

Stillwater surprises

After stumbling across a shoal of big chub in a long-forgotten pool, Adam Fisher targets them using waggler and breadflake tactics ▶

Words Mark Parler Photography Mick Rouse

GREAT BRITISH FISHING ● **GREAT BRITISH FISHING**

We join all-round angler Adam Fisher on the banks of a 'hidden lake' set well off the beaten track in Gloucestershire. Catching big chub on the float is the order of the day



STILLWATER chub can pose a real conundrum to the angler. Although similar to their river-dwelling cousins in some respects, they are completely different in others, and when targeting them with rod and line it often pays to throw away the textbook.

Once they find their way into a lake, chub seem to adopt a new set of rules. For a start they seem moodier and less predictable than running-water fish, and can really make you work for your money. At times, it's almost like chasing shadows.

One angler who recently stumbled across the fascinating and frustrating world of stillwater chubbing is Adam Fisher.

More used to targeting the stocks of his beloved River Wye, Adam came across a shoal of decent chub swimming in Quabs Pool, on the Pauntley Lakes complex, near Newent in Gloucestershire, while scouting the venue for possible inclusion in the Wye & Usk Foundation's 'Hidden Lake' portfolio.

Although Quabs Pool and the Lower Lake at Pauntley were only dug in the early 1970s, the Top Lake has been on the site for as long as anyone can remember.

How the chub got into the venue in the first place is something of a mystery. The tiny River Leadon is only a few miles away, so it is possible that the Quabs Pool fish are the descendants of a few lucky escapees from this often highly-polluted waterway. However, no-one really knows for sure.

On his first exploratory trip to the lakes, Adam landed a handful of chunky bronze chub on feeder tactics, and soon realised he was on to something special.

This time, with us in tow, the 35-year-old from Ross-on-Wye is hoping to pick out one of the water's bigger specimens using simple waggler tactics.

Selecting a swim

For somewhere so tranquil and off the beaten track, you wouldn't believe the amount of noise emanating from the lakes. A large gathering of ducks on the far side of the pool has barely stopped quacking loudly since our mid-morning arrival.

At the top end of the intimate one-acre lake, Adam Fisher is preparing to make his first cast of the day, into a spot that looks very promising.

There's a small inlet to the right of his pitch, plus a reedbed and an overhanging tree up the margin, both of which are protruding into the lake. He is planning to fish two rodlenghts out, just where the margin dives away from six inches to six foot. It looks spot-on for his intended 'bait and wait' approach.

"Although stillwater chub don't mind open water as such, I still prefer to fish to a feature when targeting them if at all possible," Adam explained. "They can be a very moody and spooky fish at times."

With the half-inch long orange top of his loaded waggler sitting proudly on the mirror-like surface of the pool, Adam throws in a couple of small balls of shredded white bread



Relaxing in a rural idyll. Adam waits patiently for the pool's chub to find his bread hookbait

towards his float, closely followed by around 20 kernels of bright yellow sweetcorn.

Once the baiting up is complete and the ducks finally quieten down, the tranquil nature of Quabs Pool returns. The loudest noises to be heard now are the buzz of the occasional bee, the rasping clack of a coot or the distinct 'plop' of acorns dropping into the water from the many marginal oak trees surrounding the pool.

"It sounds a bit like someone is stood behind me catapulting in boilies," Adam says with a chuckle.

"Of course, it could be old Kate, doing a spot of prebaiting."

Like countless other ancient lakes dotted around the country, Quabs has its own 'ghostly apparition' in the form of an elderly spinster called Kate. Legend has it that she was one of two unmarried sisters that lived in the nearby village, and that she drowned in the Top Lake many years ago.

According to folklore she now roams the lakeside on moonless nights. ►

The 'bait and wait' approach

Having become an increasingly popular species in various lakes across the UK, chub can be a reliable source of bites in the colder months. Many day-ticket anglers have broken their personal bests with stillwater examples of the species. According to Adam, once chub become lake-bound for any period of time, they change certain aspects of their behaviour.

For example, on many rivers the larger chub – 5lb-plus – tend to be quite solitary or live in small year groups. In stillwaters, however, he has found that they often tend to swim around in quite large shoals. As well as becoming more gregarious, their flanks also often change from silvery gunmetal to golden bronze. The one thing that does not change, however, is their appetite.

"I find that river and stillwater chub share one common denominator – greed," Adam continues. "In Quabs, that doesn't necessarily make them an easy target, however, because they don't really have to compete for food ►

Adam's simple loosefeed and hookbait selections



Low cost options – a loaf of white bread, a tub of maggots and a tin of sweetcorn are all the bait options needed for a day targeting chub



To bait up his swim Adam just breaks up a slice of white bread between his fingers, forms it into a loose ball, and throws it around his float. If he's not using breadflake on the hook, he normally opts for sweetcorn

“The fish somehow seem to know the location of every snag in the lake”



Adam slips another immaculate chub back into the depths of Quabs Pool

with lots of other fish. For example, if I were fishing on a commercial pool which was heavily-stocked with chub, I would use ‘mag and wag’ tactics. By constantly spraying a pinch of maggots around the waggler and making regular casts, I would be able to get the fish competing for the food, and pushing all other species aside. Here at Pauntley Lakes, however, apart from a head of large tench and plenty of small rudd, the chub are the only other species.”

Due to there being far fewer mouths to feed, Adam opts for a far more inactive approach, priming the peg with highly-visual baits, which the chub can see as well as smell, and waiting for them to be drawn to the area. He believes that there is little point using exotic or expensive baits at the venue, simply because the fish won’t have seen them before.

“My usual bait choices would be bread, corn or maggots. That said, there’s no reason other baits like pellets or cheesepaste wouldn’t work. In fact, the latter would probably be a good bet in the really cold months.”

For today’s session Adam has chosen to use what is essentially a beefed-up waggler approach comprising a Drennan Tench Float rod, paired with a fixed spool reel loaded with 5lb Maxima mainline and a 3.5lb Drennan hook-to-nylon hooklink. This, he believes, gives him the perfect mix of subtle presentation and strength.

The waggler he’s chosen is a squat, loaded crystal model, locked in place with rubber float stops. The use of a loaded pattern isn’t vital, but because the fish seem somehow to know the location of every snag in the lake, using a short float without any locking shot means you’re less likely to get broken off if they reach such places of sanctuary.

The only shot on his line is a single No.1, an inch from the swivel attaching his hooklink. At the end of this sits a large size 14 hook, perfect for either sweetcorn or breadflake.

Action comes out of the blue

As the afternoon gradually wears on, it becomes clear that the fish aren’t exactly playing ball. His float has stubbornly remained static, yet Adam remains confident.

Every so often he recasts, flicking his float past his small bed of loosefeed, before dragging the rig back up the marginal slope until the swivel and shot are just off bottom, with the nine-inch hooklink laying down the slope. Fishing like this, he says, can produce savage bites because the chub barely know they’re hooked.

And, an hour later, that is exactly what happens. Completely out of the blue, Adam’s rod is almost pulled out of his hand as a large fish tears off with his hookbait.

He reacts by bending hard into the fish, his rod taking on a near full semi-circle as he

attempts to turn the chub’s head away from the reedbed and potential disaster. Bit by bit, he begins winning the tussle and, with the line singing in the breeze, the pressure eventually tells as the fish heads out into open water. Sixty seconds later Adam’s net engulfs a beautiful bronze-flanked chub weighing more than 5lb. It genuinely looks as if it has never been caught before.

Continuing with the same approach, Adam manages a couple more fish, albeit smaller examples, over the next hour, before dusk envelops the picturesque pool and the light deteriorates too much for Adam to see his float. It’s time to pull stumps.

Pauntley Lakes may have been forgotten for many a year, but once word gets around about what is now swimming in its crystal clear waters, this hidden gem of a stillwater is sure to be put firmly back on the radar of many a keen angler.



How you can fish the venue

For information about Quabs Pool, log on to www.wishyouwerefishing.co.uk. Alternatively, guided fishing trips are available with Adam at the venue, as well as many other stillwaters and rivers. He can be contacted by emailing bookings@anglingdreams.co.uk