

River Wharfe, Tadcaster

White water Wharfing

Rino Morisini shows how to tame wild, tumbling water in his quest for barbel and chub on one of the finest stretches in Yorkshire

Words & Photography Ben Fisk

AS A RIVER for fishing, the Yorkshire Wharfe pretty much has it all. From deep in the limestone hills of the Dales it rises and for, most of its length, is a game river – shallow, wild and rocky.

There are weirs, untamed rapids and the dangerous ‘Strid’ section at Bolton Abbey, where the river is channelled into a narrow, 15ft deep gorge which has claimed the lives of almost all those who have fallen in.

But from the market town of Wetherby, the Wharfe becomes a coarse river. And a very good one at that. Chub and barbel are in abundance particularly in the downstream towns of Boston Spa and Tadcaster, which arguably offer some of the finest running water sport in the county.

Tadcaster is a firm favourite with Spotted Fin coarse

team member Amorino ‘Rino’ Morisini and a glance over its iconic old stone bridge suggests why. The nearby weir, against the backdrop of the impressive eleven arch viaduct, provides a constant main flow of well-oxygenated white water down the whole stretch. On a bright summer’s day you can often see shoals of fish as they pack into the shallows to spawn.

“The best session I’ve had here recently is 30 barbel and four chub in an evening,” said Rino.

“You couldn’t feed enough! My mate was giving them a scoop of hemp every run through to keep them feeding. When they’re really ‘on it’ you’ll see them flashing in the current to get at the bait. There’s no finer way to catch them than putting a float through. In water this fast it’s exciting stuff. I can wade out and keep my float tight to the far bank trees where they live,” he said. ▶

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Luring them out

A pair of waders is essential to fish a float in a swim like this and Rino had fixed a bankstick in the middle of the river on which to hang his bait bucket and landing net.

The main flow is diverted to the far side here so it's no surprise that most fish are likely to be holed up underneath those overhanging bushes.

"The river has come up 6in in the last few days so it's really flying through now. If I wade any further out it's a struggle to keep balanced – the cameraman has tried it and is struggling! The last thing I'm going to do is to actually fish. No, it's far better to stand here and just feed, feed and feed some more. I want to attract the barbel from underneath their lairs and get them confident on the bait. It might take a while, but they will usually come out and have a munch," smiled Rino.

His feed choice was Spotted Fin Natural hemp, a very large grain of particle which sinks quickly in the fast current and it can even be straight hooked. To this he adds a

bit of sweetcorn and occasionally a few cubes of meat.

With the swim primed after half an hour of regular feeding, it was time to introduce a hookbait, which to begin with was three maggots on a thick gauge size 16 hook.

Rino was obviously well practised in this type of underarm cast as his rig plopped deftly next to the branch at the top of the run before it was mended and on its way along the tree line. Small chub were first on the bait but in this flow each one felt three times its actual size!

After several runs down a nice grayling added variety, its trademark jagged scrap again fooling the angler into thinking he had hooked something much larger.

Barbel wars

The smaller fish are the reason Rino prefers to hold off from feeding loose maggots and casters plus, in his book, "the barbel in this river just love hemp". So, were the famed Wharfe whiskers prepared to play today? We didn't have to wait much longer for an answer.

RIGHT TOP: Chub are also likely to put in an appearance while you're fishing for barbel

RIGHT SECOND DOWN: Hemp sinks quickly and is excellent at drawing out the barbel

BOTTOM RIGHT: Wading out enables Rino to present his bait in the main flow along overhanging bushes on the far bank

The bright domed top of Rino's stick float was once again flying through the swim towards the last couple of metres of treeline, which he knew from past experience of the peg was the hotspot for a bite.

In such a current there was never anything subtle about the bites – the float was either bobbing along or it simply wasn't there, and this case was no exception. An inch or so further and it would have been tangling with a few precarious trailing branches, but as it passed them it disappeared in a split second.

Up went Rino's powerful float rod to meet a considerable force which responded on the other end – this was no chub. Immediately, he swept the rod low down to his right to counter a powerful fish doing its best to get under the far bank trees. Fourteen feet of Daiwa carbon took on quite an angle.

"Here we go," he grimaced. "Barbel."

What ensued was a real tug of war but Rino's 8lb line was holding and after a few minutes he had succeeded ▶

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TOP BAITS



MAIN SPECIES



RINO'S TACKLE

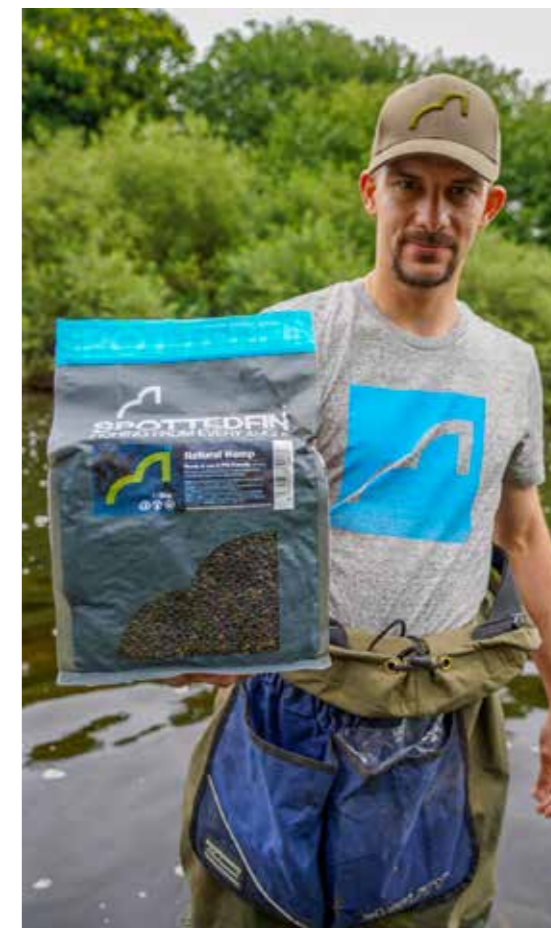
ROD
Daiwa Powermesh
Specialist Float 14ft

REEL
Shimano Aero
4000Ci4

MAINLINE
Preston Float
Max 8lb

HOOKLENGTH
5lb mono

HOOK
Drennan Super
Spade size 16





VENUE FACTFILE

LOCATION

The Wharfe at Tadcaster is controlled by Tadcaster APS. The stretch above the bridge is for members only with a waiting list, but the club controls a long day-ticket stretch directly below the bridge on the left bank.

TICKETS

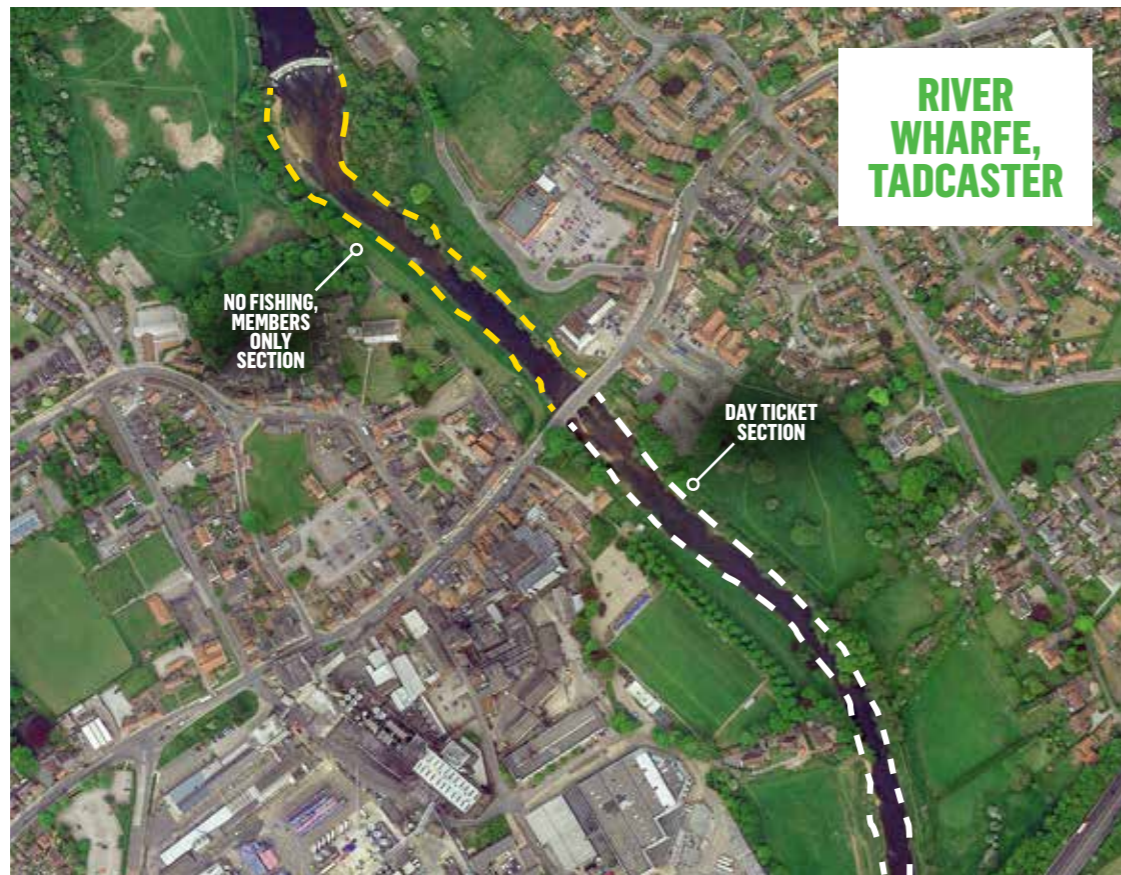
Day tickets are available from The Chocolate Box news agency and sweet shop in the town. Adults cost £4.

CONTACT

Club secretary Mr C.R. Burton – 01937 833262
www.brighthousewood.weebly.com/
tadcaster-apa.html

OPPOSITE PAGE: A typical streamlined Wharfe powerhouse of a barbel

BELOW: The barbel are thriving in this well-oxygenated stretch of river



in shifting the unseen creature out into the temporary security of the main flow. He still had to persuade it further upstream without pulling out the hook. Bit by bit, more line was persuaded back on to the reel and the dark outline of a barbel could be seen mid-river. A very relieved Rino scooped it up for the camera.

It wasn't a huge barbel but a typical Wharfe sample of around 4lb. The river isn't heavily fed with pellets so the fish are long, slimline bullets and they know how to use their shape to their advantage.

"A lot of anglers condone fishing for barbel in summer when it's hot, and on sluggish stretches and parts of the Trent they're probably right," said Rino.

"But here the water has so much oxygen in that they are extremely fit fish. Even when resting them in the net after the fight they are straining to get back. Most of my sessions are evenings when temperatures drop.

"The more rain we get the more the fish at Tadcaster tend to get pushed down from here to the slightly deeper day-ticket sections below the bridge, which also offer brilliant sport," he said.

Patience pays off

With that barbel having been safely returned (it bolted off upstream) Rino turned his attention to catching more. His set up was simplicity in itself with a Middy or Drennan Big Stick Float and the shotted a 1.5g inline olivette sat on top of the hooklength, flanked either side by locking shot.

This is no place for shirt button shotted – a big bulk or olivette is needed to keep the rig near the bottom for the barbel. The olivette sits virtually on the deck itself with about 12in of hooklength overdepth, so he's holding the rig back against the weight, not the bait, and achieves better control.

As the afternoon grew old Rino managed to persuade another couple of barbel from beneath the trees, and lost a couple too, one of which was a random hook-pull in the middle. A relatively quiet day by Tadcaster standards, but a challenging and enjoyable one none the less. Every fish is a cracker and every battle exhilarating in the wild white waters of the Yorkshire Wharfe.



VENUE

TOP TIP

Rino prefers alloy and tignum stem stick floats. Undershot them slightly in fast swims so they don't pull under with the bait dragging overdepth

"A typical Wharfe sample of around 4lb. The fish are long, slimline bullets and they use their shape to their advantage"