



## Hooked on the Foss

*The Foss is home to many species of fish and is fished by enthusiastic local anglers. David Findlay, one of our members, fishes on the Foss, has done so for many years and tells us about fish life in the river.*

One of the best indications of a healthy river is the condition of the fish, so anglers will often be the first to witness adverse events. I have enjoyed numerous trips – from Strensall down to the Foss Basin – over many years to fish different stretches of the river, mainly in the winter. In summer fish can be spotted in the low clear water but fishing is difficult with weed and overgrown banks.

A great variety of fish are present in different stretches of the Foss. I often catch a chub of around 3 lbs in the odd spot where it is four feet deep; at present there is an explosion of baby chub due to successful spawning in the last year or two. Roach up to 1½ lbs are present with plenty of small ones. The odd perch reaches 1 - 2½ lbs. Occasionally a hooked fish is grabbed by a pike which can be 8 lbs or more!

Bigger fish tend to be at Strensall or Haxby while more small fish are seen downstream. In New Earswick's faster water we see dace; gudgeon are here and elsewhere. In the city, bream will turn up, as will the odd tench and bleak.

The Foss is not classified as a trout river but I once caught two natural brown trout at Strensall of 3½ and 4¼ lbs followed by some 'escapee' rainbow trout around 1 lb (all returned). Soon after, a pollution incident wiped nearly everything out. I found it amazing that the river and fishing recovered well after 6 months and was back to normal in a year! Many fish are big travellers and the Foss shows a remarkable ability to restore itself.

We anglers like to think that while we are enjoying ourselves we are doing a useful job of monitoring the river. It is a sad day when we see dead fish afloat, but we know the au-



Author David Findlay shows a handsome chub

thorities will act on our reports and nature will soon finish the job.

As a Foss fisherman, I feel that the 'close season' (15 March to 15 June and enforced by the Environment Agency) is a mistake for our river as:

- Fish are denied food when they need it most
- The banks get more overgrown and fishing places disappear
- Keepnets are not used so any spawning fish are returned
- Important monitoring doesn't happen

Predators can reduce fish stocks. Although I have not actually seen an otter, it will be bad news for the fish if they increase any more. At one spot I wondered why no bites, then saw fairly fresh otter spraint nearby. Other predators which

fortunately seem to be declining are cormorants and mink. Thankfully, you are more likely to see, or rather hear, the 'plopping' of the lovely water vole.

My day's fishing will be made by a kingfisher winging its way past my rod end. I have timed these over a quarter of a mile covered in 8 seconds - over 100 mph. No wonder most folks miss these!

After the recent floods I can now report that the river is recovering, full of fish of all sizes with good catches. Here's to a good season!

David Findlay

**"One indication of a healthy river is the condition of the fish"**



A 'mixed bag'

APRIL



**Lots to come!**

**Wednesday 13**

Annual General Meeting at the Strensall & Towthorpe Village Hall, preceded at 7 pm by a talk by Dr. Margaret Atherden on "Wild Flowers of the Road Verges in North Yorkshire". Admission free, non-members welcome.

**Saturday 16** Litter Pick by boat and on foot. Meet at 9.30 am, wearing protective clothing inc. gloves, at the footbridge opp. Morrison's on Foss Islands Road.

**MAY**

**Sunday 8** 11 am Visit to eighteenth Century Howsham Water Mill, bringing (weather permitting) picnic or barbecue lunch. Suggested min. donation £3. Numbers limited so to book and for directions and parking instructions, contact June Card not later than 30th April.

**Thursday 12** Day Walk 3 continuing this year's theme of "Water". Meet at 9.30 am near The Half Moon pub in Newton-upon-Derwent Main St. for walk of approx. 5 m in Sutton Woods and possible pub lunch afterwards. Contact Bob Jowett.

**Thursday 19** Evening Walk A, Kirkham Abbey. Meet at Stone Trough pub for a walk of about 5 m and optional meal afterwards. Contact Anne Bednarski.

**Thursday 26** The evening "New Horizons" boat trip from Melbourne on the Pocklington Canal is fully booked. An ADDITIONAL, identical trip has been arranged for the same afternoon. Number required and limited to 12 members. For details and to reserve a place contact Peter Hopwood.

**JUNE**

**Monday 6** Evening Walk B, Moor Monkton, about 5 m. Meet at 6 pm in the Main Street near the tel. box. Optional meal afterwards at the Red Lion, Poppleton. Contact Anne Bednarski.

**Saturday 18** Himalayan Balsam Pull starting at 9.30 am. At time of going to press it's too early in the season to identify the worst-infested areas so contact June Card in w/c 13th June for meeting point(s). All hands on deck, please, for this essential work on the River Foss.

**Wednesday 22** Day Trip. Morning cruise on "Waterstart" from Castleford to Stanley Ferry. Number required and limited to 12 members. Afternoon visit to the CR&T's lock gate manufacturing Workshops – an additional 5 members acceptable. For details and to reserve a place contact Peter Hopwood.

**Fri 24 and Saturday 25** The Foss Walk in two stages, 15 m from Blue Bridge to Farlington and 14 m from Farlington to Easingwold. Linear walk using cars and buses. It will be possible to join the main group for part of the route. For details of meeting places and times contact Bob Jowett.

**JULY**

**Friday 8** Day Walk 4 Melbourne, approx. 5 m. Meet at 9.30 am near The Melbourne Arms in the Main St. Possible pub lunch afterwards. Contact Bob Jowett.

**Wednesday 13** Evening Walk C, Crayke. Meet at the Durham Ox pub at 6 pm for a walk of about 5 m followed by optional meal. Contact Anne Bednarski.

**Tuesday 19** Day Trip. Mid-morning cruise on Ripon Scenic Cruise's boat from Ripon Basin along the Ripon Canal and River Ure to Westwick Lock. Number required and limited to 12 members (or 24 possibly). Followed by 4.25 mile walk back. There will be a chance to cruise back, or part of the way, for a small extra charge. For details and to reserve a place contact Peter Hopwood.

And, looking further ahead, don't forget:

**Saturday 23** Litter Pick. Contact Barry Thomas.

**Tuesday Aug 2** Visit to Minster Bells. Some places still available – advance booking essential. Contact June Card.

**Contacts:**

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**A New Season of Walking**

The first walk of 2016 was on this year's theme of 'Water', chosen to bring interest by adding walks near other bodies of water as well as the Foss.

On the morning of 7 March, 15 walkers, including some new members and two dogs, met at Bishopthorpe's Marcia Inn. We walked a circular route around the village including sections of the River Ouse and taking us right past the front of the Archbishop of York's Palace

Walking on this lovely sunny morning was good, although we did find the last section of the river very slip-



*A good crowd turned out - canine friends included!*

pery, sticky and muddy. As an added bonus, the stiles were found to be dog friendly!

After the walk, 14 walkers enjoyed lunch at the Marcia.  
*Bob Jowett*

The City of York Archives used to be housed behind a door to the right of the Art Gallery, in cramped and out of date accommodation but the Council, unable to find the necessary funding to do justice to the records of one of England's greatest cities, was proposing to outsource their maintenance. The day was saved by a successful application for a Heritage Lottery grant and the York Gateway to History project was launched.

A total of £1.77m was provided for new state-of-the-art housing for the City Archive on the first floor of York Explore, together with the refurbishment of the nearby public spaces to enable individuals and groups to use it. At the same time, encouragement and training was given to community groups to create and develop



their own records so that the Archive would contain not only civic records dating back to 1155 but also information about the lives and concerns of the citizens of York.

In the early years of the River Foss Society, its Founder, Bill Sessions, accumulated a fascinating record, by way of Minutes, correspondence, newspaper cuttings and photographs, of the Society and of the River whose conservation was its

aim. These were held in the homes of various Committee members until last autumn. Then, after training at one of the Gateway to History workshops, we were able to bring them together, sort and classify them. In December, they were gifted to City Archive in accordance with the wishes of Bill Sessions that they should be available to the public. Thanks for their help to members Mark Gladwin, Peter Hopwood, Shirley Jones, John Millett, Mary Pringle and Pat Quinsee and to Sarah Tester and the Project team at Explore.

We have planned a visit to the City Archive on the evening of 17th October, so do come along and see our records in their splendid new home.

*June Card*



*Above: Member Tom Fothergill captured this photo of waves on the Foss, a strange light phenomenon at Earswick; Right: Julie from Community Action for Nature photographed this fox in undergrowth on the Foss last summer*



## Leading the Way

The River Foss Society encourages people to use the footpaths and enjoy walking the Foss Walk. As leader of walks for the Society, I know that there are limited sign posts on the walk, some mistakenly signed "Foss Way" (a route from Lincoln down to Axminster) instead of "Foss Walk". Most waymarks are old and in places non-existent.



*How a waymark should be.*

Walking group members of our Society, after walking not only sections but also the entire Foss Walk, know this route well and agree that it is not clearly waymarked. Also, some sections are overgrown or paths ploughed up. The Foss Walk would benefit if it was walked more often, but this requires clear waymarking.



*The wrong walk!*

It is not possible to do the walk without a map, simply due to the lack of waymarks.

It was decided that a waymark survey would be useful, so Mark Gladwin, John Millett and myself are doing this for the Society. To start, I have produced maps and a spreadsheet so that as we walk the route we can easily document

those signs and waymarks which exist and their condition.

We have now surveyed up to Cornborough Manor and investigated a total of 50 possible waymark positions. Once we complete the survey and rationalize the waymark positions, the next step is to contact City of York Council and North Yorkshire County Council who have a legal duty to sign footpaths and rights of way.

We look forward to working with these authorities to bring the Foss Walk back to a useful standard for all.

*Bob Jowett*

Did you know that you can purchase honey produced on the banks of the Foss in Strensall? Richard Lovelace, who lives bordering the Foss, runs a cottage industry of beekeeping and honey gathering in the village.

Richard tells us that about six years ago his “concern for the future of bees and indeed nature in general” led him into beekeeping, recognising the important task that

bees perform, maintaining wild

## Sweet Success

flowers and plants along the river. The bees use an amazing amount of water, especially in hot weather, with water carrier bees often seen on the water's edge of the river hanging off blades of grass or on muddy patches. Bees are well camouflaged, being black through to orange but NOT yellow – that's wasps.

So why a small honey business? “You have to take a lot of the honey off for practical reasons. The bees started to slowly help pay for some of their care and upkeep.”

Honey meadow bees are never moved as this causes tremendous stress. Their location at Richard's is superb, with the potential for forage all year round with fields of crops, hedge rows, exotic plants in gardens and essentially, water. The river is only 50 or so metres away.

Unfortunately Richard's hives had to be moved at Boxing Day as the waters rose another 12-18 inches very quickly. Without doubt the colonies would have perished had he not got hold of a small vintage tractor to use in the meadow. This vehicle “came in very handy for the rescue of the bees - they were saved on higher ground next to the house.”

The bees are kept in very well insulated boxes - thin wood can have a massive effect on temperature and damp. Thick tree stumps\trunks also have good insulating properties - they use these in the wild. If a hive



Above: rescuing colonies of bees from the Boxing Day floods

Below: Richard checks his hives



gets crowded, bees swarm to find a new home. This all contributes to the cycle of a healthy environment.

Has it been worthwhile? He's very positive about the effect his bees have on the surrounding environment, and though it's hard work, he seems to thrive on it. And, as Richard concludes, “It's so nice to have the honey out there for local people to try and it seems to be loved.”

## What do you think?

Leaving aside the limitations in the design of the Flood Barrier, it is now generally agreed that the failure of the barrier was caused

by a “sudden deluge” of water swamping the electrical control room. The subsequent flooding that occurred has quite rightly led to the demand for more investment in flood protection, which probably means more concrete barriers to protect vulnerable areas of the city.

But whilst flood protection is important, flood prevention must also play its part. We must somehow manage the agricultural land so that in the event of prolonged and excessive rainfall the flood water that builds up is contained on the land, preventing the sudden deluge of water that we have experienced.

The River Foss has a large catchment area reaching up to the Howardian Hills, and is fed by dozens of ditches and streams which could be used to retain this flood water. Perhaps the so called ‘leaking dams’ could be the answer.

The society would like to hear from you, the members, on how best to help solve this problem of flooding. Please contact me via email ([johnmillet1@talktalk.net](mailto:johnmillet1@talktalk.net)) with your ideas and views.

*John Millett*

Note: Yorkshire Wildlife Trust members can read more about flood reduction ideas in the Spring edition of *Wildlife Yorkshire*.

### On the Foss

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