



GARY NEWMAN'S angling adventures

After a decade of being hailed as Britain's best young all-rounder, Gary Newman is now firmly in the big boy's chair on a long-term basis. Follow our Angling Adventures star as he heads off in search of top quality fish.

Guided tour of the wild West

NOT QUITE a 'five' at 4 lb 14 oz but this was a really good Bristol Avon summer chub for Kenny.



BRISTOL AVON, LACOCK, WILTSHIRE

The river here is very picturesque and has all manner of different features to fish, including snags, beds of lilies and cabbages, onion reeds and streamer weed. It is home to barbel into double-figures and chub topping 6 lb, along with the occasional roach over 2 lb.

GARY'S AIM

To catch his first ever fish from the Bristol Avon and hopefully get a barbel.

CONDITIONS

The river is as low and clear as it has been for many years, which will make it harder, and heavy rain won't make fish spotting as easy.



The banks of this particular stretch of the Bristol Avon are steep and the river gin clear, so it is vitally important to keep as low as possible – hence sitting on the ground.

I've caught fish from many different rivers around the country, but the Bristol Avon was one that I had missing from that list.

I'd only ever fished it once, and that was quite a few years ago when I had a try for barbel and blanked in less than perfect conditions.

Over the winter I'd bumped into an angling guide, Kenny Parsons, who lives locally to the Bristol Avon and had fished the river for many years, and he invited me down to spend a couple of days with him fishing the river around Lacock in Wiltshire.

This stretch of the Avon, run by Amalgamated Fisheries Limited (formerly Bristol, Bath and Wiltshire Amalgamated Anglers), was very well known for producing double-figure barbel up until a few years ago. But unfortunately it has been decimated by

otters recently and, although it still produces some good fish, they aren't there in the numbers that they once were.

Luckily the river is also home to large numbers of chub which are still there and, although you won't catch any monsters, there is always an outside chance of one topping 5 lb, even in the summer months, and it is possible to catch several fish in a day.

I met Kenny in the car park of the Red Lion pub at 7 am and we loaded up with as little gear as we could get away with. We walked along the road until we came to the bridge over the Avon, crossing that, and climbing over the stile to give us access to the fields downstream of the bridge. These run all the way down to Melksham about five miles away - much of it hardly ever seeing an angler.



The river runs right alongside 13th Century Lacock Abbey, where some of the Harry Potter series was filmed.

“First of all it was just a couple of chub that showed, but then several barbel turned up, at least one of which must have been a double.”

Kenny had a couple of swims in mind that he thought would be a good place for a fish or two, and after a walk of about ten minutes we dropped our gear in a spot well back from the river bank.

The river here was about 15 yards wide and the swim he suggested that I try had a load of sunken trees in the water upstream of it, plus some far bank bushes opposite and downstream of me. There was also quite a bit of ranunculoid weed and lily pads downstream and it looked very ‘fishy’.

The banks of the Avon here are high and steep, but it was just possible to scramble down to a flatter spot closer to water level, although I was hoping that we wouldn’t get too much of the rain they’d forecast as getting back up could be a problem on slippery mud!

I was beginning to think I should have brought the rope and dog spike that I carry when fishing the Severn or Wye.

From the top of the high bank we could see a few chub gliding about over the clean gravel towards the far bank and the first job was to introduce some



I had to wait all day but then landed two barbel around the 4 lb mark in quick succession.

hemp and pellets to try and get them feeding.

This was done initially using a small Seymo tear-drop bait-dropper, but the river was so low and with such little flow, that it was possible to top the swim up by just throwing it in by hand slightly upstream of the spot.

We then left the swim alone for half-an-hour or so whilst Kenny showed me a few more spots further downstream.

It is a beautiful river with lots of features – lilies, streamer weed, snags, shallow gravels, deeper holes – and when it is clear like it was for my visit it is easy to spot the fish with the help of a decent pair of polarised sunglasses.

We spotted some chub in some of the other swims we looked at, but nothing of any real size, and also found a group of roach, with some over 1 lb hiding amongst the streamer weed, which was nice to see.

When we returned to my swim there must have been at least a dozen chub now drifting in and out of it, dropping down and feeding on the hemp and pellet, before drifting across the current, dropping back downstream and then swimming back up to the spot for a few more mouthfuls.

Amongst them were a couple of fish that looked as though they might go 5 lb, and there was also a barbel of about 6 lb there as well.

Kenny wasn’t at all bothered about catching himself and spent a lot of the morning walking the stretch and looking for fish, introducing a bit of bait in a few spots as he went, leaving me to get set up and try and catch one.

I’d been told that they were far more keen on pellets than boilies on here, so rigged up a Sonubaits Spicy Sausage barbel pellet on a size 8 ESP T6 hook to a 12 lb SinkBraid hook length and 10 lb Nash Bullet XT main line.

I also fished a Korda flying back lead sandwiched between two rubber float stops about 4 ft or so above a 1.5 oz flat pear lead, so as to pin everything to the bottom. The distance from the rig is adjusted depending on the swim and how much debris and weed is on the bottom between you and the spot, basically the more line you can pin down the better.

It was noticeable as I spent the day watching the fish that they became more cautious as the day went on, and often drifted off the spot and came almost under my feet, as if they were looking for lines.

I hooked on a small PVA bag of pellets and, as the fish were on the spot and I didn’t want to cast on top of them, I used a trick from when I used to stalk carp. By flicking a couple of 6 mm pellets at a time right on top of them it was enough to semi-spook them. Then, as soon as they drifted off downstream,

they’d be back feeding again and I repeated the same process as before, but this time it took a lot longer to get another bite and land a fish of a similar size to the first one.



A baitdropper is perfect for getting bait, such as small particles, down on the river bed exactly where you want it.

I quickly flicked out my rig. Within a minute or two the first fish were back on the spot and I knew it was only a matter of time before I hooked one of them.

I had the odd quick flick on the rod tip as they occasionally picked the line up on their fins, despite it being pinned down, and then finally the tip banged round, sprang back and banged again and I struck into my first fish.

It headed straight for the bushes on the far bank, but I was able to keep it out of those and soon had a chub of over 3 lb in the net and, after a quick photo, I slipped it back downstream as returning one in your swim is a sure way not to get any more bites.

I baited up with some more hemp and pellet and left the swim to settle down for half-an-hour whilst I went to see how Kenny was getting on. He’d managed a fish of a couple of pounds but all the others he’d seen in the same spot had now disappeared.

When I returned they were back feeding again and I repeated the same process as before, but this time it took a lot longer to get another bite and land a fish of a similar size to the first one.

By now it was early afternoon and Kenny decided to go and have a walk upstream to a different stretch that he was planning to take us on the next day, and see if he could find any fish.

Whilst he was gone I managed another chub, closer to 4 lb than the previous two had been, and also saw a much better barbel of maybe 9 lb in the swim, occasionally having a few mouthfuls of bait.

We’d had some heavy showers throughout the day and this was making fish spotting difficult, but every time the rain stopped I could see that the fish were still there, although there were less of them than earlier in the day.

I was biteless until early evening, by which time Kenny had returned to report that he’d photographed an 8 lb barbel for an angler on the other stretch and also seen a couple of doubles, so we’d definitely be giving that a try the next day.

When I hooked my next fish I knew straight away that it was a barbel as it shot straight downstream, mid-river, rather than trying to get in the snags



This chub had a lucky escape from an otter judging by the damage to its tail.



I could see just how high the river comes in flood from the skeleton of this sheep which was up in a tree ten foot or so above the water!



When sight fishing a pair of decent polaroid sunglasses are essential – amber lenses are good.

and, although no monster at around 3 to 4 lb, I was happy to get my first one from the Bristol Avon. I followed it soon afterwards with another slightly bigger one.

It had been a long day and by the colour of the sky it looked like it was due to tip it down, but Kenny really wanted me to get a 4 lb chub from the swim, and luckily I managed to oblige quite soon afterwards with one that went bang on 4 lb on the digital scales.

We made it back to the cars but had only just set off to Kenny’s house nearby, where I’d be spending the night, when the heavens opened. And that continued all evening as we sat in his conservatory eating a curry his wife had kindly prepared for us and sampling some of the local cider.

Thankfully morning dawned bright with fairly clear blue skies, and by 6.30 am we were heading back down to the river.

This time we’d be fishing upstream from the bridge in the grounds of Lacock Abbey, which was a magnificent sight. It was built in the 13th Century and the monks introduced carp to some of its stew ponds at around that time. It has also been used in the filming of the *Harry Potter* series.



I finished off my first day on the Bristol Avon with this chub of exactly 4 lb, just before the heavens opened.

Kenny pointed me in the direction of a swim that usually held the odd double-figure barbel – a very high bank swim with a snag just downstream on the near bank, and I was glad I had a long landing net handle with me otherwise there is no way I’d have been able to reach the water.

I used the same tactics as the previous day, whilst Kenny headed further upstream to have a go for a group of chub, using hemp and caster to get them feeding almost under his feet.

It was quiet in my swim, but it wasn’t long before Kenny had a nice fish of 4 lb 2 oz and quickly followed it up with a cracker of 4 lb 14 oz. The smaller of the pair had obvious otter damage to its tail and served as a reminder as to why the barbel sport had declined.

By early afternoon I hadn’t seen any sign of fish in my swim, other than a pike, and Kenny had added two more smaller chub.

I decided it was time for a move, especially when Kenny mentioned that he had seen a couple of barbel in another spot which was a hundred yards or so upstream.

On the way to that swim I spotted a barbel under a far bank bush, and there was also quite a large chub there, so I stopped to have a go. They were very wary and wouldn’t get their heads down properly, which was very frustrating and after a couple of hours I gave up – I guess they were probably resident fish in that swim and get spotted and fished for a fair bit, hence why they were so cautious.

I moved to the spot where Kenny had seen

fish earlier, which was a very tight swim with a steep bank I had to perch on, which wasn’t exactly comfortable as there was no way I could sit on a chair and had to wedge myself in amongst some tree roots on the ground.

There was a gravel run close to my bank and from about a third of the way across the river to the far side there was a big bed of cabbages, and lots of onion reeds downstream as well, which barbel love.

There were no fish there at the moment but, soon after dropping in my rig and throwing in some pellet, they started to appear.

First of all it was just a couple of chub that showed, but then several barbel turned up, at least one of which must have been a double – it was really hard to tell how many different fish there were as they stirred the bottom up and coloured the water.

This went on for an hour or so and then they drifted off but all that time my rod tip had remained motionless. Unfortunately they didn’t come back again, despite me baiting up some more, and it was soon time to pack up.

It had been great to catch some fish from a different river and, despite not having any monsters, I’d still really enjoyed the fishing and Kenny’s company.

His guiding costs start from just £60 per day and you can contact him on 07770 637300.

Further information and tickets are available from the website www.amalgamatedfisheriesltd.co.uk or from Keynsham Angling Centre who can be contacted on 01179 867507.