

# **DEVON KNOWS**

## **WHY BASSING IS SO GOOD!**



# Part One



**We head down to deepest, darkest Devon in search of a top-secret sandeel farm and the promise of bountiful bass fishing!**



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To set the scene, here is some dialogue from a recent telephone conversation with a Devon skipper and the TSF team...

"We have had 48 bass today."

"How many?"

"You heard it, 48!"

"Jesus, that's some good fishing!"

"Yep, all on live sandeels, and in one sitting."

And that was that. The TSF team was pretty much sold on the idea of visiting Nick Oatway and his fishing/business partner Bob Musk in deepest, darkest Devon.

Nick and Bob run a bass fishing operation out of Kingston, near Kingsbridge in Devon. They are great entertainers, and accommodation can either be arranged bed-and-breakfast style with Nick at his house the 'Old School', or at the local pub The Dolphin Inn.

We opt to stay with Nick, having heard the rumours of lobster and bass banquets that frequently take place for his angling clients (we are not disappointed!).

The guys offer an incredibly high level of service, much akin to that experienced in foreign fishing destinations. Nothing is too much of a



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1 Just one of several sandeel tanks that Nick and Bob look after. 2 A netful is all you need for a day's fishing. 3 Now for the adventure angling bit...



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problem, and anything can be organised, from a single angler who wants corned-beef sandwiches, to eight anglers requiring a Champagne lunch every day on the boat. Whatever you want, they will provide.

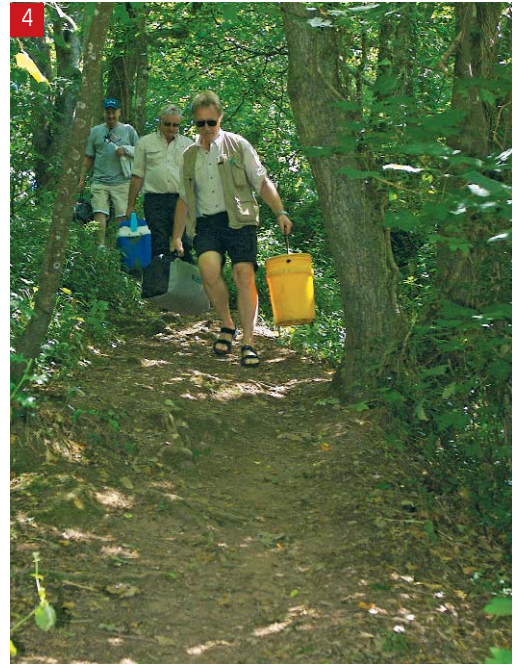
We arrive on a late summer's evening for two days' fishing. Nick and Bob have a boat moored in the local Yealm Estuary, which is the only privately owned estuary in the country. A licence is required to fish here, but this is all included when you are fishing with Nick and Bob.

Early the next morning (the morning after the night before), we crawl out of bed and set off on the short drive to the shore. But before you can fish, you need bait. Nick and Bob favour sandeels in a big way. To cut a long story short they were tired of the logistical problems of obtaining live eels, so they decided to set up their own sandeel farm. It's

not a farm in the true sense of the word, as they don't breed them, they simply buy them in and store them. At any one time they may have in excess of 10,000 live eels, though, so it certainly seems like a farm. It's safe to say that bait is never a problem here, even in the winter... but more about that later.

These guys have spent the last 15 years of their lives perfecting the technology of keeping sandeels alive for long periods and now have four, top-secret, sandeel sites scattered around the local countryside ready to supply top-quality bait for their clients.

The reason they have so many sites is quite simple... it's just in case they have a pollution incident, or a lack of oxygen in one tank, so that this way their eggs are not all in one basket, so to speak. Please note, sadly, the eels are not for sale!



4 Be prepared for a short hike to the water.



## Tackle And Tactics

If you have a taste for adventure and love the British countryside, then you will love the drive to the shore. You go down some of the narrowest, tree-hugging lanes that you will ever see anywhere in the country. You also stand a good chance of seeing some very interesting wildlife, including deer and egrets.

When you get to the shore you are then taken to the main fishing boat 'Aquarius' by a smaller tender. A quick row across a few metres of fast-flowing estuary water and you are soon tied alongside your fishing platform.

Now the real fun starts. We tackle up the rods that Nick and Bob issue us with: Greys Sea Spins. It turns out that Nick and Bob have helped the company to develop two new series of fishing rods: the 11ft Sea Spin for light-line boat fishing and a lighter, 11ft Greyflex Bait for ultra-light estuary fishing. We also set up some heavier Greys Excursion travel rods for collecting even more bait, for the larger fish.

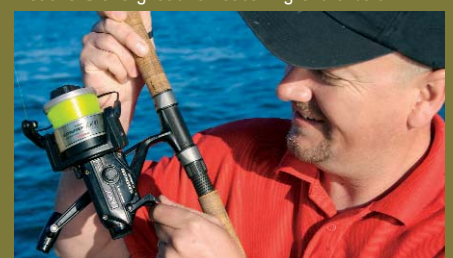
Note the key words here – light-line fishing. The Kingston team are real advocates of free-lining on light gear. They

really enjoy fishing, playing and catching fish on light lines. We are soon to come around to their way of thinking. The sensitivity and fun of this style of fishing is just about the most fun that you can have with your clothes on!

The Sea Spin rods are paired with free-running fixed-spool reels and 10lb Greys Greyton. The terminal tackle couldn't be simpler: a barrel swivel with an 18in, 12lb, fluorocarbon trace. The business end is finished off with a size 1/0 or 2/0 hook, depending on the size of the bait.



Feathers are great for catching extra bait.



Free-spool reels are great for targeting bass.

## The Session

First of all we head offshore, about half a mile, to collect some more bait, as if we need it. We spend a couple of happy hours collecting launce (the greater sandeel) and Joey mackerel, the more select specimens of which are stored in the boat's livebait well.

When the tide is right we move closer inshore to check Nick and Bob's own lobster pots. This is by no means a commercial activity, but more a benefit of living closer to the sea and a means to an amazing seafood dinner. They have 10 pots at the mouth of the estuary, which they use to introduce their clients to what else the sea has to offer. If you are lucky enough and manage to pull up a lobster or a large crab then the chances are that you could be eating it that very same night.

We collect all manner of creepy crawlies for dinner that night, including spider crabs, lobsters and one huge edible crab that takes quite a fancy to Daz! After a real fun half-hour checking, emptying, and rebaiting the pots, we move to the estuary mouth and anchor just off the rocky shoreline. Armed with the Greys Sea Spin rods and live eels, we start to fish.

The guys do favour freelining the eels but, due to the windy conditions, the decision is taken to fish with floats. These are fixed to the line just above the swivel via a clever snap link on the float.

Daz is the first into action as a bass takes an interest in his sandeel within minutes of it hitting the water. Daz shouts: "Do you see that? Look!" The sandeel is jumping clear of the water, with a good-sized bass in hot pursuit! The bass finally corners the eel, engulfs it and runs off towing the float – very reminiscent of the scene from *Jaws*.

Daz allows the fish to run, giving it time to separate from the pack of fish that Nick assures us are down there. The fish usually break off and run away with their food so they run no risk of having it stolen by other fish.

The float disappears from view in the perfectly clear water. As it sinks deeper and deeper, Daz sets the hook and bends the rod into a good bass.

The fish puts up a good account of itself on the light tackle and is eventually netted at the back of the boat by Bob. After a few pictures the fish is released. Bob and Nick are big advocates of maintaining the local fish stocks. They keep a few but most are released.

After that hooks are rebaited and cast out under the floats, they duly disappear again and the hooks are set.



5 Sandeels are stored in a special box and hung over the side of the boat.

6 Hauling crab pots is hard work.

7 A pot comes up full of spider crabs.

8 That's dinner sorted! 9 Ultra-light rods are used for the bassing. 10 The first bass is safely netted. 11 These fish aren't always huge, but they are good scrappers on light tackle.

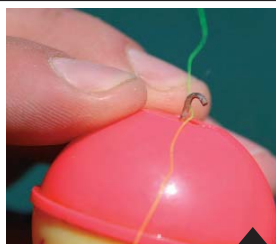


## Attaching The Float



### Step One

These floats have a clever plunger. When pressed it reveals the line hooks.



### Step Two

Simply pass the line under the hook at the top of the float.



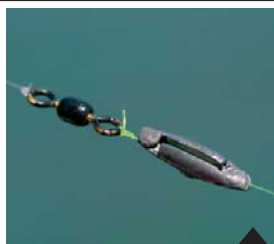
### Step Three

Then do the same at the bottom of the float



### Step Four

The float sits against the line like this.



### Step Five

Small weights can be added beneath the float for extra casting weight.

It is awesome fishing and a little crazy, especially when three fish are hooked at the same time.

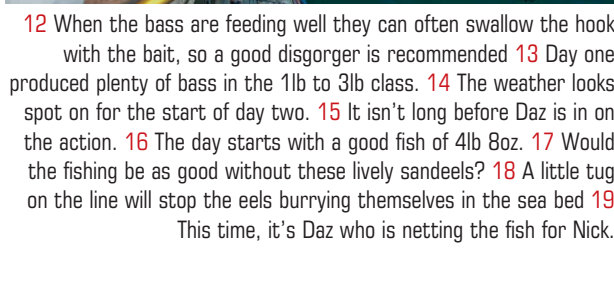
Quite a few fish are missed due to not waiting long enough for the fish to engulf the hook and bait. This is a top tip, if ever there was one, to be learnt from this episode. We fish on and manage to catch 19 fish to 5lb 8oz on the first day, which isn't bad for a couple of hours' fishing. The biggest fish comes late in the day and falls to a large lance on Nick's rod. It is an amazing afternoon's fishing and if you consider the amount of fish we have missed then we should have landed close to 40 fish.

Bob then decides to target the larger fish with the Joey mackerel, but none of them decide to put in an appearance on this trip. But he tells us of a trip earlier in the year when he landed a 12lb pollack some 30 metres off the shore on 12lb line and a Sea Spin rod – awesome!

The second day is just as successful with the three anglers landing a total of 18 fish in just three hours' fishing. It should also be noted here that for most of this time Bob and Nick aren't fishing, but rather cooking the freshly caught mackerel or enjoying it raw as sashimi, which Daz takes a real liking to.

Although you can, in theory, fish the open estuary at any time, the guys like to leave it alone for the winter months and opt to fish from their winter mooring further inland. They actually catch bass 12 months of the year here and winter is often the best time. This is due, in no uncertain terms, to the fact that the guys have sandeels in plentiful supply all year round. It's mainly the smaller school bass that they get during the winter months but, that said, they did have an 8lb fish on Boxing Day last year!

From what the guys have told us, there is no doubt that we need to return to check out this phenomenon. Rest assured, we will let you know all about it next month.



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12 When the bass are feeding well they can often swallow the hook with the bait, so a good disgorging is recommended 13 Day one produced plenty of bass in the 1lb to 3lb class. 14 The weather looks spot on for the start of day two. 15 It isn't long before Daz is in on the action. 16 The day starts with a good fish of 4lb 8oz. 17 Would the fishing be as good without these lively sandeels? 18 A little tug on the line will stop the eels burrying themselves in the sea bed 19 This time, it's Daz who is netting the fish for Nick.

## Hooking A Live Sandeel



### Step One

Place the hook through the mouth and then out through the gills.



### Step Two

Gauge the length of the hook shank against the belly of the eel.



### Step Three

Now lightly nick the hook through the belly.



### Step Four

If you get it right then the eye of the hook should be outside of the eel's mouth.



### Step Five

There it is, the perfect way to present a live sandeel to a hungry bass.

## MORE INFORMATION

### FISHING HOLIDAY PACKAGES AND TUTORIALS

The 'pristine' environment of Devon is one of the last places in Britain where the committed angler can enjoy true wilderness fishing. It offers sport of the very highest calibre for the truly dedicated angler. You will be able to fish the intimate and softer south Devon coastline. You can stalk bass in the surf, seek them at dusk in the salt marshes, catch them from the rocks in sheltered bays or simply freeline in the gentle currents of the open water.

A variety of packages are available. They range from a single day's fishing through to a full, two-week angling holiday. Typically, the 'wild summer fishing' package combines boat fishing and beach fly fishing for bass and mullet. Fishing packages may be combined with a holiday week's rental, selected high-quality pub accommodation or taken on a 'fishing-only' basis.

Corporate packages can include any or all of the above, tailor made to client requirements.

Nick and Bob have more than 15 years experience with corporate entertainment and the client list, which includes many blue-chip companies, is an enviable one.

Prices are so variable that it is impossible to quote it all here. We recommend that you ring Nick Oatway to discuss your needs and agree a price from there. It can be as cheap or as expensive as you like.

### YOUR HOSTS

Nick Oatway and Bob Musk live in south Devon and will show you the way of the sandeel. Using light tackle and with close tutorial you will stalk the elusive bass in one of the loveliest stretches of countryside and coastline in the whole of Britain. Catching a big bass at dusk, using Nick's own special rigs and set-ups, will be one of the most exciting moments of your angling life – guaranteed!

### ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is in one of the preferred country pubs, usually The Dolphin Inn, which is handy for instant morning access to the fishing. Full board or bed and breakfast can be provided for any size of party. Smaller groups can be hosted in private accommodation. Food can be geared entirely to your needs and will range from a Champagne breakfast through to packed lunches, barbecue or full dinner party. Fresh West Country seafood is second to none and a lobster or bass on the barbecue can make for the perfect end to the perfect day.

### ANGLING GUIDES

Nick Oatway and Bob Musk will introduce you to the delicate art of fishing live sandeels, showing you the nuances and tactics involved in this absorbing style of fishing. You will fish the intimate reaches of the south Devon estuaries, or perhaps one of their favourite channel marks, looking for specimen bass up to and occasionally into double figures. Nick also offers the full guiding and birding service, including a chance to watch resident kingfishers or peregrine falcons hunting across the estuary mouth. All guiding bookings are on a full-day basis.

### TACKLE

All the fishing tackle you'll need can be supplied as part of your package. It comes from the internationally famous Hardy or Greys brands and is, consequently, of the highest quality.

### CONTACT

For more information on fishing this magnificent part of the country and this awesome sport fishery, please contact Nick Oatway on tel: 01548 810249 or mobile: 07717 677222. E-mail: [nick@fishing4sport.eu](mailto:nick@fishing4sport.eu) , or [bob@fishing4sport.eu](mailto:bob@fishing4sport.eu) .



## RAPALA J13B Jointed 13 Blue



**The most successful-sea bass lure ever!**