

A Big Day at Littledale.

Thursday 13th September 2007 was one of those days that did not turn out as expected. I had a check-up arranged for 10.00am and having experienced no dental problems for the previous six months, I assumed that it would be a notably nippy visit.

I could not park at first, and had to drive round the block three times before finding a spot. Not wanting to be late, I had to rush to the surgery as fast as my legs would go. I walked slowly however, as I approached the surgery, not wanting the receptionist to think that I had been running. I've always had a thing about rushing and these days tend to avoid it. It was exactly 9.59am as I entered the surgery – so in spite of everything - I had arrived one minute early for my check-up.

'Alan Harvey, 10 o'clock appointment with Mr. Pierrepoint,' I blurted out with a gasp. 'Good morning Mr. Harvey, 'I'm sorry but Mr. Pierrepoint is running 30 that's, three zero minutes late this morning,' said the receptionist who once announced train times at Lancaster station.

It struck me as strange that Mr. Pierrepoint could be running 30 that's, three zero minutes late at 10 o'clock when, as far as knew, he only started his day at 9.30am. Given his work rate, I was pleased that my appointment was before lunch.

I did eventually get to sit in Mr. Pierrepoint's electric chair at 10.45am and within seconds he had a load of mirrors and pokey things stuffed in to my gaping mouth.

'Teeth look okay, but the gums will definitely have to come out,' he joked with a face that only a gurning champion could pull.

'No I stand corrected; you've got a small filling that needs filling at the back. It's so tiny you won't need an injection. I can do it right away. Is that okay?'

I've always found it strange that dentists expect patients to answer questions when their mouths are either numb with cocaine or full of equipment. Moreover, the way they understand the patient's gibberish must take years to master.

I finally escaped at 10.55am with a sore jaw and stretched lips that would have put Mick Jagger to shame. I paid my fee and skedaddled before Mr. Pierrepoint could do anything else to my mouth. Driving away, my car thermometer was showing a healthy 17 C and for the first time that day my mind drifted away from things oral.

What I needed was some pleasure to help me over my ordeal and a few hours of fishing sounded just the ticket. I usually plan fishing trips carefully but on this occasion I decided to throw caution to the wind and just go for it.

I picked up my bait at the Morecambe Angling Centre and by 11.30 am my Astra was packed and heading for Littledale Hall Fishery. The gigantic wind turbines that decorate the skies above Brookhouse were almost stationary and I could see that I was in for a calm day by the lake.

I was pleased that several vehicles stood in the car park as it is always nice to pass the time of day with fellow anglers. They were well spaced around the water with three occupying the deeper swims and one on the near side bank opposite the island. Luckily my preferred spot was free.

Littledale Lake is well stocked with carp, bream, roach and rudd together with some good quality perch. Most swims are highly productive in the warmer months with most species being caught on each peg. As half the day had gone, I set up quickly and put a hair rigged, tiger nut boilie in the margin twenty yards to my left. I knew the spot was visited by patrolling fish, and as most anglers were at the opposite end of the pool, I assumed any feeding fish would be undisturbed.

I am always amazed how crafty carp come close to the bank in search of food, particularly during the summer months. By the same token the speed with which they withdraw when anglers tramp on the bank is equally awesome. I usually stay still when fishing in the margin and keep low so that the fish can not see my silhouette against the sky line. Carp are cautious creatures and quick learners when it comes to danger.

My trusty Bluefox float rod was set with light tackle and a 14's hook so that I could catch silver fish and perhaps the odd small carp. I bated my swim with a mixture of trout pellets and maggots and fished with a small but juicy worm just off the bottom. Within minutes my bite alarm indicated that a fish had scooped my boilie and I found myself playing a 10-1 Common which was livid to learn that my line was attached to its meal. I weighed, photographed and returned the fish, noted its details and set about rebaiting the rod. With any luck it would not be the only decent fish of the day even though my morning had been donated to the dentist.

Whilst recasting the carp rod, I noticed my waggler sink as a hungry fish seized the worm. With hands otherwise engaged I was not in a position to do anything about the bite. Once able to concentrate on my float again, I checked the bait, catapulted more mix in to the swim and waited.

At 12.30pm the waggler moved across the surface sufficiently to prompt a strike. I lifted a petite perch out of the water; with its tail swishing and dorsal fin extended. The fish was so tiny that it did not even bend the lightest section of my rod. However, it must have been very hungry as the bait was swallowed completely and a disgorging was required to remove it. I do not enjoy catching small perch as they tend to be greedy and often difficult to unhook.

Over the next hour I caught three eight ounce roach, but lost an equivalent number as some of the bites were hesitant.

My swim quietened after a while and I switched to a corn hook bait to see if I could tempt a few bream. I have discovered that Littledale bream tend to feed later than roach and I was hopeful that I could land a few before the end of the day.

At 3.10pm the sound of my carp alarm broke the silence again and forced me to put my Bluefox rod in its rest. I lifted the carp rod to play the fish which moved away quickly, stripping line from my bait runner.

Suddenly my Bluefox tipped forward on its rest and I realized that something substantial had taken the corn and was about to take the rod as well. I had inadvertently knocked off the bait runner and had a rod ring not have been caught behind the rest; I know I would have lost the lot.

I grabbed the light rod with my right hand, whilst still holding the carp rod with my left. This was the first time I had experienced such a situation and I quickly realized that I had neither the experience nor strength to land two decent fish at the same time.

I called out to the nearest angler for assistance, but unfortunately before he arrived the fish on my carp rod ejected the bait and was gone.

I am always disappointed when I lose a good fish, but on this occasion I consoled myself with the fact that even the marvelous Matt Hayes would struggle with simultaneous specimens. Also it had to be said that I still had a good fish, albeit smaller, attached to my other line. This second fish appeared to be well hooked and after a while I became confident that my 6lb hook length was adequate to land it. Even so I took things very carefully, given that the brute had almost cost me my top tackle.

The 2-15 Mirror did not escape and was soon staring back at me from my mat. It appeared to be a surprisingly small fish to have caused such trouble but as they say, in 'every small fish there is a bigger one trying to get out'.

I re-baited my rod with corn and placed the float in the same position as before in the hope that more carp might be about. I then dealt with my carp rod which was still lying helplessly on the bank.

Within minutes the carp bait was taken again by a fish which ejected the hook almost before I could put pressure on it. I did not see this fish or feel its weight and therefore have no idea of its size. I wound in my line unhappily and checked the sharpness of the hook against my finger nail. Although the hook had not been in use for very long it was blunt and needed replacing.

The next hour was productive on the carp front with a 9-13 Common at 16.05 and Mirrors of 8-3 and 7-6 at 16.22 and 16.40 respectively. I also had a short run which did not turn in to a full take at 16.53. It looked as though my hook change had done the trick and I kept my fingers crossed that my luck would hold. My total bag so far stood at an impressive 39.4lbs and I decided to eat my snack, before I got another bite.

The other anglers were gradually disappearing and by 17.05 there was only one man standing at the other end of the lake. As things were going well I decided to give it another hour.

I recalled that on many occasions in the past I had experienced good catches in the early evening when most anglers had left for the day. It struck me that maybe the fish are cleverer than we think and know that they can avoid capture by dining late.

My day dreaming was rudely interrupted at 17.09 by another run from a 7-1 Common which made off with my boilie and steamed towards the opposite bank like a train.

I could see that a number of big carp were now 'topping' at various places around the pool and I sensed that more fish were feeding than before.

I had a steady string of fish for the next hour with a 4-15 Common at 17.21, two Mirrors of 9-13 and 7-13 at 17.32 and 17.56 with another Common of 4-13 coming just after six o'clock.

Although the light was fading by six, I knew I still had plenty of fishable day left, should I need it.

At 18.10 on the dot, I hooked a fish which was unmistakably the biggest of the day. It was slower but more powerful than the others staying low in the water as if hugging the bottom. Try as I might I could not lift it to the surface and I rapidly realized that I had hooked a monster. I took my time even though my arms began to ache; as I was determined to avoid another loss. I let it take line as it ran and carefully re-wound when I could.

After a good ten minutes of hard, but very pleasurable effort, the Common rose to the surface and even though it was some way off the bank, I was able to glimpse its length. My mouth fell open as I observed the flank of the fantastic fish. It looked to be almost three feet long and perhaps one of the legendary Littledale twenties.

On gaining its second wind it dived again and I lost sight of it for some time. However, with patience and effort the 18-8 was at last pulled over the net and although not a twenty, the spectacular specimen was the biggest I'd landed and a new personal best.

Excitedly I carried it round to the other angler so that a permanent record of my catch could be made. The photograph, which still hangs on my wall, has become one of my preferred pictures and will probably remain so for ever.

I did not even mind the soaking I got from its paddle-like tail as it swam away; it was after all a small price to pay for a fabulous fish that had taken my session weight to a magnificent 92.9lbs.

I packed my gear and drove home, smiling like a simpleton and reflecting on how the session had gone.

My day had certainly not turned out as expected.

Alan Harvey.

11.03.09.