

Balsam bashing, getting nettled and a posher kind of litter - Ilkley Angling Association working parties

A month or so ago I happened to be down by the river. It was a beautiful summer day and I came across a scantily-dressed woman reclining at the water's edge, enjoying the sunshine, near the suspension footbridge. In the river beside her was a bottle of fizz, cooling, and she had a flute to one side, ready to pop the cork. "What a lovely idea," I remarked, and we exchanged a few words.

I was less impressed with the idea when we found the empty bottle during our working party on the river this morning, as we were litter-picking and pulling out Himalayan Balsam...and getting nettled into the bargain.



Club President Steve Fairbourn with the offending bottle.

This summer we have focused on the river for working parties, rather than the club ponds in Ben Rhydding. A planned 'pond party' in July had to be scrapped as the weather was atrocious, but it is hoped that we can reschedule for late August.

Working parties on both sites are really important but they are not well-attended. On the river, being out and about collecting litter and generally improving the environment doesn't just make fishing the Wharfe a better experience for anglers – it's great public relations for Ilkley AA, and a way of educating the public so that people realise that anglers are environmentally aware.

On the ponds, we usually have a picnic or barbecue - it's a good way to socialise with members and volunteers and have a bit of fun as well. Highlights for me have been seeing Steve Fairbourn fall into the Members' Pond, fully clothed, whilst trying to spread some lime from a boat being steered by Trevor

Smith. He had to borrow some walking trousers from a volunteer, who wasn't best pleased to hear that Steve had worn them 'commando' (and said he could keep them after that).



Another highlight was watching everyone vying with each other to find the biggest "monster" lily roots when we had divers pulling them out of the pond.

This was a great way to remove the invasive lilies but only cleared a small area at a time.

Bailiff Dave Armstrong's caught a big one!

In the winter, 'pond parties' often involve bonfires and the club seems to have more than its fair share of pyromaniacs! Again, there is usually hot soup and bacon butties on hand to fuel the workers and often home-made cake as well.

Unfortunately the working parties seem to involve the usual suspects and we are often only a very small band – this might make it easier for the person doing the catering (which would be me!).

If everyone could commit to even one working party a year, it would be a massive help.

Or if you can't come to a working party, is there any other way you could help the club? And it is a club – a club that depends upon its members for survival.

Providing a raffle prize, making a donation to club funds, offering articles for the website or getting involved in running activities – these are all ways to support Ilkley Angling Association.

So why not get involved and have some fun? Make sure the Club Secretary has your email address and come along to the next working party. Who knows...the next bottle of champagne we find might be a full one!

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