

Double Dutch

I often get requests for help from anglers via my website www.teambarbel.co.uk but when a request arrived in my inbox from a Dutch Barbel angler I was quite surprised, I had never thought of Holland as a country in which the rivers might hold Barbel. I answered the query and the reply came back with more requests for help. This went on for a few days before my new found Dutch friend Frans Vogels told me of his desire to fish in England for Barbel. My reply went something like "you can come over whenever you like, but more importantly when can I come to Holland"

I left Norwich just after 18.00 and took a steady drive to the port of Harwich and within a few minutes of arriving I was on board the Stena Hollandica and looking for my cabin for the overnight ferry crossing to The Hook of Holland. After a couple of beers I retired to my cabin and got my head down for a few hours the next thing I remember was the alarm ringing its ugly tune.

With the Tom Tom set for Frans address in the Nijmegen area of Holland I was soon off the ferry and on my way and very soon covered the 80 odd miles. Frans was waiting for me and after our extensive web chats over the previous few months I felt I had known him for years. Thankfully like many Dutch people Frans can speak good English because I sure couldn't speak any Dutch.



After a cup or 2 of green tea, tackle was sorted and we were on our way to the river, the plan for the first day was a look round some sections of the mighty River Waal and then some fishing. The Waal certainly is a mighty river, 4-500 metres wide in places and with heavy industrial boat traffic, not for the faint hearted. Massive barges weighing up to 25,000 tonnes carrying everything from scrap metal to brand new cars pass the rod tip at the rate of a round 30 an hour.

Because of its vast size and strong currents to prevent serious flooding and erosion problems the Waal has many breakwaters that extend out into the river up to 100 metres from the bank. Constructed from rocks they are around 5 metres wide and are very solid structures, they make good fishing platforms, the Dutch call these Kribs.

Fishing wise for the first day or so I intended to fish my way, a large groundbait feeder stuffed with pellets then plugged with some Sonubait Hemp and Hali crush, and a hair rigged pellet on the hook. Frans meanwhile would fish the Dutch way, a small feeder filled with a mixture of hemp, corn and cheese, with a piece of cheese hair rigged on the hook.

The weather was overcast with an odd shower, Frans Told me we couldn't fish the Kribs if it rained, I thought maybe he was a fair weather angler and didn't like the rain, once it rained I found out why, the rocks turn very slippery once they get wet, it was like fishing on a glacier, and very very dangerous.

It didn't take long for Frans to get his first Barbel, a scamp of 3 or 4 lb but none the less it brought a smile to his face and an even bigger grin to mine. Not long after that first action the rod tip nodded again and Frans offered me the rod and my first piece of Dutch Barbel action. The fish about 5lb was safely netted and returned, with cheese the successful bait for both fish. Before we called it a night we both managed 2 Barbel and retired very happy.



The next morning was much brighter and we set off to fish a different area a few miles downstream of yesterdays success. Frans often adopts a mobile approach and fishes a Krib for an hour, if it doesn't produce he moves on to the next and so on, Krib hopping as he calls it. The first Krib didn't produce so we hopped along to the next favoured one and awaited some action.

Setting a chair up on the Kribs was almost impossible so I gave up early in the trip and sat on the rocks, short of taking a hammer drill and masonry bit there was no way I would get a bank stick in either. So I was very glad I took along my Korum double rod river tripod, lightweight easy to carry and very stable once lodged in the rocks it was very sturdy and with the front rest extended I was able to position my rods so the line stayed well clear of the rocks in the water around the Kribs

The first action of the day came when I had a small Barbel of around 3lb on a maggot, with no further action we moved back upstream a few miles and took in sites of the river as we went. Frans is not only very knowledgeable of the river and its surroundings he is also well respected amongst anglers in Holland for his angling skills and experience.

We ended up back on the Krib we had caught from the evening before and Frans didn't wait long for the rod top to lunge over and a hooked Barbel test his tackle once again. Frans had another quickly after and when his rod went for the third time he again offered me the rod which I was happy to take and land a lovely Barbel of over 9lb. With the score of 3 on the cheese and 1 on the maggot, the pellet attack I had planned was failing miserably I had to act.

Before we left the Krib for the evening I deposited around 2 kilos of mixed pellets and around a gallon of hemp into the river, I also balled up my remaining Hemp and Hali mix and deposited that with a few big splashes as the heavy grapefruit sized balls hit the water. I told Frans we had played it his way for 2 days with only light feeding and Krib hopping if we hadn't caught, now it was time to fish it my way, feed heavy and bring the fish to us.

We planned the next morning to fish the Pannerden Canal, a man made link from the Waal to the River Ijssel, although it takes the label of a canal it is in fact a river that flows from the Waal to the Ijssel system, it reminds me very much of the Tidal Trent. The boat traffic is much lighter on the canal than the river and with it now almost at summer level the flow rates were not enough for me to consider it a good Barbel prospect, Frans assures me as the levels start to rise again in the autumn the increased flow brings with it Barbel from the Waal and Ijssel, I had no reason to doubt him, he backed up his assurance with some pictures of Barbel from the canal caught by himself and other in previous years.

After a few hours which resulted in a few silver fish but no Barbel we returned to the Krib I had baited the night before. The wind was much stronger on the wide open section of the Waal but I was sure it wouldn't stop the Barbel from feeding, so on our arrival I topped up the feed a bit with a few more big balls of the Hemp and Hali, some hemp and half a kilo of pellets.

To find feeders both heavy and big enough to fish rivers at home like the Trent and Severn has always been difficult, many anglers including myself had resorted to making our own from wire mesh and home made leads, I was pleased to see Korum have now filled that gap with their newly introduced open ended and mesh feeders, available up to 150gram and in 3 sizes these will be perfect for the job. The ones I took to Holland in the largest size and heaviest weight did the job well allowing me to deliver a large bed of bait and with enough weight to hold the bottom exactly where I wanted it.

The one big problem fishing the Waal is the constant heavy industrial boat traffic, it just doesn't stop and therefore because of the size of some of these ships it can be very difficult to build up a swim, hours of hard work baiting and waiting can be undone in a few seconds as a 10,000 tonne barge passes within feet of the rod tops. To combat this I mixed my groundbait up quite stodgy and added some binder to help hold it together and get some feed to the river bed.



Feeding plenty of pellets and fishing a 12mm pellet "O" on the hook soon produced the goods, as my first Dutch Barbel on a pellet was landed, Frans also caught on the Pellet and we ended the day with Frans having 6 Barbel and myself 4, with 3 of mine coming to the pellet I was well happy. Frans also managed a small Wels catfish of a couple of pounds or so, apparently these are often caught some of them going a good few pounds. Not surprisingly when fishing for Barbel they often get broken by an unseen fish that slowly pulls the tip over and doesn't stop, with the resulting snap off being the inevitable outcome, the culprit being a big catfish me thinks. Again before leaving for the night I gave the river everything I had left in my bait bucket.

With it being the last day of the trip we were on the Krib by 8 the next morning and before I had even cast my rod Frans was into a good fish, by the alarming bend in his rods and the click of a forgiving clutch I could tell this might surpass any Barbel we had seen so far on the trip, that suspicion was proved correct as I slid the net under an obvious double. The Dutch tend not to weigh their fish but measure them for length, I explained to Frans that in England the length of a fish meant nothing but the weight did, and because this was over 10lb we would be over the moon with the capture of a "double". Frans took this on board and I am sure he will in future be weighing any bigger fish as well as taking a length measurement.

With the great work of the Barbel Society in trying to educate anglers in this country to treat Barbel with respect and always rest them before unhooking and ensure every fish is strong before release, we have a good knowledge of Barbel welfare. My fear was in Holland the anglers would show the fish less respect, how wrong I was Frans was very good and well aware of how to look after the Barbel once in the net and ensuring its safe return to fight another day.

Frans fish went a very pleasing 10lb 14oz, coming within 10 minutes of starting the session we were both well pleased, Frans had predicted we would not catch until later in the session. My first cast also produced a Barbel, this time on the cheese, but quickly followed by another of 8lb 12oz to a pellet. I hadn't had a chance to recast my pellet rod when the bait runner on the cheese rod played my tune, the resulting strike felt like I had hooked into a sunken tree, only this tree then moved and gave the tell tale slow thump thump of a big Barbel using the heavy flow and all its strength to test my tackle to its absolute limits.



I slowly but surely won the battle and when Frans slid the net under a big Dutch Double I was elated, after resting the fish and unhooking it, the scales registered a pleasing 11lb 2oz and after a couple of pictures it was safely returned to the mighty Waal. Understatement of the trip was to say I was pleased, with Frans help and knowledge of the river and the swims, coupled with my experience of English Barbel fishing we had together both managed a double.

The session didn't finish there though by our enforced clear up time of 16.00 due to me needing to back at The Hook for the 20.00 ferry, we had in total for the day managed 10 Barbel and for the trip 26 between us. I returned Frans generosity of earlier in the trip and allowed him to take 2 runs on my rods, he was glad he did as he clearly learned the advantage of using rods with a test curve more suitable for handling big fish in strong currents

All too quickly the trip was over and I was on board the Ferry heading back to England, the trip had been an eye opener, the size of the river, the amount of boat traffic and the potential for catching Barbel all excite me. The Dutch have a reputation of being friendly people. I can vouch for that Frans and his family treated me like a brother and to them I owe a massive thank you.

To repay my debt I have invited Frans and his wife Tijtske along with their daughter Linda to spend some time with my family in England. Frans will then hopefully be able to fulfil his ambition to actually see Barbel feeding in the wild and then target and catch them, fingers crossed and watch this space for a report of the trip.

Once again Thanks Frans it was fantastic.