

December 1992 - Issue 6

DROP BACK
ДРОП БВСК

**WALTON-ON-THAMES
REGION 15**

R.O.
David Fish

R.O.
Neil Depledge

INTRODUCTION

It is about 3 years since one extremely cold Sunday morning when I was having a look around at various lakes and river swims that I came across 4 brave/lunatic pike anglers on the Desborough Cut. I had just re-started piking for the first time since I was a teenager and asked if they could recommend any local waters. These intrepid anglers turned out to be Dave, Trev, Barry and Ron.

Thanks to this chance meeting I discovered not only the PAC but also a very sociable crowd of like minded fishermen. Since then I have attended almost all of the monthly meetings and fished all bar one of the pike-ins (and I have just 2 pike to show for it all). As a result, I have learnt a great deal about how to fish for pike (if not exactly how to catch them) and, perhaps more importantly how to handle them.

However things are changing and not, I fear, for the better. On the first pike-in I attended there were over a dozen anglers and similar numbers fished on most of venues we visited that year. This season though, there has been a very disappointing turn out on all trips. There has been a hard-core of about 5 anglers, 2 or 3 Pauls, John, Bill and myself.

If the rest of you are not interested in this kind of activity I think it is time you spoke up and saved Dave the frustration of standing up at the front of our meetings trying to drum up support and getting no-where. On the other hand if you wish the fish-ins to continue then please do two things. First, suggest a new venue (either a free water or a day ticket) and second, turn up.

Finally, last year, I offered my assistance to help Dave run the region as he came very close to quitting. We, particularly Dave, need all the help we can get. I can tell you now, that if Dave resigns I will not be able to run the Region on my own. I simply don't know enough about piking nor do I have any contacts to get the outside speakers that make so many of our meetings such enjoyable occasions. Please do not just use the monthly meetings as an excuse to get away from the wife for a couple of hours, make a contribution.

Neil

Small River Piking

Very few people who have fished the River Roding in Essex would consider the water as a potential Pike fishing venue and fewer still wet a Pike line. The water looks too small and for the most part, too fast to warrant attention. The river is of variable depth along its course, here rippling across gravel beds and there deepening to around eight feet as it cuts into the Essex clay. Similarly, the pace of the river is variable, for the most part rushing through a tiny reed fringed channel but occasionally slowing to a virtual halt in deeper, wider areas. Weed growth is prolific in summer, consisting for the most part of cabbages and lilies, but virtually nonexistent in the winter except for rotting stems. This is not a home for large pike.

Chub, dace, roach and perch are all to be found in the river but it is the huge shoals of minnows that make up the overwhelming proportion of the fish population. During the summer, you can drop a stick float into ANY swim and within seconds a firm pull will indicate another onslaught by these tiny fish. I believe that it is the minnows that sustain the bulk of the rivers pike population. So what of the pike themselves? Well, the river yields a living of sorts but the fish could hardly be said to prosper. A decade of fishing on and off suggests that around eight pounds can be taken as a maximum weight with an average of well under three. The fish are very sleek and feed fairly freely but the interesting thing about them is that the river brings out the highly specialised nature of these diminutive predators.

For many hundreds of yards the river is apparently devoid of pike as it swirls and eddies along its course but these barren sections are punctuated by locations that almost invariably contain pike. For example, there is one swim, about five feet deep, where the river has scoured out the roots of a willow tree and perhaps not surprisingly, there is a pike under that tree. It's not a big pike, even by the standards of the river, but it is a very typical small stream pike in that when I say it lives among the tree roots I mean exactly that. Bait placed two feet deep and three feet out from the roots will remain untouched but as soon as you place a bait hard against the tree and close to the bottom it is odds on to a certainty that the fish will take. So what does this tell us about critical distance? Well on the face of, so far have to more or less hit them on the nose with your bait or you can forget So far as tactics go, you have to be mobile to take a bag of fish and that means trotting the stream, lures or deadbait wobbling.

Trotting is not a technique I have used to any great extent on the river despite having a huge appetite for watching pike drown floats! This reluctance is partly because of an impatience to cover as many swims as possible and partly because I have not had the success that I have sought using other methods. Lures can be effective up to a point but to be frank, they do not bring out the best that the river has to offer. Many swims can be fished but equally many pike refuse to be moved by mere artistry. For the most part, these fellows want to chew flesh! All in all, deadbait wobbling is the most effective line of attack because you cover the swims and as every vegetarian knows, meat is murder.

The rig that I used for wobbling is simply a single hook pushed through the bait's skull, with a treble arming the flank and positioned so as to put a very slight bend in the bait. On the Roding no weight is necessary, the bait being allowed to sink under its own density. A stop-start, fluttering retrieve is, not surprisingly, the one to use.

Fishing the river Roding can be an absolute joy. One day last January Steve and I arrived on the frosted river bank at about Sam to find the valley blanketed in mist with just a little watery sunshine as a promise of finer weather to come. A little cat ice had formed around the mats of rotted weed over night clearly marking the slack water.

We made straight for the willow tree swim that I described before and lowered a bait into the roots, Needless to say, absolutely nothing happened! We moved upstream, stopping at a patch of rotted cabbage stems that could be seen deep down through the clear water. The first cast across the remnants brought a satisfying flash of amber, followed by a swirl, followed by a slack line as the hooks skidded across the pike's jaw and pulled free. Another smelt went on the rig and it was second time lucky, I suppose that one weighed about two pounds.

The interesting thing about that pike, like so many other Roding fish, was that it had buried itself in the weed stems and was to, the human eye totally invisible. Could that pike see our bait or do these fish home in through their neuromasts? In practical terms it matters very little but for small stream pike this hunting technique is of great importance. Whatever the case, I understand that some German "Scientists" blinded a number of pike to prove their ability to feed without seeing. All you understand but I wonder whether the same gentleman ever proved that a pike could swallow a mute swan?

We walked on. The next swim exhibited a stunning combination of a very deep curve, reeded on the upstream side of the far bank with a pollarded willow standing proud on an otherwise uniform skyline. Behind the reeds was an area of slack water reaching over perhaps nine square feet. A couple of casts close to the slack water brought no response. A third cast landed in the slack and fish number two, weighing perhaps three pounds was in the bag.

The sun was now burning through and the air temperature was rising. We had a long walk to the next swim and might have seen deer or even stag hounds on the far bank but it was quiet. Essex clay sticks like nothing else and the march around the edge of a ploughed field conjured folk memories of the Somme,

Twenty minutes later we arrived at a swim that sometimes holds a fish. Here the stream widens and there is slack water along both banks. The pike in this swim usually hold the line between the faster water pushing through the middle of the stream and the slack water around the banks. Today we were lucky and fish number three was landed.

Another long walk followed to what I might call the big fish swim. This is a repeat of the conditions I described above but with the important additions of an undercut reed mat at the head of the swim – lurk just behind the snag, hold very close to the bottom and are well above the average size for the river, The water is around six feet deep.

You will have guessed that the key to the swim is to place the bait hard up against the snag and Steve played his part perfectly to be rewarded with a take. A rapid strike followed, making a good positive connection and the fight was on, starting with the crucial haul away from the snag. This fish went seven and a quarter pounds which is a very good Roding fish and I remember Steve a Fenland piker by birth, saying how pleased he was to catch such a fish from what is, after all, little more than a grand ditch. After a photograph and a congratulatory coffee, it was time to march back, trying and re-trying a few swims along the way.

We stopped at the willow swim which this time obliged with a fish and before we quit Steve wanted to try another willow swim which in all my experience had never produced a fish.,,,, Yes he got one!

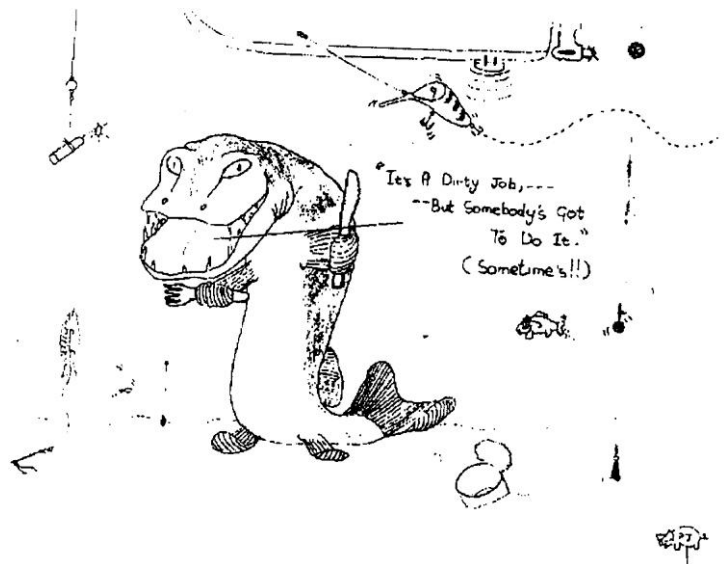
The pike very seldom wander away from their particular haunts and it is possible for the experienced Roding piker to more or less predict where the fish will be found. It follows that a responsible approach must be taken with these fish because, if you are not careful, you will quite simply terrorise them by over fishing.

This is the flavour of Roding piking and I would like to close by offering some points for consideration, Firstly these fish remain more or less static and so far as I can determine, do not patrol in the way that pike in larger rivers, drains or still waters do, This may be the origin of the pike lair "Myth". Secondly, the pike in the Roding appear to be intolerant of current and any significant rise in the level of the river is enough to kill sport.

This is interesting because on some other waters I gather that a bait placed close to the bank under such conditions can be deadly. Finally, Roding pike serve as a clear indication of the necessity of accurate bait positioning in order to achieve results. Pike location may be more than just a question of structure and lines; it may boil down to a question of feet and inches.

Keith S. Baxter

[December 1992]



We always remember our own birthdays, some more than others - this year will remain special to me, let me explain why.

I was fishing in my favourite swim on a local still-water which almost guaranteed fish every visit, expecting a promising day after some recent good catches had attracted the presence of pike; it was interesting to say the least.

I am not a pike fisherman, my quarry are generally roach and bream, but on this particular day attempts to bag up were being thwarted by a hungry pike attacking my fish, as I hooked and brought them to the net. Twice a dark shadow disturbed the surface of the water running off with my roach, 2lb Hook link and size 18 hook, forcing me to tackle up again in order to continue fishing.

I opted for 3lb lines as I had an indication bream were present in the swim some nine metres out, in sixteen feet of crystal clear water. I continued fishing and was well aware of the pike in the margins watching my every move; it became obvious that this huge beast would devour every fish I caught unless I was very quick and careful with the way in which they were landed.

It was a scene for a thrilling video as everything was clearly visible; the lurking pike was using all her predatory instincts, following the line of the fish coming to the net, waiting for the opportune moment to strike at her prey. It was inevitable that she would get another offering before long and sure enough she did WHOOSH! A twitch of her tail, a terrific surge of power, and a deadly strike presented her with another tit bit, there goes another fish and yet another hook link I thought, but I was wrong. She held on to the roach, the hook link held firm and fifteen minutes later she was still on, probably unaware that in taking the roach she'd also hooked herself, now the fun was about to start.

If I tell you that I was fishing with my pole, what chance would you give me of landing this creature. Well I thought I had none whatsoever, as every attempt to get her to the net stretched out yards of elastic and put an unbelievable bend in my pole, as she thrashed around relentlessly. I was about to unship my pole the sections to get to the business end and cut my losses before my pole gave up the ghost, when with one last effort I brought her to within netting distance. I forcibly scooped her ample flanks onto the bank with half of her hanging over the side of the net. Excited was an understatement, I was shaking with shock as I removed the tiny size 16 hook from the fleshy tissue in the scissors of her jaws.

I had my camera with me and woke up a bivvied carp angler to do the honours. She weighed in at 16lb 8oz, modest perhaps in pike terms but the biggest fish I'd ever caught - a real birthday treat and a day I'll never forget.

The story did the rounds and I asked a real pike enthusiast, Trevor Nicholls, to come down and see the performance of this pike which continued show up on subsequent visits to the water. He turned up with his family one evening in late August just as it was getting dark. I landed a few roach and true to form the pike took another fish, hook link and all. "I'm packing up now Trev", I said. "Why don't you try to catch her whilst I'm putting away the rest of my gear? You can use my leger rod and there's a reel with 10lbs line in my bag, plus a wire trace I found on the bank the other day".

I hardly got my pole unshipped and Trevor was tackled up ready for action, a roach was hooked onto a size 2 single and cast into the swim. Within seconds he connected with the fish and landed a lovely 12lb specimen, not the same fish obviously, but it rounded off another great day.

I can now see what keeps dedicated pikers at the bank, perhaps I'm hooked myself.

Tony Proud
December 1992

In the Beginning

The River Mole ambled on peacefully through its course in the meadows of Cobham, winding its way lazily round high banked comers, down short shallow straits and under bank side overhanging trees. Sometimes on its way it would catch the full summer sun, illuminating its pale green waters and reflecting, into anyone's eyes that try to spy on its inhabitants. In other parts the river was shielded from the light, throwing the water into dark and mysterious shadow and still managing to keep its secrets from prying eyes that scanned its course. The surface could also add to the deceit by appearing to be flat calm and so not giving away the presence of a host of snags that lay waiting underneath, its oily like movement only being disturbed by the occasional coot or duck as it went about its daily pursuits. For those with patience and know how the surface would sometimes betray the movement of a basking chub or carp and suicidal fry darting around the rivers edge, but only sometimes.

For those of you who can picture this scene then you will know of its sounds and scents and the peaceful feeling that surrounds you as you walk through it. For those of you who never get to experience this sort of day, then I can only hope you enjoy your work and the smell of traffic and the anticipation of your next mortgage demand! I would try and describe it for you but I only have one lifetime.

No such worries played tricks on the mind of the young boy as he climbed yet another stile, another mindless week of school behind him and his mum and dad sat at home watching the wrestling on the box chanting "easy, easy" with the old ladies in the audience. He was sweating under the weight of his fishing gear that he had lovingly accumulated over his long two year fishing career, all basic gear, cheap and practical, attended to with care and hope. Included in his tackle was his latest bit of kit, a book of Pike, its photo's of monster fish had lured him to the river and filled him with the desire to catch one of these fish for himself. He'd read it from cover to cover five times now, noting anything that could give him the edge. He had never even seen a Pike before but he had read the book, taken the advice that is preached and bought some sensible tackle to do the job in hand. He had followed the river up stream for two miles now, noting the peasants that skulked in the hedgerows, and dodged the herds of cows that resembled his parents as they lazed around with their

minds in neutral. He could have sworn he heard a cow chant "Easy, Easy" but put this down to the sun and the heat. All of this was now forgotten, he had reached the swim he wanted and hurriedly set up his rod and simple ledger. His brand new trace was attached to the 12 lbs line by a snap swivel just like his super author had dictated. On to its one treble hook he lip hooked a very sweaty sprat and sat down to think about the problem of where to cast.

The Pike stirred, it could sense the vibrations emitting through the bank but experience and instinct told her that she was safe, safe in the cover of her patch of weeds at the bottom of the drop-off. It was the same quiet instinct that had guided her through her life, it had told her what to eat and when, experience taught how. It told her where to hunt and hide, it let her bask in the sun and foretold of the raging floods of winter and the sanctuary of the rivers deep holes. Coupled with her powers of instinct was a battery of senses, perfect semi bifocal vision finely adjusted from the infra red to ultra violet, a sense of smell that could almost smell the fear of its prey with pin point accuracy. An ability to feel sound and vibration and distinguish between the sound of flowing water and that of an injured rudd. She could even vaguely make out the faint electrical signals giving off by fish as they unwittingly swam around unseen by her ever scanning eyes. To our blunted eyes she would use all of this for pure murder, murder of our managed stocks maintained for our foolish pursuit. To her it was a way and means of survival; it had got her this far, the day it fails is the day she dies, and so she lay there, no fear, no pain, contemplating murder!

In the sun the sprat glinted as it sailed through the air ten foot downstream to the nearside bank, there it hit the water, its one ounce lead destroying the surface and pinning it to bed of the river three foot below. The boy laid the 10ft rod in its banksticks and tightened the new line. After attaching his washing up bottle top bobbin to the line, he sat back out of sight to dream of twin matching carbon fibre rods, baitrunners and optonics mounted on a rod pod, just like the author of his book swore by. Landing net made ready, an area of suitable soft grass big enough for a forty pounder was designated as an unhooking area and long nose pliers for forceps, all set. Nothing a Kingfisher shot past, an electrical blue bolt..... silence. She saw the blue flash silently fly overhead, after an instant calculation instinct whispered that there was no cause for alarm so she could return to memory of the fish that had suddenly appeared on the surface about fifteen foot upstream of her and then dived to the bottom to hide, she had heard it hit the water, felt the vibrations as it dove then nothing, no colour, sound, just a faint but distinct smell to wash over her in waves. That was good enough for her, she closed in. The smell grew the more she progressed. There was a slight hole in the bed up front; she knew that, she knew it was hiding in there. She approached the hole in a head slightly down position, better for seeing. She slowly cleared the lip of the hole and there through the gloom she saw it, laying on the bottom rolling from the current. Her senses now screaming at her she instantly calculated the range and angle of attack; she tensed up, all her fins flared out and in a surge of power bore down on her victim.

The boy swallowed the warm coke and put the bottle down, a sixth sense warned him of something about to happen, a skyward bound bobbin and back winding reels of his rod bent round in a tortured arc. Nothing, his rod tip bounced again followed by a flick of the bobbin. The line from his rod tip jerked up and then went slack pause it snapped up again, this was it he thought. He picked up the rod and like a true disciple of his author, struck straight away. All of the pictures of grinning pike in his book raced through his mind, all the diagrams flashed up one after another, he could feel the pike thumping and running at the end of his line, he could feel the power and strength of it. He watched in horror as the line cut through the water like a knife, first one way then another towed by an unseen monster below. It was all too fast for him it was all he could do to hold the rod upright.

The pike was also confused, why should a dying fish put up so much resistance? It was uncontrollable with a constant pressure, it pulled her this way, stopped her going that way, why could she not eject it. Her long teeth had ripped into it, slashed it and crushed it. Instinct screamed

panic, experience was dumbfounded. She had had enough, she wanted to get away but she was being taken somewhere and resistance would not help her.

The boy, now with the landing net in hand, his wits about him and his imagination running riot squinted into sunlight filled waters for a glimpse of his prize. He could feel the fish coming up to meet him. He lowered the net and pulled his rod towards it. The fish still resisted but it was now only a token show of strength. The sunlight only allowed a hazy picture of the pike rolling into the net; he lifted it and could feel the reassuring weight of the pike. The rod was clumsily dragged out of the way and the snap swivel was released with panic stricken fingers. The net and its captive could now be lifted clear of the water and taken to the shady patch of grass for unhooking.

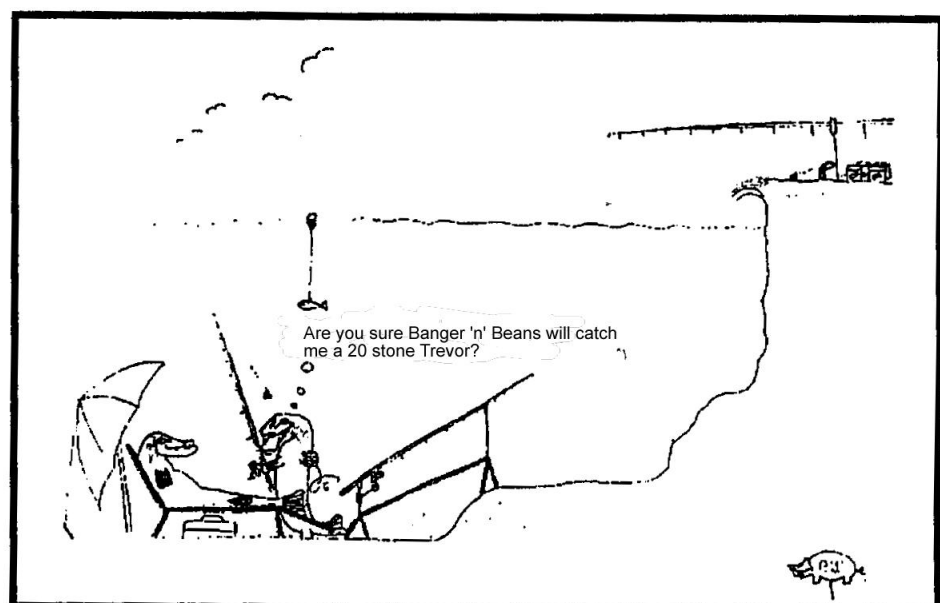
She lay on her side on the grass, her senses overloaded by the heat of the air sucking at her wet skin, her sight not totally out of focus. Her instinct yelled "Survive, Survive". She tried to swim away but merely floundered on foreign material, she lay quiet.

The boy had seen that the hook had fallen out into his net but still had to look into the pike's mouth to see that the legends were all about. He prised the jaws apart and peered in. His eyes were greeted by pristine white teeth like murderous spikes, scattered around this maw were bits of smashed sprat. It all looked like a horror movie. The boy in his awe and amazement at his conquest hurriedly set his scales to zero and hooked it into the landing net and lifted, the needle dangled around tantalising the imagination and settled, the pike squirmed and the needle bounced around in front of the boy again. There it was, a statement to the rest of the world. The boy smiled and looked again at his prize. She stared back, the boy then announced to his captive as if he were naming her ... 2 lbs 2 ozs. She thrashed again as if to remind him of what to do. He raced to the water and with proud and trembling hands placed her into the water facing upstream. He had read the Chapter 3n returning fish but didn't quite understand all that was said but at least felt duty bound to do it with some haste.

She felt the cool waters about her again, her vision restored, able to breathe, "Survive" it said "Survive" it said again, she powered off.

The boy retrieved his now twisted trace from the net and selected a new bait. The River Mole ambled on peacefully through its course in the meadows of Cobham, winding its way lazily onwards. The surface once again deceiving the eye of secrets in the light dappled straights and shaded comers. For those with patience and the know how you can hear in the far distance somewhere in the suburbs the chant "Easy, Easy, Easy!"

Paul Johnson



WEEDLESS SPOONS

Whilst the lure fishing aspect of our sport seems to have been more or less done to death in the monthlies/ the vast majority of interest seems to be focused upon plug fishing. This is a pity because spoons and in particular plain spoons (by which I mean baits like the ABU Atom) can be both enjoyable to use and effective where their use is appropriate.

Most people come to plain spoons through the ABU range of baits and there can be few Pike anglers who have not thrown a Toby around their local at one time or another. I have used these baits for many years and whilst the Pike that I have caught have been of little note, the pleasure of regularly seeing Pike strike my lures gives me reason to continue.

The main problem with plain spoons is their generally high density, a factor that causes the majority of baits to sink like the proverbial stone when not being retrieved. This increases the risk of snagging and when you then attempt to fish in close proximity to weed beds with your bait low in the water the whole situation becomes problematic.

Last season I spent considerable time fishing a gravel pit in Huntingdon. This pit was very deep, clear and weedy and it was obvious that conventional baits could not be presented effectively. It was therefore decided that weedless spoons might be the answer although I must admit that considering the ironmongery involved I did not have any great confidence.

My first discovery when setting out to use these baits was that there are two basic types of weedless plain spoon. The first type involves a hook being fixed rigid against the body of the lure with two wire guards reaching down from the head of the spoon to cover the hook point or points. Baits in this category include the ABU Favourite and the Nix Weedless. The second type incorporates a free swinging treble hook which is pushed upwards under a form of clip which retains the hook underneath the usual wire guard until a fish strikes. An example of a bait in this category is the ABU Weedless Atom.

The ABU Favourite has an action which I think is rather unusual in comparison with other plain spoons of all types in that it swims upside-down rather than gyrating in the ordinary way like of the Nix Weedless. This upside-down action coupled with the prominent tail feathers produces an effect that the pike seem to particularly appreciate. In fact this bait is worth trying as a "Change bait" even when the weedless property is not required, however there are drawbacks. Firstly, this bait is not as effective at hooking as more conventional baits and success will sometimes depend upon a pike's willingness to make multiple strikes. Secondly, if you don't want to damage the fish with that large single hook you will need to crush the barb, keep the pressure on and hope! In practice, it generally works out and you can always console yourself with the thought that lost fish could only have been reached using a weedless bait. For all of us small mouths, big hooks and barbs don't work.

The Atom type of weedless spoon incorporates, as I mentioned earlier, a clip treble hook retainer and you will find in practice that despite this rather complex arrangement, the hooking quality of the bait is reasonable. The action of these spoons is the familiar gyration that is obtained from the vast majority of plain spoons and you will only want to use this bait when a weedless spoon is the only choice because in more open water the conventional bait will always be better. The two main drawbacks with these baits is the tendency of the hook to release from its clip on casting (Not very clever when you have just hurled it at a lily patch) and abrasion between hook point and the face of the lure when pushing the hook into its clip.

So far as other tackle is concerned, I tend toward a light weight rod with a maximum lure weight rating of 30 to 40 grams coupled with a 15g bait and 15lb line. The relatively heavy line suggests

the use of a multiplier but you won't get away with a multiplier on tree lined waters like LSA Shepperton or Chertsey and you will find life difficult on the smaller rivers as well. I am not aware of any out-size weedless spoons being produced so the 60g rod is not going to come into play. Having stated my ideal, you can use your regular tackle if you want to and if you have no particular interest in lures but want to fish weedless then this will be the best answer unless you've got a really well paid job!

To conclude, we enjoyed excellent sport with our weedless lures during 1991 with three or four fish each on most occasions. In fact, there was only one blank and that was at the back end. So weedless spoons are certainly another trick worth having up your sleeve, even if their use does not constitute the ideal Pike fishing scenario.

Keith S Baxter
December 1992

First day

I always spend the close season months reading through my various Pike books so that, by the time the season opens I am certain that I shall do great things with my newly discovered, or perhaps re-discovered, skills. I say re-discovered because this sort of thing happens every year.

This year's close season reading centred upon John Sidley's book *River Piking* and so my opening session took place, with horrible inevitability, on a river, the River Wey. I was sure that with a deadly combination of a bag of deadbait, coupled with my new found knowledge I would soon have my picture in at least three different publications or at the very least I would set a new club record for the venue. Totally stupid of me of course but as they say, common sense doesn't come into it!

And so to the river on that first day.

Liz and I generally fish together and today was no exception. After wobbling several swims without success the reality of the new season was dawning when Liz announced a take in her usual relaxed manner before striking into what was clearly a small fish. Now Liz doesn't take any prisoners in these situations and her rod was soon firmly bent as the fish struggled unsuccessfully to hold depth before breaking surface to the sound of my screams "Specimen Perch". It wasn't but at 11b 8oz it was a Perch to be very pleased with and I restored my composure by muttering something about a fish that size taking a six inch dead bait!

Liz cast again and this was followed by a further announcement that she had a take, another perch no doubt. The strike was quickly made. "Any size?" I asked. "I think so", came the reply, as the "Perch" ran through a weed bed, across the main channel and into the weed bed on the other side of the river, converting itself into a good sized pike in the process. Later, when weighed in the mat she went exactly 10lbs, a new personal best for Liz and a superb start to our season.

The Pike was returned and we fished on until a figure approached along the bank. "Are you Piking?" he asked. In my case it was, I suppose a fair question and my usual courtesy did not fail me. "Yes" I replied with great authority but less conviction. "Caught anything" the stranger continued. "No" I lied. Not put off our visitor fell into conversation and related a very unusual story about a sixteen pounder that he had netted for a match fishing friend the previous season after it had attacked and held onto a three pound chub that was being played. "It wasn't hooked, it just wouldn't let go!" So, at one lie each and his the bigger, we parted the best of friends!

We fished on. Time passed and began to drag. Three hours and one ejected take later I began to realise that this was not going to be this particular dog's day. Liz took a four pounder late in the session and by that time I must admit that my humour was failing. The answers to the great pike angling problems of the day had faded from the pre-season clarity of Page and Bellars, Rickards and Gay to the murk of the boredom that tells all anglers that "Enough is, after all, enough".

And so to the journey home with the usual questionings. "Maybe if I had used finer wire or perhaps deadbait spears or maybe essence of smelt or purple dye or" Liz gave me one of her pitying looks, smiled and said "Maybe if you had fished where I did".

Keith S. Baxter

Broadlands

I've passed Broadlands Lake numerous times while working in that neck of the woods and have always wanted to give it a bash, so when Dave told us that the Fens were in crap condition and would we rather go to Broadlands, I was not totally disappointed.

The arrangements were made and Paul Johnson and myself would go down on the Friday while Dave, Neil, Barry and Craig would turn up on Saturday morning.

Now its been a bit of time since I've done any night fishing, so the old brain cells were doing overtime trying to think what I would need, so I promptly set about trying to make a list, you know obvious things like – fishing tackle, rods, reels, bait and food. Then I started to think about it a bit more and decided a gas cooker would be quite handy, along with some utensils, fork, mug, saucepan, oh yeah tin opener!

I thought about where to get all this gear, then it dawned on me, Paul's in Australia so He won't need his, so a quick phone call to his mum and I was rummaging through his stuff. Now for those of you who don't know Paul O'Rourke too well, he's the type of bloke who's got everything and takes it all with him when he goes fishing and that includes the kitchen sink. Now this is a good idea but he will insist on walking for miles and miles and I've often thought about getting him a pack horse to carry all his gear.

Anyway moving on, Friday morning arrives and I set about loading up the car. Well it wasn't till I nearly got to Paul Johnson's doorstep that I suddenly realised what the hell am I going to sleep in - I'd forgotten my bloody sleeping bag! Fortunately my parents lived local and after a quick detour I got my hands on a sleeping bag.

Arriving at Paul's he was ready and eager to set off. After rearranging the car we loaded his gear in and went on our way.

It took about an hour and 10 minutes to get there which was quite good considering we were only doing about 100 mph down the motorway (I've got a very bad habit of always driving fast).

11am and we were in the car park. We had a chat to bloke in the hut and he told us that if we were Piking then the Blackwater bay was our best bet as all the carp boys were at the other end of the lake because the wind had been blowing that way all week. Not wishing to appear ungrateful we said thanks and said we would take a look around the lake. We took a walk and eyed up all the swims available. We started at the bay which he had told us about which on looking at no one else

was fishing. After looking round and seeing one bloke catch a pike who we had a chat with, he started telling us about the lake and some deep areas and how he was just getting into pike fishing (and it showed!). While we were watching he promptly proceeded to weigh this pike in his small triangular landing net. He also said he was fishing in about 15 foot of water which later turned out to be 8-9 foot when Paul plumbed it!!!

After walking round the whole lake we decided to opt for the bay which we had been told about, it would give us plenty of room for different ideas.

We set up the bivvie and brollies and got the rest of the gear sorted out. The plan was to fish with six rods, four legered and two float fished. The next thing was to go and buy the livebait, so off I trotted back to the hut. Well 10 minutes later I was back and greeted to the sound of "Where's the liveo's then? ", "He wasn't bloody there", I said. After three more trips to get some bait and still no luck I was getting a little pissed off. Next time I told Paul that he could go as I was fed up with walking back and forth. Eventually he came back with 10 live trout which we put in the keepnet. Right, two free roving trout out there and we thought we would soon see some action huh, we thought wrong.

Sitting back on our bed chairs relaxing and just waiting for one rod to go we started to think about the weekend and our plans, which were to move around each day and hit some different swims to give the water a good going over. We're still not sure whether it was laziness or what but we ended up staying in the same swim all weekend.

By now it was about 4pm and still nothing had happened when all of a sudden I saw my float go straight under. At first I thought it was my trout livebait because of the size of it. As I got over to my rod and picked it up the float reappeared on the surface. I reeled it in to check it and to our surprise my livebait had been trashed. On closer inspection Paul told me an eel had taken it because of the teeth marks. Shit, I thought, that must be some eel because my livebait wasn't exactly small.

We decided to pack the livebaits in for the evening as it was getting dark and just concentrate on our legered rods which we were hoping would spring into life and a screaming run would appear huh, wishful thinking (or was it?)

It must have been about 7pm when one of the optonics beeped and I thought I was going to be in. Two-seconds later and Paul's gives a bleep, the dropbacks go up and bounce back down again. That's odd we thought, well what was to follow was absolute chaos and just had to be seen to be believed. All four rods were going and optonics were beeping left, right and centre with the two of us running around like headless chickens. After reeling our rods in and discovering our baits completely gutted we realised that we had hit the eel feeding time. We decided to set two rods up quickly for eels. Well as if
bBy some sort of jinx everything went quiet and all the action stopped, no bleeps, no runs, no eels, the only thing going on was the fireworks in the background.

It was starting to look like this weekend was going to be very difficult when my optonic screamed off and my bait runner was doing overtime. I was up and striking that rod before Paul could say "Esox". It felt a reasonable fish and 5 minutes later the fish was in the net. It was promptly weighed and took the scales to 1 lib exactly. We sacked it up for the night, checking it every now and then, until the morning so we could take a couple of pictures. We had waited 12 1/2 hours before our first fish was on the bank. The rest of the night proved uneventful apart from a couple of Paul's bad jokes!

Saturday morning arrived and the fish was photographed and returned with no problems or harm coming to it. Fresh baits were rigged up and our two livebaits were back out there working the water over while breakfast was sorted.

Dave, Neil and Craig turned up early and came over to see how many we had on the bank. After relaying the night's events to them they set off and made camp on the opposite side of the bay.

What happened next was something to totally brass us off. After 2 hours of fishing Craig puts a 23lb'er on the bank, we were only slightly gutted!!

As the day went on it wasn't until 1.45pm before Paul got his first proper run, just as he was playing it my live bait trout was taken and I was in as well. The results were a 41b Pike to Paul and a 21b Pike to me, only just

For the rest of the afternoon it was very quiet and our next plan of action was to put out some chopped bait and get ready for the eels when they come on the feed again. By this time the temperature was rapidly dropping (to about -5°), which proved to be a major factor as it only resulted in two bites of which one I connected with and landed a 1l/21b eel which has now taken up residency in Paul's freezer!

We re-baited all four rods and sat back and waited for a run. It wasn't until the temperature really started to drop that I felt my foot was really damp and cold, on further inspection I found I had split my wellies and where I had gone in the water earlier my foot was now starting to turn into an ice block. It was at this moment that the silence was broken by a DropBack alarm and my baitrunner was doing over-time. As I bent into what ever had picked my bait up, I realised I was into a reasonable fish. After a 10 minute battle Paul eventually saw it and promptly said that it could be a twenty, the thought of that sent shivers down my spine. When Paul actually netted it, it only turned out to be a 15lb 4oz, not bad I thought it's still a personal best. The fish was sacked up and left for the morning to take some decent pictures.

The weather had turned to what felt like arctic conditions and about 4.00am my feet couldn't take any more so I crept off to the car to warm up a bit.

"Wakey Wakey sleepy head" was the greeting I got while I was crashed out in the back of the car. It was Dave and I wondered how he could be so cheerful on such a cold morning, everywhere looked like the inside of a chest freezer.

After defrosting myself with a cup of tea we photographed the fish and returned it.

It was 9.00am when Paul finally got a run to end all runs, the baitrunner was doing double time and line was just pouring out. After a good fight a 13 1/2 lb'er was on the bank being photographed.

We never had any other touches and unfortunately Craig was the only one to see any action on their side. All in all I thought it was a good weekend and we have plans to go back next season but to try other swims and hope they produce the goods!!

Be lucky

Paul Fry

SMILE IT COULD BE WORSE

May '92 and I am preparing for the annual foray to Loch Lomond. Already things are going wrong. Dave Phillips has had to go up the week before us due to work commitments; at least we will have an up to the minute report on the fishing. That leaves 6 of us, Barry Haywood and Alan Porter, Bill Croft and Ian Edwards, Male Green and me. Barry and Alan are hiring a boat, Bill and Ian have bought an Orkney Longliner. Originally we were all travelling up together, but that soon all changed. Bill and Ian decided to leave even earlier at 2am on the Saturday morning. We had planned to leave at 4am (at least you could get some sleep!). At the last minute Barry had to pull out due to work problems and consequently Alan withdrew, so now down to 4 and travelling separately. The car was loaded up, mostly with trout livebaits, batteries and air pumps. The boat was loaded up with everything else. I picked Male up and off we set - M25, M40, M6 etc.

First problem on the motorway, any speed over 45 and the boat starts to swing. We pull off for a quick shuffle with the weight distribution and off we go again, magic! We trundle on, stopping for fuel and breakfast and are making good time. We cross the border into Scotland and are on the A24 (dual carriageway) just outside Gretna Green when CRASH, BANG, THUD, SCRAPE, CRUNCH Oh Shit! The boat's come off the trailer. We get out to investigate, no it hasn't. The boat is still on the trailer, the trailer has no axle. The axle is in the offside lane having been ripped off the trailer frame and is useless. The damage to the boat is minor, considering. We unload the boat and put as much in the car as possible. With the help of some others who stopped, we get the boat onto the grass verge. We are going to leave it there and continue on to Lomond and borrow Bills trailer so that we can retrieve the boat and work something out at Balmaha. We continue on at great speed and eventually arrive. After explaining to Bill and Ian what had happened we hook up their trailer and start back. On arrival back at the boat, it is still there and everything is intact. Fifteen hernias, much swearing and 2 hours later the boat is on the trailer. The basic principles of levers do not apply to boats on dual carriageways.

Off we set again and eventually arrive at Balmaha, having driven nearly 1,000 miles instead of 450. We decide to book into a guest house for the night, which we do and then go to Ballock to get some food. After fish & chips in the paper we return and after a quick drink, retire to bed. Nylon sheets, yeuch! and cold, it would have been warmer in the bivvy. The only good thing was we negotiated the use of the freezer for our deadbaits,

Sunday we decided to bodge repair the boat so that we could use it. We got fibre glass and resin from a chandlers and mixed it in a baked bean can and repaired the boat. We then had to wait for it to dry, so we went to the pub, covered in fibre glass resin and bits of matting.

After a considerable amount of beer we returned to the boat, it had started to rain. The repair was dry so we launched the boat, motored around the bay and set up camp. Ian had had a 14 off the bank the previous night.

I think we ate and then went back to the pub.

Monday, Malc and I took what was left of my trailer into Glasgow to the Lundespaision dealer. They said they could repair it by Friday, but it would not be cheap. They were most helpful and even took the time to work out the best way to do the repair.

Fortunately I had insured the boat and the trailer. We left the trailer with them and said we would ring on Wednesday. Now for some fishing. Not likely, the wind had increased so much that the boats were being blown onto the beach and eventually up the bank. Back to the pub!

And that was how the week went, a few hours fishing then the wind would blow up really strong, then it would rain. We didn't catch any fish, we lost all the livebaits and keepnet in the storms and we met Ralston McPherson who told us that the Loch was fishing really poorly.

We collect the trailer on Friday (£230) and decided to call it a day. We set off for home and after an eventful journey home arrived at about 1.30am.

The boat has now also been repaired at a cost of £211, thank god it was insured.

Role on May'93 the next trip can't be any worse.

David Fish