

ON THE CRACK OF ELEVEN

A Day On The Dorset Stour

The winter for me is usually reserved for the rivers, and this year was no different. I'd been doing my usual little evening sessions each week from December, but early February we had arranged a little social weekend, to do some editorial work on Subsurface and hopefully catch a few Stour chub.

Beep beep, beep beep... it drifted nonsensically into my dream, I fumbled about for my phone, it was 9.45am, four hours after the alarm had been set for. It was fair to say we'd decided the 'crack of eleven' would be as early as we'd make it down.

At half three we had still been crammed in my lounge, watching old fishing DVDs, reminiscing and discussing the future, the empty remains of fifty quids worth of Indian takeaway and a fair few empty bottles still spread around, Si assuring us that the leftovers would come in handy later on. He wasn't wrong. Half a naan and a scoop of masala at 3.30am is, it appears, the perfect snack!

So, there we were, four grown men still talking about fish, our best-laid plans of a 6am start on the Stour ebbing away by the minute. In reality, it was probably never going to happen. Get a bunch of angling mates together who haven't seen each other for a few months and then get them to stop talking and go to bed so they can get up early to go angling? Never!

In the end we rolled out of bed about ten-ish, and after a quick rehabilitating coffee, we were set. It was a nice fresh February day, a bit of cloud here and there, not too chilly but a bit more of a brisk north westerly wind than I'd hoped for, wanting to get the stick float on the go for the day. Still, it was just good to be alive and out on the river, and to be honest, any chub at all would just be a bonus. Sometimes it just doesn't really matter what happens on the fishing front, not when you're with good mates anyway.



ANGLER FILE



Name: **Gaz Fareham**
Lives: **Bournemouth**

Gaz Fareham looks back on an eventful chub session on the famous River Stour in Dorset.





The Dorset Stour; winter's playground. The famous Throop Flour Mill at the top of beat 2.



It was a bright day, and the river was running low and clear, perfect for the float, but the buffeted trees making me think twice about taking the 13 footer. We headed off, Meekey dropping in the Mill, and James and Si dropping on the weir to give the bread a go. I headed off downstream, to a spot I'd taken a few nice fish from in winters passed. The river looked beautiful; a cold, crystalline light glinting off it, just gentle creases here and there giving away the presence of subtle changes in depth and, hopefully, our quarry.

After settling, it became clear that the wind, although giving Si and James a good buffeting on the weir, was skipping over this particular section of river; at least most of the time, with just the odd gust punching through. The trees, or the high bank, just back upstream diverting the worst and leaving the trot I had in front of me in a precarious lee. I jogged back to the van to get my float rod, but not before running half a dozen pouchfuls of red maggots through the swim.

Arriving back, I sat and continued baiting, just a small pouchful every minute. As I fed, Matt Jackson happened to pass by, so we sat and chatted for a while. I was eager to congratulate him and have a chat about his phenomenal brace of 3lb roach; a truly incredible catch. He was looking for a few big chub now to add to his winter's harvest.

In the end I caved to temptation, so after half an hour of feeding I started to run the little red-tipped stick float through, a 20-yard cast across the river and slightly upstream, mend the line as it draws level to keep it running an even pace

through the deeper, central part of the trot just short of the old dead sedges that I could see the dark shadows of, looming mid-river.

I love the anticipation of the float, but after 30 trots through, my anticipation had waned somewhat, the wind making it just trickier than I hoped to keep a nice steady pace and line through the swim. Knowing it just wasn't quite right I headed off, having a quick chat with James who'd long since moved from the weir and I ended up virtually opposite where I started, on the other bank tucked in amongst the trees in the muddy reed beds that are so often underwater during the winter.

It was obvious it was a much better option, the wind missing the water completely here and with a shorter trot and better line I started baiting. After about 30 minutes of consistent baiting, I ran the little red-tipped stick through, with a single red maggot attached. Nothing, and again...still nothing. It must have been 20 trots before it finally sunk away, almost taking me by surprise, the rhythmic, repeated action of the 'pouch, cast and mend' and gently gurgling flow of water having an almost hypnotic effect.

I connected with a solid weight and began the battle of attrition that is playing Stour chub on 2lb line and a size 20 Red Maggot hook. It is one of the biggest joys of the winter for me, and a battle that is never, ever, just a matter, of course. Finally, bit by bit, I got some line back on the little Abu and a lovely clean Stour chub rolled into the net. It was thick across the back and with that lovely plump chest, a classic winter fish, the little

spade end nicked neatly in the top lip. I phoned Marcus to see if he was nearby and could take a few pictures and with a small pouch and another flick across just shy of the sticks, the little red tip started its journey down river again, sinking away in the exact same spot.

Thankfully Marcus turned up just in time, as after a good 10 minutes of delicate give and take I had another big chub ready for the net to join his mate, it was a good job he turned up when he did as it fought for grim death and almost had me in the big set of snags to my right near the net. Trying to manoeuvre the net with the other big fish in there could well have ended up none in the net, instead of two!

We looked down into the net at the two big slabs of silver and bronze flanked chub nestled up beside each other and chuckled. I was made up. 5.8 and 6.2 they went. Not colossal by Stour standards, but a bigger joy to angle for I really couldn't imagine.

The next trot through I missed a bite, and the next was another 5.8. Three in three (or four) for 17lb 2oz, I'll take that!

The rest of the day was a struggle. Evening closed in and we all switched to roving around with the cheese, Si taking a nice 5.8 and Marcus a 5.10. All in all it wasn't a bad day, even it was only from the 'crack of eleven'!

The following week I finally found my seven pounder, after five years of searching, from one of the same spots I'd trundled a bit of cheese through on many occasion...

EXCEPT ON THIS OCCASION, A TRUE GIANT WAS WAITING FOR IT, AND MY WINTER WAS MADE.



'Looking down into the net at the two big slabs of silver and bronze flanked chub nestled up beside each other'



One of Marcus' many big Stour chub.