baiting is carried out. Too much applied into a swim will give the big barbel no incentive to protect the area as there is then plenty of the food to go around. That all takes time and is why HNV baits are best suited to a long term campaign on one stretch of river, and particularly so if targeting the bigger (or the biggest!) barbel in a stretch. Using it as a bait for one-off session will certainly catch barbel because it is a very good bait in its own right; but this will never see it reach its full potential and compared to meat, in the short term, will at best only see comparable results but at a far greater financial cost!

If you are fishing infrequently or doing mostly one-off visits to various waters then meat, in my opinion, equals the best in results and many is the time it will surpass most baits, the instant appeal being time proven, and, in my opinion, the fat content being responsible for that much of the time. Processed meats are the easiest and least complicated way of using a bait with high levels of fat. Proprietary base mix ingredients tend to have much lower levels of fat than processed meat and, from that respect, show better results when used if fishing a stretch regularly when any barbel is your target - but in my opinion no more so than meat in all its forms.

So, are you after the big one? Or are you looking for a session just catching whatever comes your way barbel-wise? Do you know if there are large numbers present, or just a few? These are things you need to consider when choosing the type of bait to use.

If you are trying to single out the odd big one from a population then a fairly dedicated approach is needed. As I have said in other articles, an HNV bait with elevated levels of protein, at least above 70% in my opinion, is the way to go, combined with a pre baiting campaign of 'very little and as often as you can apply it', in order to encourage the bigger barbel to dominate a swim.

Another HNV capture – my Loddon PB – 15lb 8oz



All the things I have touched on here about labels, and preventing your bait being recognised as a danger, are particularly important, and even more so when targeting big barbel. They have been around a long time and likely have been on the bank many times and, as a consequence, have become very tricky to fool. That is something you will do well to remember in your whole approach, not just bait. I will say more about things of relevance such as digestibility further on, but really that is good for any bait not just HNV, and there is more than one way of achieving that.

Formulating an HNV means considering your bait ingredients carefully as some ingredients, such as binders which you will obviously need to make the bait roll, can pull the protein content of your mix down considerably. It takes some experience and an understanding of how ingredients will offset each other, regarding how they make your bait more or less pliable, rollable, and dissolvable. Some bulk ingredients will make your bait very moisture absorbent and will cause the mix to 'cake' or break up in too high volume within the bait, so solubles may be added to offset that. However, dependant on the nature of your bulk ingredient, and therefore the soluble portion you include, it is likely you will need that binder, and what you choose to use will depend on the first two whilst also considering that first statement of it pulling the protein level down - do you see how complex it can get? All very well for someone who has been using HNV for years, not so easy for the people who have not, and those who have no experience in bait making at all could end up with a disaster! Amusing with hindsight! But not much fun at the time to see a pile of sludge in the bottom of your saucepan or a large brick on your work surface!

So if you feel confident enough then give it a go! But it is so complicated I could write as much as I have written here easily on the subject and to give you a little advice, without the rest, will I

fear invite disaster. However, I am always up for giving a bit of help where it is wanted so please feel free to contact me via the ABF forum <http://www.barbelfishers.com/forum/> either publically on a post, or via PM.

Making a standard mix, if that is the right word, is much easier. Whilst the points above about binders and bulks having to work in your mix so that it rolls (if you intend to boil – and you don't have to) are all still relevant, what you don't need to worry about is decreasing the protein content, because it would be fairly hard to arrive at a bait with a protein level well below a barbel's natural food unless you were using very inferior ingredients. This type of bait is much more about what is instantly attractive to a barbel and certainly relevant if you are using them very infrequently on any given water. You can go a fair bit higher with flavours than you would otherwise in that situation, as long as you do not go to excess and actually make the bait repellent then that is fine. Meat meals will generally have a higher fat content than fishmeals, and the latter will have the generally higher protein content and lower fat.

The best of both worlds might be poultry protein meal, especially if fishmeals have been used frequently on your water, which roughly contains the same nutritional profile as the better quality fishmeals. Ingredients like megabland can also be extremely useful, not only as an additional bulk, but is also a very effective binder. There are dozens of others which will appeal to barbel and will make for an excellent high attraction type bait, where a baiting campaign is not necessary to achieve your aims. To these you can include additives such as Green Lipped Mussel, yeast powders, liver powders, and dozens of others that you can treat as labels and include and remove as you wish. Again, if any of you want advice on ingredients and what will function and roll well, then please feel free to contact me.

Digestibility

Regardless of the type of bait you are using, this is probably the most important factor in a bait whether using it in Summer or Winter. In my view, it is another reason why the proprietary baits often fail to deliver the goods for many, even the better ones, and it is simply because of their hard texture. Anglers frequently put in far too much of this type of hard, proprietary bait, usually boilies, not realising that even in summer temperatures they will take far longer to digest than they have time on the bank to fish.

Possibly, where (rarely these days) there are large numbers of fish present to eat the excess put in you will get away with it and have a barbel or two. Where there are more probably only a few barbel present, even thirty or forty baits can see one, two, possibly even three barbel full before they find the hookbait. Yes, possibly a barbel may find the hookbait before it is full but it will be a lottery and I am sure will dramatically increase your blanks and very often be the sole reason for them.

If you do use these proprietary baits then use them very sparingly, I would suggest using no more than three in a session, and rely on some kind of mushy loose feed as an attractant. Though these baits are primarily designed for the carp angler, they can and do catch barbel, though as barbel have a much smaller digestive capacity than carp I would recommend extreme caution with the amount you introduce into a swim unless you plan staying on for many hours...and just how many are you willing to spend on the bank?

Without even considering the ingredients of a mix, just keeping the bait soft will dramatically improve its digestibility and so load the odds of that take in your favour. Further inclusion of digestible ingredients to the bait such as wheat germ, pre-digested fishmeal, hydrolysed fish protein, soluble milks and so on, will

dramatically improve the digestibility of the mix and can even elevate the protein level which will be no bad thing. Digestibility is always important, but especially if you are fishing short sessions and much more so in winter. Once temperatures get very low I use only paste for freebies. Hard bait (I mean shop bought boilie type) is always bad in my opinion. In very cold water it can be, and many is the time I am sure is, the kiss of death.

Conclusion

So what makes a good barbel bait? Well there is no magic bait in my view, some are better than others for certain applications, but to re-cap I will list in a few lines what I consider to be the essentials.

Fat - Baits containing a reasonable level will have an instant appeal because of its vital energy giving properties.

Protein - Has a long-term appeal, simply because of its value to the barbel as a primary life-sustaining ingredient of food.

Baits that contain either, or both, in levels higher than can be found in their natural food may often be eaten in preference to its natural options and improve the baits' long term appeal, certainly more so than other bait containing cheap bulks.

Labels - Are essential for the recognition of your bait, and will ensure the individuality of your bait, but when changed slightly over a period will help avoid your bait becoming a danger signal when applying long term. Obviously, these flavours should be palatable to the barbel as they are a recognition aid only, not the long-term attractant in my opinion.

Digestibility - Probably the most important factor in all good bait at any time, but especially

on short sessions of only a few hours, and even more so in winter.

Essentially these are the factors that, in my opinion, make a good barbel bait, but, as I stated in my second paragraph, more important than the bait itself is what you do with it.

Consider all these things when formulating a bait or if using human type foods and you will have an excellent barbel bait.

Whatever your approach to your barbel fishing, your techniques, methods, rigs, daylight or night time preferences – getting that all important hook in its mouth is, in the final analysis, down to what we offer it as food. Remember it is a bait to us, but a meal to them, get it right, and



The Haven fishery

you are halfway there! Get it wrong, and you are on a hiding to nothing!

I hope I have covered most of the bases, I certainly hope I have given you something to think about and will hopefully put a few more fish on the bank for you.

Tight lines to you all!

The Association of Barbel Fishers

Putting life and friendship into barbel fishing

Association of
Barbelfishers

Join the ABF for only £5.00

Exclusive offers on prime stretches of river

Interactive forum

**Exclusive discounts on tackle, bait and across all
Shorefields Holiday Parks***

Annual magazine which YOU can star in!

Away days, events and social meetings

***See ABF website for details**

Photo courtesy of The Haven Fishery -
Offering ABF members discount rates...

www.barbelfishers.com

0844 2724904
info@wlm-baits.co.uk



This river in southern India has been the subject of many film and literary expressions, probably starting with the original John Wilson offering. These excited the fishing senses and created a desire in one's mind, "If only..."

In my own case I dismissed the thought, as having viewed the images I could not imagine myself scrambling along the rocks to chase a hooked fish. The reason for this being a long-standing knee injury, the result of a teenage motorbike accident, which age was not improving. This all changed when I had a knee implant which vastly improved my mobility and, having consulted Dave Plummer during a Florida excursion, he assured me that I was sufficiently agile.

In January 2010, I received a communication from 'Angling Direct Holidays' that there was last minute, reduced price availability for the India trip due to a cancellation. Three weeks later and I was there, having hurriedly sorted out my visa and flights.

The trip exceeded my expectations, the scenery and fishing being stunning. I caught nothing monstrous, but over seventy mahseer to 22lb's cannot be sniffed at. My immediate thought before leaving was that my long time fishing companions, son Al and our friend Mike Heljula, would love to come and having checked with Dave that there was availability, I booked them both a place without consulting them! They were more than happy with that decision, Mike with the proviso that his Great Ouse fishing companion, Chris Slidel, could also tag along, which was possible.

The following is Al's blog from his website, www.ebrocatfishing.com, which has been reproduced with his permission. He is, after all, as he keeps telling me, more articulate and a better writer than me.

It's one of those trips which really captures the imagination, the prospect of catching a huge and beautiful fish from a wild and mysterious location.

Fortunately, this January I got the opportunity to embark on this angling pilgrimage accompanied by my dad and 2 friends, Mike Heljula and Chris Slidel. We journeyed from Heathrow to Bangalore (around 10 hours), and were then transferred by mini bus to the Galibore fishing camp which is located around 3 hours drive to the south. The drive down to the camp is an experience in itself, particularly if it's a first visit to India, with the vibrant colours and general chaos quite an eye opener!

We arrived at the Camp pretty exhausted after the long journey but obviously excited and in high spirits, with the first sight of a majestic river getting the proverbial juices flowing. The accommodation on the camp is basic but adequate, everybody getting a large 'tent' to themselves which are comfortable and have self contained bathroom / washing facilities.

After a couple of hours snoozing it was time to head down to the river, just a minute's walk away, with the light rods in hand aiming to put that first Mahseer on the bank. It immediately became apparent that this was not going to be a difficult task, as this section of the Cauvery is literally teeming with small mahseer between 2 - 10lbs. My first cast with a sprout sized ball of soft ragi paste and the rod was instantly bent round by a 6lber - great stuff. The 45 minutes which followed saw me bag a further 9 small fish, with most of the takes coming within seconds of the bait hitting the water.

Around 4pm and it was down to the serious business of trying to snare a big Mahseer, as we reconvened for our first guided session. The tactics can vary, but the favoured approach is to whack out a hair rigged large (cricket) ball of boiled hard ragi, which is sufficiently solid that it prevents the hoards of small fish from whittling

it away. Once cast out, it's pretty much a waiting game, hoping that a large fish will pick the bait up. On returning blank from our first 4 hour stint for a pretty tasty curry supper, it was apparent that getting a large fish was going to be a considerable challenge; none of the 10 anglers on the camp had been successful.

The pattern of the days to come was for a morning's guided session from around 8am though to 12.30pm, which was followed by a fried breakfast back at the camp. Afternoon's were at leisure, with a choice of fishing for smaller fish from the beaches in front of the camp, walking up river and then wading back through the rapids working lures, or simply chilling out or even catching up with some sleep. Myself and Mike fancied the more active style of fishing and we spent most of the afternoons working lures. Around 4pm everybody would meet up again to head out for the evening sessions with the guides, typically finishing around 8.30pm which was around 1 hour after the fall of darkness.

minutes. Shortly after a recast the moment arrived that I had been yearning for, as I sat with rod in hand, I had a violent



One of the smarter guides...

take and the fish set off down river stripping line from a tight drag. I had to dig in a bit, but managed to get the fish turned and heading up stream. Around 15 minutes later, after a dogged battle in the deeper water and a few hairy moments around some of those rocky ledges, we were able to bank a fish clearly in excess of the magical 50lb mark. The initial weigh in was a little inconclusive, but a quick call for reinforcements armed with a weigh bar meant that we were able to establish the weight at 64.5lbs - the biggest fish to be caught from the Galibore camp in the season to date. I was truly elated with the capture as I had set myself a target of a 50lb fish to feel like I had achieved success. To say the Mahseer is a stunning looking fish would be to do them an



Fishing a serene morning session

My personal highlight of the trip arrived on the 3rd evening session of the week, shortly after the fall of darkness. We had changed tactics to a ball of soft ragi, because after dark the small fish were not quite as active, so it was possible to keep a ball of soft bait out for maybe 10 - 15



Chris with a 35lb mahseer

injustice, for me this was the most handsome fresh water specimen that I had laid my eyes on.

Al Henderson with a 64lb 8oz Mahseer



The remainder of the week yielded some more cracking fish for our group. Chris was more than pleased with the morning capture of a 41lb, along with another at 35lb. Mike also had a good quality fish at 35lb, whilst Bryce drew the short straw and never contacted one of the better fish, having to settle for a 20lb as his best. Numerous smaller fish up to around mid doubles keep the sessions interesting and can be caught easily on large balls of soft ragi, if you can keep the bait out there long enough!



Chris' 41lb

Although these results may seem fairly modest in terms of a week fishing for big fish, it is more the overall experience of the trip which will leave the abiding memories. The scenery and wildlife are simply stunning, and although we weren't fortunate enough to see the wild

elephants, they are regular visitors down to the water's edge. Huge crocodiles are often sighted patrolling the far margins, with other highlights including otters, monkeys, wild boar and water buffalo. Leopards are also present, but reclusive and not likely to be seen during day light. The bird life too is spectacular with a vast array of raptors including fish eagles swooping down to make a catch, and the lurid colours of the kingfishers is a sight to behold.



A body snatcher!

No trip like this is ever complete without a bizarre incident, and true to form we witnessed it on the very first night of the holiday..... As we were fishing, a dead body (yes.... a human one!) drifted past us before snagging on some rocks about 200 yards down river from where we sat. Within minutes, the crocodiles were on the corpse, ripping and spinning as they tore into it. Not something I can say that I have encountered on the Ebro! The guides were suggesting the body must have been drifted down the river on a funeral pile, but had somehow come adrift. A grisly episode indeed, although it did provide much entertainment over a few beers and the trademark curry dinner!

Perhaps my only regret during the trip was that I was unable to hit a big fish on the lures up in the rapids section, as this would have been the ultimate way to experience Mahseer fishing. Myself and Mike each took around 5 fish on the Rapalas, but alas no big ones. Contacting



anything of 30lb or over in this manic section of water would have been a fantastic challenge, but try as we might, we were unable to achieve it.

The week ended with a journey back to Bangalore and an afternoon spent in the city, which itself was a great bit of fun, zooming around in a motor rickshaw and bartering for gifts in the craft stores. An 8oz burger in the Hard Rock Cafe was just the ticket after a week of curry, curry and more curry!

The Top Rapids

Overall this was a fantastic week's adventure spent fishing a spectacular river in atmospheric surroundings, made all the better for me by the capture of a monster Mahseer. I wouldn't hesitate recommending this destination to any angler who likes to experience something completely unique and magical.

Sunset on the Cauvery...



The weeks of the closed season of 2013 dragged on and on as they always do. I had sorted my bait and my tackle ready for the big day, and I was bored stiff.

I decided that I must do something to pass the time away and that was to have a try for some Perch at a local commercial. I had heard rumours of fish nearing 4lb's, but my target was to be to try to catch a 3lb fish. I visited the fishery a couple of times and talked to any anglers that were fishing. I finally settled on which pool I would fish after getting some good information from some of the anglers I had spoken too.

First visit bait was to be lobworm, fished under a float with 4lb's line straight through to a size 10 hook, feeding dead red maggots using a bait dropper to try to draw some small fish in, hopefully followed by some large perch. It was a very cold day when I arrived at around 10 o'clock and to be honest I just was not confident. That feeling soon went away when, after half an hour, the float sailed confidently away and I knew from the jag-jag of the fight that I was into my first perch. After a short, unspectacular fight the fish was in the net, a good start at 2lb 8oz. Unfortunately, that proved to be the only fish of the session.

Next visit, I fished the same pool with the same tackle but decided on a change of bait, which were to be prawns whilst still feeding red maggots with a bait-dropper. It proved to be a good choice, as six perch over 2lb's came to the net, with the biggest weighing 2lb12oz.

I paid several more visits, trying different pools with the same tactics and, although I blanked a couple of times, most times fish over 2lb's were caught but never anything bigger than the 2lb 12oz perch caught on the second visit.

Therefore, I never got to achieve my target of 3lb's, but had learnt some things about perch and enjoyed passing my time, waiting for the river season.

The 2013/14 season finally arrived. First session was to be on the Derbyshire Derwent, a river that I have fished for the last three years. It is a lovely river with shallows, deeper water and plenty of bankside cover. There is also plenty of weed growing on fast gravel runs, unfortunately the weed growth at the start of the season was to prove to be a problem. Huge beds had grown out halfway over the width of the river and it had also reached the surface. It looked impenetrable and so it proved to be. Bait was to be 12mm boilie and loose feed of different sizes of pellet, mixed with some of the boilie that had been crushed. The 12lb sensor main line was also used for the hook length; hook was a size 8 Mustad Super Specimen. This is a hook that I have a lot of confidence in, as they are very strong and cheap ensuring they can be changed regularly.

My usual early season swims being unfishable, I spent the first morning of the new season walking the river being in no hurry to wet a line. I find that time spent walking the river wearing a pair of polaroid sunglasses is never wasted and after a couple of hours of walking and looking, I located some barbel on a gravel run with some nice gaps in the weed that the fish were drifting in and out of. I put some free



A 2lb 12oz perch

offerings out and watched as just one fish came out and took a couple, before sliding back under the weed and there it stayed. Still, I was in no hurry so spent some more time looking for fish and talking to the few anglers that were already fishing.

Evening arrived and the fish I had found earlier were still there. As I trickled bait in they became more and more confident; it looked as if I could not fail. Well I did! I fished the swim all night and not a sign of a bite, not even a liner. Come the morning, there was no sign of the fish that had been feeding so confidently the evening before; all a bit strange. I stuck to the same method on my next few visits but, apart from one barbel of around 8lb's and a few chub, some of which were over 5lb's, I was struggling and it looked as if the anticipation of the new season was going to be better than the reality. It was interesting though, in that each time I found fish and fished at night for them, they would be absent in the morning. Was it something I was doing or were they leaving the cover of the weed during the hours of darkness? I did not have the answer but knew they were moving out of my area to feed somewhere else.

Having been fairly successful with my methods, rigs and bait on this river in the three seasons I had fished it, I decided that on the next visit I would not look to find fish. Instead, I would look for areas near to weed, slightly deeper and with plenty of far bank cover, thinking that any natural food coming downstream would drop into the deeper water and that it may be to this kind of area that the fish were moving during the hours of darkness.

So, that was to be the plan and on the next trip I walked probably half a mile to a swim that I had fished the previous season. I knew that it had the features that I was looking for; I was just hoping that the weed would not be too bad, as it was in other parts. I need not have worried, as the swim was fine, just as it was last season. It was around eight o'clock when I was settled in, pellets and broken boilies had been loose fed to where I thought the river deepened, my rig was cast in and I sat down for a smoke. An hour and a half passed by with no sign, when suddenly the rod pulled over and an angry Barbel took off downstream. The fight was short, as I had to bully the fish away from the weed and the far bank. I rested the fish in the net while I got my



11lb 2oz barbel

scales and camera ready as it looked a decent fish and it weighed 11lb 2oz - my first double of the season and one that had possibly come due to the new plan I had used. One fish however, although a good start, would need to be backed up with others for me to be convinced that the fish were moving into deeper water during darkness.

Next trip, I decided to fish the same sort of swim but a different one to where I had the 11lb 2oz. The usual pellets and boilies were again loose fed into the swim, and the swim allowed to settle before casting in. The rig had not been in place five minutes when the rod went over, resulting in a long fish that weighed 8lb 9oz. The Barbel in the Derwent are often quite long for their weight; I put this down to them feeding on naturals a lot and not getting too fat from feeding on pellets. After returning the fish, I fed some more loose feed before casting in again. It was around four hours later when I had the next bite, which was from a nicely proportioned 10lb 6oz, which was left in the net to rest before photographing.

Unfortunately, that was to be my last session for a while as other things got in the way of the more important things in life, such as fishing! By the time I was able to go again the river was flooded, being six to eight feet above normal summer level. I have no idea why, but I have always struggled on the Derwent when it is flooded. I manage on other rivers, even when on the river Wye whilst it is flooded in winter I have caught, although it was struggle. On the Derwent, I have a feeling that it may be down to some of the stuff that gets pumped in when it is flooded.

By the next session a lot of the excess weed growth had been removed by the floods. I continued to fish the deeper water swims and, on the first session back, I landed my PB for the Derwent at 13lb 9oz.

Although I did, on occasion, fish weedy swims during the day and catch barbel including a number of double figure fish (but also some smaller fish that are always welcome); I mostly kept to the deeper types of swim that had produced for me in the season. On a less than happy note, both myself and a friend have seen otters on the bank, a situation that does not bode well for the fish. But they are here now

and nothing can be done, other than hope that nature will eventually balance everything out.

It was a good season for me as far as barbel are concerned and, on my first perch session the other day I had eleven fish, with seven going over 2lb's up to 2lb 7oz. With an average like that, surely there are 3lb(+) perch there, waiting to be caught?