

UK Carp Fishing Secrets



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Welcome to UK Carp Fishing Secrets

As somebody involved in fishing websites since early 1999, I've met a lot of anglers across the UK, as well as a few from foreign shores. Our love of angling gives us a common bond and the willingness to share our knowledge is what has led to generation after generation of new anglers being welcomed into the fold.

The three contributors to UK Carp Fishing Secrets are three of the most generous men you'll find on the internet. By that, I don't mean they'll send you money and tackle (before you ask!), but that they enjoy sharing the knowledge and skills that they have collectively learnt over many, many years of fishing. They are also very good carp anglers, each slightly different in their ways, but equally as effective and respectful of every angler's choice to approach carp fishing in a slightly different way



Jim Gibbinson is a well known published carp fishing author. He has written a number of fishing books, as well as contributing to numerous magazines, and there aren't many anglers in the UK who haven't read something by him. One aspect of Jim's fishing that sets him apart from many anglers is that he relishes the opportunity to fish difficult waters – ones that appear featureless to the untrained eye. His results speak for themselves!



Julian Grattidge has been a carp angler for as long as he can remember. He specialises in specialising! Throughout his angling years, he's done just about any kind of carp fishing available and adapts his approach accordingly. For example, when he was young, free and single, he'd do longer sessions and study carp behaviour and baiting techniques that would bring the best long-term results. Having just become a father for the first time, he's concentrating on two other aspects of carp fishing, with great results – stalking (including surface fishing) and short session angling.



Garth 'Gaffer' Barnard has always been a short session angler, never fishing more than one night on a water. Because of this, he has honed his skills and tackle to perfection. He's the kind of irritating guy who arrives last, packs up first and yet still catches the best fish.....trust me, I've seen him do it! Gaffer has an excellent way of conveying his skills to other anglers and enjoys seeing their successes.

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So, why carp?

I'm not going to pretend that I think that carp possess God-like qualities and should be placed upon a pedestal above all other fish, but I can see why some anglers do get gripped by the carping 'drug' and see them as such!

There are a number of reasons why carp are so sought after, but I reckon the three main factors are;

1. They tend to be the largest fish in the lake or river. Apart from catfish, there isn't a fish in UK waters that grows so large.
2. Once hooked, carp are fighters, usually battling every inch of the way to the landing net (and often on the unhooking mat, too!).
3. Carp are wily. They learn and become very elusive as they grow. The old adage of "Once bitten, twice shy" could almost have been written about carp! Pitting your wits against such a worthy opponent is what it's all about.

If I'm honest, I'll also say that the social side of carp fishing appeals to many of us. Across Europe, many lakes will have a variety of green tents (known as 'bivvies') pitched around them and inhabited by carp anglers. Many great friendships are formed, ideas and banter swapped, and it's even quite common for carp anglers to sit around a stove together and chip in when it comes to cooking a hearty breakfast or evening meal!

All in all, carp angling is about fun. Hopefully, UK Carp Fishing Secrets will lead you on the path to enjoying what many of us enjoy week in, week out.

We hope that you enjoy this collection of their work and are confident that the advice you receive here will help you to put more fish on the bank. When you get those results, remember to send a photo and details to us at gallery@carpfishingsecrets.co.uk for inclusion on our site!



Tight lines,

Elton Murphy
Publisher

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Introduction To Carp Fishing

Catching Carp

By Julian Grattidge

How to catch carp? It's one of the most common questions asked by beginners. Sometimes the basic principles can get lost under the constant bombardment of new methods, baits and approaches, so how do you go about the business of catching big carp?

First things first, it's important to manage expectations. Catching big carp is not easy, but for many, that's precisely the challenge. Carp can be quite clever creatures and it's not always easy to outwit them. I've been fishing for nearly thirty years and like many other specimen anglers out there, I have many blank sessions in amongst those where I catch. As a beginner, it's important to ease yourself into the sport gently, and as my late father used to say "It's no good trying to catch big ones 'till you know how to catch little ones". He was right!



Success breeds success: Martin Johnson with a small mirror carp from Blackwood Pool

The first thing you need to do is practice the art of; locating, hooking and playing fish. It's quite often the case that smaller carp in well stocked waters can be easier to catch than big old specimens. As such, waters aimed at the match or pleasure angler are good venues to start learning your craft. If when you arrive at such a venue you are faced with the option of a specimen lake in addition to match or coarse lakes; don't be tempted. Not yet anyway! What you need from the start is quantity not quality. Your main aim is to learn how to get bites and convert them into fish on the bank. Outwitting specimens takes time and experience, which will only come after you have learnt more about your intended quarry.

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Tackle is important, but don't be fooled into thinking that you need to have special rods, pods, alarms, swingers, bivvies, and accessories right from the start. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's important to bear in mind that carp fishing has become a massive industry for shops and manufacturers, all of whom pay marketing specialists large amounts of money to come up with adverts designed to convince the reader that they must have a certain item of tackle in order to catch. Don't be pulled in. To start off with, all you need is a cheap carp rod of around 2lb test curve (a good feeder or stiff match rod will suffice to get started). Any cheap coarse reel will be fine to get started, just so long as it has a drag function. The only other big thing you need is an unhooking mat. Add to that some basics like forceps, scissors, line and you are ready.

Then it's a case of catching. Like many seasoned anglers I started off knowing nothing and got better and wiser with time. The result is that I've learnt simple is often best. Why bother with a complicated set-up when a simple one will do just as well? Yes it's convenient to have pods, alarms and swingers, but these are merely accessories. You can catch just as well using bank sticks and bobbins. And in any case, like skinning cats; there's more than one way to catch a carp! If you have progressed through catching other coarse species on float and feeder, there's not really much change, just beefed up gear and bait, and if carping is your first foray into angling, don't be fooled into thinking that you can only catch carp by ledgering - float fishing can be just as productive and in many cases, more fun!

In terms of set-up, if ledgering, try a simple braid hair rig of about 9-inches. Tie it with a hair and loop for the bait-stop at one end, and a swivel on the other with a Size 8 hook. As for bait, again, don't think boilies are the only bait for carp. In the early stages when targeting the smaller fish, don't overlook sweetcorn and luncheon meat. Both are extremely productive baits. Keep the hook bait small and don't put in too much free bait. Hopefully the small fish should follow on, and believe me, when starting out, size is not important. Keep at it and get used to catching fish in the 2-5lb range. You will soon learn that carp can put up quite a fight so it's important to master the art of playing fish, knowing when to let them have a bit of line or when to offer resistance to their lunges is what it's all about.

When not at the pool try to read and re-read all you can about carp fishing. Don't get preoccupied with bait; for now you need to learn about techniques, strategy and watercraft. Read any articles you can on such subjects, there is a wealth of good information on the web so read as much as you can. Hopefully, in time, catching the smaller fish will become easier as you learn more about locating carp, baiting up and playing fish. There will come a point where you are able to turn up and catch these smaller carp pretty consistently, and only then is it time to start cutting your teeth on the next rung of the ladder.



The next rung: Find a productive doubles water, Paul Smith with a 12lb mirror carp from Bolesworth Castle; one of the best doubles waters in England's North West

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Initially, the step up to a doubles-water can be a little daunting. However, the basic rigs and techniques used on your runs water should still work; just remember to keep them simple. The big difference is the fight; playing a good double figure fish is an altogether different prospect from a five pounder! At this level it helps to have proper carp rods but they don't have to be anything special. I would perhaps still favour natural baits for a couple of reasons. Firstly, everybody and their dog will no doubt be using boilies. Secondly, natural baits cost a fraction of the price of boilies, and thirdly, being slightly different from others will often pay dividends. If you are going to use boilies, my only advice is to use good ones. Some of the crap I see on the shelves makes me wonder how some boilies catch at all! It's a case of buyer beware; a cheap boilie is not necessarily a good boilie. If you're going to use boilies, spend a little money, in my experience it's worth it in the long run, but that said, most of my fishing is done with naturals, which when prepared and presented in the right way score just as well at a fraction of the price. Food for thought, if you'll excuse the pun.

Your approach to doubles waters should be the same as the runs waters; you're looking to gain experience. The more fish you catch, the more you will learn, and so it goes. On the side, keep reading all you can. When birthdays come around and new equipment is top of your list, don't overlook books. There are some fantastic books on carp fishing written by the best anglers the sport has ever seen, past and present. Books are able to give a deeper insight to strategy over magazines and much that I have learnt over the years has come through the books I have read. A good starting point would be to grab a copy of Strategic Carp Fishing; by Rob Hughes & Simon Crow, I think this book gives the beginner or intermediate carp angler a great understanding of the mindset required to go about catching big carp consistently.

Once you've mastered the doubles waters, the world, as Shakespeare once put it, is your oyster. Many stay with doubles waters preferring the frequent action verses fight, and others carry on the search, looking for waters that hold bigger and better specimens. A rough rule of thumb would be that the bigger and wiser the fish get, the harder they are to catch, but of course for some, the allure of big fish is too great and the reward of catching one big fish far outweighs the rewards of catching greater numbers of smaller fish.



The sky's the limit: Once you've cut your teeth and mastered the art of playing fish, where you go and what you target is up to you!

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Whichever path you choose, it's important to enjoy it. It's easy to get caught up in the numbers game and I've seen many come and go who have ended up tearing their hair out in frustration when the runs don't come. So don't rush things. I'm always on the look out for big fish, but I'm just as happy picking off smaller examples when the opportunity presents itself. After all, there's nothing quite like seeing a carp pick up your hook bait, no matter what size it is!



What Makes A Successful Carp Angler?

By Julian Grattidge

This article is available in the full version of Carp Fishing Secrets from www.CarpFishingSecrets.com

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Watercraft

Watercraft, The Carp And Its Habitat

By Julian Grattidge

You've read about it, you've heard people talk about, but what does it really mean? And more importantly... how can you get some? For me, watercraft means the skill in being able to read a water, or to be more precise, being able to read the fish within a water. As mentioned in the last piece, it's no good having all the right tackle and bait if you then set up in a swim completely devoid of fish - You need to be able to narrow down all the options to give yourself the best possible chance of catching during your session.

As explained in the introduction, successful carp angling is about getting lots of little things right and watercraft is no different. It's about taking lots of little bits of information from every session you have fished, and then pulling them back out and threading them together to form a strategy when you're next out on the bank. The difficult part is in knowing where to find the information and then deciding how best to use it. Again, there's no one single thing that can improve your watercraft skills, rather a mix of information gleaned from many sources. So in this piece, I'll try to explain what watercraft is all about and explain some of the principles involved that will help you get the most out of each session.

I think it was in George Sharman's 'Carp and the Carp Angler' where he said that it was better to have a bad plan than to have no plan at all. Possibly meaning that if you had a plan, even a bad one, then at least you were forming an opinion, and if that plan failed, then technically all you needed to do was identify where the failure occurred, refine it, and try again. In essence, that's what watercraft is all about. It's about taking all the things you have learnt about carp, the water you are fishing, climatic conditions and any other affecting factors, then trying to bring it all together into one salient mass for the session that lies ahead.



Watercraft; what's it all about... and how can you get some!?

It's no easy process and it's not a skill which will come overnight but if you start applying the logic now, you will quickly feel the benefit and the long road ahead won't seem quite so daunting. Watercraft is

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something you never stop learning - you add more to it with each session you fish, and the longer you have been fishing the more experiences you are able to draw upon.

There are many different aspects to watercraft. First you need knowledge of the quarry itself; its habits, characteristics and life-cycle. You also need to learn how everyday changes in climatic conditions and angler pressure can affect carp behaviour. Once you understand the quarry, you then need to understand it in relation to its habitat. This is perhaps the single most important aspect of watercraft - knowing where to find the fish is what it's all about!

So where do we start? Well, first we need to understand a little more about the carp itself. It sounds daft, but if you want to catch big carp and catch them consistently, then you need to think like the fish you are trying to catch! Many people perceive a carp to be a swimming dustbin that only has to see a pile of bait and it's straight on it. Whereas, in reality, we have to remember that in fish terms, the carp is quite an intelligent creature with quite a well developed brain; anybody who has watched a wary carp feeding at close range will know just what I'm talking about!

Carp are capable of a number of thought patterns. In the main, these patterns appear to be governed by a sort of short and long term memory. The fish relies predominately on the long term memory part of the brain for going about its day to day business. Basically, the way I've come to see this is that a carp takes in lots of short term memories, which, after conditioning (the same thing happening time and time again) become long term memories. The question is; how can we use this to our advantage? Well, have you ever wondered why pre-baiting works? It's exactly the same thing - by supplying a constant source of free food with no danger aspect (i.e. no hook bait) the carp will pass short term memories back to the brain on each sitting saying that all is ok within the area, until eventually it becomes conditioned and they then begin to see it as a constant source of risk free food.

My own view however, is that carp will always be able to attach a degree of risk to feeding in any area, but by conditioning we are able to lower its guard. Long term conditioning on a regularly fished water will tell the carp that within the lake itself, there is always a risk that it is being angled for, but by providing this constant source of free food it thinks this particular area, for now, is safe. Once you begin to fish the area the carp will begin to wise up and after a time the spot may well dry up as the short term memory feeds into the long term memory telling the carp that, after being caught there or being around other spooky fish that have been caught there, that this area is now not safe to feed in, and so the cycle goes.



Get to know your quarry; its lifestyle and its environment

What else do we need to know about the carp? Well, in terms of feeding we need to understand that its primary feeding habits are controlled by the daily cycle of life; the onset of day & night, and the

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surrounding climate. I don't want to get too much into the feeding aspect here as we'll cover this in the bait chapter. However, in terms of watercraft you need to understand that the primary need of the carp is food in order that it can maintain itself. This does not mean it will eat whatever is placed in front of it (unless competition for that food dictates it) as one of its other inherent characteristics is for its own security.

What I'm getting at here is that it's down to the carp when and where it wants to feed - not you. You can do all you like to add attractors and such like to your bait, but if the fish does not want to eat, it won't. That said, I've found carp to be very inquisitive by nature; any seasoned stalking angler will tell you exactly the same thing. I would say over 90% of my catches when stalking are due to the inquisitive demeanour of the carp when it comes across the bait rather than the fact that it's hungry and is looking for something to eat.

Apply a shed-load of bait and often their guard will go straight up. However, a single wiggling lob worm dropped right in front of its nose is an entirely different matter; many carp seem unable to resist further investigation!

Many people also assume that all carp are exactly the same and think alike. As far as inherent characteristics go I don't doubt it. However, my own experiences and those of others around me suggest that each fish can be very different. On the Capesthorne Estate where I have watched the same group of carp for many, many years, you begin to see that each fish has its own character, just like you or I - some are really bold and are always first on the scene to see what's going on, others are more reserved and always tend to hold back.

You also notice that the bigger fish often have a smaller sidekick whom they tend to let feed first before they decide whether to partake. Information like this is invaluable in relation to planning your attack on a chosen water or for when targeting a particular big fish.

The key here is observation - and lots of it. Spend time getting to know how the carp live in the water you are fishing and you are half way to catching them. There are a couple of different scenarios you will be faced with when it comes to getting to know the fish, mainly with regard to the type of session you are planning - Is it a one off trip to a new water, or is it a new water which you intend to be spending a lot of time on?

Firstly, let's take a water that you intend to be spending quite a bit of time on. Firstly, you need to be aware that not all aspects of watercraft are carried out on the bank. If you really want to get to grips with the fish in a particular lake, you should do some homework. The more you can find out about the lake and its occupants, the easier the fishing becomes.

The first thing I would do is ask around in the local tackle shops to see if anybody knows anything, then I would check out the internet. There are literally thousands and thousands of websites devoted to fishing, fisheries and clubs. Find out if the water you intend to fish has its own website, and if it does start emailing them to find out as much as you can about the water.

If there is no website, ask about on a fishing forum, somebody somewhere is bound to know something. Also, find out if it is controlled by a club, if so, do they hold regular meetings? If they do, get yourself down there, you'd be amazed at the snippets of information you can pick up.

Don't be shy - ask questions. You are basically looking to gain some shortcuts here. Starting a campaign on a new water can be a little daunting and the more info you can obtain at the start, the quicker you'll get results.

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Do your homework; rarely will big fish come and find you!

OK, you've done the background work, now it's time to hit the bank. To start off with I would head down to the venue armed with a map of sorts, polarized glasses, binoculars, pad, pen, compass and feature finding rod. My feeling is that if you try to do your reconnaissance when you are actually fishing a proper session, you are likely to get too bogged down in the swim you are fishing to bother doing your homework properly. That said, I fish a system where I can quickly slip a hooklink onto my set-up, so I would also take a net, mat, and other essentials, so that if I happened upon a fish that was just gagging to be caught, I've got everything there with me - but the aim here is to travel light. Your main purpose is to get a feel for the place and try to identify some choice swims.

It helps to make a map, brief at first, then you can make a detailed one back at home which you can keep adding to with each session/swim you fish. Firstly you are just looking to get a rough feel for the underwater topography and layout. Work one swim at a time and make a few tentative casts around with the feature finding set up. Don't get too tied up in each swim to start off with, just make a few casts around to get a feel for the depth, type of lake bed, obvious features within the swim and the margins. Make notes of anything of interest and move onto the next swim. Be aware of other anglers and be considerate as you don't want to be disturbing their fishing. If there are any trees around make sure you get up them!! - You'd be amazed at how much more you can see from just a few feet up as the amount of glare on the surface diminishes the higher up you are - polarized glasses are a must as they cut out the surface glare and help you to see under the surface of the water. They are not expensive and most tackle shops stock them, alternatively there are loads online - just make sure you get some with UV400 protection as these will also block out the sun's harmful rays that can damage your eyes.

Whilst casting around and climbing up trees, just what is it you're looking for? Well, you are looking for places which the carp will feed and move through, or even hang around in. In the main, I've found that carp are usually found doing one of four things; travelling, feeding, playing or resting. The travelling is simple enough as they are often moving to or from a play or feeding area. The feeding areas are more difficult to spot, but by plotting on the map areas where you constantly see fish moving you can begin to

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work out where they are moving to and from, which in turn helps to narrow down potentially productive areas for further investigation - This technique of plotting helped me locate a very small feeding area almost completely covered by Lilly pads on one lake; after further investigation I was able to apply bait to the spot and took countless specimen fish that season from the area without anybody else even knowing that it existed! The other aspects are playing and resting - where the fish are just hanging around sitting motionless on top or slopping about making sudden movements and grouping with other fish in certain areas. On many waters I've found they do this at certain times of the day and often in the same places - many lakes can have a number of these places and climate/conditions on the given day will often give a clue as to which of these areas you will find them in.



Working out patrol routes and carp movements will bring handsome rewards

So what makes a holding or feeding area? It could be lots of things; it could be somewhere where they feel secure like a snaggy area, or a weedbed or even under Lilly pads. It could be somewhere they like to eat, perhaps where there is an abundance of natural food like bloodworm, snails or crustaceans. It could be a feature within the lake where there is a change in depth or sediment makeup like the shallow water of the margins, or the shelf around an island. The truth is that there may be hundreds of places in a lake that 'could' be fish holding areas, but investigation is needed as these areas can often be different from one water to the next. That said; Lilly pads, islands, shelves and bars are always worth investigation on any water. But do be careful as a feature which immediately jumps out to you as being a 'hot-spot' has probably jumped out at every other angler that has ever stood on the same peg in the past, and thus the fish may have attached a good degree of danger to baits placed in such 'obvious' areas.

Once you have located a few potential spots that you feel might be worth fishing, either from observations or from what you've found with the feature finding set-up, it's time to get fishing. But here's the golden rule - **DON'T PICK A SWIM BEFORE YOU GET TO THE LAKE!** Without doubt, this is the single biggest mistake that anglers tend to make on every session. It may well be the 'hot' swim, or the one that looks most 'fishy' or the one that some bloke had five fish out of the last time you were there - but what good will it do you if all the fish are now parked-up at the opposite end of the lake?

On EVERY session, ALWAYS have a good look around before you decide where to set up - Even when you are convinced you think you know where they are. It's a routine you **MUST** get yourself into, as you'd be amazed how often you come into the most unlikely swim on the lake and bingo - there they are, right in front of you just begging to be caught. If you go away with just one thing from reading this book; make sure this is it!

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Finding the fish is what it's all about, and no matter how big the water or how well I know it, I will always have a good look around, and even if I'm only fishing for say three or four hours, I may still spend an hour or more looking around to ensure I pick a swim that offers the maximum chance of a result. Beginners often tell me that they find it difficult to spot carp on their chosen lake, and yes, it can be difficult when you start out. But do stick at it - you will soon learn to tell the difference between the actions of carp and other coarse species. What I do notice however, is that those who often say it on the bank are those who have never climbed a tree to look down on a swim or used a pair of Polarized Glasses. Often I'll lend them mine and literally tell them to climb a tree near the swim and look down over the area they are fishing. The look on their faces when they come back down is a real picture - it's as if a whole new world has suddenly opened up in front of them. It's often the case that the next time I see them; they are stuck up a tree looking down at a group of fish through their new set of polarized glasses!



If you spot a tree - get up it; you'll be amazed at what you can see!

The point I'm making is that it's not really that difficult so long as you have the right tools for the job. From trees or the ground you are looking for the same thing, the tell tale signs of carp. Look for the dorsal fins of cruising carp, often trailing a bow wave on the surface like a boat. They could be sat motionless with just their backs breaking the surface; again only a decent amount of time spent looking around each swim will find these stationary carp. Also look for swirls or boils on the surface where a carp has made a sudden movement - and don't ignore the margins! Even on the murkiest of waters you will still be able to spot carp with polarized glasses, you can usually see at least six or eight inches under the surface - more than enough in most cases.

You need to see yourself as a bit of a tracker because even if you can't see the fish itself, you can often find evidence that they have been in the area recently. If the lake bed is clouded up on the bottom for example; you will soon learn to differentiate these signs from other forms of wild life and begin to get a feel for the areas the carp are happy in. Carp can also be quite noisy at times. Often they will leap and crash, or you may hear slurps and sucking as they investigate items on the surface.

Again, I get a lot of youngsters and novices coming up to me saying they can't spot anything and the fish are nowhere to be found. Whilst there can be times when they simply aren't playing ball, you can usually find something that gives them away - The key to spotting fish is stealth. It's no good clomping around a lake wearing a bright white T-Shirt and expecting to spot fish in every margin you peer into. Be quiet, calm and light on your feet and believe me, the carp will come to you! Carp will visit almost every area in a lake, and that includes the margin right in front of your rods. The only thing that will stop them visiting such areas is bankside disturbance, either visual and audible.

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Quite often people will make noise as they walk around a venue and then suddenly quieten down as they approach a swim - too late. You should be quite ALL the time if you want to find the fish. If you stay still, quiet, and camouflaged, the fish will often slide straight into view, inches from the bank without having the slightest clue you are there. I'm not saying you should immediately go out and deck yourself head to toe in Realtree - far from it. But do ensure that you always wear clothing that won't stand out. I always favour dark green clothing as it blends with most things. When you are in a swim, don't stand right in the middle waving hands about, pointing and shouting to your friend in the next swim - keep it zipped at all times and if you do talk, do it in hushed tones - rarely is there a need to shout. If you keep to the edges of a swim you won't stand out on the skyline and thus you are much less likely to spook fish. If there is a bush or tree next to the swim, get right up against it as these will be shapes the fish are used to seeing and they won't spook.



**Stealth is a very important aspect of successful carping:
Stay quiet and stay hidden as much as possible - Can you spot my bivvy?**

Stealth is one of the most important tools in the specimen anglers' armoury - and it costs absolutely nothing!! If you can prevent a fish detecting you before you detect it - then you've cracked it. The whole point is to try and catch them with their guard down - and if they don't know you are there, then obviously you have the upper hand.

Setting up should be exactly the same approach. I see many people setting up bivvies and equipment as if on a building site; banging and crashing, hammering in bivvy pegs and shouting to a friend in the next swim about events since they last saw each other; you may as well forget it! The fish will return, but you've lost the upper hand. For me, the first few hours of a session can be the most important. If I've just spent an hour walking around to find them, and they are now all in front of me, the last thing I want to do is scare them all away as I set up!

The above principles should be adopted each time you visit the water. In doing so, with each trip you will begin to see (and learn) more and more. When I'm out on a session I tend to keep a log or journal. Nothing fancy, I just take a pad with me and note down basic information like temperature, wind direction, and general conditions. I make notes of any fish I spot and any I bank. You'd be amazed how valuable this information can be as you get to grips with a new campaign - especially when you're back at home - you'd be surprised at some of the patterns that can emerge.

It's often the case that the information reveals the best areas and times to fish throughout the year. Again, watercraft is about using any information at your disposal. I also find it helps to get down to the water as

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often as possible - even if I'm not fishing. There really is no substitute for observation on a water and the more time you can spend there the better - even if it's only ten minutes on the way home from work.

Such principles are all well and good if it's a water you will be fishing on a regular basis - you can hone your skills as the season unfolds, but what if you are planning a one off trip to a new water that you've never fished before? Well, the theory is exactly the same - you just need to refine it to maximise your chances on a short session. Let's assume you are visiting a water of two or three acres that you've never seen before, arriving mid-afternoon and fishing for 24 hours.

First things first, do your homework. It's unlikely you will have less than 24 hours notice for the session, so again, ring around and get on the web to try and find a bit of advice for the venue. You have to be careful what you listen to. The key here is to take on board what people say about swims, methods, or approaches - but don't let it rule your judgement on the day.

On arriving at the water you want to have a good look around before you even get the gear out of the car - remember the golden rule: ALWAYS have a good look around before you decide where to set up. First of all I'd grab a rod and have a good look in each swim looking for signs of fish. On swims that look to have good potential I would have a quick cast around - just to confirm depth and bottom ensuring nothing is going to take you by surprise should you decide to set up on the peg. I've lost count of the times I've fished with mates who have made the fatal mistake of choosing a swim on looks alone. They spend an hour setting up the bivvy and rods, and only on casting in a lead do they realise they are fishing in a mass of weed when the rest of the lake is clear, or find they have got fifty feet of water in front of them. The best one was a trip to Oxfordshire on a water we'd not fished before. A lad fishing with us set up in what looked to be a nice swim just behind an island in a nice little bay. It was October time - cold, wet and windy. There was a bit of a chop on the water but the swim looked fishy. After an hour setting up in the rain he was ready to cast out; at which point he found out, to his cost, that the whole of the bay was only about seven inches deep!! And no, he's never lived it down... You have been warned!

Hopefully, as you make your way around the lake you will see some signs of activity in certain swims or an area that might indicate where the fish may be. You are looking for signs of fish, but not just that. If I'm only on for a short session I want to know that the swim I pick has got the best potential of offering a fish in the limited time I have available. I may spend as much as a couple of hours looking around before deciding on a swim. You may think this is excessive if you are only spending a short session on the water - but believe me, the more time you spend watching a water in advance the better your chances when you do eventually wet a line. I've fished with people who pick a swim within minutes of arrival at a water and they're set up with lines in and a brew in hand before I've even done a lap of the lake. It may be another hour after that before I cast a line in. But nine times out of ten I'll be the first one to catch a carp - often within the first hour or so of casting out. Many people I fish with think some of my successes are down to luck and the fact I manage to drop into 'going-swims' without knowing it. Although I don't deny luck can play a part, the reality is that I spend more time working things out before committing to anything.

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Swim selection - Picking the right swim at the right time is vital

I would say seventy percent of anglers on an average water spend no more than five minutes deciding where they are going to fish - irrespective of weather they know the water or not. For me it's no coincidence that the remainder who put much more time into their choice of swim tend to catch more fish! As highlighted earlier, you need to get up some trees, stick your head through a few bushes - try and get to the spots that others will simply overlook, either through lack of experience or sheer laziness.

If it's a water I've not fished before, I will often concentrate on what appear to be the most overlooked swims first. If there is a swim that looks as if it's hard work to get your gear round to, or one that would be really awkward to get your bivvy in - that's the first swim I'd tend to look at to try and find carp off their guard - simply because not many will fish it and carp may well feel more secure in these areas.

The point I'm making is that you should discount nothing until you've had a good look around. And when you do discount a swim, make sure it's because there are no fish in it - not because you would not be able to set your bivvy up nice and neat!

If I find a swim that looks as if it may have some potential but I've not yet viewed the rest of the lake, I'll often trickle a little bit of bait in. I'm not talking about firing in a ton of boilies; usually no more than a handful of particle mix will suffice. Basically, if it looks really 'fishy', then logic dictates that a fish should soon come along. I'll then keep moving and may repeat the process a couple of times before I've done a full lap of the water. If by that time I've not come across a swim full of fish, I'll then move back around to the swims where I've put a little out and see what's developed. You'd be amazed at just how often this tactic works - I really can't begin to count the number of times I've come back to one of these spots to find a fish, or in many cases a number of fish mopping up the bait.

Basically it's short session stalking tactics; trickle a little bit of bait in here and there and see what happens.

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Clear spots and feeding areas can be much more visible from above

It's not always easy to figure out where these spots might be. However, what I would say is that they are quite often where you would least expect to find them. I would be looking for areas that just seem a little irregular - free of weed, pads, or silt. Little spots where the bottom looks different to the area immediately surrounding it. Often the bottom looks as if it's been swept clear, and often it has... by big greedy carp! Broken shells or debris from snails, swan mussels and crustaceans can be a dead giveaway. These spots can often be quite clear and many who don't look around properly will miss them. As we covered earlier - get the polarized glasses on and climb some trees. At the end of the day it is down to you to find them, they won't go out of their way to find you!

Don't dismiss the margins either, a massive amount of my fish come from baits placed within ten feet of the bank - even on waters where the 'done-thing' is to cast as far as your rod can withstand. It's often the case that people are so busy casting to the heavens that they miss all the activity under their feet. I've yet to find a water where fish don't come right into the margins. What's more, you're always guaranteed better presentation close in - just keep quiet and well away from the rods.



Ignore the margins at your peril. An early morning fish taken three feet from the bank

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So let's say you've found some fish, or at least a swim which looks to show signs of recent activity, what's next? Well, a quiet set up is key. Again too many people rush the setting up not wanting to miss a second before getting the rods out. I'm the opposite. I will set up very slowly, making sure I've never got my back to the water for more than a minute at a time. I will constantly be scanning the swim for signs of activity, so that when I do finally cast out I'm confident my chosen spots offer the best possible chance of banking a fish.

Another thing to bear in mind is that the fish will tend to move about a great deal in any 24 hour period; much of their behaviour is conditioned by temperature, and temperature fluctuates in most areas with the onset of day and night (as the water is heated and cooled) thus, even if you do find them prior to setting up, the chances are they won't remain there throughout. As such, when I do come across fish, I often leave setting up bivvies and such like and just get on with the fishing whilst they are there in front of me. It's often the case that I will fish with a friend and on finding the fish in a certain area we'll decide on swims close to each other. Often the friend will then go about setting up bivvies and camping gear before sorting the rods - I'm often the other way around. I will tend to grab a rod and go for the fish right away, having a bait in place within a couple of minutes of choosing the swim. It's often the case (if you get it all right) that a fish will be banked quite quickly within the first hour or two, and in the same fashion it's often the case that the fish can then move to a different area. The problem for my friend is that having already bivvied up, he is now tied to the swim - all I have to do is pick up my gear and move off with the fish.



Staying mobile accounted for the downfall of this specimen

Part of watercraft is this constant reassessing of the situation right throughout the duration of your session. You should be watching all the time from dawn till dusk. The trick is in being able to know when to effect the change - what you have to remember is that what may have been right when you set up, might have changed completely just a few hours later. You need to keep reviewing your strategy. Yes it might be a pain to break all the gear down and move round to the other side of the lake, yes it might be raining and blowing a gale, but as I've said before, the bigger fish very rarely make it easy for you. Nearly every big fish I've caught I've had to work hard for, especially up North! But I still maintain the reward far outweighs the hardships, even in the most extreme cases. The key here is to travel light. Wherever possible I try to ensure I can carry all my kit in one go with relative ease, even if I'm on for a few nights, that way a move is no big deal. I remember setting up in Capesthorne shallows one afternoon in early October after finding a few fish milling around in the margins. Nothing happened until about 2am when I heard a good

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fish boshing out at the other end of the lake in the bay. After hearing the boshing another half a dozen times over the next twenty minutes I decided to get out of bed, reel in the rods, and go and have a look. Sure enough the fish were going mental - to this day I have no idea why! What I did know was that I only had about another eight hours to go until I had to leave and as such, I decided to move swim - there and then at nearly three in the morning! The result was a brace of stunning mid-twenty mirrors before it even came light! The question is, would I have caught those two fish if I'd have stayed up in the shallows and simply rolled over and gone back to sleep? I doubt it very much. Perhaps an extreme example, but you get my point.

You should never be scared to reel in and have a walk around - it's part of my everyday routine when fishing. You rarely know what's going on in other areas of the lake that are out of view unless you go and have a look. Again, for me its stalking tactics I'm always looking for the next opportunity to present itself.

It's all a case of effort. You will only get out what you put in. If you want to set up in a swim for a weekend with every luxury around you and relax without lifting a finger, fine, I'm not going to criticise you for it - there is the odd occasion when I'm like that myself, but for the most part I'm there to catch fish - so for me, staying glued to ones bivvy behind motionless swingers is not going to help. Yet so many do it week in week out... It's beyond me!

I hope some of this information will act as a good incentive to get out there and get to grips with your chosen water. None of the methods or principles involve expensive gear, it's more to do with knowing your quarry and its habitat. The more time you put in now, the easier your fishing becomes in the future.

So the next time you are sat behind silent buzzers, ask yourself a few basic questions; am I doing all I can to maximise my chances on this session? Do I know the spots in my swim where the fish are likely to be, and of utmost importance - are they there right now?

If the answer to any of the above is no, then it's time you started to think a bit more about your fishing.

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Polarised Fishing Glasses

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Approaches & Techniques

Getting The Right Approach

By Julian Grattidge

There are many ways to catch carp; legering, float fishing, free-lining, or even surface fishing. But how do you know which approach to use and when to use it? Selecting the right approach when you arrive at a water is crucial, as aside from enjoying a few hours out in the fresh air, if you are employing the wrong method at the wrong time, you may as well not be there at all really! So, how do you get it right? The key is in watercraft. The clues are always there and, if read correctly, they will often give a pointer as to which approach could ultimately prove best for the session.

Aside from the obvious factors like time of day, weather conditions and temperature, we are also looking for visual indicators to give us some short cuts - we need to establish what the fish are actually doing. When I arrive at a water I will always take time to have a good look around. Not only am I looking for a swim that will give me the best chance of catching a fish, but I'm also looking to find out what kind of mood the fish are actually in. Although carp behave much the same from one day to the next in terms of mannerisms and characteristics; where they will be and what they will be doing will almost certainly be governed by the prevailing climatic conditions at the time of your visit, and those conditions can often change during the session itself.



First things first - find the fish

The first thing to try and do is work out what depth they are in. Quite often you will see groups of fish holding or moving around at different depths, and if you suddenly stumble upon twenty fish playing around on the surface, then it's a good bet that a floating bait is going to be order of the day! Alternatively, they might not be on the surface as such, but just under, in the upper layers. They may be difficult to spot from the swim itself so if you can find a high vantage point, or even better, climb a tree, then do it - and make sure you have your polarised glasses with you! If you start to see dark shapes lurking not far beneath the surface then it's a good bet they are in the upper layers. A surface approach could also work well here,

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but don't ignore shallow areas and the margins. When in the upper layers, the fish will often move quite close into the edge and patrol along the marginal shelves, so a float fished bait flicked out to bankside feature could work really well when placed on the edge of a pad line or close to an overhanging bush or tree.

It's quite possible that after investigating all areas of the lake you might not have spotted a thing. If you've observed properly and not rushed the observations in each area, then this would point to the fish being in the lower layers of water out of sight. As such, ledgering would probably suit best. The real trick is not to have a pre-determined idea of how you are going to fish for them before you turn up at a water, which, unfortunately, is how the majority of carp anglers go about it. I shouldn't moan too much though, as this just leaves more fish for me to catch!

Through the use of Gizmo links, I'm able to change my set up in seconds so I can quite literally change from a bottom fished ledger set-up to a floating set-up in seconds. This versatility has enabled me to catch many fish over the years, simply by taking advantage of visual indicators. If you are fishing on the bottom and you suddenly start to see fish in the middle or upper layers what do you do? Most will leave the bottom bait in place thinking that the fish will eventually find it. I would much prefer to place a bait right under its nose. Active carp are usually feeding carp, so I would be trying to place a bait right into the thick of it. My first response if they were in the middle layers would be to see if I could get them feeding up on the surface by firing out a few floaters. Patience is the key; it might take a while to get them going but given the right conditions you can usually get a result quite quickly once the first floater has been taken. Alternatively I might look to place a bait in the middle layers, either through use of a zig-rig, or more likely through a float fished set-up.



Float fishing for big carp - a lost art?

Float fishing for carp is almost a lost art - how many anglers do you see float fishing for specimen carp? Not many! Yet there are various float fishing methods that have proved deadly for me in the past, particularly the lift rig - nothing could be simpler for flicking out a bait in to the path of a fizzing carp with zero disturbance.

In essence, selecting the right approach is about finding the fish, and then working out which is the quickest and quietest way to place a bait right in front of them without getting sussed. The other key point,

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as I've said many times before, is not to sit behind idle buzzers. By their very nature, fish move about. My theory is that by moving about with them and by following the clues that the weather conditions are giving me, I'm much more likely to come across fish than if I just chuck out a three ounce lead and wait for the fish to visit the bottom of the lake in that particular area.

Quite often I'll be found stalking, a method that has caught me by far the most, and in most cases, my largest fish. The interesting thing is that quite often when stalking you come across moving fish and you have a very limited time to work out the best way of presenting a bait. In these cases, and as much stalking work is done close in, I often go for a free-lined bait. Nothing could be simpler, and in a few seconds you can flick the bait into the path of the oncoming fish, duck down and wait for the line to pull away. It's often that simple. I would say that perhaps 60-to-70% of my fish taken whilst stalking have fallen to a bait that has been in the water for less than say two minutes. The only reason those fish have been caught is because I've kept on the move.



Think on your feet: This 25lb Capesthorpe mirror was taken within ten seconds of flicking a free-lined worm off the edge of a lily pad just in front of its patrol route.

You don't have to go stalking though. Even when fishing multiple rods, there's no reason not to travel light, keep on the look out, and change tactics (or swims!) where necessary. At the end of the day it's about keeping up with the changing conditions around you, and learning how such changes effect fish behaviour. Just as importantly, make sure you keep an open mind about how to target the fish. Yes, chucking out a lead is always the easiest option - but that does not necessarily mean it is the best. Successful carp angling is about being able to think on your feet and rising to the challenge, not going for the easy option. So, next time you're fishing and things are a little quiet, if you spot fish moving that are not near your hookbait - ask yourself the question - how can I place a bait right in front of its nose without spooking it?

You'd be amazed at how often it works.



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Rigs For Carp Fishing

Hair Rig & Knotless Knot

By Garth Barnard

The modern day Hair-rig was devised by Kevin Maddocks and Len Middleton in the late 70's. It was while conducting tank tests that they concluded that Carp were actually frightened by the effect of the hook and hooklength passing over their lips.

The way round this was to mount the bait on a very light, supple, two-inch Hair (donated by Kevin's wife!), which was attached to the lower bend of the hook.

The long supple Hair allowed the Carp to confidently pick up the bait and pass it back to the Pharyngeal teeth without feeling the effect of the hook or hooklength over its lips.

The Hair-rig has changed a lot since then in that there is less emphasis being placed on the Carp's fear of the effect of the hook and hooklength over its lips. Nowadays the emphasis is on the hook being able to turn and find a good hook-hold as the hookbait is being ejected by the Carp.

The easiest and most effective method of producing a Hair-rig is to use the Knotless-knot.

The Knotless Knot

The Knotless-knot is very simple and easy to tie. The knot simply utilizes the hooklength material to firmly tie on the hook and produce the hair of a desired length.

Tying The Knotless Knot

1. Tie a small loop using an Over-hand knot at one end of your selected hooklength material, I've used a 12 inch length of braid in this instance. This loop for your boilie stop to secure the boilie in place.



2. Using a Boilie Needle thread the boilie (or whatever you're using as a Hookbait) on to what will be the Hair.

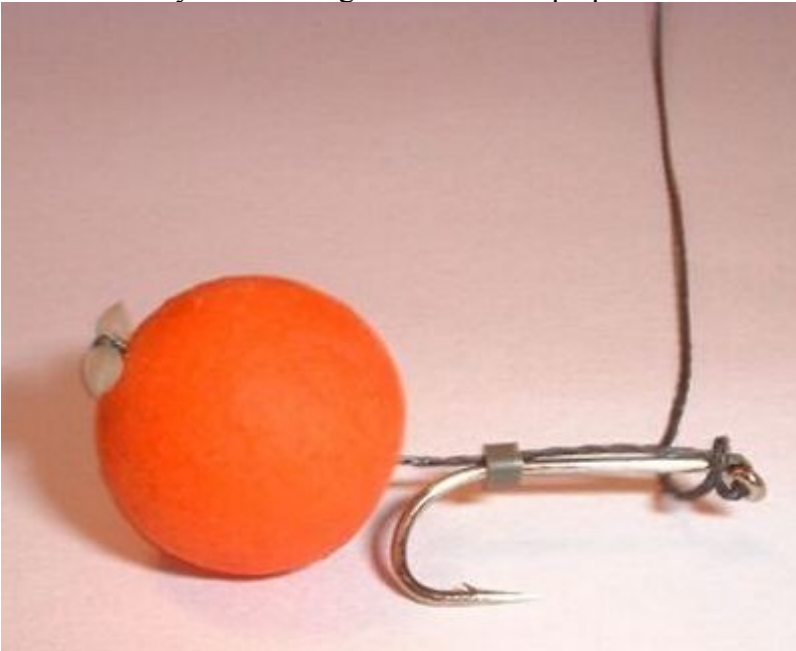


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3. Once the Boilie has been threaded on to the Hair a Boilie Stop is pushed through the loop to secure the Boilie in place. Thread a small piece of Silicone tubing on to the hooklength and then on to hook, before threading the hooklength through the eye of the hook.



4. Adjust the length of the Hair to your desired length, about 3mm from the end of the hook to the hookbait is my desired length of hair. Whip up the shank of the hook using a minimum of 5 turns.



5. Thread the hooklength once more back through the eye of the hook and pull tight.



6. Tie a swivel on to the end of the hooklength and you're ready to go!

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I always put a small dap of Super Glue on the knots just for piece of mind, but it isn't necessary.

Using the Hair-Rig

Once the Hair-rig has been tied a Boilie or bait of the same size can be used on the same Hair time and time again as the Hair length has been set for that particular size of bait.

The piece of Silicone tubing that I use is to determine the position of where the Hair leaves the Shank of the hook, which is level with the hookpoint. This also allows the hook to turn and the rig to work, in a sense, as an anti-eject 'Blow-Back' rig. In other words, once the hook has penetrated the lip of the fish, the fish won't be able to blow out the bait and hook, just the bait.



Other anglers prefer not to use a small piece of Silicone tubing, but instead whip all of the way up the shank of the hook until they are level with the hook point, which is fine.

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Hair Length

In my experience, and whilst discussing Hair length with other anglers, I've found that there is no ultimate Hair length, though a gap of between 2mm to 10mm from the bend of the hook to the hookbait is favoured by most.



It's a case of trial and error in finding a Hair length that works for the size and pattern of hook being used, the size of bait being used, the hooklength material and the way in which the carp are feeding. If you are missing runs or you feel the fish are picking up and successfully ejecting your hook and hookbait then adjust the length of the Hair, which could make all the difference.



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By Garth Barnard

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Zig-Rig

By Garth Barnard

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Bait & Baiting Techniques

The Boilie (Boiled Baits)

By Julian Grattidge

We've all heard it... "What flavour boilie did you have it on Mister?" As if the selection of a certain bait is somehow guaranteed to bring success. Bait is undoubtedly a major factor in carp fishing but it's not the be all and end all – the where, when and how are all just as important. Most magazines carry adverts that might give the impression that by selecting their own particular 'brew', banking the venues largest resident is then somehow inevitable, because their particular concoction is 'taking waters apart' up and down the country and features the 'best ingredients ever'. Don't get me wrong, it might be a good bait - it might be a very good bait – but how do you know before you part with your hard-earned? Should you believe

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everything you read?

Bait is such a complex subject that it's not as simple as saying 'x' bait is good, or 'y' bait is not, and I don't profess to know it all. However, I know enough to advise that you will have better **long-term** success by offering a constant supply of a high nutritional value bait, as apposed to a 'crap' bait; so termed because it offers little in the way of nutrition but is loaded with flavour & attractants.

A fish will soon get to recognise a food source and its nutritional value – My own results with Essential Baits Shellfish B5 on Capesthorne are a good indicator of what a quality bait can do when applied correctly. The fish soon learnt that it fulfilled much of their nutritional requirements and they got on it big-time. At one point it was accounting for over 80% of the fish that were coming off! The opposite applies with a so called 'crap' bait. There will be an initial flurry of activity as it tastes/smells nice, but they will soon wise up to the fact that they will get little benefit from eating it and more often than not will move on to fill up on a food source that they know does them good. You will continue to pick up fish here and there but you won't do as well as those offering a better bait.



Two at once! Chris Knapper (left) shows just what a quality bait can do when applied correctly.

When selecting a bait my advice would be to look the actual ingredients, rather than the packaging. That said, bait is much to do with confidence - if you can't stop catching on the one you are using then don't change – but the moment you see other people fishing in the same manner and catching more, you should always ask yourself why. However, confidence is one thing, blindly following the 'masses' and 'names' is another entirely. You only have to take a look at some of the current high profile anglers and see how many times they've switched allegiances within the last few years to know that for some, it's hard-cash that would seem to dictate which jacket they wear on their back, rather than the effectiveness of a particular bait. As with any industry, there are good companies and bad – the trick is in making sure you select products from one of the better suppliers. But how do you pick out the best, as it's sometimes difficult to cut through the advertising blurb and get right down to the facts? There's no easy answer - if you want to be a really successful angler, then you need to take the time to work things out for yourself. I guess it's nothing new, but the majority of anglers are always happy to be led than to lead - until a few hundred years ago most people thought the world was flat... get my drift?

To be blunt, aside from what you have read in the magazines, what do you actually know about the EXACT ingredients that are in the bait you are using? And by that I don't mean what it says on the packaging – I mean the ACTUALL ingredients in that specific bag you have picked up of the shelf? I would say that 70% of anglers don't really know the specific make-up of the bait they are using - no matter

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how much they wax lyrical about how good it is and how many waters its 'taken apart'. Yawn.

The simple truth of the matter is that if you want to go forwards you must first go back. Learn all you can about ingredients and what effect they have on a bait – do you know what different types of fishmeal are out there, and what each type will do to a bait? And what the addition of birdfoods, milks, or proteins will do? If you don't, then how can you claim to have superior knowledge about which is the best bait to use? The majority of anglers will claim to be on the best bait possible but once you probe more deeply and get past the advertising hype written in the angling press, most can add very little to the conversation. For me, that's simply not good enough – end off.

The point I'm making is that I would never buy any bait without first taking a great deal of time to research the company, ingredients, and manufacturing processes. Even then I would still want to (and do) speak to the person behind the bait before using it. Some years ago before making the switch to B5 I spent no small amount of time talking to Mike Willmott at Essential, both about how and where he sources his ingredients and then about his manufacturing processes and only when I had a deep understanding of it, did I make the switch. Do you seriously think that all Green Lipped Mussel Extract comes from the same supplier, in the same tin, at the same cost? Of course it doesn't! There is good stuff and there is bad stuff – and I know the GLM in the bait I'm buying is of the highest quality available and I even know which Country it comes from – and yes, that does make a difference too! How about your bait? Do you know what grade it is and which supplier it comes from?

You may think I take things to the extreme, but what I do is ensure that when I have chosen a bait, there is then no need to dabble with others – I have ultimate confidence. I see anglers constantly trying bait after bait, comparing one rod fished to another, a different bait on each rig, or mixtures on all! All of which will only take your eye of the ball. Most have this rose-tinted vision of a nice quality assured factory with a sponsored high-profile angler sitting at the end of a conveyor checking that each bait is up to the required standard – wake up!

I know where many baits are made, and some don't even get their hands dirty! Many outsource much if not all of their rolling, and some may even reduce the quality of ingredients to improve cost effectiveness – and who keeps a check on what the rolling companies are doing and how accurate their facilities are for getting the optimum balance of ingredients? Again, I've heard stories that would make your toes curl – and people are paying good money for this stuff!

Some might ask what happens after a few seasons when the bait 'dries-up?' Well, if it's a good bait, it shouldn't, simple as that. In relation to B5 'drying up' it's simply never happened for us. Long term results on many waters showed that quite the opposite happened, the more that went in, the better the results got as the fish realised here was a food source that gave them much of their required intake of nutrients – to a certain extent they can't help but eat it! That said, they will soon wise up to areas it is offered to them in regularity and so swims fished in the same way using the same spots may drop off in effectiveness, but to be honest, in my eyes much of that is down to watercraft as the same bait offered elsewhere will be gobbled up just as readily – outwitting specimen carp is a constant endeavour and a never ending battle of wills.

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Select the right boilie and apply it correctly, and the fish will come - the first time on the venue with Mick's Snail & Shell and I managed five more just as nice as this one!

I make no claims or allegations about any manufacturer or supplier, it's for you to go out and do your own homework. However, as I've said to many in the past, there are very few suppliers in the UK who I would trust hand on heart to give me exactly what I have asked for; and two at the top of that list would be Mike Willmott (Essential Baits) and Mick Ball (MB Baits). Before you ask, yes, I have ties to both (not financially) - and there's a good reason for that – I trust them implicitly. You see, I take my angling very seriously, so I feel it's only right that I should give serious consideration to the bait I put on my hook. That said, I only use boilies for about fifteen percent of my carp fishing, so just imagine how much thought goes into my naturals!



Shelf Life Or Fresh Frozen Boilies?

By Julian Grattidge

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Making your own Boilies

By Garth Barnard

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Dips And Soaks

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Caring For Your Quarry

Carp Care and Fish Handling
By Julian Grattidge

For me, care for the quarry should start long before the fish is actually on the bank. On many occasions I have witnessed so called specimen anglers (not just carp anglers) casting baits to what at best could be described as 'adventurous' positions, at worst, downright stupid. Yes, there is a high probability you will

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get the take you are after if you place your bait six inches off those snags or right up against that submerged tree. However, there is also a high probability that you will lose it before you've even picked up your rod. What's worse, the fish could be left tethered. I'm not going to get bogged down with safe rigs in this piece as there is plenty of content covering suitable set-ups in the rig chapter. The point I'm making is that you should think of fish welfare long before you hook one. Use your common sense. Take into account the proximity of features that may cause a problem if you hook a fish. Think about your own ability to overcome these obstacles. This applies to all sectors of the sport, not just carp angling.



Fish care should start long before it's up on the scales!

In addition, the rod you use and the way you use it should be carefully considered. After reading many articles, newcomers to the sport could be forgiven for thinking they need 3lb test curve rods and 3oz leads for all their fishing. If you are fishing small and medium sized waters nothing could be further from the truth! The strength or test curve of the rod should be matched to the distances and weights you will be casting for the majority of your fishing – in essence, the bigger the distance, the larger the test curve. However, if you learn how to use a fishing rod correctly, and perhaps more importantly, learn how to cast, you can achieve big distances with small test curve rods. Nearly all my fishing is done with my trusty hand built Sportex two and a quarter pound test curve rods – and yes, I can easily chuck a big lump well over one hundred yards. The benefit of large test curve rods is that at distance you can apply pressure quicker and gain control of the situation faster, but what you have to bear in mind is that at short range, almost the opposite can apply. The rod can be less sensitive and therefore more difficult to use at close quarters leading to hook pulls, etc. Thus, if most of your fishing is done on small waters you would be better suited to a smaller test curve rod. As I say, it's about matching your tackle to your intended use so give it some thought.

With that out of the way, how do we look after a big fish once we've hooked it? The first thing to ensure is that you have all the right gear in the right place at the right time. Once a fish picks up your bait it's no good if the landing net is still in your bag and the unhooking mat is in the car. Before you cast a bait you should always ensure that your landing net is set up, near to your rods and ready to go. Also, make sure that the net is the correct size for the type of fish you are targeting. If you are fishing for carp, and the water contains specimen fish, then you should be prepared for the eventuality of actually catching one! In

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my eyes there is no excuse for having the wrong tackle and equipment for the fish you are trying to target. Indeed on the water I run we expel members who turn up with inadequate tackle, as do many others - so think on! I appreciate that tackle can sometimes be costly, but even the most expensive of brands have become much more affordable via eBay and alike so there really is no excuse.



Ensure you have the right equipment for the job.

Once the fish is in the net don't be in too much of a rush to pull your prize straight out. I know it's a very exciting time, but just take a moment to ensure everything is ready and that all the items you need are already in place so that once the fish is lifted out of the water you don't then need to keep running to and from your bivvy looking for various bits of paraphernalia, and if you do need to sort out a few bits before lifting the fish make sure the net is fully secured! You should always fish with some sort of unhooking mat to protect the carp while it is out of the water, so make sure this is ready and positioned away from the waters edge and, if possible, on a flat surface (This ensures the fish can't flap its way back down the bank and into the water – I've seen it happen so many times!). Also, if you intend to weigh your fish you will need a weigh sling. Again this should be ready in advance. You will also need to have a pair of forceps to hand in case your fish is deeply hooked. Again, all this should be ready beforehand so that when you do have a fish; it's out of the water for the minimum amount of time. I always keep my sling wrapped up in my unhooking mat and also keep a pair of long-nosed forceps clipped to my unhooking mat, this ensures that the three main items I need are always together and in one place. Also, to minimise time on the bank, it helps to wet your sling and have scales zeroed before you lift the fish.

OK, so with everything in place you are ready to lift the net and have a look at your prize. However, do be VERY careful here, as you have to bear in mind that the fish is still hooked. If you just grab around the mesh of the net and heave everything up onto the bank there is a good chance you will pull the line and actually pull the hook out of the mouth. It's my opinion that more mouth damage occurs to fish when they are being lifted than at any other time so please, do be careful. Just make sure that when you lift the net, that the line is not in your grip – if it is, make sure it's slack enough below so that it won't pull on the fish's mouth when you lift. Also, ensure that the fish is positioned neatly in the centre and bottom of the net before you lift, this way it won't suddenly get trapped in an awkward position or tumble to the bottom

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of the net when you gather the mesh and lift it. You should never lift a fish by using the net pole or handle as either could easily give way under the weight of a specimen fish. You should always gather the mesh in your hands just above the fish (a bit like you would if you were about to blow up a paper bag) and the lift carefully with the fish in one hand and your rod and net pole in the other.



Always treat fish with the care and respect they deserve.

Once you have carefully transferred the fish from the water to your unhooking mat you should go about your business with care but with promptness. The idea is to keep the fish out of the water for the minimum amount of time necessary. Yes, it is a fact that carp can survive for a long time out of water; I once read that the Dutch were well known for their fondness of carp (to eat, that is!) and would often wrap large carp in damp Hessian sacks in their cellars. They would keep the sacks wet at all times and feed the carp bread and milk for a couple of days prior to eating! However, just because they can survive out of water for a long time does not necessarily mean they want to! So just bear the time factor in mind.

Now you need to unhook the fish. I find the easiest way is to first check where and how the hook has been set and then, manoeuvre it so that it comes out in exactly the same manner in which it went in. I position the eye and shank with my thumb and forefinger, then when the barb and angle of the shank is at exactly the same angle as when it went in, apply a small sharp jab of pressure on the eye of the hook and it will simply pop out. It's a little tricky to put down on paper so if you are unsure about the best way to unhook a fish, go and have a look at an experienced carp angler with a fish on the bank and ask them to show you – that's how I learnt. It's a very simple process once you've learnt and takes just a second to do. However, if the fish is deep hooked don't waste time fiddling, just reach for the forceps – it's much quicker. A quick tip here is to remove the rod and line as soon as you have removed the hook. Just place the hook in your rod eye, wind in the slack line and place the rod to one side. If you don't you can guarantee that when you do come to sort everything out later the line will be tangled everywhere and the hook will be firmly embedded and immovable from the bottom of your landing net! Once you have unhooked the fish, it's a good time to perform a quick health check. I always investigate both flanks of the fish and have a look at all the fins, tail and dorsal ridge to check for any damage or injuries. I also check the gill covers, head and also have a check inside the mouth. If you do find any damage it is a good idea to have some antiseptic treatment handy (Klinik is a good one, as is the Nash Tackle Medi Carp). Just apply a small amount to the effected area.



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Performing a quick health check

On transferring the fish from net to sling, make sure you are not wearing anything that could damage the fish, like a ring with sharp edges or a set stone or a watch with a sharp strap - I made sure my wedding ring was a simple flat band so that I would not have to take it off every time I handled a fish! I always try to remove my watch when handling a specimen for photos, etc. Also, as with any fish, make sure your hands are wet and that any slings and sacks you are using are already wet before handling as the body of a fish has a mucus covering which protects the fish from infection so it's important not to damage this membrane when handling. When you transfer the fish to a sling, again make sure that the fish is in the bottom centre of the sling and that its pectoral fins are tucked into the body so that it won't damage itself when you lift it up.

Ok, you've weighed your fish and congratulations, it's a big'un! Time for a photograph to capture the moment - There are two schools of thought here, either taking a photo there and then whatever time of day or night, or, if it's at night, sacking the fish until it's light enough to take some photos. Sacking fish is a subject which causes a good deal of debate. Personally I'm not a big fan of sacking fish and prefer wherever possible to take photos there and then and to return the fish immediately. If you prepare for your shot properly my feeling is that you can get some stunning images at night which can really capture the moment.

However, if you wish to sack a fish and the venue permits it, then you should always remember not to sack a fish in shallow water or immediately after a prolonged battle. Carp obtain their oxygen by wafting water through their gills and in some cases a sack can reduce the free-flow of water required to necessitate this process so you should never place a worn out fish into a sack – in simple terms it could die through exhaustion.

Also, by the same token, shallow water has less dissolved oxygen for the fish to utilise so bear this in mind for the same reasons. It goes without saying that you should ensure the sack is properly secured – the thought of a specimen fish set adrift in a sealed sack does not bear thinking about, so make sure you secure it properly and it won't be a situation you're ever faced with.

If you are going to sack a fish, make sure you check it at regular intervals to ensure firstly that the fish is OK and secondly that everything is secure.

So, either way it's now time to get a photo and the fish is on the mat. A few basic rules apply here; readiness being the first. The camera gear should have been set up prior to lifting the fish from the water.

Once you're competent at handling both fish and camera, self-take is an option but for now we'll assume that you have somebody to take the picture for you. Firstly, ensure the photographer is ready with the camera before you attempt to lift the fish. When lifting you should try not to hold the fish against your

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body as clothing can damage the skin of the fish and remove its protective membrane. Also you should try not to lift the fish from under its belly. Many of the delicate organs including the heart are located on the underside of the body, and whilst in the water there is little pressure on such areas, once out of the water (thus effected by gravity) the pressure is greatly increased. The best way to lift a carp is to have one hand under its head, just in front of the pectoral fins, and one hand under its body, just past the stomach by its anal fin.

With the photographer in front of you, you want to have the fish on its side with back towards you and belly towards camera. Then, carefully scoop your hands under the fish from behind and bring them round to the front of the body. Scoop one hand under the head and slide the pectoral fin between your fingers. Then scoop the other hand under the rear section around to the anal fin area (see photo below). Then, slowly lift and level the fish. Be prepared for the fish to kick and be ready to cushion it when it does! I've found this method of lifting to be by far the most effective giving good stability to counter the fish when it decides to kick. Keep the fish low to the mat and hold it steady. Big fish can be hard to hold still so it helps to brace the fish; I tend to keep my elbows on my knees which gives a more rigid frame. A quick photography tip here; it helps for the photographer to be at the same level as you, i.e. close to the ground - either kneeling down or, even better, lying down. This gives a great perspective rather than if you are on the floor and the photographer is standing up directly in front of you, the sharp angle when taken from above will make your capture look much smaller than it actually is!



Ready to lift...



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Hold steady and keep the fish close to the mat

Once you have the shot it's time to get the fish back in the water. Place it back in the centre and bottom of the sling as before and again make sure the pectoral fins are tucked into the body, and then carefully lift the fish and place back into the water. Do not make the mistake of thinking that just because the fish has behaved for the photo that you can return it without the sling, you can be guaranteed it will have a flap at some point before you get it back in the water – always safer to put it back in the sling for transport. The fish should be returned with great care, keep the body position upright and allow the fish to gain its composure before letting it swim off. Once back in the water I remove the sling and gently support the fish upright by loosely holding around the wrist of its tail. This allows the fish to waft all its fins, get some water moving through its gills again and after a short time it will regain its composure, give a kick of the tail and shoot off back to the deep – often soaking you in the process, but that's all part of the experience!



Take care on returning the fish and allow it to recover

Once the fish has been returned it's easy to get caught up in the moment but you just need to spend a few minutes getting everything sorted and ready for the next one! Give your landing net a quick rinse and place back by your rods, make sure the sling and mat are back where they should be and any implements used during unhooking, weighing and photographing are back in their rightful positions, that way, when the next fish comes along you are ready to repeat the process all over again with the minimum amount of fuss.



Job Done! Now you can relax sort your gear out and catch another!

Like most things in fishing, it's about common sense. It's simply a case of having everything ready and in the right place at the right time, and when you do land a specimen, make sure you treat it with the care and respect it deserves.



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Rules Rule, OK!

By Jim Gibbinson

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Angling Ethics

By Jim Gibbinson

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Application Examples

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Preface

By Elton Murphy

It's often the case with written material that what seems relatively straight forward on paper can often be much harder to work out in reality. As so much of the content in this book relates to the theories, experiences, results and observations of the authors, we have decided to publish extracts from one of our featured authors Fishing Journals.

Our main purpose for publishing such material is to try and give the reader some real insight into how the author uses all of the techniques written about in previous chapters in order to bring about results when targeting specimen carp.

The following extracts are taken from the diaries of long-time carp angler Julian Grattidge, and follow the highs and lows, thoughts and experiences, of his time spent fishing for carp on various waters around the UK.



Part 1 (Introduction and Extracts from July 2002)

By Julian Grattidge

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You know how it is; you've spent a few seasons on a water, had a few fish, and moved on. Well that was the story with the Top Pool, Mart and I did a couple of seasons on there a few years back, and very hard it was too - one of those places that really did your head in, but for some reason you kept going back for more!

The water is classic estate lake stuff, set in the heart of the Cheshire countryside. It's surrounded by a few other good waters on the same estate, but for some reason the Top Pool has always been overlooked, you could often go for weeks without seeing anyone on there, partly because the other waters have a bigger head of fish, but mainly due to the fact that it's so hard going.



More margin features than you can shake a stick at!

It's the kind of enchanted carp water you dream of finding, enclosed around most of its banks by heavy woodland, covered in thick sets of pads with overgrown bank side vegetation, old ewe trees fanning out over the margins, and massive rhododendrons which over the years have grown out into the lake to provide fantastic margin features. The downside is the weed.

Over the years the lake has become heavily silted, and the thick Canadian pond weed has quite literally taken over, growing right up to the surface throughout the whole of the lake, add to that the thick algal scum that forms across the surface right through the summer months and it becomes a nightmare to fish.

That said, it has a strange addictive quality, and after each blank session when you're telling yourself "never again" you somehow find yourself planning your next trip whilst still on the drive home! The main attraction for me, besides the fact that I'm always up for a challenge, was the fish stocks. Only a handful of the carp were less than twenty pounds, and as for the biggest, well that was anybody's guess!

The fact that it was hardly fished meant that nobody really knew what was in there, whilst one or two mid-twenty fish had been taken over the years, much bigger fish had often been seen but never outwitted.

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The mid-shallows.

After a fair amount of research we reckoned that thirties could be a realistic possibility, and that was good enough for us, the thought of banking a big lunker which may not have graced the bank for years (rare in our neck of the woods) had me drooling - tickets were purchased and the love hate relationship began...

If only we knew then what we know now, what a season that was. We fished virtually every weekend from June to September without so much as a bleep! We tried everything; clear spots, raked spots, in weed, on top, on bottom, and don't even get me started on baits..!!

The fish were certainly in there; they took great pleasure in taunting us on a regular basis. They would boat up on top during the day sending huge bow waves out behind them, when viewing the lake from up in the trees it looked like it was an open day for the local boat club! The fish were cute, very cute, we often saw them come in over baited patches and move off without so much as sniffing the bait, then after a few hours they would return, sample a freebie and move off again. They would keep repeating the process until all that remained was the hook bait, they'd then bugger off and leave it with you. If it wasn't for the tranquil surroundings and the idyllic nature of the place I'm sure we'd have committed suicide long before, but we kept going back, time and time again, we hadn't given up on a water before and we weren't about to start now - although it now became all to clear why we rarely saw anybody else fishing it! We kept telling ourselves that no fish were uncatchable, and it was only a matter of time - and we had plenty.



Mart waiting for action in the Boathouse swim.

Through process of elimination we made subtle changes to approach, tactics, and bait, in the hope of finding the key to success, after all we were catching plenty of other specimens; bream to 7lb, and lots of

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tench to near double figures, all of which were made welcome whilst we waited for the elusive carp to make an appearance. Early September and the unthinkable happened - we caught one!

I remember waking to the sound of a Delkim bite alarm at full-chat, a proper one-toner. The only problem was that it wasn't mine! Somehow I knew it was a carp, and on arrival at Mart's swim saw him bent double into a good fish that was doing it's best to make it into the nearest set of pads.

Mart's face was a picture, not least because he never looked too clever when he first woke, but because he looked scared to death. He need not have worried, after a good tussle I slipped the net under the fish, and Mart let out a battle cry! The fish was a perfect mirror, which went 20lb 2oz on the scales. After a quick photo the fish was returned and a grin appeared on Mart's face that stayed firmly in place for over a week!

It was quite strange really, all that wait and it was over in a matter of minutes. It was only about five in the morning, but it seemed as good a time as any to open a couple of bottles, and we just sat for a while savouring the moment, beer in hand. The sessions over the following weeks gave no sign that our luck was about to change, as we went back to a series of blanks, but our mood was lifted when I hit into a good carp early in October, only for the hook to pull (Grrrrr). We only managed a few sessions between October and December as we decided to take part in a winter carp league arranged by a mate on another water (seemed like a good idea at the time), which ran every other week.

My thoughts were never too far away from the Top Pool over the Christmas period and come January I was full of determination and enthusiasm for the New Year ahead. I was busy with work for the first few weeks in January but saw that unseasonably warm weather was forecast for the last weekend in the month so we decided to do the Saturday night.

You know how it is when you can feel something's changed on a water, you just have that confidence when you arrive and you can't wait to get the rods in, well that was me. We arrived just in time to get set up before darkness fell. We fished two swims next to each other in the bay, and placed the baits out in the usual way. Boilies on fluoro links, bagged up with a little crumbed boilie and fresh maggots.

Although warm for the time of year it was still bloody cold, so as evening approached we had a few sips of Scotland's finest to keep us warm. It was a full moon and a clear night and the place looked fantastic bathed in moonlight. There was no wind whatsoever, and only topping fish broke the surface as we chatted for several hours, topping up with coffee and spirits, whilst every hour or so I'd put a couple of pouches of maggots over my baited spots.

We retired to our respective bivvy's at around midnight and after a quick warm over the Coleman, I tucked up in bed. I awoke to the sound of an alarm and looked out of my bivvy door to see the tip of my left hand rod wagging away as line was stripped from the reel. I was on it in a flash and the immediate battle curve signalled that a decent carp was on the other end - at last!

The fish made a headlong sprint through the weed for the sunken punt way to the left of my swim. I eased the drag a touch as I was keen to avoid another hook pull, then gently firmed down on the spool to slow its run. I turned the fish at around twenty-five yards and it erupted on the surface out to my left.

Mart appeared at my side, offering words of encouragement as the battle unfolded. After a while I got the fish back to the margin, and after a couple of final lunges Mart slipped the net under a good common - Wehey! The scales bumped round to 21lb 1oz - result!

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'Crinkle-Tail' 21lb of winter common - result!

I was made up, all the effort had finally paid off, and the result wriggled about in my hands as Mart reeled of a couple of shots on the camera. The fish went straight back, and as I released it into the water it gave one massive flick of its tail, covering me in water, and was gone.

For a while I just sat on my swim soaking up the moment before baiting up and casting back out. I was well happy, but the best was yet to come!

Two hours later and my right hand rod was away, I was still not over the first fish really and kind of assumed that this one must be a tench, on striking the rod it bent double and I suddenly awoke to the fact I was into another good carp!

After a short initial run the fish just held bottom and wouldn't move. For a while I thought it had weeded me, but after some gentle persuasion I managed to get it moving again. I was trying not to get carried away but in the back of my mind I could not help but wonder if this was a biggie.

After what seemed like an age I got the fish near the net, but each time the fish saw the net a powerful lunge would prolong the tension as she went off down the margin again on another run. Eventually, thanks to a full-stretch affair by Mart, the fish went into the net, and I was finally able to breathe out!

Mart lifted the net onto the unhooking mat and uttered sounds as if to say it were a decent fish, and after removing half a ton of pondweed from the net, a stunning dark mirror came into view - a proper old warrior.

By now the weight seemed insignificant, yet I still raised a smile when the scales went just shy of 27lb.

Typical isn't it, you wait all year to catch one fish from a water, then take a brace of twenties in a couple of hours - that's the Top Pool for you!

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Worth the wait? Not half..!!

After that, work kept me away from the bank till the end of the season pretty much, I managed a couple of trips, taking one good common. All that just made the wait till the following season all that more difficult to bear. Not helped by the fact that there was a very strict policy of no entry onto the estate during the closed season, so you couldn't even go up for a look around - gutted! The Drinks factory I was running at the time had released a load of new products which began selling really well, so come weekends I was always overseeing extra shifts or away visiting clients - not good for fishing. Thus, I changed my approach over the following season, rather than doing weekends, I did a midweek overnighiter every Wednesday, getting there at around 9pm, and leaving at around 6am the following morning to get home, showered, changed, and off to work for 8.30!



A stunning Top Pool near-leather at 24lb .

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The midweek sessions certainly seemed to pay off. Whilst Mart still struggled at weekends, I was able to average a fish perhaps every four sessions, which for the Top Pool was good going! More twenties graced the net, although none bigger than the mirror from the previous season, not that it bothered me, each fish was absolutely mint and a pleasure to catch, my favourite of the season was a 24lb near-leather taken early in August, a stunning fish.

The other fish of note was a double figure common that I must have caught five times throughout the season, a cracking fish that gave me the fight of my life each time I had it - far better than any of the twenties! - Its takes were so violent that it ripped the rod of the buzzer-bar on two separate occasions! We nicknamed it 'Mental the Common' for obvious reasons, and it was a joy to bank on each occasion. The funny thing with Mental was that he would only show on a rod that had already banked a fish during that particular session – weird!



'Mental the Common' on one of his regular appearances

There's nothing quite like taking a good fish in the night then going straight off to work in the morning - you feel on top of the world all day, especially if some of the lads in the factory are into carping and during the coffee break you can casually drop in the fact that you had a nice twenty earlier that morning!

Work eased a little as October neared, so I was able to do a few weekend sessions with Mart. Unfortunately, he'd not had a fish out since his 20 the previous September, and things were starting to get to him.

Luckily though, a few weeks later he fished Birch Grove and took a couple of lovely thirties, which seemed to ease the pain somewhat.

Well it would wouldn't it!



A brace of Birch 30's seemed to lift Mart's spirits, this one at 31lb 6oz.

Our next session on the Top Pool was a bit of a nightmare, after a fruitless first night and no action during the following day, I'd heavily baited a margin swim for the second night. Just after dawn I had an absolute screamer from the baited patch and struck into a BIG lump that just kept going, and only began to slow after taking me through two sets of pads. It took an eternity to get the fish back near the bank, but finally I was able to make out a big common just a couple of yards out, it was the big common we'd spotted on several occasions during the season and reckoned it to be around 28-29lb. It didn't like the net one bit, and I cautiously had to keep turning the fish as it attempted another lunge away from the net, then, just as it's head came over the top of the net it made one final bid for freedom, lunged to my right and slipped the hook - boy, did I swear!

I was truly gutted, and it played on my mind for weeks. I kept reliving the moment constantly going through the "what-ifs?" In retrospect, I suppose I should have 'got straight back on' so to speak, but for one reason or another we didn't go back on for a while, and before we knew it, we'd fished a few new waters and joined a new syndicate!

We did well for the next two seasons on the new syndicate water, mixed with a few outings to Birch Grove and a several weeks spent deep in Oxfordshire. Also, by that time I'd left my old job at the drinks factory and had started working as Editor for a new fisheries directory, so it seemed there was always a new water to visit just around the corner. We dropped out of the syndicate at the beginning of this year; the travelling was getting too much. So a new challenge had to be found. We'd done plenty of scouting around since the beginning of the year but nothing had really appealed to us. There are plenty of holes in the ground with 20's a chuck, but to be honest, they're just not our bag. Throughout all this, I always knew I'd be back on the Top Pool one day, I say it about a lot of waters, but with the Top Pool it was personal!

Time was marching on and we were still no nearer to finding a subtle venue for the 2002/03 season. My good lady had mentioned a craft fair she wanted to go to, which, it turned out, was to be held on the same estate that the Top Pool was situated on - Hmmm... Fate?

After an hour or so mooching around the craft fair I think Lisa had had enough of me, as I was itching to

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get down to the lake to have a look around. As I wondered down to the lake I had a strange feeling come over me, as if the Top Pool was reeling me in again.

As I made my way around the old boathouse I couldn't help smiling as the water came into full view - it was still as breathtaking as ever. I made my way up one of the old climbing trees by the stile-swim to get a better look over the bay area, and what was the first sight that greeted me? - The big fat common I'd lost during my last session there some two years previous!

Need I say more?

The seasons not long kicked off, and where have we been every weekend since?

You guessed it – back on The Top Pool!



Home sweet home!

Just a couple of sessions in and it seems as if we've never been away from the place. The weed problem has worsened (if that were at all possible!) and it's still just as difficult as it always was. That said, we've already had some promising early results, more in the next piece.

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Part 2 (Return to the Top Pool, September 2002)

By Julian Grattidge

This article is available in the full version of Carp Fishing Secrets from www.CarpFishingSecrets.com

Part 3 (Thoughts on Bait, July 2003)

By Julian Grattidge

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Part 11 (Surface Fishing Adventures, Last Chance Saloon, May 2006)
By Julian Grattidge

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Appendix

Online Retailers Of Carp Fishing Tackle

[Fishtec](#) – **Fishtec With Matt Hayes**; Every big name brand going, with extremely competitive prices and deals all the time.

www.carp-reel.co.uk – Carp fishing reel advice.

www.trevs-tackle.com – **Trev's Tackle**; Large range of carp fishing tackle. The Fishrite range is especially good for those starting out, or on a budget.

www.tacklebargain.com - **Tackle Bargains**; Specialists in selling clearance lines, bulk and one-off items. Some real bargains here.

www.fishing-direct.com – **Hooked Tackle & Bait**; Specialist carp fishing shop carrying the best brands, **including bait**. Supplies to the UK only.

www.spex-4-less.com – **Spex4Less**; Probably the UK's cheapest optician. Most importantly, they supply **prescription polarised fishing glasses**.

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