

Floodw

When the forecast is for persistent rain in the autumn and winter, Gardner and Sonubaits-backed Alan Stagg rubs his hands in glee. It's time for barbel, if you don't mind a little bit of mud underfoot.



Water Barbel



In recent years I think it is fair to say that throughout the country the majority of us have noticed a change in the weather.

No matter what the season, it is not unusual to see prolonged periods of heavy rain.

It has almost become part of our everyday lives to switch on our televisions at this time of year and hear reports of flooding as our country struggles to adapt to these increasingly wet conditions.

Anglers - Daft Or What?

So what does this mean for anglers? It always amazes me when it has been raining for days, the temperatures are mild and the rivers are up and coloured offering perfect conditions for barbel, and yet the banks are devoid of anglers.

These are not comfortable fishing conditions but surely that's why many of us have invested in good quality waterproofs and thermals so we can be out relishing these opportunities.

It is common to arrive at the river in textbook conditions to find the car park empty, yet in the summer with high temperatures and the sun beaming down - far from ideal conditions - the riverbanks are teeming with anglers.

Opportunity Knocks

The anglers willing to put in the effort on these dull and miserable days will, more often than not, have the river to themselves, allowing them to capitalise on such opportunities.

This leads me back to the first floods of the season, which we have just experienced. I fished Friday, Saturday and Sunday for a few hours each evening and, not surprisingly, had the banks to myself.

As I had just started fishing a new stretch, I knew that any experience I could gain, while the river was carrying extra water, would put me in good stead for the winter when these conditions would repeat themselves.

Arriving at the fishery on Friday evening, it had been raining continually for nearly two days. Once on the river I was unsurprised to find it coloured. The river looked perfect and, although I returned home without any action, I was keen to get back the next evening for another go.

Up She Comes

Arriving the next day, I found the river had risen more than two feet overnight and, with no other anglers on the fishery, I was rubbing my hands together with glee.

I headed back to the swim I had fished the previous day, but I was disappointed when I arrived at the swim to find the spot where I had sat the previous evening was under water, leaving me little choice but to look elsewhere.

Momentarily disappointed, I walked several miles downstream looking at every swim on the way,

trying to imagine what it would be like next time the rain fell in force.

After walking the stretch, I settled for a swim which held a nice near-bank slack, stretching for nearly a third of the way across the river. With an overhanging bush both above and below the slack area, it screamed barbel and is the type of swim I always look for in high water conditions.

I find it important, when not knowing a swim or particular area of the river, to have a little feel around on the bottom to find any gravel areas, or indeed snags, which might cause a problem once a fish is hooked.

Often only a few casts are needed with a heavy lead in a rough area where I plan to present a hook-bait.

Doing this, it gives me the confidence that my bait and presentation is as good as I can get it. It also allows me to know, once sat back, that I'm fishing as effectively as possible and if fish are present then the rod will go over.

Baiting Time

On finding a suitable area, and particularly if it is an area of slack water, I put a bed of bait down.

However, I only do this if I am 100 per cent confident that a large proportion of the bait I am going to introduce will stay in the selected area.

If this isn't the case, then it is totally pointless, as it will wash downstream, taking the fish you want to catch with it.

Once I am satisfied that most of the bait will not get washed away, then I put down a decent bed, consisting of a mixture of Sonubaits 6mm halibut pellets and scented hemp.



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Often these slack areas are only one or two rod lengths from the bank and are my favourite areas for high-water conditions. It also means it is quick and easy to deposit a bed of bait onto the riverbed.

I do this by using a home-made bait dropper I have talked about before in CF. I often put in at least 10 dropper-loads of bait, even if I am fishing for just a few hours.

I do this because I always time my sessions, if at all possible, to the time I think the fish are most likely to feed.

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Waiting Game

Once I have found an area I am confident in, I prepare the area, introduce a rig and then sit back and wait. I seldom use a roving approach in these situations. My tackle does not change from summer to autumn, apart from maybe the size of lead!

My tackle consists of a back lead which runs on 12lb GR60 main line, leading to a couple of feet of Gardner's Plummet lead core.

I always use a heavy lead in such conditions and even in a near-bank slack use between two and three ounces.

The lead is left free-running on the main line, to a hook-link made of Gardner Tackle's new Chod Skin in 10lb breaking strain, a new coated hook-link material that I have been using this summer and autumn with good results.

Hook choice is a Talon Tip in a size 6 or 8, depending on the size of hook-bait I intend to use.

Hook-bait Essentials

Hook-baits for this style of fishing are important. The fish need to find them in the coloured water.

Paste, boilies and meat are all successful barbel baits in floodwater conditions. However, my favorite bait in these conditions is Sonubaits' halibut pellets in 13mm and 17mm in size.

I present these on a hair and put the whole lot in a solid PVA bag with 10

to 15 samples of the hook-bait.

These are the only large food items that I introduce into the swim.

This forces the fish to approach the hook-bait if it wants a bigger piece of food, which are presented in a neat pile.

I have been using solid PVA bags rather than the mesh type bags in the last couple of months, mainly because I have been fishing a heavily weeded river.

They can be a bit more fiddly than the mesh, which is a very convenient way to use PVA, but I think it is worth the effort.

Even after some high water conditions the weed is still in abundance. Using a solid PVA bag gives me 100 per cent confidence that my rig and freebies are presented effectively, and are not fouled by any weed or debris present in the swim.



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Doubling Up

In a swim with a nice near bank slack, I like to use two rods if I feel the area is large enough and, of course, if I am allowed to do so.

I like to use two rods in such circumstances because it allows the angler to present hook-baits in two areas of the swim. I usually present one mid-slack, around a rod length or two from the bank, and the second rod further downstream at the end of the slack, about the same distance from the bank.

By spreading your feed along the bank it encourages the fish to work up through the swim, looking for food.

Line bites are an important part of my barbel fishing. They can tell you a lot about what is happening under water and, indeed, if there are any fish present in the swim.

Barbel will continually work across a swim in their search for food and often, once you start getting line bites and the hook-bait has been presented correctly, the rod will go over.

This really is the time to sit on your hands, be patient, and wait for a positive indication as striking at line bites can spook the intended quarry and ruin your swim.

Kit Yourself Out

As I stated at the beginning of this article, it is important to be correctly kitted out for such fishing.

Good quality waterproofs and thermal clothes are vital. They allow you to stay comfortable in wet conditions and enjoy your angling. Remember, a wet and cold angler is not a happy angler and will not fish effectively.



8lb 10oz

Another point worth noting is sometimes rivers can rise quickly and it is never worth being near or venturing on the banks in these conditions. No fish is ever worth your life. The riverbank at these times can become very slippery, so always make sure you take care.

End Note

Recently my local River Loddon rose three feet overnight after three days of heavy rain. I fished three short sessions over a weekend at the times when I thought the fish might feed.

The result was three double figure barbel - 10lb 12oz, 11lb 6oz and 12lb 5oz - plus a smaller specimen weighing 8lb 10oz, using exactly the tactics detailed.

As long as it is safe to do so, get out there and enjoy your fishing. Often the fish are big and are feeding heavily in the coloured water. Now is the time to catch a biggie. Good Luck. **CF**



11lb 6oz



10lb 12oz