

# Ninjas of the

## BRYCE HENDERSON

BRYCE HENDERSON IS NOW AN OFFICIAL PENSIONER, HAVING RETIRED FIVE YEARS AGO. HE WAS BORN AND HAS LIVED ALL HIS LIFE IN WEST YORKSHIRE, FOR THE LAST THIRTY WITHIN THE AREA TO THE ILKLEY SIDE OF LEEDS.

HAVING LEFT SCHOOL AT SEVENTEEN HE SERVED AN APPRENTICESHIP IN REFRIGERATION ENGINEERING. CLUMSINESS GOT HIM PROMOTED INTO THE DESIGN OFFICE WHERE HE FOUND HIS TRUE VOCATION, WHICH ULTIMATELY LEAD HIM TO OWNING HIS OWN COMPANY, SELLING AND INSTALLING REFRIGERATION SYSTEMS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

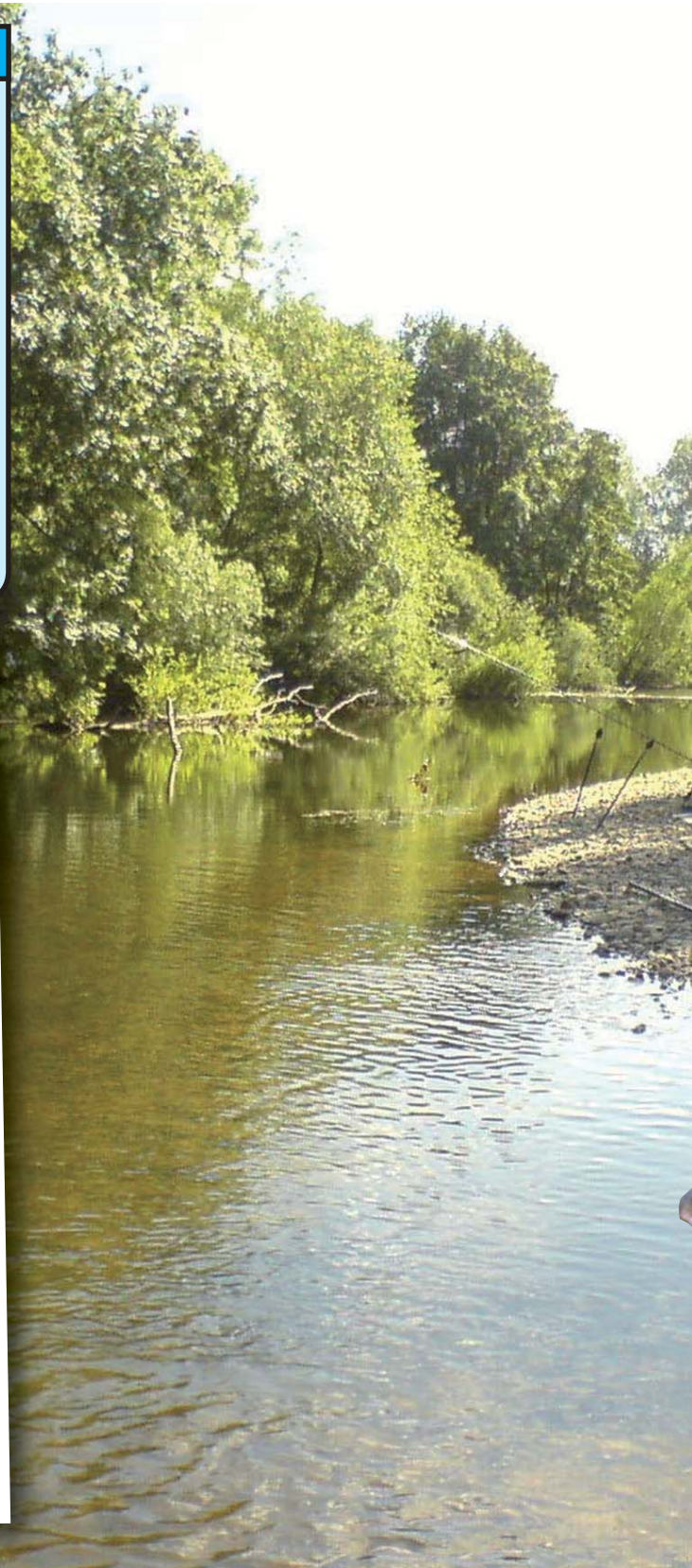
HE HAS BEEN MARRIED FOR FORTY YEARS WITH TWO GROWN UP SONS AND THREE GRANDCHILDREN.

BRYCE STARTED FISHING FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, AND FOR THE PAST SIX HAVE FISHED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FOR BARBEL WITH A P.B. OF 12LB 6OZ FROM THE SOCIETIES TOPCLIFFE PRESERVE.

AS WELL AS THE YORKSHIRE RIVERS HE ALSO MAKES REGULAR VISITS TO THE TEME, SEVERN AND GREAT OUSE, AND EXCURSIONS TO THE EBRO FOR CAT FISHING.

HIS OTHER INTERESTS INCLUDE MOUNTAIN WALKING, WINE MAKING, TRAVEL AND ACTING AS HEAVY LABOURER FOR HIS WIFE, A KEEN GARDENER.

HE IS ALSO U.K CONTACT FOR THE SPANISH BASED GUIDED CAT FISHING BUSINESS OF HIS YOUNGEST SON.



# e Nidd

Ninja “a person trained in ancient Japanese martial arts”. In looking for an appropriate alliteration this was the only one I could come up with that comes near to describing the fighting qualities of the barbel that live in this small Yorkshire river.

If one imagines that the specialised skills of hook straightening, line breaking, and the ability to find hidden lairs amongst roots, martial arts then the description is an apt one.

There are six, eastward flowing Yorkshire rivers (excluding the Don and Dearne in The Peoples Republic of South Yorkshire) and the westward flowing Yorkshire Derwent, that are major tributaries of the Yorkshire Ouse. Amongst the anglers fishing these rivers, I think that most would agree that the Nidd fish are amongst the hardest fighting of any, indeed it can be said that that they make the so-called Teme Tigers seem like pussy cats! This has to be fact as Yorkshiremen are as renowned for the modesty of their claims as they are their generosity and free spending.

Now, a geography lesson. At school during lessons covering local geographic features an acronym was hammered into

us as a mantra that we must never forget for the rest of our lives.

## “SUNWAC”

This being, naming from the north, Swale, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe, Aire and Calder, the six eastward flowing Yorkshire rivers. Just how this information helped us with our ultimate hunt for a job I’m at a loss, but it has ensured I remember the names of the six potential barbel rivers local to me.

All these rivers rise in the high Pennines and are spate rivers, having the capability of rising extremely quickly with dark chocolate peaty water and falling not quite so fast.

As such over the years, flood banks and defences up to a height of over 20ft have been constructed, which truth be told, have not made their lower reaches especially beautiful in some places.

The Swale is probably the most famous of the rivers from a barbel perspective, historically holding the Yorkshire record. It rises on the southern side of the Durham border with the Tees on the northern side of the watershed, flowing through Richmond, Catterick and then south through the Vale of York to ultimately join the Ure, where they become the Yorkshire Ouse, this then carries on through York, gathering rivers as it goes to ultimately disgorge into the Humber and the North Sea.

The best barbeling is to be had in the lower Swale, which can be said, to be between Topcliffe weir and the start of the Ouse.

Ah! I hear you



7lb 4oz  
Nidd ninja

say "Topcliffe" that has a familiar ring. Yes indeed, about a mile below the weir on the east bank lies the Societies Topcliffe water, holding a good head of barbel to approaching 13lbs, a magical and enigmatic length where the fishing is tremendous or frustrating for about equal periods. At times with summer levels it can resemble an almost static canal, but add about 2ft of extra water, or even 10ft, with the extra colour, and it becomes a river to die for.

The Ure, 10 miles further south flows from a lake called Semmer Water and then down Wenslydale, through Middleham (racing stables), Masham (beer) and Ripon (Oh! a cathedral). It was recently shown on television in a short film that featured barbel spawning, along with chub and lamprey. It is probably the most attractive of the six rivers with minimal flood defences until the lowest five miles below Ripon, upto

joining the Swale to form the Ouse.

In barbeling terms, whilst there is a good population they are out numbered on a ratio of about 10: 1 by chub and do not reach the size of the Swale fish, any double is indeed a fish to be proud of and an achievement I have yet to attain.

The third river south is the Nidd to which I will return later.

The Wharfe next, which is the longest, rising on the Cumbrian border, flowing along side the route of the Dalesway long distance footpath through beautiful Wharfedale. Ilkley is the first town of any significance shortly followed by Otley, then down to Wetherby, Boston Spa and Tadcaster. The lengths below Boston Spa hold a sizable head of good barbel, from whence came the current Yorkshire record at over 15lbs. The water above Wetherby has significant stocks but these seem to be a smaller stamp of fish. The current upper

limit is Harewood weir although stockings of small fish have taken place at both Otley and Ilkley during recent years which hopefully will begin to show in about five years time. For one reason or another this is not a river I fish much despite being my nearest containing barbel, so consequently have no great fishing knowledge of it.

The River Aire, it makes you weep, my nearest river, and not a barbel in it. Ruined by the industrial effluent from initially Keighley, and then topped up by Bradford and Leeds. In fairness the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water have invested a lot of money and effort and all parts could now hold good numbers of all species. Clear water and streamer weed can now be found, certainly chub and roach are well re-established and I understand a barbel stocking was made last year in the Keighley area.

Last and probably least the Calder, another river

ruined by the industrial revolution whilst flowing through Halifax and Huddersfield, and like the Aire making a come back with stocked barbel, now up to about 2 lbs below Huddersfield. The fish may be there, but really who would want to fish in such an industrial landscape when the four most northerly rivers are such a picture and more rewarding.

So now to return to the Nidd. It is the shortest of the rivers, rising over the fell from Appletrewick in mid Wharfedale. The upper reaches flow through Pateley Bridge and Ripley where it could be said that the middle reaches start. These middle reaches stretch through Knaresborough, and it is at their upper end where the first barbel occur. They are not present because of natural fish movement but as a result of a stocking program by Knaresborough Piscatorials about ten years ago and some are now approaching double figures.

The change to the lower Nidd is roughly where it passes under the A1 motorway and for a further 10 miles or so before joining the Ouse north of York. Fish migration on the Nidd as with most of the other Yorkshire rivers is hindered by a great number of weirs, another 19<sup>th</sup> century legacy, built because of the need for waterpower to mechanise the textile industry. Of all these rivers the Nidd is the least volatile not suffering the same spates, this as a result of two large reservoirs built to serve Bradford in Upper Nidderdale, never the less it can still fill its twenty foot flood-banks.

My own fishing in Yorkshire is shared between the Swale, Ure and Nidd, all three having different attributes and I would not like to have to choose a favourite. It adds to the day's anticipation to have the inward debate as to which to





*10 fish swim with added 2006 snag*

fish, dependent on weather, river conditions, and recent experiences. However, the lower Nidd is high in my affections as the place where two of my fishing highlights have occurred. It is also rare for this part of the world in that during low summer conditions, the fish may be spotted in the clear shallower water. That is once you have hacked your way to the bank-side through the balsam and nettles, a small sickle is an essential tool.

To digress slightly, I did not start fishing until my late forties and have only been fishing seriously for barbell in the last six years. My interest initially was roused by my youngest son Al, who stated fishing in his early teens, for whom I quickly became an essential fishing accessory as a driver and wallet. On one, (fishing for him) family holiday I

decided that I should give it a whirl and spent an afternoon in a mini perch competition with him, fishing in a stream feeding an Irish Lough. First day on holiday and I hadn't thought about work at all, not the usual three days slightly fretting, it was magic. I was concentrating on something that didn't affect anyone else in the world but mattered intensely to me.

During the following years my fishing interest increased, involving trips to Ireland, France and eventually Spain. This latter when Al and his mates, (once they could drive) told me "we don't think you will enjoy coming to France with us this year", so I thought "sod em" and went off to the Ebro on my own and had a great holiday and some stunning fishing. Funnily enough the

following year they came to Spain with me, where we had our first experience of the cat fishing, which ultimately lead to Al and Martin, his original school fishing mate, going out to Spain full time as cat fish guides ([www.ebrocatfishing.com](http://www.ebrocatfishing.com)). Obviously the university education and economics degree were an absolute necessity for this career choice, not bad though, making a living whilst indulging your hobby. In dotting around the Yorkshire rivers during that period I slowly became aware of the fact that barbel seemed to be the fish of the discerning angler, and as a result joined Knaresborough Piscatorials who had a lot of water on the Nidd and others on the Ure and Swale. My first efforts were disappointing with little reward for my efforts until

one day on the lower Nidd after several moves I ended up in the furthest peg from the car, in a drizzle under a poncho.

After about ten minutes a good bite, probably the best fish so far from this stretch, Oh hell! It's just a decent chub! On the basis "where there's one there may be more" I recast.

Ten minutes later, never mind a good bite, my rod was nearly wrenched out of my hand and after a seemingly prolonged and adrenaline filled fight my first Nidd ninja. This fish was caught on 6lb line and a 14 hook, which my research had lead me to believe was the correct set up, how wrong I was despite this first success. Subsequent experiences caused me to up line and hook size progressively until now I'm using 15lb Power Pro, No 8 hooks and a

## *Ninjas of the Nidd* By Bryce Henderson

Peregrine 11ft Gti with quiver tip. It is only with this tackle that I am confident that I can control the fish and keep them out of the willows on the opposite bank, which in most cases are within twenty feet.

This first fish was a milestone and started the process of me becoming increasingly besotted with these magical fish. It came shortly after a visit to Spain where I had landed my first exhilarating 100 lb cat but that capture seemed as nothing compared with that first 4lb 8oz barbel. All my own endeavours!

The following year resulted in an invitation to fish the Teme for a few days with a knowledgeable local; the river is like a double size Nidd only with more fish. A great experience, with fish that fight nearly as hard as those northern ninjas, certainly this experience cemented my love affair with the species.

My second Nidd highlight was three seasons ago during August 2005 when the river was running low and clear. I had got into the habit on reaching the water of walking to the farthest

and favourite peg, giving it a couple of hours and then moving progressively back to the car covering about a thousand yards and six pegs in total, and spending about 45 minutes in each one.

This seemed to work well as even if I didn't catch in the banker, I generally caught something on the return journey, although surprisingly pre-baiting these swims on the outward walk doesn't seem to make any appreciable difference to the catch rate. There are few chub compared to barbel, the latter of which are in the four to seven pound bracket and at prime fighting weight, a bonus one day was a 9lb fish that remains my Nidd PB, doubles being few and far between .

At this point in time my maximum bag was 3 fish from one peg so I was delighted when two successive visits resulted in five bag hauls and both from the banker. On my walk back along the bank following the second of these, early evening, I came across a bivey, complete with sleeping angler in a spot I had never fished, nor seen

any sign of it being fished at all. Here the river is a bit deeper, slower and about twice-normal width (maybe thirty feet); there are some far bank features but not the usual submerged half tree.

Next time I visited, starting fishing at my normal 10am, and on the basis of "did he know something I don't" I decided to give the spot a try for an hour, it was easily identified by the pot noodle carton, cig packet, chocolate wrapper and some cannies. So much for the club threat "LEAVE LITTER, LEAVE THE CLUB".

After about an hour as I was contemplating moving on to the banker came the familiar barbel twitch, resulting in a landed fish. So" I'll give it another hour". By early afternoon I was elated having landed a further five, my best Nidd day and by five o'clock had landed ten. What a day! which was also blessed by a bream of about 3lbs, my only Nidd snotty to date, but not a ninja bream. Needless to say this swim is now always visited but has never since yielded more than 2 fish, in fact since then I have reverted to only 2 or 3 fish

maximums in a day. The conditions that late summer must have been absolutely spot on.

Fishing as a pastime, and in particular fishing these three rivers, has enhanced my life in more ways, in that it has enabled me to indulge one of my other interests which is birding, why go seeking them out when by sitting quietly on the bank the birds will come to you. Strangely enough the three rivers all have different bird interests, the Nidd with its raptors (red kite, buzzard, sparrow hawk, kestrel), the Ure its waders (curlew, greenshank, oyster catcher), and the Swale, well a bit like the fishing, sometimes good, sometimes rubbish.

On them all though there are the roving bands of tits, kingfisher, robins, wrens etc. Most of my fishing is solitary during weekdays and daylight, but occasionally I will fish into dark with friends. My wife thinks we're a strange bunch, a mid forty year old who was our original guide on the Teme, one in his early thirties who now lives on the Great Ouse and me an old ditherer from't North.

This is fishing, age differences creates no boundaries, just a common interest and from that lasting friendship.

Four years ago I joined the Society, and attended some regional meetings at Wetherby and this has opened up a whole new world. I have become acquainted with people who I would not have met otherwise, and this in turn has enabled me to visit different rivers I would never have had the chance to fish.

No one I have met personally has been anything but friendly and helpful and the openness and camaraderie of my fellow members of our Topcliffe fishery has to be experienced to be believed. A great bunch of people!

