

# *Convenience* FISHING

Grayling at your feet; food and shelter just behind you,  
and opportunity even when the water's lively.  
Welcome to the civilised face of urban fishing...»









**T**HERE'S something ceremonial about the last stage of the Tour De France. Whatever the Alpine rigours that precede it, the climax of the world's greatest bicycle race is all about gentle gradients and a triumphant arrival on the Champs-Élysées. I understand there's an unspoken convention that if you haven't already won the race, you don't bust a gut trying to do so on that final Sunday in Paris.

Unlikely as it sounds, that midsummer pageant comes to mind on a blowy January morning in Ilkley, as Fred Bainbridge and I work our final *Trout Fisherman* feature together.

With the Yorkshire Dales as his backyard, we have known some lengthy 'yomps' in our time, Fred's obsessional quest for fish repeatedly taking us many miles from civilisation.

"You're a 58-year-old diabetic with raging blood pressure," he reminded me as we headed for West Yorkshire. "By rights, I should have broken you by now, yet here you are..."

### Hotel

It's when we park by the Riverside Hotel and contemplate today's 'beat' of the River Wharfe, that the Tour de France analogy springs to mind. If Yorkshire hasn't broken me by now, it certainly won't be happening today.



**Fred Bainbridge**

England international and match angler. Fifteen times Northern champion across bank, rivers and loch-style disciplines.

**Heaviest fish**  
21lb 8oz rainbow

**Favourite reservoir**  
Stocks

**Favourite small water**  
Tanfield Lodge



The 'yomp' from car park to river is more appropriately measured in feet than kilometres and the beat is condensed into a stone platform little longer than a cricket pitch, with the Hotel and the adjoining refreshments 'Kabin' at our backs. My last feature with Fred is my first with anyone where chattering water and buzzing reel have been accompanied by the ever-present bouquet of fish and chips.

On reflection, this seems a very un-Bainbridge setting. Watching him don all his gear for a few hours' soft-core fishing before an audience of dogwalkers is like watching Chuck Norris get ready to neutralise a Mothers' Union meeting.

Remind me again what's brought us here.

"It's always been on my mind to come here," he responds. "The only reason I've not done so is because it's just off my usual stomping grounds.

"I've heard it's got good shoals of

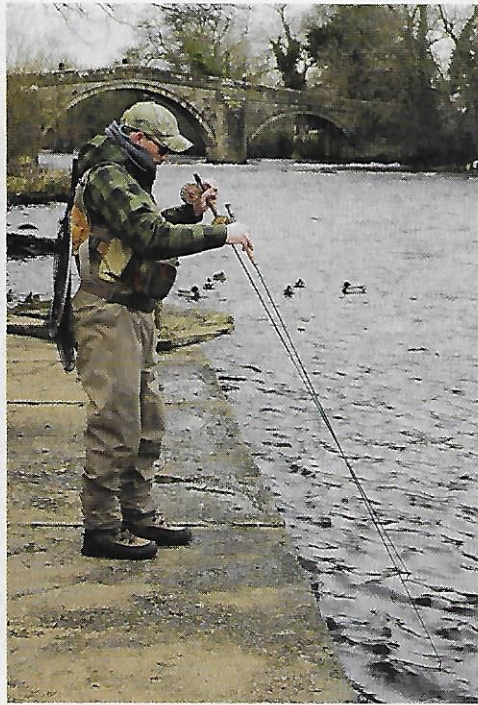
grayling, though, and it's where real fishing starts in the Dales in some ways, because in the upper Dales, it's often thin, fast water, even though it's picturesque. You've got a bigger river down here, and you tend to get more fish in that scenario."

With the upper Dales quiet on the fish front at present, he has decided that today is the day, although there's a faint tone of alarm to his voice as he gets his first glimpse of a river that's bigger than expected.

"It's a little bit up and coloured," he reports after a recce, "which is fine for trout but not grayling. An influx of fresh water can knock grayling right off, so that's my biggest fear."

Two things lift his mood. He has watched competition anglers fish effectively from the kind of wall we have in front of us today, during qualifiers and national finals on the River Dee, simply floating a bung downstream. Standing on the Ilkley





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wall what’s more, inserting two rods to ascertain depth, he is pleased to note that he has patches of water just two or three feet deep in front of him.

“That’s perfect,” he declares. “At least there’s some clarity amid the coloured water. That’s why you look for shallow areas when it’s coloured. That’s where the most visibility is.”

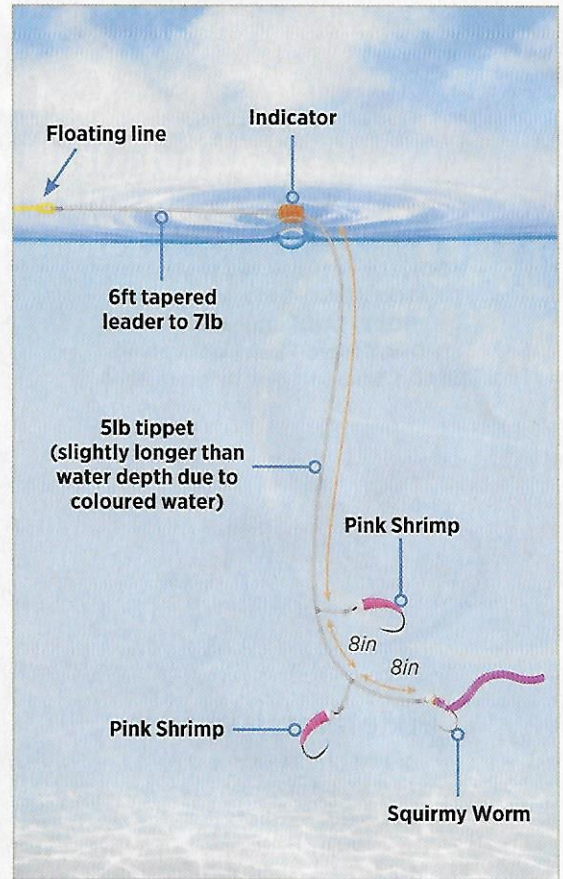
**Brazen**

The brazen lump of foam he flings onto the water, mind you, would be unmissable even in a slurry pit. Mindful of the mixed feelings aroused by ‘float fishing’ among the fly fraternity, many anglers opt for trim, almost apologetic lobes of foam or plastic when they feel the

need to keep their flies aloft. Fred, on the other hand, seems hell-bent on turning the counter-culture into an art form. It is as if he has taken the mid-section of an average-sized carrot, and planed its flanks into an octagon. My observation that at least I won’t be the one who has to field the irate emails prompts an expression of bemused innocence.

“It’s a pretty successful method for winter grayling, the bung,” Fred insists, “and this one’s highly visible in low light and very sensitive despite its size: it goes straight under, even though it’s bulky. The take detection will never be as good as with

**Leader set-up**



**FAR LEFT** Free parking is available to the side of the hotel.

**LEFT** Considering the options.

**ABOVE LEFT** Fred checks what depths he’s working with.

**BELOW** If you’re going to irritate the purists, you might as well do it good and proper...

tight-line French nymfing, where it’s instant, but I get a hell of a lot of fish with the bung in the winter.”

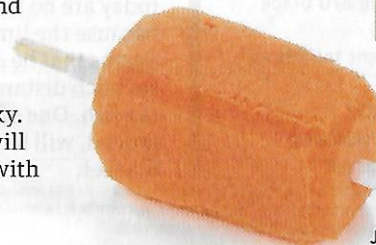
He cuts them out of a Veniard foam block, before removing the heads off a cotton bud and Supergluing the resulting hollow shaft into a hole bored through the foam. The tippet is fed through the shaft and wedged into place with the ends of cocktail sticks.

Because of the need to make a visual impression in what is still generally coloured water, he fishes three flies (see diagram) but they are only about eight inches apart (if you alternate with a second rod, he suggests, have the flies a foot apart, just in case fish are higher in the water than you expect).

“I want them all down deep, the point fly pulling on bottom, because that’s your braking system,” he says. “As the bung comes downstream, you’ll see it bobbling, which reflects the effects of the river bed on the point fly. If it’s not bobbling, your point hook is either too light, or the flies aren’t deep enough. You want the section of leader beneath the bung to be a few inches longer than the water is deep.”

**Presentation**

Employing the river bed as part of your presentation technique is not without snags >>





RECOMMENDED PATTERNS



**Squirmy Worm**

**HOOK** Size 14 Hanak 450 (wide gape)  
**THREAD** Glo-Brite floss No.4  
**BODY/TAIL** Purple squirmy  
**THORAX** Micro-Flash lilac dubbing  
**BEAD** 3.5mm soft pink tungsten bead



**Pixie Nymph variant**

**HOOK** Size 14 standard jig  
**THREAD** Light brown Uni 8/0  
**BUTT & RIB** Glo-Brite floss N.8  
**BODY** Hare's ear  
**FLASHBACK** Holo gold medium tinsel  
**BEAD** 3.5mm copper tungsten



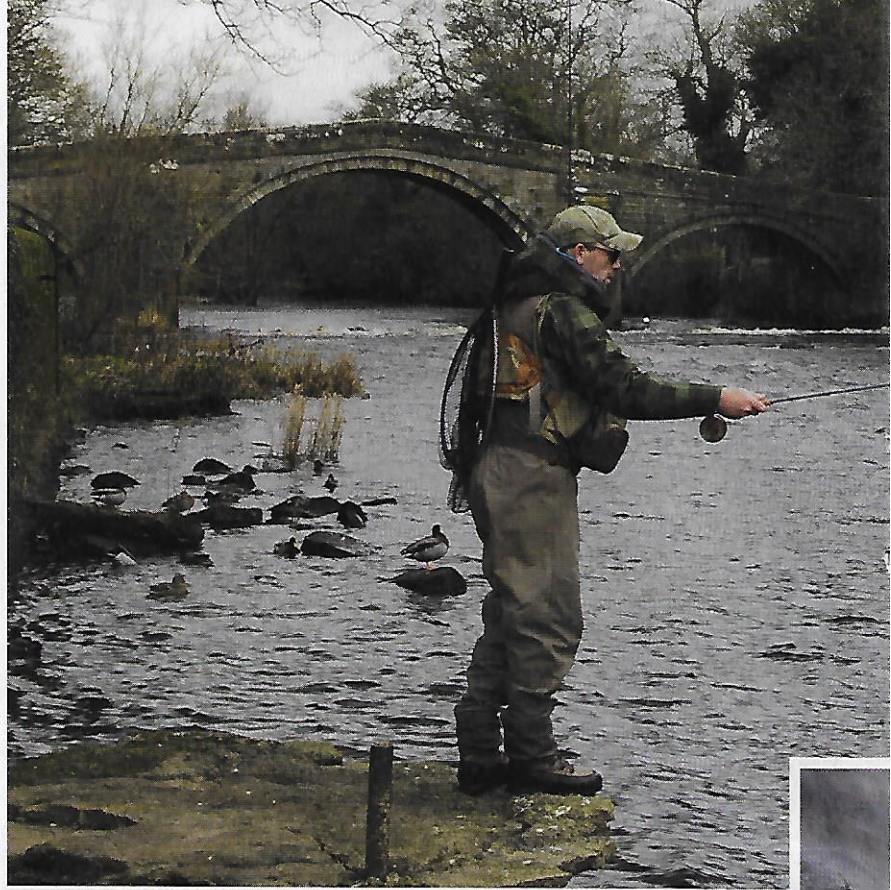
**Pink Shrimp**

**HOOK** Size 12-14 Czech nymph/shrimp  
**BODY** Glo-Brite floss No.2  
**RIB** 4lb fluorocarbon  
**FLASHBACK** UV tinsel medium  
**BEAD** 3mm white tungsten



**Red Tag Nymph**

**HOOK** Size 16 Dohiku SP **THREAD** Uni 8/0 black  
**BUTT** Glo-Brite floss No.3  
**BODY** Black Lite-Brite or black pheasant tail fibres  
**RIB** Silver wire  
**THORAX HACKLE** Natural CDC  
**THORAX** Peacock green Shimmer dubbing  
**BEAD** Silver disco 3.5mm tungsten



however. Literally. Three fish will come to Fred this morning but many more times does his rod tip bend downwards due to obstructions on the bottom, the nature of them testimony to our location.

He snags on a swim-feeder, a discarded belt and what looks like an old T-shirt, all classic detritus of town fishing.

"I bet it's full of people in summer here; swimmers and dogs in the water," says Fred, not in an enthusiastic way.

"One advantage of coloured water is that you can at least use a heavier tippet. It mightn't get your flies down so quickly but it does give you a better chance of recovering your fly."

Another advantage is the convenience of working with medium rod lengths. Fred's rods today are no longer than 10ft because the limited visibility means that he doesn't have to put so much distance between him and the fish. One of the grayling, indeed, will be hooked almost at his feet.

"A lot of the time, the middle fly will usually be the one that takes," he adds. "So that's where you put the fly you're most confident in."

Fly choice and their formation is the lion's share of the workload. The rest is simply plopping the trio of flies into the shallower patches in front of the wall and letting the bung take the strain as they trundle downstream.

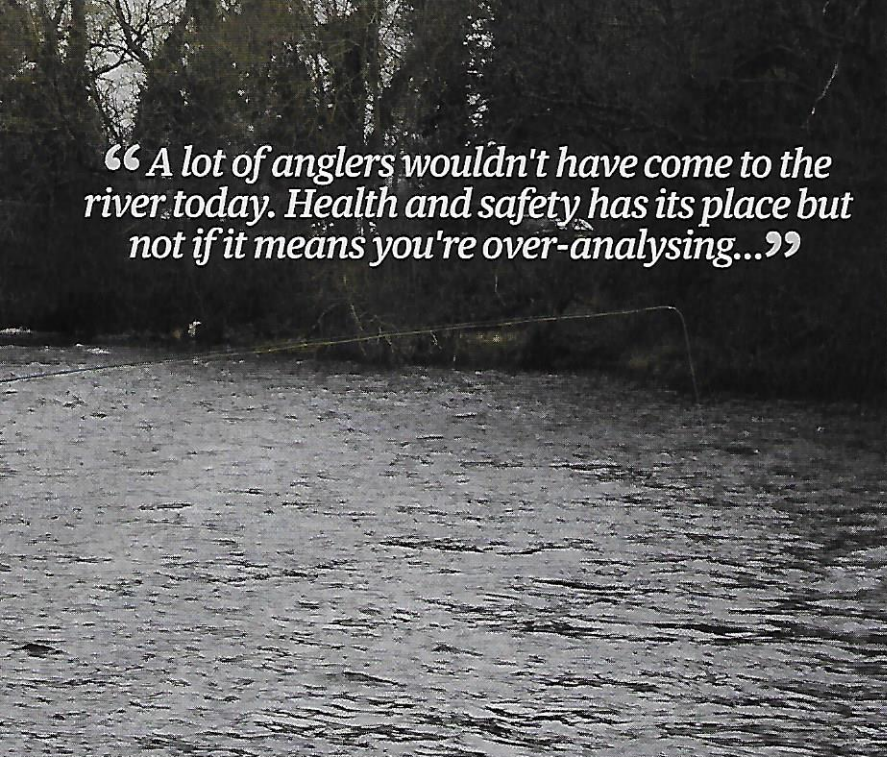
"The only reason I got in the water at all was to make netting fish easier," Fred reflects later. "I could have caught them just as easily from on top of the wall."

"There's a simple strategy for finding winter grayling. Fish 10 minutes in one spot, then move until you find a fish or a shoal. I'd have normally covered much more water today but with the lift in the river overnight, I was confined to the few shallow areas of clearer water that I could find, so I just worked the flow by the wall."

When I suggest that the river has fished better than I expected, given his consternation when we first arrived, he tells me there's an object lesson there for fishing's



**“A lot of anglers wouldn't have come to the river today. Health and safety has its place but not if it means you're over-analysing...”**



**ABOVE LEFT**  
You don't normally think of ducks and drakes fighting, but oh they do...

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
Just a couple of the 'souvenirs' snagged along the way.

**TOP RIGHT** This wall was Fred's base for the entire session.

keyboard warriors. Assessing river conditions, he cautions, isn't just a matter of checking webcams and websites.

“A lot of anglers wouldn't even have come to the river today,” he explains. “They'd have gauged everything before they even went out - depth, wind speed - and if anything was a whisker above the norm, they'd have written it off.

“Health and safety has its place but not if it means you're over-analysing. I've won championships in rivers that were so high there wasn't even a bank to fish from, but no-one had to go to those lengths today. In fact, there was no point standing in risky areas, because there wouldn't have been fish anywhere near you!

“All you had to do was look for any water below the waist: target the shallower, safer, easier areas. If there weren't any, then by all means, go home.”

But there were, and Fred profited accordingly. And then we walked 15 yards for some of the best fish and chips you could wish for.

Game over. 🐟

**Factfile**

**River Wharfe**

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**OPEN** June 16-March 14 (grayling); March 25-September 30 (trout) 8am-10pm

**PRICE RANGE** £11 (day) £50 (week). Permits from Riverside Hotel after 7.30am (for other outlets see website)

**PARK** east side of hotel