

Wilson/Wye – Barbel

With the upper Wye left behind we headed back into England, taking with us memories of truly wild fishing. Would the middle reaches treat us as kindly?

Few rivers can match the Wye for barbel action and although their ultimate size may not peak at the same level as other venues, a rod wrenching time can be banked on. Strangely though a couple of television cameras will make even the simplest of tasks tricky, so we certainly weren't counting our chickens!

To aid our quest Seth Johnson Marshall from the Wye & Usk Foundation once again paved the way with a guided tour of a stretch under their control. Although the landscape had changed Holme Lacy, near Hereford, still provided us with some of mother nature's finest designs. Rolling hills interspersed with woodland while derelict salmon goints saw the sparkling river pushed off course with the river margins awash with wild flowers. Unlike other rivers denuded by agriculture the steep banks had provided an oasis to plant life.

On our guided tour every swim looked like a barbel home but the piece de resistance was saved to last. Why is the best swim always the longest walk?

Here the flow increased as it sat directly above a shallow gravel bend. In this final run 3 trees hung low against the surface, home to our quest. A handful of halibut pellets peppered the surface – what would reveal itself? Seconds later we began counting shadows heading in convoy to the food. Chub and barbel were all eager to get their own share. After 20 we lost count, though it mattered little as what we did know was that this was fishing heaven. It wasn't a hard task to decide where we were going to be starting in the morning.

Sitting side by side we eagerly readied the tackle, while our pellets were allowed to once again work their magic. The Wye is a harsh river on tackle and one which takes no prisoners. Come here with traditional tackle, 1¼lb, avon style rods with 8lb line and you will be eaten alive. Therefore I rigged up accordingly; a 1¾lb test curved power barbel rod combined with an Okuma Epix Pro 50 loaded to the gunnels with 12lb ESP mono.

For terminal tackle a long length of anchor tubing was threaded up the line. Wye fish aren't tackle shy so I have no problem in using the tubing to protect my mono against boulders and rocks. Then came the safety clip and tail rubber. A length of 15lb coated braid and a size 8 hook completed the set up.

For bait we both didn't have to look beyond a 14mm and 10mm marine halibut pellets combined with a PVA mesh bag of 6mms for added attraction.

So with cameras ready to roll, casts were made. John had kindly positioned me in the downstream side so, in theory, I should have received the initial action. It

transpired however that this was an irrelevance to the hoards of hungry chub, as our rod tips bounced continuously as the pellets were plucked and pulled.

If these had been our prime target then we would have dispensed with the hair rigs, for although brilliant for carp and barbel, chub feed in a completely different manner. Normally they clasp the bait between their lips slowly backing away. Guess where your hook is when they feel the resistance of the rod tip? Still outside their mouths. Despite the inadequacies of our tackle a string of suicidal chub came our way. They weren't small either weighing in at 4lb+

Unfortunately this commotion, combined with relentless recasting of 2 anglers in the same swim did little for the barbel's confidence and they drifted back under cover downstream.

How we both longed to don a pair a chest waders and trot with a pin. Alas again the curse of filming had struck - it's never as easy as it seems. Television actually makes everything twice as difficult. Still there was no point crying about it we just had to solve the problem. John is now a past master at this so after a brief discussion a new plan was hatched.

If the fish wouldn't come to us then we would go to them. Long casts would be made to the first two overhanging trees. Casting would also be kept to a minimum, however we would continue to feed in front of us. Hopefully this would keep the chub at bay upstream and allow time for the hookbait to settle and the barbel to find them.

For the first time our tips remained motionless for 20 minutes. It was good to soak up the sun and relax. Then suddenly my tip wrenched over and line poured off the spool. The change in pace was amazing, now adrenalin was coursing through the veins where moments ago I didn't have a care in the world. This was certainly a barbel, confirmed by the sight of a bronze flank twisting in the flow. Not a big fish but very welcome under the spotlight of the cameras.

No bigger than 5lbs but its pristine condition made up for that. The Wye fish are spectacular – wild and uncaught.

Had we solved the puzzle? Were we about to sample the Wye at its finest? Well in one word – yes. Both John and I enjoyed rod wrenching battles, magnified by the distance – we now needed to coax them upstream.

It was good to spend time with John pulling each other's leg, with John reminding me about when I couldn't tie a proper knot, which was only corrected by a lesson from him. How time flies it only seemed like yesterday.

My rig also gave John much amusement. 'Super Kid with his super rig!' I tried to explain that it was intended to prevent cut offs but all he did was chuckle. John

made his next cast only to see his line break, weakened by the rocks. Both of us fell about laughing but he still didn't want any of my tubing.

Shortly afterwards came my next bite. Immediately I knew this was a different 'kettle of fish', holding station and occasionally forcing me to give line. At one stage it even became snagged, making me walk downstream in an attempt to free it. Eventually the tackle took its toll and John netted a long bronze flank weighing, we guessed, around 9lbs. Its torso contained not an ounce of fat. Put the same fish in a pellet fed water and it would have easily made double figures.

This however is how barbel should really look and the Wye fish are magnificent. As we both smiled for the camera I couldn't think of a better place to be.

Martni's Top 5 Tips

1. Take plenty of pellets with you – Wye chub are very hungry and you may have to catch a few first.
2. Don't worry about tackle shy barbel – instead use gear which will help you land them.
3. Use PVA mesh bags of pellets to increase the attraction around your hookbait.
4. Play the fish hard – if you can get them off the bottom then 99 times out of 100 you will win.
5. Don't use backleads – they may be vital on pressured rivers but here they will only snag up.

Martin's Tackle

Rod	1¾lb TC Drennan Power Barbel – the Wye is no place for light tackle
Reel	Okuma Epix Pro 50 Bait feeder – with its large spool using strong line isn't an issue
Line	12lb ESP – don't use braid it is useless over rocks
Hooklength	15lb brown striptease – the coating not only acts as an anti tackle device but protects against snags
Hook	Size 8 continental boilie hook – the beaked point protects against turning over too easy on the the rocks

John & Martin's Bait

2 kilos 14mm Dynamite Marine Halibut Pellets
2 kilos 10mm Dynamite Marine Halibut pellets
1 kilo of 6mms for PVA stocking bags

For details of Holme Lacy and other venues, contact the Wye & Usk Foundation on 01982 551520 or www.wywuskfoundation.org

For local tackle and bait contact Woody's Tackle, Hereford on 01432 344644