

River Wye – Wilson Chub

Streaming through the gorge an unrelenting flow tumbles down over huge slabs of bed rock while overhead a buzzard hangs motionless. Hidden within its depth vast shoals of dace hold station, occasionally fragmented by a dark shadow ghosting across the bottom - its only concern comes from an angler wetting his fly. Alas though I feel I have done this stunning river an injustice for the English language doesn't contain the words to describe such beauty.

The river, of course, is the Wye a bastion for wild fishing and stunning scenery. I can not think of a finer place in which to while away a few hours.

Home of the mighty salmon, locals are quite rightly protective of this environment. Landowner and ghillies alike can be fearful of the 'coarse' angler. Slowly but surely though these boundaries are being lowered and perhaps the time has come when all anglers are equal for many freshwater species find a home between the rocks and weed.

Leading the way is the Wye and Usk Foundation which at present controls 80 miles of river. Sure their main clientele wields the fly but all anglers do get a friendly welcome. In fact the coarse angler is in for a treat as the foundation is now actively searching for middle and lower river beats to offer barbelers, chubbers and pikers alike!

Set up as an environmental charity it also boosts the local economy via an influx of eager anglers. It would indeed appear that any man's money is now acceptable. Please don't misinterpret this for bad behaviour as only respectable, responsible anglers need apply. Follow the countryside code though and you too could be sampling some of the most fantastic fishing this country has to offer.

Keen to get my own slice it wasn't hard to accept the invitation from John Wilson to appear in an episode of his new series featuring the Wye. In December Discovery Real Time (channel 250) will be screening 'Dream Fishing'. Running for 15 half hour slots it offers a kaleidoscope of adventures – Norway to Thailand with lots more in between and fish ranging from sharks to carp fishing.

John really is the professional's professional with a career spanning 150 shows and 30 books. He keeps telling me he's going to ease up but that's about as likely as me winning the lottery!

So a drive through the Brecon Beacons took me to my rendezvous point with John at Builth Wells and the upper reaches. Although a population of barbel do exist here it was the chub which was on the agenda for the first stage of our journey. Filming would commence the following morning but with Seth and Simon from the foundation offering a guided tour we would get our first glimpse that evening.

Suspended high above on a stone bridge, we looked down on the sparkling water. In both directions it looked mouth watering, laying across a backdrop of rolling hills and woodland.

Over dinner we excitedly discussed our findings. Chub hanging just below the surface while an occasional barbel twisted portraying its presence against the boulders. It wasn't hard to be enthusiastic.

A 5 o' clock alarm call heralded the start of 3 days fishing and filming. We just hoped we could do the river justice because if you think fishing is difficult enough just wait until you bring along the cameras. Imagine trying to creep into position with two cameramen and a soundman. How John has kept it up for so long god only knows.

Although we were both acutely aware that the river required a roving approach to maximise sport, unfortunately this option wasn't viable within the constraints of filming. Instead we chose a deep run situated at the end of some boulder strewn shallows, hopefully giving us plenty of scope. Both of us employed heavy lines combined with strong quiver tip rods. My particular choice was a Drennan Super Feeder Combo.

Even on the virgin coarse waters of the upper river we trickled in the obligatory halibut pellet, with a banded or hair rigged 14mm variety being our chosen hookbait. It wasn't long before our tips shook violently as chub started to snatch at the pellets. Obviously the catholic tastes of the chub had been instantly triggered by the fishy aroma.

John's tip cranked over and he was first to make contact with the river. Not a big fish but splendid all the same and in pristine condition. For a while we both found the chub obliging before the swim began to dry up as predicted. Upper Wye fish live in small pockets so to maximise the rivers potential we needed to move, even if this meant that the cameramen and soundman followed suit.

Lifting the rods we both tried to reel in but unfortunately the river bed had decided to eat our leads – a common problem on the Wye. Undeterred John called on his masheer experience to solve the problem. Dispensing with the rod, instead the mainline was held and all the stretch within the line was removed by pulling hard. Imagine an elastic band stretched like this – what happens when you let go? It springs back. So In turn the force catapults your lead free. Amazingly it worked and it is a great tip for all anglers fishing in such conditions.

Our move took us to a rocky beach where the river swept round a left hand bend before tumbling over some rapids and holding station just above here were the barbel and chub, clearly visible in amongst the streamer weed. By slipping off

our socks and shoes we slowly crept out onto a huge slab of bedrock – true ‘cowboys and indians’ fishing!

From this vantage point a bait could be flicked upstream and allowed to waft down into a hungry mouth. Instead of our original tackle a simple weighted hook would suffice and the bait became a large chunk of spam.

Poised as ghillie I watched as John’s line edged backwards with the meat trundling along in tow. A quick pluck was followed by the line zipping upwards. An equally quick strike saw the culprit hooked – 4lbs of pristine chub.

Over the course of the day we continued to explore the beat catching chub to order. Each one special, set to a backdrop which made you feel glad to be alive. No monsters surfaced, but to worry about such matters would be to miss the point. Catching is just a small point of the Wye experience, indeed as the TV series title says ‘Dream Fishing’.

With our work done it was time to head south and follow the river’s course into England. Here we hoped to swap chub for barbel and I’ll tell you next week if we were successful.

The Way & Usk Foundation supply both game and coarse fishing with many venues open on a day ticket. Call 01982 551520 or go to www.wyeuskfoundation.org

For fishing tackle and tips visit Woody at Woody’s Tackle, Hereford, tel -1432 344644

Top 5 Wye Tips

1. Don’t fish too light – the fish aren’t line shy but the rocks will cut you.
2. Take plenty of bait – on the upper river don’t be afraid of old classics like sweet corn and meat.
3. Take plenty of leads - snags are just part and parcel of the river. Also don’t forget to try John Wilson’s masheer tactics.
4. Travel light – roving is certainly the best option of the upper river.
5. Take a set of Polaroid glasses – in the clear water it’s possible to spot fish.

Martin’s Wye Chub Tackle

Rod Drennan Super Feeder Combo – with its maximum reach being 13ft this is ideal for wide, powerful rivers

Reel Okuma V30M – a good reel is essential on the Wye for coping with the stresses and strains. Play the fish hard to keep them from the snags

Line 8lb Drennan Specimen Plus – there’s no need for fine, hi tec lines – reliability is key here

Hook Drennan Super Specialist – light enough for the chub to accept, it is also incredibly strong