

The heat is on

Join Korum big-fish maestro **Duncan Charman** as he accepts a tricky early season barbel challenge.

My favourite time for catching barbel in summer is after dark, so when I was asked to catch one in the heat of the day I knew I'd have my work cut out.

Still, if there's one thing I relish it's a challenge, so with **Total Coarse Fishing's** Steve Martin throwing down the gauntlet, I was happy to accept.

Steve wanted me introduce him to my local stretch of the River Loddon in Berkshire. No problem there, but then he dropped the bombshell. Instead of the preferred after-dark trip, Steve wanted me to catch at the worst time of day imaginable – that dreaded dull spot between 11am and 2pm...



ANGLER FACT FILE

Name: Duncan Charman
Age: 44
Hometown: Aldershot, Hampshire
Occupation: Photographer

As you can see there was very little room for manoeuvre as Duncan played his barbel.

The day of the challenge came and I prayed that the weatherman had got it wrong, but it wasn't to be and the sun shone in a cloudless blue sky. Worst still, the lack of wind had allowed temperatures to soar well into the eighties. Challenge? More like an impossibility!

The night before I had spent time pondering a game plan and knew that if I was to be successful then it was going to be a case of travelling light, roving around and keeping rigs as simple as possible. Carefully looking at your kit and removing items that are rarely used plays a big part in becoming a roving angler and my kit consists of the bare essentials, with a chair being a luxury only taken on days when I know it will be a waiting game.

Watercraft was another area that was going to play a big part in the session and all the hours spent targeting the chub population in

this stretch throughout the colder months would certainly help.

I knew the Farnham Angling Society stretch held a healthy stock of barbel, mainly between 4lb and 8lb, with the outside chance of a big double, plus a good population of chub that might just save the day. In terms of numbers I knew that if I fished well I might have a chance, even in these conditions.

THE PLAN

My plan was to prime six areas with some pellets introduced via a small baitdropper. Some anglers carry a second rod to bait up with but I prefer to use a tiny baitdropper which I easily attach to my end rig by burying the hook within the cork on the back of the dropper. To do this I needed to be alone on the bank as other anglers will often unknowingly interfere and intrude on these. With sweat dripping from my chin, I made the short journey to the river. I needed to find the shade of a tree; every barbel in the river would be doing the same.

Keeping well back from the water's edge and not wanting to throw an unnecessary shadow, I stealthily walked the length of the river, creeping into small, secluded areas that most would ignore. I looked for swims that weren't particularly worn, but ones that offered cover such as undercut banks, overhanging trees and bushes, weed, tree roots or just shade. I found half a dozen



During daylight every fish will be on guard and a lead splashing on the water's surface would ruin my chances.

spots and with a few hours available before the arrival of other barbel anglers, my initial plan was put into operation.

Each swim was primed with some Sonubaits' 4mm S-Pellets. This took me an hour but I was in no hurry and I finally returned to the first swim with the hope that the scent from the pellets would have provoked some interest from a barbel or two.

I intended to spend 15 minutes fishing each of my swims, which I chose knowing that I could simply lower the bait directly from the rod tip. During daylight every fish will be on guard and a lead splashing on the water's surface would ruin my chances and see every fish vacating the swim.

Once the bait has been lowered in it's a case of holding the rod and feeling for bites. If any swim produced knocks, I planned a return visit later in the day if time allowed, but I was hoping that one of the six would produce a barbel on the first attempt. To maximise my angling time on the bank my rig had been made up the night before and was set up on the rod. As always, I opted for a very simple running rig. A running rig is far more sensitive than a bolt rig and today was all about trying to catch one fish at a time, so if a barbel did brush up against my line, I wanted to know about it.

Don't be in too much of a rush to fish. Stay concealed and let the fish gain in confidence before wetting a line.

Duncan's terminal tackle set-up incorporated a simple running 1oz flat lead, Korum Quick Change bead and 13mm hair-rigged Sonubaits pellet.

TACKLE

Tackle needs to be strong when fishing tight areas, as when a fish is hooked you can't give them an inch.

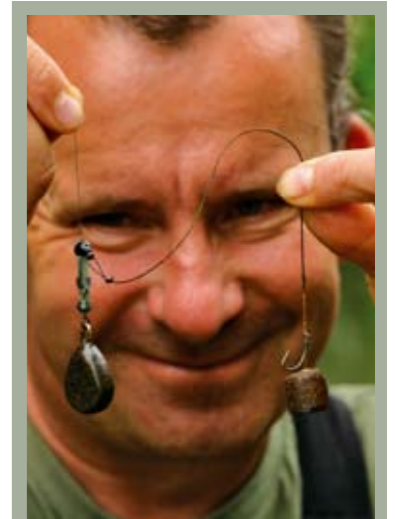
Rod: Korum Neoteric 12ft Quiver rod with a 4oz tip that allows any small taps to be seen if undetected by my sense of feel.

Reel: Any quality small reel with a reliable clutch is essential when it comes to playing fish in tight situations and when set correctly will allow maximum pressure to be applied during a fight.

Line: 12lb Korum Advanced, which is extremely abrasion resistant and has superb knot strength.

Terminal tackle: A small 1oz flat lead is attached to a Korum running link to keep resistance down and allow a quick change of lead size if required. I then used a Korum Quick Change Bead as the link between main line and hooklength, which was 12 inches of Sufix Camfusion with the outer coating completely removed.

Hook: Size 8 Korum S3 barbless, tied to the line hair-rig style.

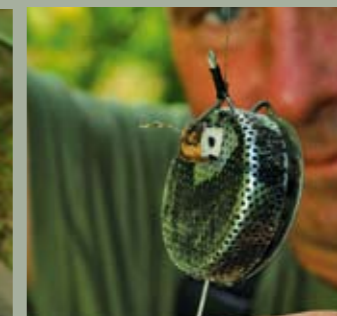


This 6lb barbel was a fine reward on a very hard day.

HOW TO USE A BAIT-DROPPER



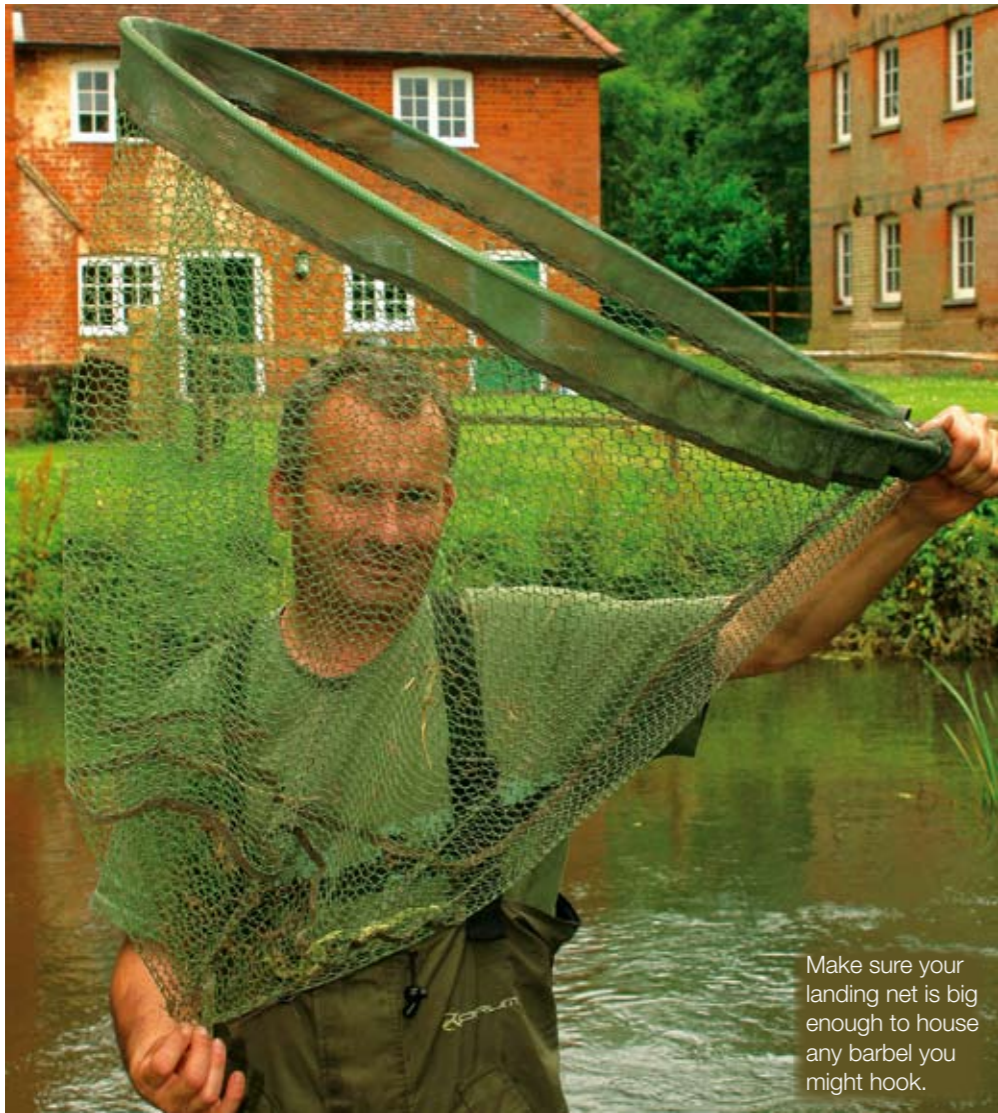
01 Add your feed pellets to the open baitdropper.



02 Close the dropper and attach your hook to the cork on the back.



03 When the baitdropper hits the riverbed, it opens up like this to release the pellets.



Make sure your landing net is big enough to house any barbel you might hook.

ON TO THE FISHING

The first area I tried was a big pool that offered an undercut bank on the far side with lots of tree roots extending into it. It was an area I'd caught from before and felt confident of a chance. Sure enough, I soon felt a 'thud' through the rod, followed by a steady pull. Unfortunately the hook failed to penetrate. Was it a violent liner? Was my strike premature? I'll never know.

What I do know is that I'd blown my first chance. Would I get another on what was always going to be a really difficult day? It was unlikely that another bite would follow from the same swim so it was time to move downstream to an outcrop of brambles – another form of cover and an area that normally produces, albeit from chub.

As expected the twitches began, but after a frustrating 15 minutes whatever it was that had been interested had wised up. The next two swims had been chosen as they both offered undercut nearside banks – a perfect sheltering place for barbel during the heat of the day. I was confident that barbel were present, but none were bold enough to make an appearance.

The next swim had all the hallmarks of producing the goods but it was so tight that I almost walked past it. The position had lots of overhanging bushes and brambles downstream offering both cover and shade. Above the swim there was a lot of streamer weed, which stopped just above the bushes allowing me a small area into which I could lower my bait.

I sat well back and held the rod but it took just a few seconds for the tip to slam down and an instinctive strike saw it bend in an alarming curve.

A big spray of water was sent skywards as a defiant barbel tried to bury itself in the weed, but my tackle was up to the job and soon a fantastic summer barbel graced my net. The fight was all over in just a few seconds, showing the importance of balanced tackle, and I smiled as I lifted my prize for the waiting camera.

A shallow area downstream allowed me the perfect place from which I could return the barbel safely, placing her gently back into the water, head facing upstream. She once again sprayed me with water as she regained her energy and swam off strongly. A firm handshake from Steve Martin was

my reward for a challenge met, one we both agreed looked doomed for failure.

I tried the last swim without any joy but who's complaining? With the sun high in the sky and the temperature now almost unbearable, it was time for a celebratory pint. Mine's an ice-cold lager!

DUNCAN'S TOP FIVE TIPS FOR CATCHING SUMMER BARBEL

- 1** Look for shaded areas offering bankside cover and shade during daylight.
- 2** Don't head straight for a worn swim – look for unfished areas in between.
- 3** Preparation before leaving home will allow you to focus on your fishing.
- 4** Keep well back from the water's edge. A stealthy approach is best.
- 5** Pellet paste around your hook bait is difficult to beat, especially in a primed swim.



Take a varied selection of leads with you for barbel fishing.



VENUE FILE
 RIVER LODDON, STANFORD END, BERKSHIRE
 Controlling club: Farnham AS
 Tickets: Members only.
 Website: www.farnhamanglingsociety.com
 Enquiries: The Creel, 36 Station Road, Aldershot, Hants, GU11 1HT. Tel: 01252 320871

BAIT

My hook bait was a Sonubaits' 13mm hard pellet, which I attached to the hair and locked in position with a purpose-made pellet stop. I pre-drilled several pellets to make things easier on the bank. Drilling pellets can be frustrating, especially if they become damp or your drill isn't very sharp, so make sure you buy a high-quality drill and the pellets you're using are as fresh as possible. Don't rush the drilling process; let the drill cut the pellet rather than forcing it through. I always pre-drill a batch of pellets before leaving home, as although it only takes a few seconds on the bank, the last thing you want when a bite comes is to be fiddling around doing something that should already have been prepared.

Today I also moulded a walnut-sized lump of paste around the pellet. This method has worked for me throughout the year and if a barbel is about, bites can be instant. My paste had also been made up the night before simply by pouring boiling water over some 6mm Sonubaits Hard Feed pellets and leaving overnight.

To get the right consistency, I cover the pellets with boiling water, leave for 10 minutes, then drain off the excess water.

HOW TO MAKE AND USE PASTE



01 The night before fishing, pour boiling water over some 6mm hard-feed pellets for 10 minutes.



02 In the morning, after they have drained, you'll be able to make a paste from the scalded pellets.



03 Flatten a lump of paste.



04 Lay your hooked pellet on the paste.



05 Mould the paste around the pellet. The finished result.

HOW TO HOOK A 13MM HARD PELLETT



01 Use a fine, strong drill and make a hole through the centre of the pellet from end to end.



02 Don't force the drill through or you'll break the pellet.



03 Remove the drill and push the pellet on to a baiting needle.



04 Hook the needle into the loop at the end of the hair.



05 Now slide the pellet from the needle on to the hair.



06 Secure with a boilie stop.



07 Match the colour of the boilie stop to the colour of the bait.