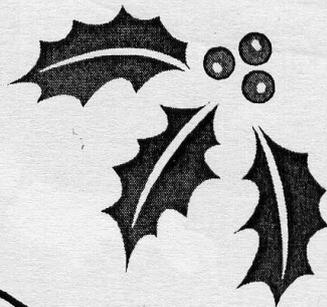
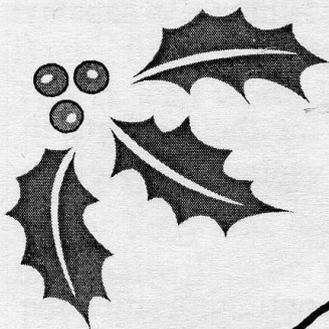


Dropback

Issue 17 - December 1999

Millenium Edition



Joint RO
Dave Fish

Joint RO
Neil Depledge

RO's Lines

Well, here we go with another pike season. At least its the start of another season for the traditionalists. Although I have fished for (and caught) a few pike during the summer months, it was very much an after thought rather than a dedicated outing. But now as the weather turns colder and the days start to shorten it is time to get out the pike gear.

So where will you be fishing this winter? There are new opportunities for all of us. Through Steve and Dave's efforts, Walton PAC members have the opportunity to fish the Fen-is Meadow trout fishery. Perhaps by the time you read this there will be some stories to tell. Thanks must also go to Darren and Tony Stone for their efforts in putting together a varied and interesting list of venues for Region Fish-Ins.

At that point I had stopped writing and am now continuing after the debacles of the Grand Union and Wilstone Reservoir fish-ins. Only Tony and I turned up for the former and only Darren and Tony for the latter. So I have to ask all of you, 'Why if you didn't rate these venues, did none of you open your mouths and say something?' Obviously you don't have to attend these trips but if you are not interested in Fish-ins let us know and we won't waste any more time arranging them.

We are now well into the autumn series of meetings and have had two superb speakers in the shape of Barrie Rickards and Dennis Moules.

Unfortunately Bill Palmer will not be at the December meeting due to personal circumstances but hopefully he will be able to visit us sometime in the New Year. I also know that one of our own members is planning a talk and slide show for the New Year. It is important that we build upon this purple patch of presentations, so if you know of someone who would/could give an interesting talk let Dave or I know and we will try to book them.

Neil



Doing the Derg, Part I

Some people in the region may remember a small (but perfectly formed) friend that used to attend meetings and functions with Brian and I some ten or so years back. His name was Tony 'Stumpy' Smith and he was a major part of 'Fishing with the Family', as we call our piking adventures (trust me - you don't have time to watch the video). He was also co-author of 'Bank side cooking with Thommo and Smiffy' which features in an edition of 'Drop Back' from way back when. This is well worth looking up as it has the recipe for Uncle Ben's three-minute rice! Sad to say Tony was diagnosed as terminally ill in the summer of 1997 and was only given nine months to live. In typical style he made it to February 1999 and in the time in between we played lots of cricket, toyed with sports cars, drunk a lot but more importantly fished whenever he was up to it. This included a damp but hilarious week long boat trip to the Broads in which the nature reserve hosted one of the finest Guy Fawkes displays in the country that night of the 5th. November 1997. It also included a very special trip to Lough Derg in Ireland.



Throughout November and December Tony had chemotherapy and was a bit low when 1998 arrived. A group of us had tried to give him targets to aim for but at the time we had no plans on the go. One very drunken night Tony mentioned that a friend, Chas, had said that if we went on the Broads again he'd like to come with us. I had private reservations about being stuck out on the waterways if Tony was taken bad so I suggested we should think of hiring a cottage somewhere new – what about Ireland or Scotland. Smiffy immediately found an ad in one of his magazines and I phoned there and then. To take a drunken caller at 10.30 at night seriously shows what a laid back character our now friend John Finn is. John only had one cottage in use and that was booked but he told us he was decorating a second and that would be ready shortly. He advised leaving it until May but I explained our position and he worked (a word not high on his vocabulary) his socks off to have it ready for February. Our trip to Lough Derg, the largest Lough on the Shannon, was definitely on. The intrepid party was made up of myself (Dave Thomas alias Thommo), Tony Smith (Stumpy/Smiffy), Simon Coxwell (Coxie), Dave Hodges (Aussie Dave) and Charles D. Whiteoak Esq (Chas).

We arrived with a gale blowing and although Hodges and I were adamant to fish the first day we had to be content with slinging the Beno eel out in the harbour, all to no avail. Looking out at the Lough you would have thought you were at the sea front with six to eight feet waves crashing down. There were two trophies up for grabs, 'The Beno Eel Challenge Trophy' (for the largest pike caught on a Beno Eel) and 'Doing the Derg' (for the total weight of pike caught in the week), but it looked like we'd be lucky to fish at all unless the forecast for the week was wrong.

We settled in to the cottage. With the peat fire and a glass of Jamesons in your hand it didn't matter that there was a gale blowing, it was all rather snug and so far away from the rat race you wanted to stay forever. The next day was the same and we had to be content with fishing the river. This at least gave us the chance to show off our boating skills to John and by the end of the morning he knew he was dealing with a load of idiots, with Hodges being at the top of the pile. He and I were sharing the smaller boat and when we announced we were going to do some trolling John asked who would be rowing. The grin that spread across his face when Hodges picked up the oars said it all. As Aussie was to say many times that week 'he thinks I'm stupid'. No fish caught by the way. John then announces that we are going to cross the Lough to fish the sheltered side (it's miles across!). The mad Irishman sets off with Coxie and Smiffy and Hodges and I have no choice but to follow. We went straight at the waves (the only safe way) and within seconds we are so wet from spray that I'm waiting for my life jacket to inflate itself. I'm on the engine and remember thinking how I wished Brian was there to see Aussie Dave's face. He was clinging to the middle seat, grimacing as every other second we were flung high in the air, only to come crashing straight down again and receive another soaking. I should have been as worried as he was but he looked so funny that I got the giggles and had to shake myself out of it to set off in pursuit of our host and friends. The speed we had to troll at would have taken a very fit pike to keep up with, let alone snatch our magnificent selection of lures (yes, the total staff of Harris lures had a holiday in the Caribbean on the proceeds from us). Even though the weather was hostile the enormity of the Lough and the scenery was breathtaking.

We commiserated with ourselves at the 'Whiskey Still' that night and drank the most superb cider we have ever tasted. It was so good we had to taste a lot. The result was that early next morning John Finn was knocking on the door and getting us up to report a short break in the weather. The plan was to immediately move the boats to another part of the Lough where we would be sheltered and reasonably safe from the weather that was forecast. Coxie has gone to pick Chas up from the airport so Stumpy and I were taking one boat, John would lead in the other and Aussie Dave was to take the car round to the new mooring. John had drawn a map. He told Dave that it would take us 45 minutes in the boats so he had better leave in the car straight away. It took Dave 10 minutes – 'he thinks I'm stupid!'. The frightening thing about this trip was the huge rocks just visible below

the surface but it was worth it as we were now in a sheltered part of the Lough and should be able to fish for most of the remaining week. John took us out and showed us some likely spots, always with the rider 'its better in the Spring'. One area he showed us was called 'the Peat Lough'. Just imagine an area of about eight acres, twenty feet deep and enclosed by reed beds, totally sheltered from even the worst of winds. It was love at first sight. It was here the fish would come to spawn in the Spring but it had to hold pike all year round. Surrounded by huge green, green hills that even looked as if they glowed in the rain and with an ivy clad ruin looking down on from years ago. What a place to sit and unwind. Who cares that there were no fish that day? At the board meeting that evening Hodges and I decided to get up early and be on the Lough at first light. Smiffy, Coxie and Chas were to have a lie in.

A misty cold morning, still dark, Dave and I steer the boat into a bay and start to troll twenty yards from the shore. Dave's using a lure and I'm using a dead roach under a fox trolling float (very good). Dave gets snagged, I stop the boat and we start to row back over the snag. My float, no longer being towed, disappears. Panic! We're drifting into the reeds and rocks, Dave's lure is snagged and I've got a fish on that's already run fifty yards from left to right. I've got to keep it out and away from the reeds and Dave's anchored line but we've also got to stop the boat from being blown on to the rocks. Fortunately, we're the only two people stupid enough to be out at that time in the morning and no one can witness the mad behaviour that is taking place in the bay. Dave frees his lure and rows us away from the rocks just as the fish is tiring after putting up a tremendous fight. It comes to the net, Dave lifts it.....and the landing net handle snaps. Phew! The net catches on the rowlock and the fish is still in it. My first Irish pike is boated. Seven and a half pounds, how can it have fought like a good double? Smiles and photos all round and back for breakfast. Guess what – the others don't believe us.



One big shock on the way back. We pass within feet of a huge rock, the size of an iceberg, six inches below the surface, thoughtfully marked with a rusty metal rod, which is visible from all of ten feet (in good light). When we asked John why it was not marked better he said if it was more boats would come round into that bay and that's not to be encouraged. We return in the afternoon. Dave, Smiffy and I are in the large boat and poor old Chas is with Coxie who is in a very philosophical mood (meaning of life, smacking children etc). No takes so we decide to try a small hidden Lough that a gamekeeper had mentioned. Coxie and Chas decide to go back round to the Peat Lough. As soon as they are out of our sight their engine cuts. Warning to all users of boats, check your fuel at least every other day! Better still, Coxie, every time you go out! Poor old Chas has to row a few miles. Seriously, lucky it happened on a calmer day. We go in search of the stream that will lead us to the Small Lough. By the time we've found and negotiated or way up it we have very little time to fish but it's got to be worth returning to. Down the small stream and out in to the main Lough. Full speed round the bay and past the Peat Lough, head straight for the mooring. This has all taken forty minutes and its got quite dark. The shoreline is even darker. Look for a landmark. Was that street lamp near the mooring? Is that Dave's car in the gloom? Luckily yes. Now look out for the rocks each side of the channel. We're back! What bloody idiots! Worse than Coxie? Probably, yes.

Day five, Tuesday. We fish the Peat Lough to no avail whilst Hodges stays at the moorings and tries his luck for coarse fish. Good news, Hodges has caught some perch! Bad news, they're all over

half a pound. We sack them up at the mooring for use in the afternoon (when they've died). These dead perch need two floats to stop them swimming to the bottom and even then they're still capable of holding them down for five seconds every now and then. It's really quite exciting but the expectancy comes to nothing. Back to the cottage along the windy country lanes. We're joined in the road by a hapless hare that tastes lovely cooked in red wine with onions.

Day six. Bad weather, lots of waves. We know the Peat Lough is sheltered but we've got to cross a lot of water to get to it. Smiffy and I decide to try, Aussie is going to stay and fish for anything but pike (and draw pictures – he's gone all arty). I tell Smiffy to shout if he thinks I'm pushing our luck and head out into the Lough. We have to do two sides of a triangle, straight at the waves and then back at an angle to avoid capsizing but we make it to the Peat Lough, moor up in the reeds and fish out into deep water. The two Spiny Normans are working well but they still have the annoying habit of constantly taking the floats under for five seconds. This is the last day we're to fish together as three of us leave tomorrow; Stumpy and Coxie are staying one day more. I desperately want Tony to catch but sods law comes into play and it's my float that goes under. This time it stays down. Has Norman snagged or is he being eaten? Tighten up, feel the tug, **STRIKE**. Line peels off and the fish heads for the middle of the Lough. Great fight from a nine-pound fish! Make no mistake; Lough pike fight like hell.



That was the last time I pike fished with Tony. John Finn took them out the next day and didn't come off the Lough until Tony had caught (a couple of jacks but Irish pike none the less). We did do a few carp trips in the summer of 1998 but that trip to Ireland was very special. When Tony died we vowed we'd go back and this we did in April. This trip produced lots of fish and I intend covering it in a future Drop Back but for now I hope you haven't minded me reminiscing over that first and memorable trip to the Emerald Isle.



Fish of the Year

Pictured below is Chris Sims with his magnificent pike weighing in at 31lbs 04ozs. It was caught from the same Fenland Drain that barely a month earlier produced Chris' previous PB, a fish of 28lbs.



Cold Casting

We arrived at Lowestoft early evening on a normal mid January Friday to shore fish the north beach for the weekend, knocking on the back door of the tackle shop to pick up our order - lug, rag, and some squid as we always did, the shop owner said.

“You’re wasting your time. There’s a strong north-east wind on the way in. Your best bet is to turn left at the Chine, walk half a mile to the pillbox, set up your brazier on the leeward side and go to kip in your sleeping bags”. We thanked him, then set off to park the van at the foot of the Chine and from there to the pillbox.

On arriving we set up the brazier and boiled a kettle of water to make the tea. By this time it was dark and, as the man, said, a biting north-east wind was starting to pick up. At this point I noticed the ice forming along the shore side, the first time that I had ever seen the sea freeze and it was slowly getting worse.

We set up a rod each, baited and cast out. After that we each took one-hour turns to watch for any action, while the rest tried to keep warm. One real piece of luck was that the pillbox was full of driftwood, so the brazier was kept well alight. In next to no time it was my turn to keep watch, so I donned my heavy weather gear and stepped out. The strong ice cold wind now snow laden, was hitting the beach at an angle. The wet line was rigid with ice, glistening in the pale moonlight. After what seemed like a month my stint was over and I staggered back to the lee of the pillbox.

My parka was so rigid that I had to wait while it defrosted so that it could be taken off, The next item was food, so the double cooker was set up for a brace of bacon and onion baps and a steaming mug

of tea each. The aroma and the taste have to be experienced to be believed. Try it in that situation sometime, you won't regret it.

Eventually the night gave way to dawn and breakfast. Another memorable event but the rods never moved probably because they were frozen stiff and we had a right old job taking them down. At eight, the tackle dealer showed up with tea in a large flask, a most welcoming site. After re-drift-wooding the pillbox, we were on the road by ten, looking forwards to hours of dodgy driving back to London.

Cec White



A short session on the Thames

I thought that I would share with you a pike session that I had recently on the River Thames at Chertsey. It was a Wednesday; the sun was shining and the wind blowing gently from the south-west, making it a very mild day.

I arrived at about 11-30am and promptly set up two rods. I baited one with a legered sardine and the other I freelined with an eel section. I had a take almost immediately on the sardine which resulted in a pike of about 4lbs.

An hour later and the sardine was away again. This time hard fighting pike of 10lbs 03ozs was landed. It is always nice to catch a Thames double.

I decided to change the eel section to a popped-up sardine. Nothing happened for the next few hours. I brought in the popped-up sardine and removed the balsa wood insert. The sardine was now resting on the bottom and within minutes I had a take upon this bait. A further couple of minutes resulted in a hard fighting pike of 7lbs 14ozs lying in the net.

I always check the swim I am fishing for depth and features and on this occasion it worked well. I caught the first two fish in the deepest part of the swim, about 12 feet, and the last fish of the day at dusk in the shallowest part of the swim at 9 feet.

A very pleasant autumn afternoon's fishing.

Tony Horwell



Compare and Contrast

The weekend of the 6th and 7th of November provided the most startling contrast of good and bad pike fishing I have ever seen. It was very much a case of the old North/South divide.

Here in the South we experienced one disappointing and one truly awful days fishing at Thorpe Park. On the Saturday the Region turned up for its second boat and bank day, and, for the second time running the weather Gods decided to see how hard they could blow. Not only was it very windy, when we drove into the park we discovered that a temporary bridge had been built over the main connecting channel and that it was impossible for boats to move between back and front lakes

(except, of course, for Malcolm who invented new game called 'Boat Limbo'). This was not a problem for several boats as they were small and light enough to be launched from the bank. But two boats were too big for this and their dejected owners decided to try their luck elsewhere. About 7 boats took to the water and about 6 anglers fished from the bank. Pete Holford probably caught more weight of pike than all of the rest of us put together when he banked a pair of double figure fish, the largest going over 17lbs.

But if we thought we'd had a bad day it was nothing compared to the Sunday. Following a conversation earlier in the year I had managed to arrange for the Harris Angling sponsored PAC Lure Championship to return to Thorpe Park after an absence of two years. It is a credit to the stature of the water that a record 91 anglers turned up for the event, including a visiting team of South African lure anglers. They were in the UK for a return set of fixtures against a LAS team that visited South Africa last year. The weather was clear and bright and the strong winds of yesterday had died down to a gentle breeze. If not exactly perfect, the conditions were far more promising to the previous day. Sadly, looks can be deceiving. At the end of 5 hours of casting every imaginable type of lure there had been a grand total of 12 pike caught. First prize went to one of the South African team who managed two fish for a total weight of barely 8 lbs.

Will 91 turn up next year? Who knows, anglers are nothing if not a very optimistic bunch. Now compare that with the results of the exclusive PAC event on the only lake in Scotland - Lake Mentieth. The following is a report I found on the Internet:

40 anglers from all over the country assembled for the 9 am kick-off. Weather was good initially but a strong wind blew up later. Fishing was with lures and deadbaits only. All fish under seven pounds were transferred to another water, all other fish were returned.

13 twenties and two thirties came out on the day. PAC committee member Bill Little had only one fish, a 30-04 on a lure! Best catch was to Dave Hill who had fish of 23, 25-08 and 32-08 on Dave Lumb 'Dolphin' jerkbaits. Each fish broke his previous personal best! Best catch to a junior was to young Danny Merrion who had a 28-12! Danny is no stranger to big fish on PAC events having had big pike from Llandegffedd in the past. I also heard that Mark Tyrantia (RO for the Hitchin Region) caught three twenties and a further double.

It just goes to show that as a well known TV angler is frequently heard to say, "There are 3 keys points when it comes to catching fish, "Location, Location and Location." He just might have a point.

To all Walton-on-Thames PAC members
Have a very happy Christmas and New Year
And may all your runs be screamers!!!!!!