



Fishing Days

My angling days ended nearly twenty years ago. Most of my fishing was for carp in the later period. I had grown up in coastal Devon, so fished for mullet as a kid. When I moved to Dorset for work, I took up carp fishing with a work mate.

My son, Paul came along and wanted to fish, so we went together until he was in his mid-teens. Shortly after that, I gave up to concentrate on powerboat racing. That definitely took up all my money and spare time. Fishing was still in my blood, but not enough to make me want to go out and pick up a rod again.

Watching John Wilson on TV, catching big catfish in Spain, looked very attractive. I had dreamt about taking a holiday somewhere warm with some fishing thrown in, but it was always unlikely. I would have needed a friend who was already taking holidays like that to make it happen. Fast forward to the present day, and Steve, luckily, is an old hand at fishing in India. He came to visit for an evening, bringing a film he made in 2009, fishing all along the River Cauvery. The finale of the film was a big mahseer; that got my juices flowing again.

The Trip

For the first two weeks of our trip, we travelled in relative comfort, staying in very nice hotels. We were eased into the Indian experience. It was culture shock to see people asleep on the side of the road. It was, simply, the chaos of Indian village life that greeted us when we left our very nice hotel on the beach. It was slightly discomforting for me, but I never felt threatened.

Over the first few days, I began to become more accepting of the standard of life. I could see that most people, even if they had very



Initially, going to India was never on my bucket list. It really felt like the kind of place that would leave me out my comfort zone. I gave up camping a long time ago, so I needed my luxury.

The volume of people was intimidating; I wanted good food and a comfortable bed. I didn't mind the thought of travelling hard, preferably on an escorted tour, but I need to know I have a good bed in a bug-free room to look forward to.

Stories of cricket teams getting Delhi belly and TV shows looking at the slums helped me form my opinion. A few friends had been to Goa and come back with tales of how it was like Spain, but a little more unusual, so I had half a mind to take a look, but would have needed to book an organised trip.

A meal out in a very good Indian restaurant with our two friends Steve and Bobbie lead to plenty of 'wine talk' about going with them to south India. They have travelled all over Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, so could arrange a trip for us and accompany us.

They had invited us before, but they always did it the hard way. I had said to them: "as soon as you're ready to grow up and do it the easy way, we will go with you." That time was approaching.

little, were good humoured and very happy. OK, so trying to buy things could be a battle of wills, but generally speaking you could enjoy the bartering process. It was turning out to be fun. On a visit to Chamundi Hill in Mysore, the rickshaw driver even let me drive his auto while he sat in the back with my wife.

My eyes were starting to be opened. Some of the most difficult bits of the trip, like an overnight train from Chennai to Mettupalayam, ended up being the most memorable.



Getting Hooked

Arriving in the beautiful, rural land of Coorg, it reminded me of parts of Devon. The River Cauvery looked like the upper River Dart. Trees coming right down to a peaty-looking water just like one straight off Dartmoor, made me feel at home. Friendly people really helped us kick back and relax. We had many an evening, sat on the balcony at the homestay we were in, watching the glow worms flashing like twinkling stars. The stars above us were impressive as well. I had to get my i-Pad out and show our hosts the constellations.

"made me feel at home"

Next afternoon, Steve took me to the river for a fish. I was very wary of snakes. The undergrowth was very heavy, and even though we were on a footpath, this was a more wild side of rural India.

Steve selected a place to sit on the bank and fish. Trees and bushes surrounded us and we had to flatten the grass to sit and cast. I'm sure I didn't imagine the slithering noises from nearby vegetation.

We only managed an hour's fishing before the sun sank. It got dark very quickly. Compared to being in a city, when it got dark, it got really dark, very fast.

Nothing really happened while we fished. It was exciting to have a cast, and seeing a fish roll got the heart racing, but no bites. At least the desire to get stuck in overcame the fear of snakes.

The next day we were up early. A walk along the river, casting a small spinner into likely hiding places finally got some action. The rod bent round and my first Indian fish came to the bank. It was a Carnatic carp of about 2lbs.



"my first Indian fish"

WASI Lake

A few days later, we left the wives in Bangalore and took an early morning rickshaw to meet Steve's friend Sandeep. When he arrived at the side of a flyover south of the city, I met a real old fashioned gentleman. The two hour drive to the Wildlife Association of South India lake was filled with tales of problems with poaching, Sandeep was explaining how fishing in India is often done for the pot. Politics seemed to be involved heavily. At least the stop in a village wine shop to pick up beers suggested we might have a relaxed couple of day's sport.

The lake was attractive, but the accommodation was certainly not five star! There was a shower, a fridge, toilet and camp beds, and I now knew that the people I was with would make sure nothing untoward happened.

Coming from a carp fishing background, it was very rare that I would float fish. Trotting was quite alien to me. It was far more of an all action way of fishing. Steve tied a hair rig for me, I swung a banded pellet into the current and the float buried within five yards. I missed the bite. This happened on another three or four trots down, I needed to get the feel back for it.



I needed to forget about fish hooking themselves and strike as soon as the float went. There was a shoal of fish going mad for the loose fed pellets. It was not quite like a trout lake, but not far off. How could I fail to hook one of these fish?

Finally it all came right. My first instinct was to get the rod high, but Steve was telling me to drop it to one side and apply sidestrain. It was like a shot of adrenaline as the fish charged off. I was wondering what kind of fish it would be. I could tell it had to be a fish going towards ten pounds. There was a real hard resistance on the line, but I felt fairly relaxed. It was excitement, but not panic. And then, the fish popped up. I couldn't believe it was only 2lbs.



We carried on fishing for another three or four hours that evening. The next morning I managed to bank some mahseer getting up towards six or seven pounds. They were not the monsters I imagined I would be fishing for in India, but they were such good sport.

I am definitely hooked on fishing again and it's thanks to mahseer. They were a massive part of a most enjoyable trip to a fascinating country.

all text
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