

BIG CHUB, DELAYED SHOCK & THE TREBUCHET

It is generally accepted knowledge that Chub are brighter than the average coarse fish, and also that you will catch more of them with your bait mounted directly onto the hook rather than on a hair-rig. As any experienced barbel angler will tell you, using a pellet or boilie, on a longish hair rig – means you should hook significantly fewer “swim-wrecking” chub.

Now up until 2004, I'd always believed that a competent chub angler armed with a quiver-tip rod or trotting gear, would almost always outfish an angler bolt-rigging with boilies 'carp-style'. However, whilst working at Oxfordshire's famous tackle shop J&K Tackle in Bicester, I met a crack local carp angler, by the name of Pete Andrews, who over the course of a few weeks enthralled me with tales of a succession of big Chub he was taking on modified river carp tactics.



Bicester's Pete Andrews with a monster Thames Chub

Now Pete is ex-army and a jolly, but tough and uncompromising character – and his tactics were little different! Light Carp rods, 12lb line and 3oz leads were his tools for the job, and I somewhat arrogantly thought that if Pete was catching so many chub with such gear, I would take it apart on proper chub tackle. I was heading for a fall!

It wasn't too long before I'd badgered Pete to take me along on one of his Chub trips to the middle Thames in South Oxfordshire – the appropriate ticket was purchased and a date was set. Over the course of the long walk to the swims, he explained how he'd carp fished the water quite extensively over recent seasons, taking some handsome river carp over 20lb over the course of the campaign. But good Chub had regularly hung themselves, and so as Winter set in Pete had modified the tactics slightly to catch the Chub by design, as the carp captures naturally diminished in the colder water.

When we got to the area Pete had been doing well from recently, I immediately saw that the river here was significantly wider, deeper and more powerful to the Upper Thames upstream of Oxford I was more familiar with. Setting up a conventional link leger & quivertip outfit, I soon found that the power, depth and sheer width of the river meant I could only fish effectively down the nearside sliver of the river. Fishing any further out than that meant even a 3oz tip would pull round with the force of the flow on the line, no matter how much bow was paid out.



Wide Deep River Thames downstream of Oxford

Although there were a few nice near-bank bushes to fish to, the main features were on the far bank, including a huge slack bay 60 yards distant that Pete was going to target.

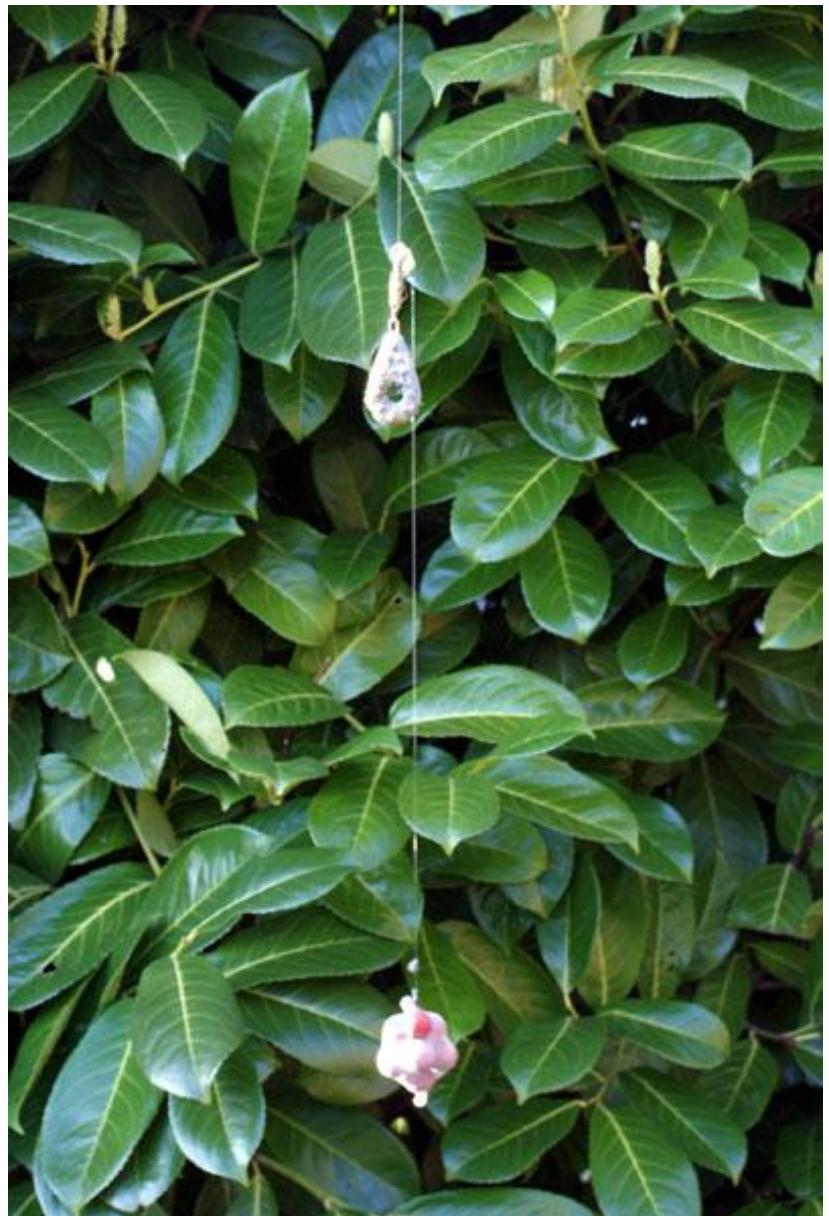
This obvious winter fish holding area was completely unfishable with my gear. However, after a couple of hours of fishing I was feeling quite happy with myself having extracted a brace of 3lb Chub from the near bank bushes. I was brought down to earth with a bump to find Pete *had already bagged about 7 quality Chub to 5lb odd* from the far bank bay! This was quite a wake up call, and beautifully illustrated that in fishing, the only rule which is a given is that there are *always* exceptions to accepted thinking!

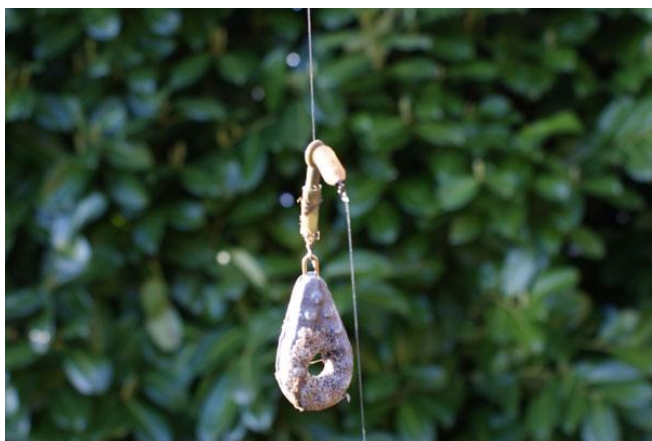
Over the course of subsequent seasons I readily accepted the tactics Pete had shown me and of course in turn, modified them slightly to suit different swims & venues of my own – and it has worked virtually everywhere I tried. Of course there are always days when you fail and question your tactics, but I have had a number of memorable trips with this approach where I could not have fished effectively with conventional chub gear. In turn I passed on the lessons learned to a friend & fellow Oxfordshire specimen angler, who also embraced and enjoyed the method and now also uses the tactic regularly himself where situations require, with considerable success. I would stress, that my first choice chub tactics on all smaller & medium sized rivers are always the quiver tip or float, but on bigger rivers, the heavy gear does open up areas other anglers can't fish – and thus puts extra big chub in my landing net. Generally, far bank swims of around 40yards range and over, often in water over 8 feet deep, are ideal swims – and usually these areas are plenty spacious enough for 2 rods to be employed.

Recently I have polished the set up to the following, and this has worked consistently on a variety of big river venues. Ideal rod is a 1.75lb Barbel rod – ideally with a softish tip action (my rod of choice for the past 5 years is the now discontinued Drennan Specialist Power Barbel) – the extra power sounds overgunned for chub, but you are employing overhead casts with 2oz leads, sometimes stepping up in Winter to 3oz, and then playing Chub of over 6lbs as well. And then there are bonus river carp, barbel, tench and bream which happily take the bait. Reels are the ever reliable Shimano 6000 GT Baitrunners – spooled with either 10lb or 12lb line, depending on the volume of flow and choice of lead. The baitrunner system is essential if you wish (as I usually do) to use 2 rods; I have often had simultaneous 'trebuchets', and some takes are so violent you will lose your rod if you are indisposed or have fallen asleep.

Although a straight forward bolt rig will work, a little more finesse converts (and continues too, trip after trip) more bites to hooked fish. A set up I have been using the past couple of years consists of an 18inch Soft Ghost Fluorocarbon hooklength through to a size 10 Super Specialist Barbel hook, knotless knotted. The hair has to be precisely measured out so that the 14mm boilie is tight to the shank of the hook – as pictured (left). Ideally it should be so tight that's it a little tricky to squeeze the hairstop through the loop; this is important. Big Chub rapidly acquire the irritating skill of sucking up the boilie, but holding it in the front of the mouth only whilst they drop back in the flow. If they feel resistance, they allow the tight line to pull the boilie back out of the mouth, and the angler only sees an exciting but fruitless bang on the tip.

The 'elimination' of the long hair, so that the boilie is pressed against the shank, means its much harder for the chub to hold the bait without being in contact with the hook – and the choice of hook, with a needle sharp straight point (not beaked) aids the chance if it catching hold successfully. The final ruse in my strategy is to use a pop-up boilie, critically balanced with just the right size of Kryston Heavy Metal 5mm up the hooklength– this means the boilie wafts around in the flow very naturally (like the freebies around it) and when the wary chub sucks, it flies into the mouth easily.





The rig consists of the lead on an Enterprise Low Resistance Run Ring, which is stopped at the top of the hooklink by a large Drennan Swivel Stop Bead.

But the clever bit is exactly 12 inches up the mainline from the stop bead, where a Grippa Stop is positioned with an 8mm ESP rubber shock bead below it. The idea here is that the big chub sucks up the buoyant boilie, drops downstream with it in the mouth – is hopefully momentarily reassured by the slack (and if you haven't already struck), the run ring and lead hit the stop and BANG!

The chub is pricked, bolts and the rod crashes over in what my friends and I call a Trebuchet - the action with the rods positioned up is like that of the medieval castle-siege artillery and is a very exciting bite signal indeed! Some of these explosive bites have to be seen to be believed, yet the culprit when landed is surprisingly a chub of just 3lb odd. A useful side benefit to the grippa stop and bead is that any debris and leaves slide down the line but stick on the stop, leaving the lead and hooklength clear. I call this simple and effective rig the Delayed Shock rig, for obvious reasons.



Rods Down

This theory seems to work quite well, though ideally you don't want flow too severe – as this causes everything to tighten up to the tip too much – meaning there is less slack for the chub to take up when it picks up the bait. In normal flow conditions I prefer to fish the rods down in a conventional position, but usually in higher velocity Winter flows I fish them rods-up-parallel, which makes it easier to watch both tips together, and also keeps more line out of the water, reducing the amount of debris which collects. Although it looks a bit "noddy barbel angler" it seems to make absolutely no difference to my catch rate, in fact its probably been better over several seasons than the rod down results.

A pair of Drennan Isotopes (right) are inexpensive and much easier to watch in the dark than a single one. Care needs to be taken after casting to ensure the line hasn't twisted around an Isotope – as this can be an expensive mistake if you subsequently have cause to strike.





Rods Up

Bites with this method are a mix of explosive trebuchets, big drop backs, and shakes and taps; all of which require immediate striking, so you need to concentrate. Much of this fishing is done in poor light or complete darkness – so a pair of Isotopes on the rod top are essential; I find a pair is far easier to watch than a single. I usually carry 2 pairs of bank sticks – a pair of long Fox cam lock models where I need to get the rods high, and a pair of very short ones where I'm fishing the rods low. On occasion I have used both – with butt grips on the short ones and the long ones fully extended – getting the rods up to maximum height to hold over to the far bank slack in extreme conditions.



A Trebuchet!

My current bait of choice is CC Moore's excellent Meteor Boilies, a devastating mix of wheat, fish, milk and egg protein. These are highly digestible, and are low in oil, making them ideal for winter use. They have a super hi-vis red colour, nice firm texture, and, importantly – are available in accompanying tubs of both 14mm Airball pop-ups and hardened hookbaits (which are very useful on occasions when the crayfish drive you mad).



Big Chub Bait – note the mesh bags made up in advance



Balanced Pop Up tight to the shank with PVA Mesh Bag

Loose feeding is a non-exact science which needs to be gauged on how many fish you think are in front of you, and also the velocity of flow and nature of the river bed – experience being the key. Generally, I will hook on a 32mm PVA Mesh bag of 7 freebies to every cast, which is not only the most accurate way to feed, but also keeps the

hooklength out straight and reduces the risk of a tangle on the cast. 7 freebie boilies and a hookbait is a tasty snack for just a single big chub. I always make a generous number of mesh bags up in advance – I don't want to waste time doing these on the bank when I should be watching the rod tops.



What you often see when they are properly having it! Note how even this modest chub has a gullet full of boilies and been 'nailed' in the scissors.

Often I will leave each cast in situ for around an hour, unless the lead is dislodged by debris. If I'm confident the boilies are being taken in the swim by feeding fish (and are not being washed 40 yards downstream) I often feed say ten extra in pairs via the catapult, with further top ups as I catch fish or when taps occur or fish show themselves.

When they are really having it, it seems you can feed any number of boilies without overfeeding them, and often I have seen the satisfying site of chub being landed with a gullet full of pulped boile (see picture) – this shows that they are plainly enjoying the bait and actively seeking out the boilies.

I'll finish this piece with a short description of an evening trip to the Thames at Oxford in February. Due to family commitments I had been unable to get away until 6pm, when it was already well past dusk and fully dark. Conditions were excellent, a nice mild overcast evening with the river in good trim – I just knew from past experience the chub would feed well. I drove over to an Oxfordshire Thames location I knew well, which was completely deserted, and fed 20 Meteor boilies into three old favourite swims – this generous initial salvo of 60 baits is something I would normally only do when I was really positive of feeding fish being present.

My first swim was a slightly deeper far bank run some 45 yards across the channel. Soon after starting I missed a bite on my downstream rod, but a second opportunity soon came on the other rod and after an exciting scrap a nice fat Chub of 4lb 7oz was soon in the net. Good start, which reassured me that my instincts of a good chub feeding evening might well be correct. The swim failed to produce any more bites, so having given it just over an hour I moved off into swim 2. This was a trickier cast, about 35yards over to some overhanging branches – with the rods needing to be rested high to keep the line out of the fast flowing run down the middle – but a very consistent big fish swim for me in the past. However tonight it provided only frustration, as I managed to completely miss one good bite and then bump off another – leaving me a little disappointed with my performance. So having given it well over an hour (I hate leaving a swim when I have not properly exploited fish that are plainly there to be caught) it was off into my third and final swim. The time was 10pm and with work tomorrow I had elected to pack up at 11pm sharp.

In the past this swim has not tended to produce many bites, but does produce the odd big Chub over 6lb on occasion. My right hand rod went 30 yards upstream to the head of a sharply pronounced crease, the left hand one about 20 yards across to the slacker water down the inside of the far bank.

Little happened for the next 55 minutes and I had decided to leave both hookbaits exactly where I'd cast them for the full final hour. In fact with no indications or signs of fish being present in the swim, I was close to nodding off, feeling a little deflated that I'd wasted several opportunities and not really pulled up any trees with just one 4lb Chub.

As if in answer, and just as I was thinking of reeling in, the right hand rod top seemed to nod. A second passed. Had I imagined it? Then all the tension fell out of the line as the lead was dislodged, a clear drop back bite – so without hesitation I picked up the rod, wound in a few yards of slack and swept the rod back over my head. About half way back I made contact, a satisfying thump resonated up the blank, but it did not yield; big chub hooked!

With stout gear I was always in control and it was fairly straight forward with the flow on my side to bully the fish up in the water and into the slacker water in front of me. As the chub wallowed I glimpsed a big white gob and an impressive bulk – and it did cross my mind for a split second whether I had finally cracked the 7lb dream.

There were no mistakes at the net and I peeled back the mesh to reveal a very fine Thames chub in excellent fat condition, and judging by the scale patterns it had already lived a pretty chequered life. On the Avon's it went 6lb 10oz, a superb end to the evening and another capture on the delayed shock rig.

