



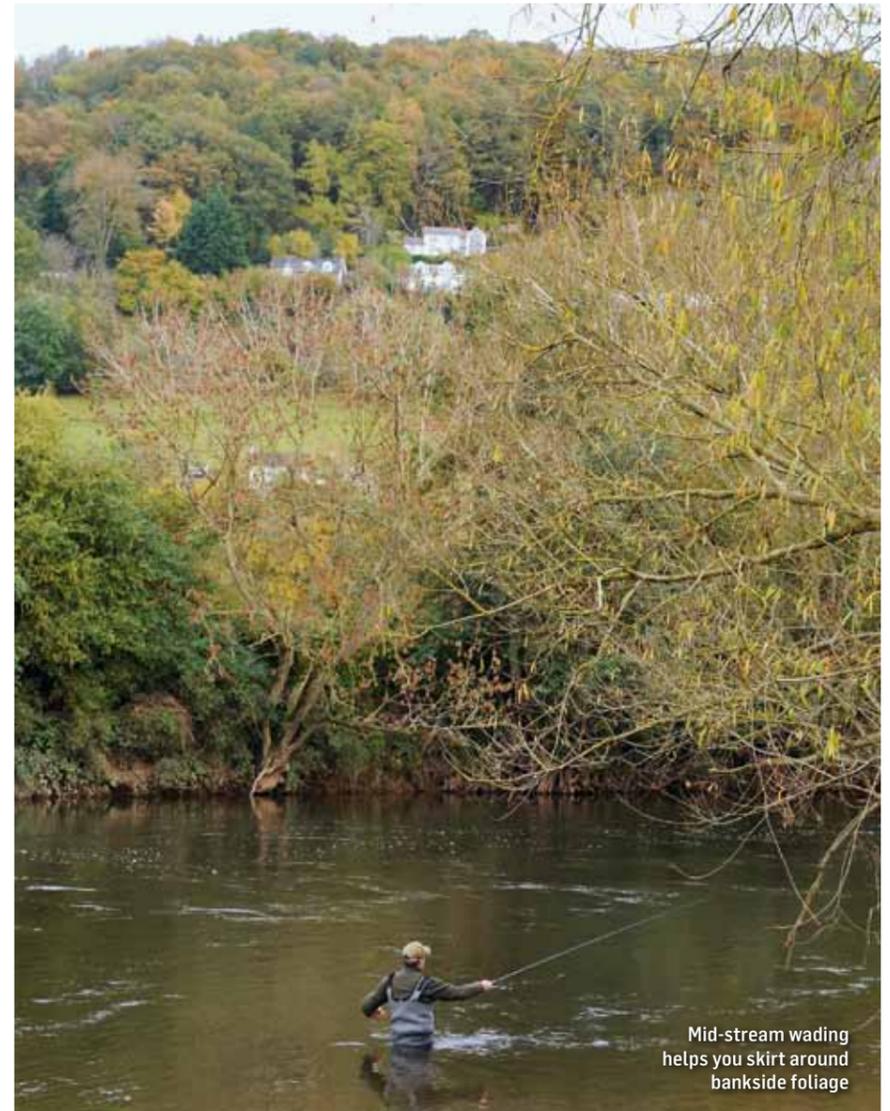
No better way to spend a day

There is no more enjoyable way to float-fish a river for chub than wading, getting among the fish and becoming one with the surroundings. Adam Fisher reveals all...

Words Mark Parker Photography Mick Rouse



Adam is cloistered beneath the Lower Hill Court road bridge



Mid-stream wading helps you skirt around bankside foliage

THERE is something mouth-wateringly exciting about the combination of wading and long-trotting on a river like the Wye.

It is one of those skills long since relegated to the shade by the popularity of stillwaters and the evolution of the pole.

This is a real shame, because there is something of the hunter-gatherer to be derived from sending a baited rig beneath a float a long way downstream.

It harks back many decades to when the likes of the late duo Benny Ashurst and Ray Mumford used to fish the stick float with such finesse they could almost make one talk. This is when Britain produced 'great' river anglers.

Wading thigh-deep in a briskly flowing river, catching fish and fully immersing yourself in the personal contest of man versus fish is guaranteed to stir the senses.

There really is nothing better!

As for today, the image of freelance fishery consultant Adam Fisher stood heron-like and mid-flow in the gently rippling waters of the Middle Hill Court section of the Wye, had a quintessentially English feel to it.

"So many of us ignore this form of angling, preferring to sit shoulder to shoulder on a soulless commercial, pole fishing for carp. It really is beyond me," opined Adam.

"Give me a chubber float, bread, a pair of waders and a few fish to catch and I'm a very happy man!"

And who would argue?

A court appearance

Stood thigh deep in the first swim of the day, Adam's 3.5 AAA Middy No.2 Chubber/Bread float danced downstream in the river's powerful surge as the 4lb Maxima mainline peeled effortlessly off the spool of his centrepin reel.

Sending the float gliding downstream 40 yards or more before holding back hard at the end of the run, Adam would then quickly wind the rig back, before rebaiting and sending another freshly hooked chunk of bread flake on its watery path.

Apart from the occasional rasping clack of a cock pheasant and the perpetual tinkle of water over gravel, the scene was one of total peace and tranquility, like a still photo taken from a delightful ancient angling tome.

With autumn rapidly turning to winter, the surrounding trees were shedding their diminishing leaf cover of stunning browns, ochres, coppers, reds and golds.

The only other disturbance to this most delightful of vistas were the myriad sparkles of diamond light thrown up by the rippling

water and the sporadic movement of Adam as he wound his float back, before starting another trot.

All the time, he was wishing for the float to bury under the strain of a beautiful, brassy-flanked chub, a fish that abounds in the river Wye in thousands.

The sad thing is they are largely ignored on the waterway. The coarse boys are more interested in the river's barbel and pike, while the game anglers are focussed on trout, salmon and sea trout.

"I grew up on the river, so I have always had a great affinity with the place," said Adam. "Having said that I love all rivers, regardless of where they are. I just happen to be lucky enough to live near the Wye.

"When I was a kid, the Wye was more of a salmon river, especially here on the Hill Courts, but these days there are good heads of both coarse and game fish.

"In the 1950s the Hill Courts were famous, with swims like Vanstone Pool, Maddox and Corner Tree.

"It was from this very area that Robert Pashley – the Wizard of the Wye – caught the majority of his 10,000 Wye salmon. Legend has it that he would often take more than 30 20lb fish in one day and use a trout rod just to make things more interesting!"

The first customer

After half a dozen runs down, Adam's float buried in the blink of an eye as a Wye chub found the flake hookbait too much to resist.

Pressing his index finger firmly against the drum of the reel, Adam hardly needed to strike as the force of the water set the hook.

Slowly winding the powerful fish upstream, it became obvious why Adam chooses a 1.5lb Drennan Avon rod rather than a standard float blank.

With the combination of flow and an angry 3lb or 4lb chub on the end, a float rod would simply lack the necessary power, leading to fish losses rather than the exultation of playing one on a light set-up.

Carefully coaxing the fish in the current, the centrepin was admirably demonstrating why it is reel of choice when trotting.

With just a light touch on the drum Adam was able to expertly stop the fish or give line whenever he felt it necessary.

"Fixed spool reels and even the old faithful closed-face reels used by lots of river anglers are fine, but they cannot touch a centrepin for sensitivity during the fight. There is no better clutch than your thumb or finger," said Adam through gritted teeth as the object of the day's desire made every effort to snag itself or throw the hook.



Adam's first fish of the day was a fin-perfect 3lb-plus chub, caught from the Middle Hill Court stretch

After a short but relatively violent fight which fractured the near silence of the chocolate-box scene, Adam cautiously slid the first fish of the day into his waiting grasp.

Not quite 4lb, it was a great start to what had the makings of being an exceptional day.

Feeding the swim with a tennis-ball sized lump of liquidised bread, the white fluffy orb immediately broke apart as the flow

took it, bursting the once chunky item into a thousand tiny particles, which raced out of sight within the blink of an eye. A larger lump of hooked flake flowed in its wake only moments later.

Sadly, this one fish was the last of the action at Middle Court, so a move downstream was called for. Perhaps a change of scene would see us into more fish. ▶

Going lower down

The second swim of the day – on Lower Hill Court – saw Adam fishing opposite the ruins of Goodrich Castle where the combination of steeply wooded banks opposite and the imposing ancient stone road bridge he was planning to trot his float under gave the swim a very cloistered feel.

Being part submerged in water brings a completely new perspective to the river and the fishing that not even the regular drone of traffic from above could disturb.

Even though Adam was only around 20ft away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, the make-up of the swim itself made you feel like the only people on Earth.

Like living near an airport, within minutes of being there, the car noise evaporates from your psyche and you become at one with the surroundings, effortlessly blending into the environment so that you quickly become no more threat to the waiting chub than any other bankside feature.

Standing around a third of the way across the river to allow him to navigate a large willow tree, Adam was able to trot either side of one of the bridge's main supports.

"These can be good areas for the chub because the flow is forced around the supports, forming a crease close to the bridge itself," explained Adam.

"This is a good area for chub and other fish to lie up because it is on the edge of the flow. This brings down a lot of natural food, but they can sit out of the main thrust of the river."

"The other beauty of the bridge is that it provides a great deal of cover, structure and sanctuary, perfect for shy, easily-spooked fish like chub."

Even after priming the swim with a ball of liquidised bread and then trying maggots – both on the hook and loosefed little and often – the bridge failed to yield any chub.

"There is a couple of foot of extra water on the river today, which came in last night," Adam explained.

"This can often push the fish out of their usual lies, so it pays to keep as mobile as you can on days like this."

This point was perfectly illustrated by the fact that the only kit Adam was carrying was



Travelling light is the name of the game when long-trotting several swims in a day on the River Wye

his rod set-up, a pocketful of terminal bits and a bucket containing his liquidised bread, a few whole slices and a pint or so of fresh bronze maggots.

"Before I enter the water, I fill up the pouch of my waders with maggots if I'm planning on using them. Otherwise, I find a convenient branch to hook the bucket on if I need more bread," he added.

Third time lucky

The third and last swim of the session saw Adam moving 500 yards upstream of the bridge.

With a large beach of gravel and a gentle slope to the water this was a perfect place to wade.

Whenever there is gravel in the margins, it is usually an indication that the area is safe to wade.

"You'll rarely be wading more than two or three rodlengths from the bank, but it can be tricky and you still need to be very careful," cautioned Adam.

"If the water is coloured, don't risk it, even if you know the stretch very well, because you never know what might have shifted in the flow."

Adam is only really looking to stand far enough out so that he has a clear view downstream, past any marginal willow trees, of which there are many on the Lower Hill Court beat.

Once again, the swim was primed with a couple of large bread balls, before his size 10 Korda Mixa hook was baited with a fresh chunk of flake.

Trotting the float well downstream, Adam had to send the float a good 40 yards to get

any kind of indication. Thankfully for our intrepid piscador this indication was in the shape of a fighting-fit Wye chub. Giving as little quarter as he dare with just 4lb straight through to the hook, the chub gave a good account of itself, twisting and writhing in the flow as it attempted to find a convenient snag to help free itself.

After a couple of hairy moments, Adam was able to palm his latest conquest, a second fish approaching the 4lb mark.

Being very shy creatures, the next few trots brought no bites, so Adam dropped in two balls of liquidised bread, letting the current carry them quickly downstream.

Sticking with the bread flake, he was forced to trot further and further away in order to keep in contact with the spooking fish, but his tactics were paying off handsomely, as he caught repeatedly.

The combination of a ball of bread followed by a large flake hookbait was too much for the chub shoal to resist and, by the time the light began to fade and the bites dried up completely, he had landed five decent chub from the pacey shallow run.

With a total of six fish in the bag, all averaging around 4lb, Adam's Wye wading adventure had been a total success.

It had not only demonstrated the value of wading, but had admirably displayed the pleasure, adventure and joy to be gained from getting in the water and literally sharing the element with your quarry.

Perhaps he could have caught just as many by trotting or legering from the bank, but it wouldn't have been anywhere near as much fun or enjoyment as wading.

"He was forced to trot further and further but his tactics were paying off handsomely"



Great British Fishing

Adam fished on the Middle and Lower Hill Court beats of the River Wye. Day tickets cost £20 per day with a maximum of four issued per day. They are available through the Wye & Usk Foundation (01982 560788, www.wyeuskfoundation.org) or through Wye Angling at Ross-on-Wye (01989 566986). For visiting anglers there is self-catering accommodation at Flanesford Priory (www.flanesfordpriory.co.uk). This is within walking distance of Lower Hill Court and a very short drive to numerous other first-class W&UF fisheries.



There's no need for landing nets when wading – simply draw the fish to hand



Watch the video

Go to www.iycf.co.uk to see how Adam feeds liquidised bread