



HOOK, LINE AND SINKER: Keen angler Lucy Bowden wants more women to join her club.

Lucy is aiming to get more women hooked

YOUNG, confident and female, she doesn't quite cut the image of an angler.

That's the kind of stereotypical attitude Lucy Bowden's been up against ever since fishing hooked her in her childhood.

Through her ladies-only club, 'Fishing for Everyone', the 22-year-old from Alnwick, has made it her mission to get more women anglers on board the UK's favourite pastime.

"It's a major male dominated sport. Not all ladies are that confident, for example, some have lost their husbands you know, and I think being in an all-ladies club gives them more confidence," says Lucy.

"They've never thought about trying before, they think it's a man's sport. The other thing's family. The guys can sometimes go off, and mothers can't really do that!"

Growing up, Lucy, a qualified angling coach, wasn't your average teenager. Unlike most adolescents, her typical haunt wasn't the booze-laden bar or nightclub. Instead, she found herself at ease on the riverbank, or strolling through her native Northumbrian countryside.

She adds: "I just find it really relaxing, I really enjoy going out in the countryside. I've made some great friends. It's one of those vast sports anyone can do really. There shouldn't be any barriers."

She first started fishing at the age of five, when her dad Chris used to take her with her younger sister April down to Peter's Mill on the River Aln.

ANDREW HILLIAR speaks to a North Eastern woman who is transforming angling into a female-friendly sport.

"I got in through my dad, he's been angling for 40 years. When I caught my eight and a half pound rainbow trout, I was hooked from then."

Lucy landed the record eight and a half pound catch at a newly opened farm fishery in Berwick, called Conundrum.

And despite being only 11 at the time, her record stood for almost 10 years, until it was finally broken in 2005. In the same year, she travelled to Nottingham to promote women's angling at a conference, set up a fishing club at her old school, and landed in Ireland to promote angling for disabled people. Many people would capsize under the sheer bulk of such a packed schedule.

Despite being well known in angling circles at the time, many people didn't take her seriously when she first floated the idea of a ladies fishing club.

She explains: "I think they just

thought it was a bit of a phase, she's going to do this and she's going to do that," says Lucy, in tones of measured defiance.

And although she suffers occasional ridicule, she refuses to take the bait: "I get the odd negative comment now and then from men and women. If anything it pushes me harder, it makes me want to do more."

The female-only club, one of two in the UK, made such a splash at the time that it only spurred her on. It has gone from strength to strength since it was set up in April 2008, becoming an official angling club for women in August 2009. Lucy already wants to develop the club through 2010 and beyond.

She says: "It

took off literally immediately. The interest was so great that I decided to grow the club further and set up a committee.

"My plan is to get quite a few of the anglers trained as qualified instructors. We're just going to expand."

"Obviously with the recession's doom and gloom, I think something like this has come along at just the right time."

She quickly rejects any suggestion that the club is anything like a feminist grouping.

For a start, she says, how could she promote women angling if the club was to be swamped by men? Lucy, who has a boyfriend but is not married, adds that, although it

is strictly for women, any juniors under 16 are welcome to join – girls and boys.

To reel in more women, Lucy concedes she'll have to canvass beyond the pages of fishing magazines, which are read mainly by men. From time to time she sounds more like an entrepreneur than an angler.

Perhaps it's best to say she's a combination of both.

Her website, 'fishingforeveryone', was set up in 2004 and targets women shopping online for fishing supplies. Lucy's developed a keen marketing eye, having been nominated for North East business awards in 2006 and 2007.

She's already taken to the airwaves, and has her sights set on advertising in popular women's magazines, but it won't be easy attracting the readers of the female glossies.

"Women who don't fish don't read fishing magazines so you have to get out of that. It's working out of the mould really, and getting some really good role models," says Lucy, sounding slightly daunted, but characteristically enthusiastic. She comes across as a bit of a role model herself.

"TV is good as well, I've done TV internationally. It's just about promoting it – I call it my mission. There's no one else doing it, so it's a bit scary. But it's like you're setting the standard.

"It inspires me, it's just something that pushes me further."

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