

First Fish From Frank's.

As a 'fair weather' fisherman I have never tried my luck in January before, having once been told that it is 'too cold to catch'. However, the five day forecast showed that Wednesday 23rd January 2008 was promising with no rain and projected temperatures of 12 C. I knew that the wind, which was to increase during the day, would not be a problem as some pegs at Frank's are sheltered no matter which way it blows. I anticipated that with a securely pegged umbrella I would be well protected from the weather.

I packed my gear at 08.45, purchased my first pint of maggots for the year and set off for Beacon Fell. The Lancaster traffic had reduced to a trickle as the school run was over and most people were at work. I was soon out of the City and moving south in the steady stream of cars that inhabit the roads at that time of the morning. Leaving the A6 at Brock I could see the flooded fields on both sides of the road and I wondered how much the extra water would affect my fishing.

Arriving at Frank's gate I could remember the code numbers clearly, although I have to admit that it took me several attempts to get the sequence right. I was reminded of the famous Morecambe and Wise piano sketch in which Andre Previn tells Eric that he has played all the wrong notes. Eric's unforgettable reply was that he had played all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order. It's surprising what the affects of too much Christmas pudding and Chardonnay do to the brain not to mention the waist line!

Always curious to see what others have caught previously I made my way to the hut so that I could study the log. Try as I might I could not get in, the lock was stuck fast and in desperate need of TLC and WD40.

As I approached the water I could see that the wind was strong enough to cause a ripple on pegs 1 to 19, but luckily the other side of the pool was calm and revealed a large number of 'good' fish moving near the surface. I selected peg 26 for both shelter and ease of casting to a feature, and set up quickly to maximize my time in the water. There were one or two carp topping at the back of the lake and I was keen to bag one in my first session of the year.

Using a hair rigged boilie and one ounce lead; I placed my rig just to the right of the island as near to the reeds as I could manage and then concentrated on my float rod. Knowing that bites would be tentative I selected a light float, 14's hook and single maggot in the hope that I would be able to tempt a few silver fish. Having put a small handful of trout pellets in to my swim I catapulted maggots periodically hoping that the 'little and often' principle would have the desired effect.

I knew from disturbances in the water that some small fish were about although they showed little interest in the steady flow of maggots that I supplied. During the next hour or so I tried different coloured arrangements of single, double and even triple maggots all to no avail. Small pieces of chopped worm produced nothing and no interest was shown in the strawberry flavored pellets which had previously worked well. In desperation I

sprinkled a little Marcel Van Den Eynde aniseed powder over the maggots in the hope that it would bring about a change in my fortunes.

There is no doubt that the combination of aniseed powder and single white maggot produced a reaction. However, the movements of my float were minute and certainly did not amount to a 'proper' bite. Even with a shotting adjustment which took my float further down in the water, the fish were still not confident enough to scoff the bait.

By 1.30 I had reached the conclusion that I was flogging a dead horse with my float rod. Perhaps January really was too early for silver fish at Frank's. Moreover, the silence of my carp alarm was giving me the impression that the bigger fish were not dining either. It was starting to look as though I would blank on my first session of the year.

The silence was suddenly shattered by my alarm which gave a single bleep followed by a continuous scream as a fish shot off with my boilie. I jumped from my chair, lifted the rod and instinctively looked at its tip to estimate what size of fish I was dealing with.

The rod showed a reasonable bend and although not a monster the fish stripped line from my reel rapidly as it headed for the reeds in the shallow water. Applying pressure I encouraged it to change direction and took in line as it came in my way. On seeing the net it turned again and attempted to get in to the vegetation on the right side of the peg. Luckily it did not succeed but turned back towards deeper water.

I was once told that as a rule carp don't fight very much when the water is cold. This fish, however, had obviously not been told about the rule and was prepared to put up a fair old scuffle inspite of temperature.

After the characteristic gulp of air, I got it safely in the net and on the mat for a photograph. The Mirror Carp weighed in at 6-2, looked to be in excellent condition and had an enormous stomach for it size. It had evidently been chomping for England during the Winter months and is probably destined to be whopper!

Imagine my surprise to find that the fish was just three years old and one of 50 baby Simmos that were obtained from Highfield to supplement stocks in the main lake.

Who said that January's too cold to catch?

Alan Harvey.
25th January 2008.