

THE LOST DIARY

April–September 1981

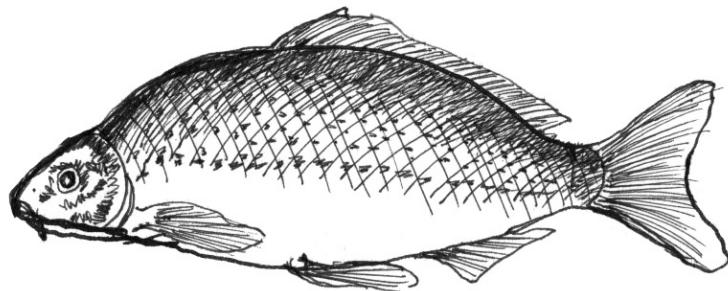
*A summer fishing in pursuit
of golden scales*



Chris Yates

unbound

THE LOST DIARY



April-September 1981

Fishing Diary
of
C. Fernyhough Yates

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Three handwritten signatures are shown side-by-side. The first signature on the left is 'Dan'. The middle signature is 'Justin'. The third signature on the right is 'John'.

Dan, Justin and John
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PROLOGUE



This diary, which was lost for over twenty years and has recently been found again in a box of Christmas decorations, concerns not only my last season at Redmire Pool, but also the last season in which I fished almost exclusively for carp. It begins in the spring of 1981 and ends in the autumn, but amongst the many lovely days by the waterside there is never an actual moment that seems to mark the beginning of any diminishing enthusiasm for what was then my favourite species. Rather, it appears from the writing that my devotion to the golden scales becomes deeper as the diary progresses, so maybe the clues lie elsewhere.

Since the age of five, when I saw a seemingly miraculous creature in my local village pond and learned that it was a carp, I had been more or less obsessed by this fish. In June 1980, when I was thirty-two and had just caught what was then the largest British carp ever, I wondered if my obsession had been cured. But then I had a mad idea that, having landed a fifty-pounder, I could now dream of capturing Redmire's real monster, the King, a fish I'd glimpsed only once, yet knew was possibly the biggest carp in Europe.

Like all anglers, I'm always hoping that an outsize fish will take my bait, but I have never narrowed my vision to the exclusion of the more easily attainable angling delights. Indeed, I have always felt that a single-minded Captain Ahab quest for an individual monster is a sign of a slightly psychotic or maybe rather boring personality. Yet, by June '81, while I had not lost my enthusiasm for *any* size of carp, there was this curious thought that, having gifted me once

with a colossus, maybe Redmire would be generous again. Certainly, as you will discover, I came very close to another of the pool's aristocarp, but it wasn't in the way I'd imagined; and as the days and weeks passed I began to sense that Redmire was not just telling me that I must never take her for granted, she was also teaching me a sobering lesson.

Maybe it was this that, eventually, marked a change in my angling outlook, or perhaps it was the effect of a troubling pettiness in the governance of the actual ten-man Redmire syndicate that I allude to in the early pages. However, whatever it was, it didn't spoil my enjoyment of what was another magical if sometimes challenging season. And as well as the fishing there were discoveries of new waters, nostalgic pilgrimages to old haunts, meetings with new friends and occasional unexpected encounters with creatures other than fish and with presences that were not quite human.

The actual writing was done either in quiet moments on the bank - and there were plenty of those - or at home, which was, in the 1980s, Vale Cottage, a lovely old barn of a cottage in a wooded valley - Whitmore Vale - on the Hampshire/Surrey border. And, of course, I always used my old 1930s Swan fountain pen.

Christopher Yates
Cranbourne Chase
Autumn, 2013

APRIL



Thursday 9th

It was hot - hotter than it had been last June - and, as Clare and I drove down to Guildford, I couldn't understand why I was wearing such a heavy pullover. She was going to the record shop; I went to Jefferies to have a look at their small collection of centre-pins. There was nothing that felt just right in my hands, but they did have a very nice old creel for only six pounds, which I bought instead. And then, as I was walking down the street to meet Clare, a shining golden carp almost leapt out at me from the window of the brass knick-knack shop. So I had to buy that as well. The vision of it inspired me to seek out the real thing, and the unexpectedly summery weather gave me hope of success. So, on the way home, I cunningly suggested that we glug down the chilled ginger beer we'd just bought on the banks of Forked Pond.

Blimey! The carp were obviously just waiting for us. I had no idea the water was so well populated, though, obviously, being the close season, the fish were far more visible than they will be in June. I climbed an oak tree and watched as several beautiful creatures cruised past beneath me, mirrors and commons, some well over 25lbs. In all, there must have been about thirty fish enjoying the sunshine, though most were in the 10-12lbs range. Lovely to see them - and as they serenely drifted below me I remembered the half-dream from last night when, just as I

was dipping towards sleep, I glimpsed the ghostly image of a deep swimming carp in a deeply blue lake.

Tuesday 14th

It rained and the wind was cool from the north-east. Began rewriting my June article, 'The Prospect of Dawn', for *Angling*, sorry that the magazine was about to change its name to the far less appealing Coarse Fishing Monthly (I shall continue to refer to it in here by its original title). The sun came out at mid-morning so I moved into the garden, where the writing suddenly took a new, unexpected and favourable direction.

In the afternoon I took a break and went down to see Donald Leney at Springhead. We had tea in his study, enjoying a widely ranging conversation, though perhaps 'widely ranging' is the wrong term as we were only concerned with a hundred aspects of water life (carp, golden tench, Redmire, trout, pondweed, dragonflies etc.). Leney had gathered a few of his favourite books for me to borrow: *With Nets and Lines* by T.A. Waterhouse, *Wood Pool* by BB and *The Fisherman's Fireside Book*, an interesting-looking anthology that I'd not heard of before. In return, I gave him a copy of this month's *Angling* with the group portrait of the Golden Scale Club. He was quite impressed. 'This fellow, bottom left,' he said, having recognised me, 'is the one who looks best the part.' And he laughed. Then Mrs Packham came in with another tray of her just-baked slab cake and a fresh pot of tea; and by the time I left, the moon was rising, white, behind the silhouette of the dead wellingtonia in Leney's garden.

Now I'm probably not going to finish the article before my dear editor's deadline. Sorry, Sandy, but some things have to take precedence over other things.

Thursday 16th

Left for Redmire at 6.00pm and was in Ross-on-Wye at 9.10. I got some fish and chips there, and then went on to Langarren to phone Clare and inform her of my safe arrival. Finally, I rolled down the grassy slope to the pool, stepping out into the moonlight and taking in a deep draught of Redmire's sweet air (exactly a month before the new season starts and the balsam poplar leaves must just now be unfurling). But the night is far colder than I anticipated and I've only got my lightweight sleeping bag.

Friday 17th

A cold wind rippled the pool at dawn, but the sky was clear and it was lovely to see Redmire in the first green flush of spring. However, I didn't have much time to appreciate the morning or sneak along the banks looking for signs of carp. In fact I'd only just boiled a kettle for tea when I heard the drone of an approaching car. It was Barry's, and within the hour we were joined by Ron, Henry, John, Dave, Steve and Tom, all eager to finish the work on the dam repair that we'd begun last month. And after that we spent the rest of the day trimming the