



JOHN BAILEY the thinking angler

THIS WEEK: trotting in the late summer months is the subject of JB's gaze. What better way to spend a day on the river?

TROTTING will put a smile on your face! John loves getting into the flow. Do please take care near running water, especially if you follow in his footsteps and wear chest waders.



Get out and enjoy some SUMMER TROT



Held back as the light fades and ready to dip under... hopefully!

A FLOAT rides the current at 60 yards range. You squint against the sun, not quite sure if it's there or if it's disappeared. On a hunch and a prayer, you strike firmly, far back. Thump! Fish! How good is this? And this is how it happened to me a couple of years back, making a Hardy DVD on the middle Hampshire Avon with Dave Burgess. Up until that point I'd done a lot of trotting in the summer, but on my own rivers, doing it my own way. Dave, that day, introduced me to something quite different. A 13 or 14 ft float rod, centrepin, 4 lb main line through to a size 16 hook. A baby Drennan Avon float

attached top and bottom. The bulk shot midway and a No.6 just a few inches up from the hook. Heavy feeding. Half a pint of maggots put into the flow before a cast is even contemplated. The whole concept was to get the chub moving, interested, ravenous. It worked. A pint of maggots, though, it took to get some 20 chub wheeling this way and that across the current. Dave's first trot produced a fish of perhaps four and three quarters in weight. My turn. The float went so far I could barely see it but, somehow, I sensed it was the time to strike. You don't bully a big fish on light



The craft of float fishing a river is hard to beat.

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line at long range up a weeded river. You cajole it and that's what I did that day. I guess the cameraman shot 15 minutes of film before the net was ready to engulf it. Five? Five and a quarter? It didn't really matter. The point was made. Even in crystal water, in the brightest of sunlight, big chub can be fooled on the float. Of course, you need to choose the run. Ideally, you'll have a good stretch of river to go at, at least 70 or 80 yards, and the weed mustn't be too thick. You've got to have at least two to four feet of water to operate in without too many foul-ups. It's all about setting the swim up, getting the fish looking, fooling them into forgetting their spookiness. After that, it's float control pure and simple. You've got to guide those maggots down the river in a way that looks as natural as it's humanly possible to do.

I said that this was not my normal way of trotting a summer river. Not all of us can fish the Hampshire Avon. A lot of us have to make do with smaller, slower-paced, weedier rivers. On rivers like this, you are looking for swims that are completely different. Over here on the Wensum, I'm generally searching for a comparatively weed-free run, often less than ten yards in extent. These deeper, darker holes might well be on bends, or along tree margins where weed growth is stunted through lack of light. Sometimes you will find a sudden deepening of the river bed, or alongside a weed raft. What is sure is that in these pieces

of river, there are almost always good fish to be caught. Roach, dace, chub and perch are probably the river species that you will be targeting. Strategy is important. Weigh up your piece of water. Don't dive in. Like Dave did on the Avon, 20 minutes is well spent feeding quietly, steadily, building the swim to a fever pitch. Moving quietly, feed the float through gently and it's often a bite a chuck during the late summer when the water is warm and the fishing can come easy. For water such as this I like the stick. It doesn't have to be large. Something big enough to carry two or three BB is generally quite enough. Again, as with the Avon, I might start with maggots, but I'll be quick to go over to bread flake if very small fish prove to be a nuisance. On rivers such as these, I might go down to 3 lb line, though 4 or 5 lb line is always an option if I'm convinced there are serious chub about – or even a stray barbel. Down on the Avon, float control was paramount, and even at these tight, eyeball-to-eyeball distances, it still is. The river might be slow, you might not be fishing far from your rod tip, but you've still got to guide that float with absolute precision. I like to hold back frequently, letting the float trickle down at somewhat less than the pace of the current. I'll stop it altogether at times and, by fishing a little over depth, I'll let the bait lie on the bottom before tweaking it to move slowly downstream once more.

JOHN'S SUPER 7 TROT

- 1 LIGHTER LOADS.** Travel light and travel further. Rod, reel, net, bait and a few bits and pieces and you're ready to go.
- 2 HANDY APRON.** A bait apron is essential. You're standing, you're moving, you're mobile. No time at all for bait trays.
- 3 SUPER SHADES.** Polarised glasses are an essentiality. If you can see your bait being taken, it doesn't half add spice to your fishing.
- 4 CHESTIES.** Breathable chestwaders are great for this job - you don't need a seat, you can get into the heavily weeded margins and have much more control over that float.
- 5 LOB ONE OUT.** Have a pot of worms with you. Trotting a lob every now and then can produce a bonus perch or a big chub or roach that would look at nothing else.
- 6 SPEEDY SMALLS.** Get small fish in really fast. Building up a swim like this will often attract jack pike.
- 7 CRUMBS OF CLUES.** Fishing mash? Watch those floating bits of crust as they go off downriver away from you. Investigate any swirls and you could be on for a PB chub, dace or roach.



Don't dwell too long when you hook small fish. Get them in quickly.

I don't do boredom in my fishing anymore; life's too short. Fishing the float on a river, high summer and the hours pass like you wouldn't believe. It's best, on either the Avon or the smaller rivers to have two, three, or four swims up your sleeve, because they can die on you, especially after you've had a netful. You don't have to get up at cock-crow but the river is a stunning place to be on a late summer dawn. The cows munching at dew-soaked grass. The heron getting up with a crawl. Mist burning off into the warmth of another incredible, English day. Best of all, a good roach rolling in a blur of red and of silver.

This is when you'll catch the biggest fish, the elusive chub, that massive roach that disappears in the daylight hours. This is when you will almost certainly have the river to yourself. If I see footsteps upriver in the dew, I'll go downriver. It's not that I'm antisocial, but I know how many anglers can disturb a swim and spook the fish before they've even introduced a bait. Remember that. Late summer rivers are clear. The fish can see you and they can feel you as you walk along the banks. Keep your profile low. Make your movements slow, gentle and relaxed. This is you as the hunter, the heron on the riverbank.



John's good lady, Sarah, shows a cracking chub caught while trotting with a float.