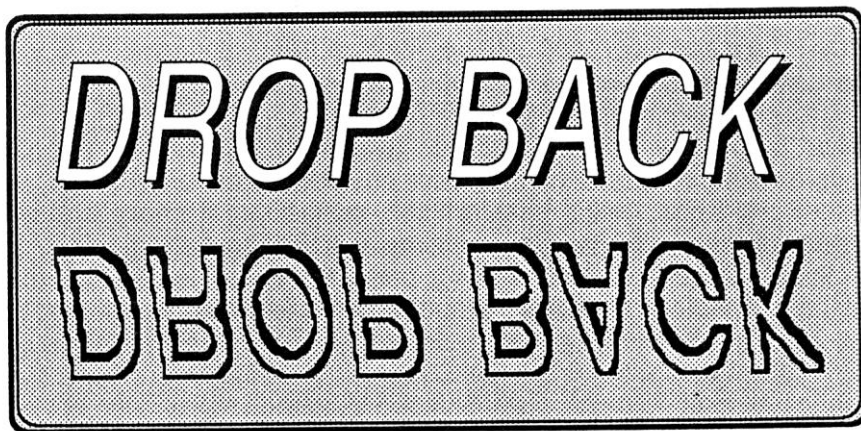


January 1994 - Issue 7



**WALTON-ON-THAMES
REGION 15**

**R.O.
David Fish**

**R.O.
Neil Depledge**

Introduction

It is just over a year since I wrote the introduction for the last edition of DropBack. It was a slightly angry and rather pessimistic piece of text, as I was concerned for the future of the Walton Region. Meetings were not particularly well attended and fish-ins were becoming virtually a private day out for myself and about 4 others.

This year, though, it is very much an optimistic report. The past three meetings have all seen over 20 members present and on all three occasions there were a couple of regulars missing, so the membership is looking very healthy. Even better was the attendance at the last fish-in, at Haliford Mere. Despite the awful weather of the previous week, 15 members turned up and five fish were landed plus one which was hooked and lost. This was the second best result I can remember since I joined the region 4 years ago, only that excellent day at New Road Pit last January bettered it. For new members, on that day, 12 fish were landed of which only one weighed less than 10lbs. In addition at least three other fish were lost.

You will read on the back cover, details of the remaining fish-ins for this season. This year has seen us plan the fish-ins with more thought and advance planning than in previous years. I personally would like to see this followed up and improved even further next year. The committee would be greatly helped in this matter if you would make your thoughts clearly heard. Where would you like to fish and how often? As someone who doesn't have a regular fishing partner I welcome regular opportunities to fish new waters with a group of friends. However, it is up to all members to express an opinion so that you all get good value for your membership fees. You will read further thoughts on this and related topics in an article written by Robbie. Please give it serious consideration and let us know your opinion.

Finally, a plea to you all. DropBack started off as a quarterly production, then became 6 monthly and as stated above this, is the first edition for a year. Please, put your pen to paper and write an article. It does not have to be as long as some of the ones in this edition. Geoff's bivvy review is a good example of a short but informative piece of writing that could be of use to all of us. Go on give it a go.

A Happy New Year to you all and good luck for '94.

Neil

Stalking Pike in Lakes and Pits

Many is the time I have walked round the margins of a lake laden with 2 cwt of tackle that a pike, or in fact several pike, have shot out from underneath my feet to disappear into the sanctuary of deeper, undisturbed water. Not only jacks but large fish well into double figures seem to find the margins desirable abode. I have then, along with the majority of anglers set up my rods and hurled my baits as far as humanly possible, sat back in my chair and blanked.

During one such session on a local gravel pit I was feeling uncommonly active and decided to have a look round. This particular pit was crystal clear with prolific tree and bush growth in and around the margins, with several sunken trees dotted around. The margins were, on average, about 4 ft deep; however, there were several much deeper holes.

As softly as a 15 stone man can, I walked along the bank, slipped my polaroids on, knelt down and peered through the tangle of tree roots. Suspended 2 ft down in the water were two pike, one, I

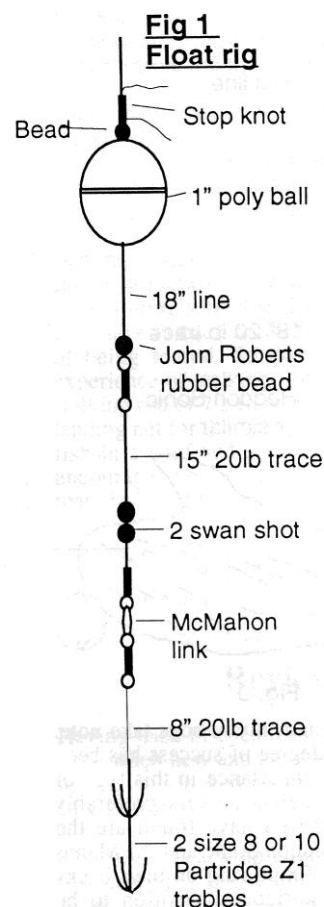
would estimate at 7 or 8 lbs, the other considerably larger. Trying to contain my excitement I edged away on my hands and knees and fetched a rod from my swim. The first problem then presented itself to me. I was using 13 ft rods with obvious restrictions in manoeuvrability, also my rigs were sunken float paternosters, hardly ideal for a confined, tree filled area. However, I could not risk the fish moving away before I had a chance of catching them.

Armed with a rod and my 42" landing net, I crept back to the spot where the fish had been. Gingerly placing the net and rod on the ground I peered into the depths once again. The pike were still there having turned more towards the open water. Trying to suppress my building excitement I reached back for my rod. Lifting it gently I soon discovered I could not extend it without sticking it into the overhanging trees. I then made the decision to toss the bait (half a mackerel) in by hand.

I quickly took the lead link off, just leaving me with the float, the uptrace and the hook trace. I gently threw the bait in front of the pike who seemed to visibly tense up. The mackerel drifted ever downwards, spiralling slightly as it came to rest on the gravel 2 ft below the pike. There it stayed. The pike, after their momentary interest, relaxed and turned back towards the bank. The smaller pike gently edged forward to take up a new position in front of the larger fish. I waited for something to happen, it didn't. Feeling rather frustrated, I came to the conclusion that they weren't feeding and were probably paired up for mating. I pulled the bait towards me again by hand; it slid over a submerged branch before snagging solidly. I pulled gently hoping to free it but it only bedded into the branch more. At this moment the larger pike moved to within 6 inches of the bait, its gills moving methodically and its fins gently waving. I pulled the snagged trace once again and the mackerel twitched enticingly. The pike now moved to the bait and plucked it, trace and all, and moved away. What the hell do I do now? I thought. I could still see the pike but not the bait now completely engulfed by the cavernous mouth. The only thing to do was pull the hooks home by hand.

I gently tightened up to the fish and pulled, she was on. All hell broke loose; the smaller pike shot away furrowing the water. The hooked pike plunged into the tangle of trees burning my hand as the line slipped through. I then realised that I could lose the fish easily unless I acted quickly. I then doubled the line over my hand and pulled. The pike reacted by coming out of the snag straight up to the surface where it lay thrashing, the top treble was loose and the bottom treble perfectly situated in the corner of the mouth. I reached down quickly and slid my left hand under her chin. With one smooth lift she was out. I quickly un-clipped the trace and took the pike 10 yds back to my swim. She weighed 15lb 12ozs, not bad for my first stalked pike.

I retrieved my tackle and thought about what had happened. The rod was the first problem, its length being the main disadvantage. I then dismantled it and attached the reel to the end of the top section with insulating tape. I now had a 6 ft, 3.25lb test curve rod. This felt much better. I then swapped spools on the reel, putting on one containing 18lb line, as in snaggy situations I would obviously have to hook and hold the fish if I was to stand any chance of landing them. After seeing with my own eyes that the landed pike had ignored the bait after it had dropped below its field of vision, I set up a simple float rig which would allow me to suspend a bait at the same depth as the pike (see Fig 1). This is simple I thought as I worked my way back to another likely looking area. I attached a

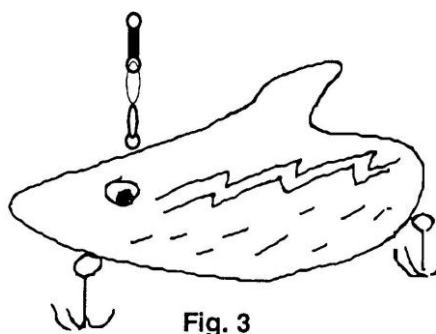
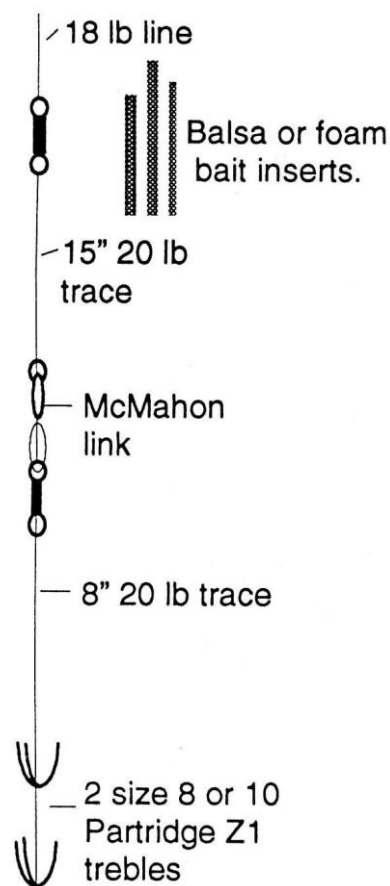


smelt,' this time with the top treble in the root of the dorsal fin and the bottom treble in the snout, thereby enabling the bait to sit horizontally in the water. With the aid of the float, I was able to twitch the bait attractively in the water. I landed two more pike, both were taken on the erratically twitched smelt. I would have landed several more but a problem arose with me watching the float rather than the bait and the taking pike.

We, as pike anglers, enjoy the sight of the float sliding away into the depths, however, in this situation it caused me to pull out of the fish. The third I lost due to the float snagging in a submerged bush. Thinking about this on the way home I decided to try a float-less rig which would still give me the ability to twitch the bait at the required depth (see Fig 2, right).

How I did this was to fish with unfrozen baits loaded with balsa or foam until almost neutral buoyancy is achieved. Even though this is fairly time consuming it can be very successful, and baits can be adjusted to drop as little as half an inch every two seconds. The buoyancy loading needs to be balanced between the nose and the tail of the bait to sink horizontally.

Again, the hooking rig I use is top treble in the dorsal and bottom treble in the head of the bait. This rig obviously enables you to concentrate only on the bait and taking pike rather than the float, it is also far less likely to snag. On both these rigs I have found that the size of bait is crucial but the species of bait is not. I use baits between 2 ins and 5 ins. The reason for this is that we need to hit fish immediately to prevent them from diving into the snags. Obviously the larger the bait the less likely it is that the hooks are inside the pike's mouth which in this confined situation is less than ideal.



maintained.

In this method of piking it is interesting to notice how few takes occur when the pike is stationary. Bed chair, bivvy boys take note. Experiments have continued with lures and a degree of success has been achieved. The choice of lure is of paramount importance in this type of fishing. As far as plugs go they must be vaneless sinkers preferably containing noise making ball-bearings. The best I have found are the Cotton Cordell Ratspot, Rapala Rattle Trap, Heddon Sonic and the Manns Leroy Brown plug. All these plugs have their fixing ring on their backs rather than their snout, thereby allowing a horizontal position to be

Other lures which work well are types of jigs and various spoons. The disadvantage is really that they have to be fished directly underneath the rod tip to create the right action and prevent snagging. By far the most successful type of retrieve I have used is the figure of eight using the rod tip.

Another disadvantage with lures can be that they require constant rod tip action to make them work, a natural bait doesn't. It has been apparent that this excessive rod tip action can spook the pike, so approach with caution. These methods can be employed in any clear water situation in rivers, lakes and pits. Obviously though, the less water flow the better, as the baits can drift into snags and out of

sight far more easily. A good pair of polaroids are essential as are reinforced knees in your waders or trousers as you tend to move around on your hands and knees rather a lot.

General observations on this style of fishing are that margin dwelling pike can be stimulated to feed at most times of the day but seem far easier to tempt during settled spells of high pressure. Also spooked fish, providing they haven't been hooked, tend to return to the margins within 45 minutes of being scared. So do go back and try again. Lastly, since the first experience of stalking, I have converted an old North Western SS6 into a stalking rod of 7.5 ft, an ideal length for this method. Also I have a smaller landing net for this method of 30 ins with a 4 ft handle enabling me to land fish in a confined space where my 42 in net would not fit. I hope this encourages you to have a go at this style of fishing, I am sure you will reap the benefits of stealth.

Good stalking!

Howard Kaye



Review of CIT Ltd Bivvy.

Having used bivvies for a number of seasons I have found that they leak even when new and are a bad fit, no matter how many times you put them up. Having looked around, I have now found a good quality bivvy made by CIT Ltd.

This bivvy is a wrap around in 3 parts and can be used as a full bivvy or just using the storm sides on their own, handy in the summer for night sessions or for day sessions in winter when the rain is driven by the wind.

This olive green bivvy is made of a heavier nylon than most bivvies and does not leak. It is fixed to the broolly by Velcro. Eyes at the top of each panel fit over the ends of the broolly ribs and are kept in place by end caps. This gives a good all round fit and keeps out both wind and rain.

The door has good quality zips on both sides and a mosquito net. Pegging points are "D" rings which are double stitched, as are all panels on this bivvy. It also has a decent valance all round.

The bivvy costs £50-00 with Velcro stitched to your broolly for just another £5-00. It is made by Costum Industrial Textiles Ltd., 93A Hersham Rd., Walton on Thames, Surrey (opposite the Halfway House pub). They are a camping equipment shop and make their own tents, weigh-slings, unhooking mats or anything else you want, to your specifications. Prices are reasonable.

Contact Martin Dwane on 0932 244311. (He's an angler and knows what anglers want).

Geoff Clarkson

THE LAST SESSION

Friday 12th March 1993

Bob, my angling companion and I decided to take the last Friday of the fishing season to visit the Throop fishery on the Dorset Sour, our last full day session of the season. Bob was to chub fish and I would plug fish for pike.

We paid for our tickets at the bailiff's house and started at the top section of Throop, which is actually the Mill stretch, by 8 o'clock. There were already a few anglers about, as Bob set off up stream and I started in the Mill pool. The pool has a good depth so I started with a 4" Creek Chub Pike, nothing happened so I tried another couple of lures, still nothing. Using a shallow diver I covered the shallows at the tail end of the pool, nothing. Walking back to the head of the pool an angler had moved leaving the weir sill available. The mill is now disused and only a little water runs over the sill nowadays, but it is still a good spot. I cast around and then saw a pike strike out towards the middle. It was a long cast but nothing came of it. I noticed a flattening of the water only 5 yards or so from me and cast, a pike of about 61lbs followed the Pike lure back, I cast around for him but there was no further sign of him, so I moved on.

Just above the weir pool are deep slow eddies, great looking spots but still nothing. I eventually walked upstream to Bob who had not had a touch on his ledger. We chatted and I moved about 25 yards above him and noticed how the bank had been reinforced, but due to the slight angle had a slack of only a foot wide, running for about 5 or 6 yards. I changed to a Bill Lewis Rattle-trap suspending lure of 3.5" long, cast and held the rod up so that the current pushed the lure against the bank, lowered the rod top and retrieved with slow, start-stop motion, a jab on the rod top showed I was "in", a brief skirmish and a four pounder was in the net.

Immediately above this swim was a perfect bay again only five or six yards long, I cast and as I lifted the lure out at the end of the retrieve a pike appeared. I cast again, this time at my feet he knocked it with his nose, the third cast he grabbed it. As it was only very small, three pounds I would guess, I hustled him into the net and onto the bank. I had a surprise as the lure was well down and his teeth were chewing the wire trace. Thank goodness for very long forceps and he was soon on his way.

Where I had been standing to cast to the last swim I noticed the natural bank was steep and undercut, so I moved a few yards above it and cast close in and retrieved. At the last second a pike of around 6lbs appeared from nowhere, took one look at me and shot off not to be seen again. Looking back I had found three pike within 20 yards of each other although all were rather small. Looking about 20 yards further upstream was the perfect looking, good sized, reed fringed eddy, it just had to house the big one! I covered the whole area and tried another plug as well, but nothing, a real disappointment. It started to rain, I tried some other swims but not a sign, it seemed the feeding session had finished.

Bob had caught nothing and suggested we get back to the car and try the lower stretch of the fishery, bearing in mind that Throop is five miles of River. As it was lunch time we delved into our packed sandwiches and coffee. Fortified, we set off along the lower stretch. It had by now stopped raining and I made my way upstream but saw nothing. I moved downstream, trying some of the swims on the way and as they did not seem to be very deep, I stuck to my rattle-trap. Above the small weir two anglers were legering dead baits, it appeared that there was a slight slack run in the middle, they had had a couple of dropped runs. They showed interest in my lure and said I could have a couple of casts immediately below them but still above the weir.

First cast out and I had a six pounder, they were pleased I had caught and I went on downstream. I cast through some swims and arrived at a long eddy half the width of the river, I covered the top half with nothing to show, then moved down to the bottom half, I cast across the eddy to the edge of the fast water, let the ripples disappear and started the retrieve.

It had probably only travelled about two feet when it stopped dead. Whatever had taken it moved solidly upstream, I knew it was a good fish and looked round for potential snags and problems, but

all looked clear unless it started to make long runs. It was not a great fight, the pike would go a few yards upstream, then a few yards downstream, then swirl and repeat the procedure. I used a lot of pressure and back wound as required. I was soon able to edge the fish in and over the net, he was mine! I reckoned sixteen pounds or more. Leaving the fish in the net I carried it with my camera and scales to the two anglers who had been dead baiting. Carefully weighed on the Avon scales it went round to 18lb 2ozs, a couple of quick photographs and back she went.

I set off again downstream and having squeezed under some trees found a small bay in the reeds. I cast upstream close to the reeds and got a take almost immediately. This was a more lively fish and it rushed out into the current making it feel much larger. I started to edge it back when it shot for the reeds to my left, quick winding and a lot of side strain kept it out. After some more runs I gained line and steered it over the net. Although it looked as if it would break double figures, it only went seven and a half pounds on the scales, I suppose it was because it was a long fish but not very deep.

More swims were tried but darkness was falling, the two anglers who were dead baiting had an eight and a half pounder soon after they saw my fish. I tried a Magnum Lazy Ike in spotted yellow. Being mainly yellow it shows up well and after a few casts I had a follow but the fish sheared away as the plug came into the shallows.

It really was getting dark now so I had to pack up, I met with Bob up the bank but he had caught nothing, as indeed had most of the anglers I saw fishing, but I had five pike for my efforts.

Looking back it appeared that the pike fed for about an hour from roughly 11 to 12 am, and again for an hour in the afternoon from about 2-30 to 3- 30 pm. The deadbaiters had also caught their fish during the afternoon feeding period.

Unexpectedly, I was able to get a couple of hours out at my local pit on Sunday morning 14th March, this pit is very hard and produces very few pike (or anything else come to that). Therefore, it is hardly fished, but it is local to my house, in ten minutes I can be at the water side. Using the same floating Rattle-trap lure that produced the fish on the Stour I caught a five pounder, quite an event for this water believe me!

So I had finished the season in style and become a convert to neutral buoyancy, or suspended, lures. They really do mean you can keep a lure down in the water and retrieve at, probably, half the speed of some lures and actually stop reeling in for a second or two and let the lure suspend in the water. There is no doubt about it, they produce.

The Boll Lewis floating 3.5" Rattle-trap lure I used (being American they spell it Rat-L-Trap) dives to about 2.5ft, my one was the Silver Tennessee shad finish and is available by mail order form Quality Fishing Plugs and costs £3-70 including P&P.

Who said plugs are expensive?



SCOTTISH DEBACLE

For almost as long as I have been fishing I have wanted to fish the Lochs of Scotland and last summer I decided to put my dream into action. I planned a fortnight's holiday during mid

September, incorporating six days fishing. This was not an over generous allocation of fishing time but on the other hand Liz was then six months pregnant!

Our first venue was Loch Stroan, which is situated in the Queen Elizabeth National Park in Dumfriesshire. A call into the Forestry Commission Offices at Castle Douglas to purchase tickets was rewarded by confirmation that the loch does hold a head of pike and perch and so we set out for a days spooning.

Arriving at the bank side it was apparent that Stroan is around 6 acres in extent and fringed by stunning heather covered hills, spruce plantations and an extensive reed bed. The place looked absolutely fantastic until I discovered a discarded half mackerel lying untouched in three feet of water, together with an assortment of empty beer cans strewn along the bank. In that moment, my interest in the loch departed. The day degenerated into a mechanical bait slinging exercise and no fish were caught.

I was bitterly disappointed with Stroan and Liz put up with two days of hell because someone had got there first (forgivable) and had littered the place (unforgivable). Groaning under the strain she suggested a day on Loch Ken by way of therapy, so off we went to Crossmichael to get a boat. When we arrived, the portacabin was open but the chap refused service because his partner was away and he was planning to go home shortly. Unable to make the distinction between tragedy and farce I took this disappointment rather badly. Liz calmed things down and we set off back to the car and off up the A713 to the next boat house where, surprise, all the boats were out! This left us with no choice but to fish from the bank and so off we set across the fields down to the loch side.

Ken is another beautiful water and looks like a cross between a Southern Reservoir (of the flooded valley type) and a very large, island studded river. We spent the rest of the day bouncing our spoons off the pebble littered margins but to no effect and then set off back to the car. I must admit that by now I was feeling supercharged and threw my kit into the car boot which Liz obligingly slammed shut. The resulting sound was something between a bang and a crackle as my rod exploded under the blow. In fact, the damage was so extensive that I had no need to open the rod bag to appreciate that it was the end of that particular length of carbon.

The following morning I toured the tackle shops of Castle Douglas looking for a two and three quarter pound test curve rod but salmon anglers don't use such things and I was unable to find anything that even approximated to my need. As we set off up the A75 heading towards the north, I reflected on the personal cost of angling dreams and mused whether I could afford the investment.

Liz took all this much better than I did (it wasn't her rod after all) and when we found ourselves near Lomond, she suggested a day afloat. We drove across to Ardlui where it was a lovely morning with an early autumn mist and a flat calm on the loch. We trolled Ardlui bay and the lower River Falloch, pausing only to throw a few spoons across the sunken grass alongside the river. Nothing moved all day but this was pure magic as we slowly worked our way along rock formations plunging down into the loch; under the rowan trees clinging to the granite; across the sand bars visible under the boat and around the little bays, studded with sunken willow trees.

Our spoons were big perch and trout patterned Lukkis. One was dressed with an orange and brown spinnerbait skirt and the other with a luminous muppet. They slowly fluttered down as we let out our lines behind the boat, the occasional grab from a snag confirming the trolling depth. When all was finished, neither of us wanted to stop and I felt elated. If you have to blank, this is the way to do it!

After Lomond we travelled back to Dumfriesshire for a few days fishing around Newton Stewart. Our first venue was Loch Maberry which is a large water (around 40 acres) set in a rugged, heather covered landscape. Our baits were popped up trout presented on float ledger tackle. We were using Middy sliders and with everything wound down tight, our sight bobs were just visible above the chop of the water. The day was warm with broken cloud and over head we enjoyed the spectacle of RAF low level training. We were now fishing on the 45 minute rule.

Two hours and two moves into the session the unexpected happened. Liz's float dived! She struck, seemingly at thin air, re-baited and a few minutes later there was a repeat performance. This happened several times but after that we moved on. I don't know what it was that was going for Liz's bait but my guess is either an eel or a very small pike since absolutely no contact whatsoever was made with the fish and Liz knows what she is doing.

We continued moving swims every 45 minutes and during the afternoon my float went away and the thought "All or nothing..... Now or never" flashed through my consciousness. I struck and a fish was on. I played her to the bank and was just beginning to hope when she jumped, unbelievably green and white, full length out of water. The hooks flew out and my four pound dream was gone.

After Maberry we had two further sessions, one on Loch Heron and the other on the White Loch but my heart was no longer in it. Those two days are almost lost to memory. It rained, I cast my deads, blew up a drifter on splashdown and nothing else happened.

At the end of our stay at Newton Stewart our host asked Liz what we had caught. "Nothing" she said, to which our host helpfully suggested that she buy her husband "one of those books by Barrie Rickards".

Never again I swear, never again but who knows?

(After reading this, Liz confirmed "*It is, never again!*")

Keith Baxter

A DIRTY WEEKEND?

If you judge the weekend on the first hour then everything went perfectly. My radio alarm gently woke me and as I dressed I was looking forward to the weekend with great anticipation. I grabbed a small bowl of cornflakes (after all a huge fried breakfast on the bank side was only about an hour and a half away!) and a cup of tea, then set about loading what seemed like enough gear for a month's fishing. God how I envy those people who seem to make all their gear fit into one small bag, it was just as well I had borrowed the school's minibus.

Arriving at the District Arms 10 minutes before the 6-00 am meeting time I was pleased to see Bill and Andy were already there. After a quick chat, Bill set off to collect Barry on the understanding that I would follow on with the rest as soon as they arrived. That was probably the last thing that went right for the next 12 hours (in fact the only thing that went right in the next 28 hours was the meal Dave cooked that night, but more of that later).

Six o'clock came and went, then 10 past, 20 past and half past. All this time the rain had been falling making it a miserable and rather worrying wait. Eventually Dave pulled up in his car but with an ominously empty passenger seat. Where was GB? (for the uninitiated GB stands for Paul

Johnson - figure it out for yourself!). Dave had driven out to Tolworth and despite hammering on the front door for several minutes had failed to rouse anyone. Being a policeman, Dave went round to the local nick and checked the electoral role (or was it criminal records?) and sure enough a Johnson was registered at the address. Again a severe hammering on the door failed to raise a response. Unfortunately, Paul's phone number is ex-directory and Dave didn't have his list with him. So he had driven all the way back to Ashford empty handed.

After a quick discussion the three of us drove round to Dave's where he emerged a couple of minutes later to announce that the address he had for Paul was 3 years out of date but that he had kept the same phone number. Paul swears he gave Dave the new address but it had obviously disappeared somewhere in the system. So Dave set off once more for Tolworth and Keith and I drove to Staines to meet up with Bill and Barry - who of course had gotten fed up of waiting and had driven off to see what was going on. We later found out that they had driven to the pub and then set off for Milton Keynes.

Eventually at about 7-30 Dave and Paul arrived, we transferred their gear and set off up the motorway. An uneventful journey was slightly soured when we realised that we had left the map of how to find the lake from the M1 at Dave's

(I later found it in my jackets inside pocket). Fortunately Dave remembered a couple of place names and road numbers and about 20 mins after leaving the motorway we found the lake. Unfortunately we didn't find Bill and Barry.

We pulled up in what passed for the car park (and had been used as an extension for the local tip) and set off for a walk round the lake, Dave and Andy went one way and Paul and I the other. The lake was very shallow where Paul and I looked so we headed back to the car park where we met the Head Bailiff. We chatted for a while and he pointed out the best place to fish. You might have guessed that it was just about the farthest part of the lake. The bailiff said he would be back later to collect our money and left. A few minutes later as Dave and Andy returned, Bill and Barry arrived. No, they hadn't got lost; they had stopped for a breakfast at the motorway services.

We quickly explained what had happened and then discussed what to do about getting set up. As it was about 400 yds to where we were to fish the idea of carrying all the gear did not appeal to any of us. So, as there was a track that headed towards the lake we decided to drive over. Fair enough, it was very wet but a track is a track, and it was a long walk. We had just unloaded the gear and were spreading out our tents when a land rover pulled up and an extremely angry and uncooperative bailiff told us to clear off as we had no right driving down the track and that it was "...Anglers like you that get us a bad name!!!" He was totally deaf to our pleadings and despite the fact that there was no sign to the contrary he said we should have known it was not allowed (unless, of course, you are a bailiff!).

So a somewhat bemused group of anglers gathered up their gear and drove back to the car park to discuss what to do next. The trouble was that we couldn't fish any of the other Linear lakes and we didn't know of any other suitable waters nearby. So we decided to drive all the way back to London and bivvy up at Wraysbury Nol.

By now you might have thought we had had all the bad luck but just after we crossed the M4 heading south on the M25 the bloody minibus' engine cut out. Dave pulled onto the hard shoulder and tried the ignition, surprisingly it fired first time and we set off. However, after only about 200 yds it died again. For the next 10 mins it would start but cut out the moment Dave let the clutch out. Then for no apparent reason it started and kept going. Wraysbury here we come!

Arriving at Wraysbury we had an unnerving sense of déjà-vu, there was no sign of Bill's van. Try the other car park someone suggested, but no luck. So we returned to the 1st car park. Before unloading the gear we went for a quick recce and Paul thought his luck had changed when he spotted an abandoned rod and reel on the bank. Picking it up he realised that the line was out in the water and there was a bait attached. Just as he started to wind in a bloke appeared out of the bushes and asked if he had had a run. We 'politely' expressed our concern at his leaving his rod unattended and left him to it. He had no other gear with him, no net, no forceps, nothing!

We unloaded all the gear and started to set up. I couldn't make my mind up whether to set up my tent or not. It's one thing to camp out 100 miles from home but the thought of my bed just 2 miles away was a different prospect. Round about this time the two B's arrived, it appeared that Bill had somehow managed to miss the M25 and had ended up at Brent Cross. Barry claims he was reading the Linear booklet to see if it said anything about cars, tracks and lunatic bailiffs.

So five of us set up in a row and Andy, who was not staying the night, fished on a point on the other side of the bay. In case you had forgotten it was still raining heavily and by now the wind was started to rise. I think it was now about 11 am or even later. Five hours into the weekend and our baits were still dry and more importantly our cookers were still cold! Don't you just love fishing!! However, a cup of tea and a cooked breakfast soon puts life back into perspective. The baits were in the water, we were relatively dry under our brollies and there was the sport on the radio.

Of course whilst all this was going on Big John was innocently finishing his shift at work and having loaded his gear into his van, set off to join the intrepid pikers. Like Paul, BJ is also ex-directory and so by the time Dave had managed to get the number BJ was already on the road. Several hours later he arrived at the lake somewhat confused by stories of a group of anglers being chucked off at Milton Keynes. Thankfully he saw the funny side of it and said he would probably join us for breakfast the following morning.

As the afternoon wore on I made the biggest mistake of the weekend, I decide that I would pitch my tent and brave the elements. This seemed to do no more than encourage the wind to blow harder and shortly after it got dark, about 4-30 or 5-00 pm I decide to break down my gear and stow it in the tent (that was one of the more sensible things I did that weekend). For the next couple of hours I read a book and dozed.

Amazingly, I was woken by Barry telling me that Dave had landed a pike of about 9lbs. Shortly after that the real highlight of the weekend, this was not difficult but should not detract from the quality of the meal, Dave served up plates full of steaming hot chili and rice. Four men (no, not including Bill) and a double gas cooker make for a very warm tent, but after that day it felt like heaven.

We said our goodnights and headed back to our tents to wait out the night, or rather three of us did. Bill and Barry disappeared to the pub and didn't get back till about 1-00 am.

You know that it is windy outside when the tent side starts to wrap itself over your face and the surrounding trees and fences are making horrible straining noises as they fight to keep a grip in the earth. As dawn broke I realised that fishing was out of the question. The wind had turned through 180° over night and was blowing at gale force 27 or so it seemed. As I gingerly poked my head out of the tent I was very relieved that I had taken down my brolly the night before. Bill hadn't and his inverted and broken brolly was now draped over the fence of a neighbouring garden. Waves were breaking on the bank that would have been more at home on Newquay surfing beach and a little boy out for a walk with his father disappeared horizontally into a bush.

At last everyone came to their senses and de-camped. It took 4 of us to hang on to each tent as we removed the tent pegs. Finally, after several exhausting trips to and from the car park, everything was loaded (try hanging on to camp beds and un-hooking mats in that wind). Now for the civilised bit, breakfast at Dave's. On the way I was amazed at the number of men fishing the pits and river. To think they had got out of warm beds, seen the weather and still they went out. And I thought we were daft.

Arriving at Dave's, Karen showed what a sensible woman she is and promptly got up, got dressed and went to visit relatives. After all, four dirty, smelly pikers are not ideal company on a Sunday morning. Two hours later and with gallons of hot tea and a mountainous fried breakfast inside us we went our own ways. It was only when I got home that I realised just how filthy my gear was. I don't have the biggest of flats and there seemed to be wet and muddy fishing tackle and clothing drying everywhere for the next three days.

Looking back on it all I still don't know whether to laugh or cry at it all. It was an extremely unpleasant weekend with a couple of enjoyable moments, oddly enough both involving food. One bit of good news is that not only did Linear not get our near £200 ticket money; we have since heard that they have lost the lease to another company.

One thing I have decided, after the two very cold trips of the past two years and this debacle, if we are to organise a weekend away next year I have a couple of suggestions. Firstly, let's do it in October, or even earlier, the weather will be warmer and there will be several hours more daylight and secondly let's make sure we have a full and up to date list of addresses and phone numbers.

Neil Depledge

LEARNING TO PIKE FISH

My introduction to pike fishing came on the banks of the Old West River when I was just nine years old. It was an October day during 1972 and my float fished maggot had been ignored all day. Bored by this inaction, I decided to join my father in a stroll along the river bank. We had not gone very far when we came upon the body of a freshly killed pike that had been thrown up on the bank. I had never seen a pike before and that fish made quite an impression on me. The pike was the biggest fish I had ever seen. Its beautiful markings had been preserved by the drying Fenland wind and its jaw had curled up, revealing the outsize teeth. I approved of its death and joked with my father about the improved prospects for roach fishing but he explained to me that killing pike for the sake of fish stock was nonsense. He went on to say that the pike was a worthy fish and perhaps I should try to catch one. My dad was hardly a fisherman but I think he appreciated a wonderful creature and deplored its demise.

The following week I arrived back at the water with a cheap Japanese copy of a river runt spook to which a rather good perch pattern had been applied by the manufacturer. The plug was tied direct to the nylon and there I was, a pike angler. I remember those first few casts vividly and my sense of anticipation was so heightened that I expected a slashing take at any moment but any fish that saw my lure chose to ignore it.

During the morning, three green clad gentlemen jingled along the bank with spinning rods and I watched them for some time. They seemed to be covering an awful lot of water in a very short period of time and this active form of fishing really began to appeal to me as I intensified my efforts with the plug. Finally they disappeared from sight. When they reappeared, they were carrying

around half a dozen dead pike in a net and not put off by this I asked them what bait they had been using. They showed me their bar spoons and I duly placed an order with my mum.

So there I was, a day into my piking and no fish as yet, but I was already extending my knowledge. First and foremost, I had learned that killing pike was not the way forward and converted by my dad, I really felt that those chaps had violated a cardinal sporting rule.

The following weekend I tried again, this time alternating between the plug and a silver ABU Droppen which had arrived with my mum's Thursday shopping. I had no joy and my dad suggested that a change to the River Cam for the next session.

All that week at school I went through one of those angling crises that every young fisherman dreams are a part of the sport. Put simply, should I seek reliable sport from small fish or seemingly unreliable sport from the big ones? I cracked and went for the roach!

At this point fate kindly took a hand, but the first sign of what was to follow escaped my immediate consciousness. Fishing from the boat, my sport with the roach was erratic. After a little while I caught a tiddler that I was unable to unhook quickly. I dropped it back into the water whilst I looked for my disgorged, but when I lifted the fish again all hell broke loose as a pike of around 5lbs launched itself at the roach. The pike missed completely and I quickly lowered the roach back into the swirling water left by the departing predator.

Almost as soon as the unfortunate roach broke the surface the line went tight and my rod whipped round. This was everything that I had dreamed of, slashing violence, boiling water and heart thumping action. The fish was hooked and playing when agonisingly, the line parted, not with the pistol shot crack I had come to dread but with a sinister silence. I had to read a book to find out why but all that came later.

On went the plug but to no avail. I changed to the spinner and flayed the water for some time before getting well and truly snagged on a weed bed. My dad was called to free my bait but it was no good and he left me to it. Suddenly, the bait pinged loose and just as suddenly the rod tip plunged and a pike was on.

Spurred on by my recent defeat, I played that fish to the very best of my ability, almost unbelieving that I would even see her before she broke loose. She came a little closer to me and there she was, an amber sheet of muscle flexing through the water and flaring her gills, but I still had to face the hazard of an uncertain netting exercise. In she went and a wave of sheer joy broke over me. I had caught a pike and at 16" she seemed huge. A sense of deep satisfaction now settled upon me which can only be compared to the satisfaction that is felt from the occasional larger fish that has come my way in later years. I felt that I had nothing more to achieve but lured on into the darkening afternoon to be rewarded with fish number two, an eighteen incher that took the plug and confirmed my mum's initial selection.

As we drove home, the pitch black night skies opened and heavy rain flooded across the windscreen making it almost impossible to see our way. Huge puddles formed at the side of the road and roared in the wheel arches. As the storm raged and we worked our way along the Fenland tracks the images of my pike swam before me. I can see that storm and those pike even now.

Keith Baxter

Why did I join the PAC A Personal Reflection.

Having been an active angler during my youth and early teens I, like many, forsook the gentle art in preference to Discos, Pubs, Night Clubs and worst of all, the OPPOSITE SEX!!!

Reaching the grand old age of 27 and never having been fully rid of my interest in things piscatorial, my wife suggested I should resurrect this wonderful passion (fishing - not the pubs, clubs etc). Unaware that to many this is more of a hobby and to quote Mick Brown, "...it's rather like a fix to a junkie". This is the category I found myself in (fortunately or unfortunately depending whether you are married to me or not).

What do I do? I asked myself – well, being an avid reader of books and magazines, I soon decided pike were to be my quarry. This decision led to numerous and expensive visits, to what I know now, were inadequate and ill advised tackle shops in South London, where I was living. Vast quantities of hard earned cash was handed over and so armed, I set out for my prey.

Where is all this leading to? Well, I will continue. After roughly eight months of what I thought was finding my feet and discovering that what I knew was very limited, I spotted an advert giving a potted resumé for the PAC. As mentioned earlier, living in South London, there was hardly a "hard core" of pike anglers and so, found myself alone and very much in ignorance.

To resume this rambling tale, I sent off my subscription and duly received my first copy of *Pikelines*. As you can imagine, I found the whole magazine a real eye opener and thought that this was what I needed to enlighten myself.

As most of you are aware it lists, in most copies, all the active regions and I found that Walton-on-Thames - some thirty miles from home - was the nearest.

After a letter to the RO, Dave, I received a phone call welcoming me to the PAC and inviting me to attend monthly meetings, which I eagerly did.

This was some two or three years ago and on reflection I ask myself one or two questions. Firstly, what did I think the PAC would give me and secondly, were these expectations fulfilled? In answer to the first question – I expected to be led (as a novice) by the hand, to be entertained and for most of the other members to be just like me.

The answer to the second is again a bit rambling but please bear with me!! Initially the PAC did not live up to my expectations, this was short lived and soon changed.

Why? I will explain, I would guess and this is only a guess, about 90% of members joined, expecting the same as I did. Some were happy with what they discovered, however, many and myself included, were a bit disillusioned. My theory and it is a theory and not a criticism, is as follows.

Mother Nature, bless her cotton socks, bestowed on us a vast array of characteristics. Some of us are confident and loud (those who know me would put me in the loud category), some of us are quiet and retiring, others are not necessarily shy but are not public speakers. Many people are just plain shy and the worst category of all is what I call the "Mercenary". This guy has done it all but wants to know everything about who caught what and where. He milks his fellow members of all their knowledge.

Put all these people together in a room and I guess you have the average PAC meeting. With this group of people the following scenario unfolds: The loud, confident (not always the best anglers) "find" each other fairly quickly and spend a lot of time together. The Mercenary type rapidly latch on to them for all they can glean, leaving the retiring and shy group to their own devices.

Many of the above listed and I am sure you can find a niche for yourself somewhere, are quite happy with what goes on. However, some are disappointed but do not know what to do. They mumble in the bar afterwards about "What was that all about?" and "I missed a good movie on Sky to come here and what for?".

Who gets the blame? The poor old RO - unpaid, possibly overworked and expecting to get something out of the meeting as well. He may be at fault in some areas but not many. We, the membership are at fault.

I mentioned earlier, that after a short period of time, my idea of what the PAC gave me changed to a more positive view.

This was triggered off after only one or two meetings, when a long standing and to me, valued member of the club, asked if I would like a trip out with him and a couple of others. The next two seasons saw me fish waters I never would have. My confidence in what I had to say and also in what I did was boosted and lastly, what I hope will be a long lasting friendship followed (I will not name him to save embarrassment, but he knows who he is - thank-you).

This, in hindsight, has led me to rethink my earlier questions and their relevance. I am now pleased to say that I have a new opinion on my membership of my local region, it is in equation form and is as follows

What I put in + what others put in = What we get out

Now, that was simple enough, well simple enough for my brain, so what then is the million dollar answer to the million dollar question? Well, I think that there isn't one. However, what we could do is think of a perfect world scenario and try our best to emulate it. This could be in many forms and I will list a few:

1. The confident and experienced anglers could break ranks and take new, inexperienced anglers under their wing (much the same as happened to me).
2. At fish-ins, break up those cliques and share the camaraderie with the new guys/girls.
3. Do not laugh at the simple question or statement made by someone not as experienced as yourself. In fact, encourage questions as they lead to discussion and knowledge, maybe we could all learn something.
4. If someone does not have "designer" tackle, he/she may be reluctant to attend a fish-in. Encourage and reassure them that they will not be thought of as "Noddies".
5. Break ranks, speak to everyone, not just your couple of buddies. This goes for every category, the loud ones and the quiet ones.
6. You quiet ones out there, speak up, sometimes you will be surprised at the response.

7. Do not blame your RO, at least he has the balls to stand there every month. He is just like you and me, support him. His title is Regional Officer, not GOD!
8. Have fun and enjoy yourselves (very important).

Anyway I am sure you could add to this list and I hope you do. Those of you who know me are probably saying that I can write a good tale, but can I put my money where my mouth is? Maybe yes, maybe no, but at least I have thought about it, a good step in the right direction. Have you??

As mentioned earlier, this is meant as a not a critical piece but an observation, in fact it seems that Region 15 is going through a period of rejuvenation right now. I have gained a lot of good friends and times from my association with them and I hope for many, many more.

Good luck for '94

Robbie Woodford

Fish-Ins

Sunday 23rd January - Theale Lagoon

A large (130+ acres) gravel pit near Reading. We will meet at the District Arms at 6-00am and travel down in convoy. Days tickets last year were only about £3-00 for two rods.

Sunday 6th February - Ardingly Reservoir

An even larger reservoir in Sussex. Again we will meet at the District Arms at 6-00am. Day tickets are about £8-00 for two rods, although you can fish up to 4 rods (you will need 2 National rod licences). They are very hot on "correct" tackle. You must have a large landing net (36" arms min.), an unhooking mat, forceps etc and be a competent angler. If this causes any problems speak to one of us in advance.

Sunday 20th February - Throop Fishery, River Stour

Very famous stretch of this Dorset river. It's a near 100 mile journey but could be well worth it. Details of the meet times and venue will be arranged at the Feb. meeting. If you cannot attend but wish to go, telephone Dave or Neil after the meeting on the 7th.

Sunday 6th March - 2nd Annual Charity Pike match

Venue still to be settled. Last year most of us acted as stewards and did not Fish. A worthy cause and an extremely enjoyable day for both competitors and Region members. Details will be published as soon as possible.

