

A Bankside Interview

with Steven Hodges

THE INDIVIDUAL

As a boy where did it all start for you?

I can still remember the first time I went fishing it was on the canal in Kidderminster when I was five years old.

Who did you first go fishing with?

My dear old Gran took me fishing for that first time which started a lifelong fascination for the sport.

Who was your first fishing hero and why?

My first fishing hero was the famous author and fisherman Anthony Pearson.

As a young lad I would read his books: Sea Fishing, Fishing and Successful Sea Fishing over and over again. Any fisherman who reads his books would gain inspiration from his writing not only for fishing but about life also. If you have not read any of his books I would highly recommend you do.

Who would you say has most influenced your fishing?

In my early years I grew up in Kidderminster which is about three miles from the River Severn at Bewdley. There were two brothers Cyril Garbutt who lived in Lax Lane, Bewdley and George Garbutt who lived in Highley and worked with my dad at the local carpet factory Naylor's.

These two men were proper countrymen who lived and breathed the river and I spent many happy hours fishing and learning from them how to fish, especially for Chub from the Lax Lane ford at Bewdley on the Severn. George also taught me how to catch minnows using a wine bottle and fish them on a two-hook

In this my third bankside interview as Editor I have chosen Steven because of the consistent success that he has on our Pixham Ferry Fishery on the River Severn. Also, because it is a river that is not an easy nut to crack. Further, like several others Steve will help anyone if asked and since I have known him as editor, he has always supported me and provided some excellent articles which can be read in previous issues. It is for these reasons that I felt he should be recognised and rewarded in some small way.



rig for trout in the close season.

What was the turning point that led you to bigger fish and barbel?

When I joined the Barbel Society and read of the large

catches and large specimens being caught it inspired me to specialise in these wonderful fish and learn all I could about them.

When you first became mobile (was it a bike or

car?) and where did this lead you to?

I first became mobile with a bike and used to cycle to Bewdley at every opportunity to fish the Severn. Also in my teenage years although I grew up in Worcestershire

it was sea fishing that I became interested in and with my Dad I joined the Kidderminster Sea Angling Club so when I had my first car I made many weekend trips to fish the welsh coast for Bass.

An accomplished angler today on the Severn, when and where did you first start fishing this River?

I first started to fish the Severn in Bewdley in the early sixties but later on I started to fish at Arley higher up the river which is where I first started to catch barbel.

What other rivers has your desire for barbel fishing taken you to?

I have tended to only fish my local rivers for barbel; the Severn, Teme and Avon. I know some huge catches are made on the Trent for example but I have no desire to travel far as I have quality barbel fishing on my doorstep.

I also make a couple of trips to the Wye each season where I like to touch leger for barbel.

What has been your highlight in barbel fishing to date?

Without doubt this season has been the highlight of my Barbel fishing to date. I originally set myself a target of 100 fish and 20 doubles at the beginning of this season and as I write I have already had 132 fish with 33 doubles. I feel incredibly privileged to have caught so many quality fish.

Do you get the opportunity to spend time watching your fish?

On rivers like the Teme or the Wye in low, clear conditions I have occasionally observed fish but on the Lower Severn the only time I observe them is when they roll on the surface. Actually I have on a couple of occasions on the Avon cast over the area of a rolling fish and subsequently hooked them

Have you always fished for barbel, or do you focus on other species, for example during the close season.

Although I grew up in Worcestershire, I have always been interested in sea fishing despite the distance from the sea.

I am a member of the National Mullet Club, Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society, Zander Anglers Club and National Anguilla Club. I have fished for all these species over the years.

Recently however I have become very interested and fascinated with Zander and will be spending some time this winter fishing for them both in the Severn and some canals. I am also very interested in Lure fishing.

Personally, what have you got out of being a BS member?

I have learnt a great deal from being a member of the BS from meeting many of the members and exchanging ideas etc.

I have also fished a few sessions with Steve Pope



11lbs 8ozs: from Pixham



12lbs 7ozs: from lower Severn

who gave me lots of help and advice.

Lol Breakspear has also been very helpful when I have exchanged ideas with him.

After joining the BS and starting to catch quality barbel consistently I was also accepted into the Barbel Catchers where I also gained more knowledge about barbel.

Do you have a favourite venue and why is it your favourite?

Without doubt the Lower Severn between Worcester and Gloucester is my favourite venue.

It is a very mysterious and atmospheric river and you never know what monster fish lurk below the surface or what you may catch. I firmly believe a new Severn record barbel and

Zander will come from this area in the not too distant future.

TACTICAL TALK

What was the method you used when you first started fishing for barbel?

When I first started fishing for barbel I legered cubes of Spam in the shallow, fast water of the middle Severn.

How has this changed and what is your usual tackle for barbel fishing today?

To be honest it has not really changed that much. My most successful bait and method is legered spam, the only difference being I now hair rig it using a meat coil rather than burying the hook in it.



13lbs 7ozs: My PB from Pixham

Do you have any expectations or targets for the remainder of this season?

I have already surpassed my original target for this season but what I would still like to achieve is to be in the right swim when that record barbel decides to feed and comes across my bait.

Could you tell me your set up you use in both the summer and winter? Especially when the water is clear, low and with little flow?

In the spring/summer with normal water levels I use 1.75 TC rods with 4000 Bait runners, 12lbs Pro Gold mono, a running leger using a pulley rig bead for the weight with a buffer bead and a stainless-steel link tied to the end of the mainline.

Hook links are 12 to 18 inches long using 15lbs clear Amnesia mono with a strong, quality swivel and a size 6 Gardner wide gape talon tip hook with either a hair loop or a Phoxinus meat coil tied on.

In winter and flood conditions I use 2.25 TC rods, 6000 bait runners, 18lbs Varivas sport mono. End rigs same as summer.

Hook links are pre-tied and stored on Gardner mini rig bins so that should I get snagged and break off I can re-tie my end tackle and have a bait back in the water in a couple of minutes.

When the water is clear and low I always seek out deeper water that has some flow and fish during darkness.

What is your current confidence bait, and do you ever use meat?

My all time confidence bait is meat. In the Autumn and Winter, I use meat exclusively.

In the spring and summer I still use meat on one rod but use 20mm



Source boilies on my second rod with a PVA bag attached every cast filled with crushed boilies/small pellets.

This is because at this time of year eels are very active and strip meat baits in minutes.

I find that later at night however the eel activity ceases and I revert to meat on both rods.

What influences you regarding hook lengths: either choice of material or in length?

I do not use long hook lengths, mine are 12 to 18 inches long.

I use Amnesia clear mono in 15lbs BS (from my sea angling experience) because it is a tough, supple material and it is memory free so if you tension it before casting it lies straight.

If you use them, what are your favourite leads or feeders?

I no longer use feeders but when I did I used Fiskies.

Leads I use plain grippers with a centre hole in weights from 2 to 6 oz's which cover all situations.

I buy them in bulk from local sources because I get through a lot during the season.

Do you use paste much, and when do you use paste, for example, boilie wraps?

No I have tried it but

found that paste wraps get stripped by minnows in seconds so prefer to rely just on the boilie although I do scrape the surface skin with my nail to increase the scent trail.

Finally, how do you normally bait up for a session at the back end of the season?

Meat. I will just mention though that when I use

spam I always use it fresh from the tin when it has that fresh pinkish appearance and meaty smell so I cut it up just before a session and store it in sealed polythene containers. I no longer flavour it and find that once it is a day or two old, even if it has been in the fridge it loses that smell and turns a dull greyish colour so I discard any leftovers.

Well that's my third interview, and as with Gary Manders and Austen Rogers in previous editions, I thank Steven for his openness with us all. He is a top guy, who puts a lot of effort and time into his fishing which arguably is the answer to his consistent success on Pixham and year after year he is putting in consistently good catches. I wish Steven every success in the future.

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