

'Mythical' Giant River Roach

Matt Tann

I remember some 15/20 years ago, going to the river as a boy with my dad and uncle. I would watch them trotting and bagging up on massive Hampshire Avon roach; it became a Tann family tradition! A 3lb Roach in those days was a relatively common occurrence and often

the keep net would be bulging with two pound specimens!

We all remember the 'Passion for Angling' episode on the Hampshire Avon where Bob and Chris had possibly the best catch of specimen roach ever captured on television. The Avon was

the Mecca for roach and was untouchable. Sadly, the same cannot be said today. Many people blame the arrival of cormorants, an influx in the otter population or water extraction and loss of the species' natural habitat. Whatever the case a 3lb Roach (and for the majority





even a 2lb Roach) is a myth or just an impossible target.

Well at the turn of this year I heard a rumour that a few big roach were showing again, so I decided to see if there was any truth in these Chinese whispers and began my quest for my own big river red fin. Roach prefer the colder conditions so after a summer of Barbel fishing and watching likely spots, and seeing a few encouraging signs I waited for late autumn and set up stall to try and prove there is a roach revival happening on the Avon. Perhaps giant Roach may not be such a legendary myth after all.

One other fundamental part of my quest was to catch the roach by trotting. I'm a silverfish man in general and trotting rivers is my 'bread and butter'. It's my passion and in my eyes it is by far the best form of fishing.

My chosen spot on this particular trip was a backwater section of the

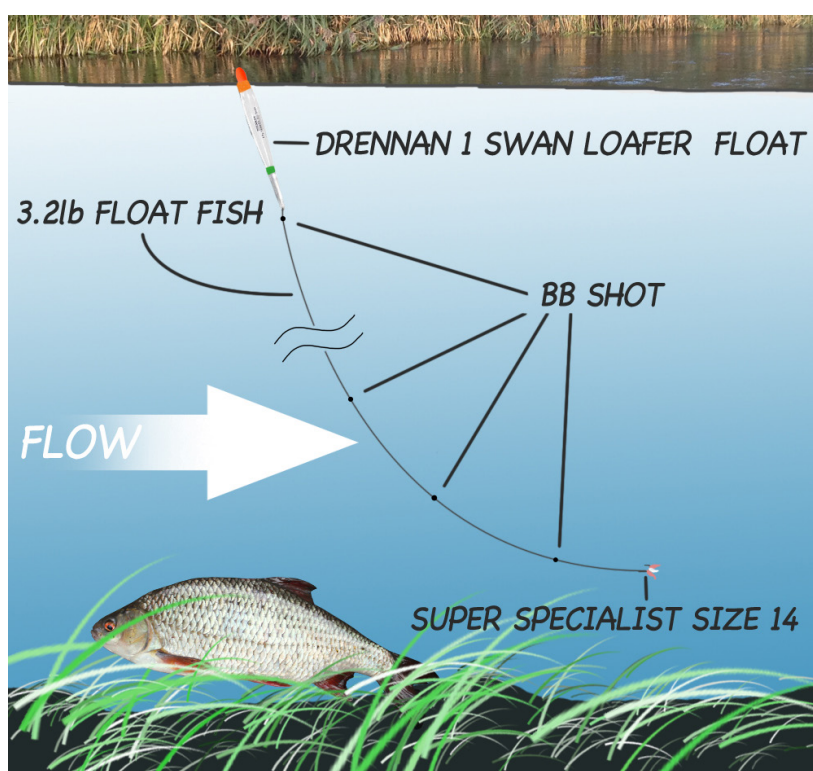
river where I had caught a big 2lb Roach several weeks previously. I had noticed a shoal or two of Roach in the summer months (when the water was lower) and I was certain that some of the fish that day were potential 3lb specimens! I located a swim where I knew there to be a deep hole, surrounded by a few clumps of streamer weed. The depth is around 5 feet and it has pockets of slack water; an ideal habitat for big Roach. The water was slightly murky due to some rain a few days earlier but all-in-all, I had to say conditions were just about right.

A small amount of loose breadcrumb and some cooked

hempseed is normally enough to encourage the fish to feed. For this particular section of river I would be using red & white maggots. Many anglers prefer to use bread when targeting big Roach, but as this spot is quite fast flowing & snaggy and because I want to catch them trotting; I feel maggots are a better option.

Along with good bait, the right tackle is essential when roach fishing by design - I always prefer a simple approach and to keep things as light as possible. In my opinion, the best possible rod for the job is the new Drennan Matchpro Ultralight 15ft. This in my mind is the 'jewel' in the crown of the Ultralight range and is the best possible rod available to tackle big roach. The main attribute being at only 6.5oz it's a masterpiece of lightweight engineering – so can be held in the hand without fatigue for long periods. The extra length with the 15ft option gives you so much more control over the line and allows you to present the float and bait in perfect order - a crucial advantage when targeting big, shy and illusive roach.





On the reel I like to use the Drennan Floatfish 3.2lb to continue with the 'keeping things light' approach. I decided not to use a hook link, and went straight through to a size 14 Super Specialist hook.

For my float I opted to use a 1 swan Loafer. I prefer this float for the job as its light, very strong and extremely durable. It is also able to take a good amount of shot, which

enables me to get the bait down fast to near the bottom and the feeding roach. They also allow me to hold back hard in fast flowing water, or allow a softer glide in gentle flow, plus the crystal body is very unobtrusive with a bright tip – easy to see in most conditions.

I use 4BB shot instead of just one swan shot. One positioned just below the float, two equally spaced

down the line, and one 8 inches from the hook – a classic shirt button style really. I feel this set up to be best for the particular swim and produces a nice even fall on the hookbait as the float trots downstream. I feeling keeping everything simple and uncomplicated also reduces the risk of hook pulls and lost fish.

With everything set, I baited up with a favoured combination of red / white / red maggot. I cast out the rig and let the gentle flow carry the loafer on its watery journey - several pinches of hemp and maggot as loose feed following closely behind. A few brief pauses to mend the line and avoid a few known snags. The new 15 ft rod was making this almost effortless and a real joy!

After several trots and with the bait building up the swim, the loafer disappeared mid trot, and with an effortless strike of the rod I felt the tell tale thump of a quality fish. The rod tip bent in the early morning sun, masterfully taking control of the situation and gave me the upper hand. A flash of silver and red fins and suddenly the fish felt much heavier and it truly was heart in the mouth action! But the tackle was faultless and soon my intended target was in the net.

The roach lay in the net glistening in the net sun, a stunning bar of silver with the most beautiful red fins - almost like a painting! It weighed in a very healthy

2lb 2oz. Several more roach followed all around the 1lb 5oz mark, with a few quality dace thrown in for good measure.

The session continued with further success and before I knew it the sun was going down and the session came to an end. My net was gently cradling some of the most special fish to grace a river and a good head of dace to. A trotting success! I can thoroughly recommend the new Ultralight 15ft rod for trotting and it would surely make as a quality addition to any anglers armory.

I had maybe not on this occasion found the outright monster fish, or bettered my



2lb 14oz during a previous session on another stretch but I am able to categorically say the big roach are still out there on our rivers and with effort, and the right tackle you really do have the chance of landing a truly special river

‘redfin’...

*Matthew Tann, Portsmouth
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