

DEVON KNOWS...

Why Bassing Is So Good!

WORDS AND PICS: ANDY PETHERICK



The first fish of the evening session.

In the second part of our exciting bass series, the TSF team return to the sleepy village of Kingston for some interesting night action...

There is a saying that states "you never stop learning" and that's exactly what the TSF team finds out on its second visit to Nick Oatway's and Bob Musk's fishing operation 'Fishing 4 Fun' in Kingston, Devon.

Enchanted by our previous visit to the depths of Devon, we are lured back by the promise of some 'out of season' bass fishing. The guys had promised us some action during the back end of October, and it doesn't look like they were lying! Through some rigorous fishing during the winter months they have found out that their estuary, where they have sole rights (it's the only private one in England!), has some amazing sport to offer.

We arrive early one October morning when the leaves are starting to change colour on the trees, and meet Nick and Bob netting sandeels in one of their numerous tanks. Their spirits are high, we are on one of the highest tides for a long while, and they are certain that we are going to hit some serious action.

Their theory is simple: on the higher winter tides the fish become more aggressive as the higher volume of water has a faster flow rate, which dislodges more food, and this creates a sort of feeding frenzy among the bass that are knocking

around.

It's true that big bass can be targeted in many places around the UK coastline and, if you are VERY lucky, right into November. But these guys have two secret weapons. Number one is the estuary where they have sole access; the other is a yearlong supply of sandeels, which are the main ingredient for success.

The fish are channelled into the estuary, and with a bit of careful positioning of the boat, are well within any angler's grasp. But it's fair to say that there is a bit more to it than this.

We set off down the twisty, windy, overgrown track to the estuary. The guys have moved their boat to the winter mooring. This is about 300 yards further up the estuary, in a deep hole, where they have had the most success in the winter months.

Because of the weather usually associated with this time of year they are reluctant to venture out to sea, and prefer the safety of the estuary instead.

The ideal is to be sat in the boat about an hour before dark with a strong, incoming tide. The guys have been perfecting their fishing tactics for years in order to reap success year round.

As mentioned in part one of this feature, they are stout advocates of light-line fishing. At this time the guys advocate freelining eels over the side. They use 12ft Greys Multi-bait rods, coupled with Shimano Baitrunners (10lb main line), which are a bit more dainty than the Greys Sea Spins that are used for their 'offshore' work.

As the tide pushes they use a live sandeel on a 2/0 to 4/0, depending on the size of the eel, on a 5ft trace of 8lb clear mono to a large swivel. This swivel acts as a casting aid as well as preventing tangles.

A cast is made to the side of the boat and allowed to drift with the tide, with the reel's bail arm open and unhindered in any way. The line whips off the reel in even turns due to the steady push/draw of the tide. You are watching for any irregularities in its speed – if it picks up pace, pay attention.

The fish hunt in packs at this time of year. They will grab your eel and run away to engulf it in peace. All you will see is your line speed up for a matter of seconds and then you have to strike before the fish feels the hook and drops the bait. It sounds simple, doesn't it? Wait until you try!



1 All wait anxiously as Bob rows out to get the boat.

THE SESSION

After a few missed runs, the TSF team begins to get into the rhythm of it all, and we soon have eight bass to the boat to 4lb – not bad for the back end of October!

As high water approaches, the tide begins to slow and night starts to fall, the guys perfect another tactic by using an LED float for a bite indicator, which certainly adds to the excitement because fishing in the dark is far more fun!

Bob travels quite a bit and, on a trip to the USA, found some LED floats. These are great because you can see them for miles in complete darkness. Happily, for those of us who are not globetrotters, Masterline now distributes an equivalent to these, under the Blue Fox brand.

The transition from freelining to float fishing is quite simple. The float is simply clipped to the swivel, or just above it, and the depth that it's set at is rarely an issue because the fish will travel a great distance to nail a lively sandeel. One of the great things about fishing with Bob and Nick is that the water they fish is usually gin clear. During daylight hours you can see the fish chasing and engulfing your bait, as long as it is close enough to the boat that is.

The float is cast out to the side of the boat and drifts wherever the tide allows. Action is rarely slow in coming, as we find!

The great thing about fishing like this is that, due to the visibility of the floats, tangles rarely happen.

We watch Daz's float drift to about 75 yards from the boat, then disappear. He allows it to stay submerged for about 15 seconds then, under Nick's guidance, he strikes into the first fish of the evening. After a good scrap on the light tackle, the net is slid under a prime, angry, 3lb Devon bass, the first of hopefully many this night.

What an amazing way to fish! There is something about watching a float disappear; you never know quite what has grabbed your bait, and the experience is heightened by the glow of the LED float in the dark.

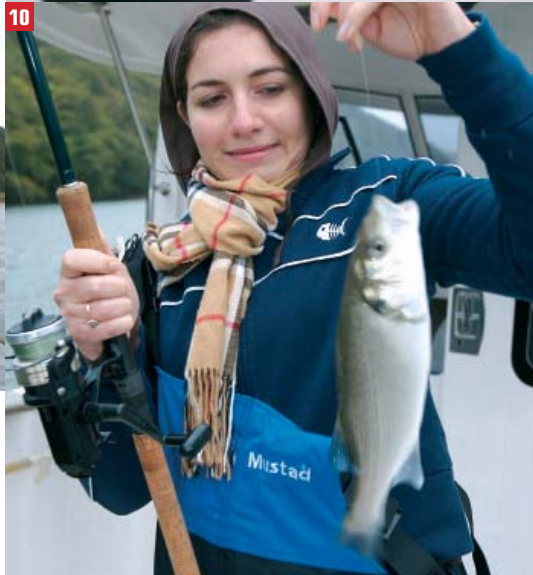
We laugh at ourselves, because as soon as a float touches the water, whoever is fishing it falls silent, transfixed by the glow across the water, waiting for that imminent bite!

As we fish, Bob explains the reason that they favour light, long rods. "We like these Grey's Multi-baits for three reasons. Firstly, the length allows for good line control from the boat.



2 Daz hooks up some bait ready for action. **3** A landing net is the best way to get the fish onto the boat. **4** The first bass of the daylight session is lightly lip hooked – perfect to be returned to fight another day. **5** Bob returns a small schoolie. **6** Daz strikes into another bass.





7 These fish can pull your string on light tackle; Daz gets the runaround! **8** One of the night-time fish is unhooked. **9** Daz can only look on as he misses a good take. **10** Even Daz's girlfriend Dee gets in on the action. **11** This is all you need for night-time float fishing.



Secondly, they are soft in the tip, which means that we don't lose bait during casting and, thirdly, when you are hooking fish, sometimes double-figure fish, it helps to have a soft tip because the fish can put up a real struggle in the current.

"What we are doing here can be done from any shoreline or bridge; the key thing is to have good-quality bait for the winter months. We have put a lot of effort into ensuring that we have a good supply of sandeels all year round. This, coupled with the light-line fishing, means that we are virtually guaranteed success."

It's fair to say that the guys do have something truly unique. They have records for the past few years that show they have been very successful in the winter months. They even have dated pictures, with snow and ice, with good bass in the frame.

After a very exciting evening's fishing, we retire to the local pub, 'The Dolphin', for debriefing before one of Nick's famous roast meals. We also look at the tide tables for the coming months.

Both are very excited about the prospects for January and February. "We have some great tides that should produce some good sport," offers Nick. "They sure will," agrees Bob. "We are hopeful of some larger specimens. Although most of the fish average around the 2lb to 3lb mark, it's not unusual for the odd double-figure fish to crop up during these months."

Having scrapped on light gear with bass of around 4lb to 5lb, we can't wait to get back for the opportunity of a double-figure bass on light tackle. Bob and Nick are keen to point out that, although the fishing takes place in an estuary, it's neither river nor sea fishing – it's simply sportfishing as they like to call it, and most of the fish are returned.

To this end Nick and Bob are creating a bass fishing Mecca. The morning after the night before, which included one of Nick's famous crab and lobster meals, several large G and Ts and a few bottles of red, we go to look at the intrepid pair's newest venture – the fishing chapel.

We kid you not. Don't get us wrong, it's not where you go and pray for your fishing sins to be repented! The local chapel in the village came up for sale, so Bob and Nick bought it. They intend to convert it into a fishing sanctuary for anglers who enjoy light-line fishing, primarily for bass, but also for all the other types of fishing the estuary

DEVON KNOWS...

has to offer. There is going to be four or five bedrooms, all with en-suite bathrooms. There will also be a bar and an impressive dining room. Trust us, we have seen the plans, and they look spot on. The guys intend having this ready for next May. We look forward to hearing how they get on with the new venture; it's a truly remarkable set-up that they have.

These guys have it sorted – tailor-made fishing trips where you can catch bass all year round, in some of the most beautiful scenery in the UK. It's a recipe for success!

MORE INFORMATION

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 Bob Musk on tel: 07810 453129
E-mail: nick@fishing4sport.eu,
or bob@fishing4sport.eu.



12 Bob gets to grips with the float fishing as the light begins to fade. **13** The LED float shows up extremely well. **14** There is no mistake this time as Daz lifts a cracking bass from the river. **15** Bass can't resist live sandeels. **16** Nick concentrates hard as he plays another schoolie. **17** The team settles down for one of Nick's famous evening meals.

