



KLINK AND DINK IN THE DALES

As a Yorkshireman who had never fished the Nidd, it was high time **Chris McCully** explored this river where the brown trout “go like the clappers”

Chris McCully
watches for
rises on the
Nidd at Darley.



KLINK AND DINK IN THE DALES continued

Above: Adrian Bristow lifts into a fish at the lower end of the beat. Above centre: a cracking Nidd brownie is returned.

THE FIRST LOOK at a new water is always significant. There are some streams – some of them are very august – which make me feel claustrophobic; others, running newly manicured through their expensive weedbeds, put me uncomfortably on my mettle, or what little of it is left; still others, whose gigantic trout are all smutting 26 yards away, ask for impossible prowess, and my heart quietly sinks.

The Nidd was none of these. After floods the river had at last resumed its bed, though was still a touch high and carried a memory of colour from the peat of the upper dale. It flowed in a succession of long glides and

and beyond the ripples, the dusty yellow of a willow, and beyond the willow, the edge of a scarp, the vast leavings of the end of glaciation. The Dales.

IT'S A SHAMEFUL CONFESSION for a Yorkshireman, but until recently I'd never fished the River Nidd. The reaches of the river upstream of Knaresborough, and particularly those lying between Ripley and Pateley Bridge, offer wonderful fly-fishing for trout and grayling. They always have done. Tom Bradley's *Yorkshire Angler's Guide* (1894) noted of the Nidd that "the fishing is good throughout its entire length", though added that some reaches of river were strictly preserved – as many of them still are. Openings for visitors are few, but Nidderdale

of it until the text was reprinted in 1984. In Jukes' work, the loved river is never named, but from the descriptions, as well as from some acquaintance with the upper reaches of other Dales rivers, I suspect that what Jukes was describing were the northerly reaches of the Nidd as these existed before Scar House and Gouthwaite Reservoirs were built. Since Scar House was constructed in the 1920s, the time frame of my suspicions would be plausible. Someone will know, but until the identity of Jukes' loved river can be conclusively proved, there are his superb descriptions to content us: "The water in itself is a joy to hear and see. It is mostly peat, and the colour of it, in the deeper places, a rich, warm purple-brown: over the pebbled shallows

"An increasing number of natural flies were in the air – small dark olives,

rocky pools through woods whose banks held the waxy smell of rosebay willow. If you were to lift up your eyes briefly from the surface you'd see a field wall already holding more than a hint of limestone. A cobweb in the corner stones held unlucky sedges and needle-flies. As I peered at these remnants, somewhere out in the nearby glide there was the audible thwuck of a rising fish. I looked up – of course I looked up – and saw the after-ebb of ripples,

AC offers reasonably-priced trout day-tickets for stretches around Pateley Bridge and at Dacre Banks. On our visit we fished the river just south of Dacre Banks at Darley.

Apart from its angling reputation, there was a further reason I wanted to try conclusions with the Nidd. If I'm right, the Nidd is the focus of that wonderful book, *Loved River* by H.R. Jukes. This work first appeared in 1935. I'd never heard

it is pale and golden. There are strange lights on it sometimes, when the clouds suddenly darken and the sun is hidden. Then one sees the brooding mystery of these wild places..."

WHEN I PUT UP THE FOUR-weight I was uncertain as to what the fish might be taking. From experience on other Dales rivers, and notably the Wharfe, since it was September I more than half-expected to see sedges,



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROD CALBRADÉ

needle-flies, willow-flies, and some hatches of smaller upwings – perhaps some iron blues together with medium and large dark olives. And there would invariably be trout taking invisible scraps of nothing in the still reaches under the trees.

The dry-fly, then? A team of Yorkshire Spiders fished up and across and with as little drag as possible? I thought of a recent visit to Pickering Beck, where Ade Bristow and Rod Calbrade had patiently explained Klink and Dink to me. As many fly-fishers know – that’s the multitude that didn’t until recently include me – the technique has its ultimate origins in New Zealand (it is known as New Zealand-style). A Klinkhåmer (the Klink) is tied on to the point as usual, and then a goldhead (the Dink) is attached to the bend of the Klink on a length of 2 lb or 3 lb nylon. This length can be varied according to how deep the fish are lying, and can therefore be anything from a few inches to several feet. Using this set-up you cover several options: the damp-bottomed Klink can be presented to trout or grayling moving in or on the surface, while the fully-sunken Dink covers fish taking ascending nymphs or pupae. Such is the theory – and for once, angling theory seems to work in practice. Ade, who in any given season catches hundreds of fish on Yorkshire streams, uses the method extensively, and reports that the fish respond equally to

both Klink and Dink.

So... Why not? Klink and Dink seemed an admirably efficient way of beginning on the Nidd. I attached a washed-out grey/brown Klinkhåmer (size 14) to the point, added a 2 ft length of 2½ lb nylon to the bend, and then tied on a small goldhead. Meanwhile, Ade had already returned at least three trout before I’d even wet a line. “Black Klink,” he called up the bank as I sashayed inelegantly past while inhaling the fumes of rosebay willow.

I could see, and can still see, disadvantages to Klinking and Dinking. One is that the Dink, once sunk, fishes at a fixed length from the Klink, and may therefore be interpreted as unnatural by choosy trout or grayling, who might otherwise expect to see insects either tumbling about in the underwater currents, or generally ascending to the surface to hatch. A second potential snag is that the Klink and Dink set-up is tricky to cast, since the leader is relatively



Chris into his best fish of the day from a likely-looking run.

Below left: Adrian’s “Klink and Dink” – a small gold bead Hare’s Ear fished under a grey-brown Klinkhåmer. Below: one after the other, the fish keep coming to the deadly Klink and Dink.



unbalanced. The Dink tends to lob over the Klink as the energy in the forward cast dies, and this indelicate lob doesn’t lend itself to accuracy. I also add that tangles, when you get them, can with this technique be so ferocious that it’s better to snip off the flies and make up a new leader-end from scratch rather than trying to unpick the twists and coils.

The notional disadvantages didn’t seem to matter to the Nidd trout. By the time I’d considered the presentational problems and had undone a mere four tangles, Ade was continuing to catch lovely wild browns one after the other. As the morning progressed, an increasing number of natural flies were in the air – small dark olives, some sedges... And then, as I relaxed and as the timing came back, it was my turn.

In an eddy at the edge of a long glide I spotted three fish rising. Up and across went the Klink and Dink. The little goldhead sank, levelled... and the Klink pulled upstream and under. It’s reassuring, at distance and in reflected light, to be able to use the Klinkhåmer as a kind of high-class float. The trout bored away, made a short run across the river, came to hand. It was around the pound, this one, with goldhead fastened in its upper jaw. Another cast, slightly further upstream, and... A repeat performance. In the end I returned all three of those fish – all of them trout, and with the best making a cross-river run of 20 yards. “They go like the clappers, don’t they?” said Ade when we compared notes at lunchtime. Clappers, indeed – and with one



KLINK AND DINK IN THE DALES *continued*

silvery after-note in the form of a grayling which, while rising to olives, had made a mistake to the Klinkhåmer. It was lovely fishing.

The mood of trout and grayling often seems to change during an angling lunch-break, however short. At any pre-cheese-sandwich moment you can be covering a number of rising fish; by the time you’ve swallowed the last of the coffee you’re looking at ominously grey water untroubled by any moving fish whatsoever. Yet on the Nidd, the early afternoon was simply a continuance of the morning: fish were rising quietly, and to the same variety of flies that had been hatching an hour or two before. Even fishing blind up a promising glide could bring a result in the form of a trout or a grayling moving to the goldhead or annexing the Klinkhåmer. I began to lose track of our totals, then went back to the pool at which I’d begun. During the morning I’d seen the merest dimple in what looked to be the best lie in the run – a desk-sized area adjacent to a rock ledge where the current lost its power and smoothed. Out went the Klink and Dink. The polypropylene wing of the Klink rode the current’s foam edge; the goldhead fished into the flow.

As soon as I raised the rod I

knew that whatever had taken the nymph was a serious proposition. The fish made an immediate and unstoppable run upstream – 20 yards, then 25. I worked it back. It ran nearly as far again downstream. I worked it back. With any smaller fish, a fly-rod nods and judders. With this one, the four-weight simply stayed bent, pulsed as the fish played deep. Eventually, inevitably, there was a heavy-bodied thrash of flank in the trickle of foam on the surface of the pool, and slowly, the fish tired. I saw that the goldhead was fixed in the outside of its gill-plate, which accounted for some of the uncontrollable nature of the play – but not all of it. And then the business was done. The fish slid into the net, a very good pound and a half of beautifully marked Nidd trout.

We’d nearly had enough, on that generous afternoon of soft flows, quiet breeze and slanting light. Knowing that we’d shared and enjoyed something almost exceptional, Rod and Ade said goodbye. Goodbye, but... I hadn’t quite done, and after handshakes went back to the river, to a group of trout and grayling smutting under the trees. I changed the end of the leader, knotted on a single small (size 16) Klinkhåmer – colour seemed immaterial – and



Small but perfectly formed: another fish to a goldhead.

spent an hour watching wings ride the glide. It is an odd confession for someone who occasionally writes about fishing, but I wasn’t really trying to catch fish. I simply felt in place there in the Dales.

A final cast. A grayling moved below me. I cast backhanded, angled the line up, threw some slack as the rod-tip lowered. The line landed in an unlovely wobble, but this at least allowed the Klinkhåmer room to float drag-free over the fish. The grayling rose, a nip at the fly as it rode a surface crease. I stayed my hand. Small ripples ebbed away downstream, and what had momentarily happened on the River Nidd became the Nidd again.



One final cast at a smutting trout.

Factfile

I FISHED at Darley as a guest of the reciprocal arrangement that exists between Harrogate Fly Fishers and Pickering Fishery Association. For details of the Pickering association’s membership, write to the General Secretary, Ade Bristow, Mulberry Cottage, Low Street, Carlton, North Yorkshire DN14 9PH. The use of barbless hooks is encouraged.

Day-ticket water on the Nidd is offered by Nidderdale Angling Club at and around Pateley Bridge. Tickets are available from April 1-September 30 only, and cost £10 per day or £30 per week. Nidderdale AC also offers day-tickets on Scar House Reservoir, which contains wild brown trout. Full details of tickets and membership of

Nidderdale AC at www.nidderdaleac.co.uk/tickets

Rods of between 8-9 ft, rated for 4-5-wt lines, are suitable for the dry-fly and nymph-fishing, while the river also lends itself to wet-fly fishing with Spiders, for which you may need a longer and fairly soft-actioned rod. Flies should include Hawthorns, a selection of Olives, Sedges, Black Gnats, Klinkhåmers and goldheads.

Ade also reports great success using the Super Pupa – a sedge-suggesting pattern born in Sweden and used extensively by that great Northern angler, John Roberts. Waders are recommended. Since the river sometimes runs over pools filled with large boulders, a wading staff might also be very useful.