

First off the Top.

By Alan Harvey

I had planned to fish in the match at Frank's Pool on Sunday 10th May 2009, but unfortunately overslept following two late nights and did not make it. It's funny how the age thing affects one's staying power. I could once go to bed at midnight and be up by seven, but not any more.

As the day was to be a 'fishing day', I had to rethink quickly and given that many commercial fisheries are heaving at week-ends, I settled on Wild Boar Farm Pool or WBFP as I call it.

I set off at 10am and after a steady drive landed just before 11.00. Two other anglers were already in situ, one in the shallow water near the Willow and the other in the deeper corner near the overhanging hawthorn tree.

When fishing at Wild Boar I usually select the swim near the large stone as it is relatively snag free and well positioned to give a good view of the whole pool. The main disadvantage of the peg however, is that it is quite high above the water, and gives the fish an excellent view of the angler.

The small pool felt full with two other anglers in place and things were very quiet at first with few fish rising and bites coming infrequently.

I set up my waggler rod with bait just on the bottom and after inadvertently stepping on my line and loosing a crocodile plummet, I eventually started fishing at 11.20am.

I tried maggot first to see if there were any fish about and astonishingly within seconds my float flew under and I lifted a 4 ounce Crucian out of the water. 'That's at least one small Crucian the cormorants didn't get', I said to my self, remembering that the birds had also 'fished' WBFP during the winter.

After this promising start, I rebaited and went in for another. I did not wait long, and within seconds a baby rudd took my float for a dive.

Noting the details in my diary, I hoped that the day would continue as it had started and make my 40 mile trip worthwhile.

Switching to pellet in the hope that I could tempt something larger, I went back in and added a handful of 6mm carp pellets to create a tempting bed of bait.

I crossed my fingers in the hope that my day would continue in the same way. Unfortunately it did not and my swim dried up completely.

No matter what I tried, I was just not able to stimulate any interest from any WBFP residents.

Had I over feed the swim? Were my first two fish only 'strays'? I did not know, but I did know that the feeding fish had faded away.

The other anglers did not appear to be catching much either and I wondered whether I had just picked one of those quiet days that we all get from time to time.

It is at such times that my thoughts wonder to other things often associated with the surroundings. To my mind it was a lovely day for fishing, mild, dull and only a gentle breeze rippling the water. The trees were starting to sprout following the rain of previous days; the birds were going about their normal business for the time of year and a flock of the cleanest sheep I have ever seen munched their way through the lush green grass that carpeted the field.

My day dreaming was suddenly brought to an abrupt end by the sight of a bent quiver tip and an angler straining to keep a sizable carp from diving in to the roots of the hawthorn tree. Within seconds his 8lb line had broken and the fish had escaped in to the depths. I realized that the angler was actually surface fishing with bread using a short quiver tip rod that enabled him to place his bait well under the overhanging branches of the hawthorn. Undeterred he rebaited and continued with the tactic which to my mind demanded nerves of steel and a split second reaction time.

I noticed that the second angler was using the same approach near to the willow branches although I did not notice him having the same degree of success.

Looking around the pool I could not see any other carp moving near the surface except those under the tree and not surprisingly the first angler was soon battling with a second substantial fish.

This time he was able to pull the beast out from under the tree and after a short scuffle the six pound mirror was safely in the net. I saw its bright mirror scales flash in the sun light as it went back in to the water with a splash, hopefully to be caught another day.

The approach of lunch time saw the two anglers to pack up their gear and be on their way. 'You can't let them take any line when they are under a tree', said one angler as he passed me on his way the gate. I nodded knowledgably although I knew full well that I had never caught a carp 'off the top' or from under a tree for that matter.

The pool was soon silent as their car disappeared down the road leaving me to ponder what I had witnessed.

The next half hour was punctuated by the occasional bite and the even more occasional rudd that came out of the water on my line. Fish were just not feeding on pellet and it soon became clear that maggot was the only bait to bring fish to the bank.

Glancing over to the Hawthorn tree, I could see that carp were topping under the branches again and I quietly walked nearer to take a look.

To my astonishment I could see a massive mirror moving just under the surface, its scales were clearly visible through the water, and my tinted sun glasses allowed me to see its gigantic mouth sucking in food as it swam. Every now and then it vanished and reappeared in a different place, always staying within the safety of the tree. The fish obviously believed that the branches provided a safe feeding area and it clearly had no intention of leaving them.

Realizing that this was perhaps my only chance of a decent fish, I removed my float and weights and attached a piece of bread to my size 12 hook. With no weights and float the rig was light and difficult to position with accuracy. It took several attempts but eventually I worked out how I could place my bait under the tree where the carp had been.

I held my breath as time and time again I saw a fish circle the area; my arms ached with holding my rod out as far as I could. The mirror appeared to be topping then submerging to swim under branches and roots to surface elsewhere. As the fish tended to follow the same circular pattern, I hoped that in time it would return to the spot that held my bait. The only question was would the bread still be on the hook when it did? I suddenly saw a massive mouth come out of no where, suck in my bread and power off under the roots. My adrenaline level rocketed; and as I struck sideways I felt the hook set in to a powerful fish.

Instinctively I applied side strain, knowing that to give ground would mean instant disaster. I applied as much force as I dared knowing that the 5lb hook length would be tested to the limit by this muscular Mirror. With great relief I got the brute out from the tree and in to open water where I was able to use my bait runner to good effect. It dived deep and heaved hard taking line as it swam down in the water, perhaps hoping to snag my line on the debris of the depths. Each time it ran it appeared to head for snags and I wondered how long my line could take the pounding it was getting. I knew that I had to keep the fish in open water in the hope that I could tire it out enough to land it. But I also knew that this was easier said than done! After a battle that raged for longer than it should have, and at times could have gone either way, I netted my very first 'fish off the top'. It was in perfect condition, weighed in at 6-15 and had all of the characteristic colouring of a Wild Boar Mirror. I gratefully photographed my special fish and quickly returned it to fight again another day.

The excitement had made my heart pound like a jack hammer, and so I decided to eat my lunch, recover and plan what to do next. I had learned very quickly that surface fishing for carp was an exciting approach that required nerves of steel and rapid reaction times. I was not at all sure that I had either.

Whilst guzzling my tomato soup, I noticed that carp were now topping in the shallows at the other end of the pool, and on the basis of this observation I promptly put out a 15mm fish-meal boilie, dropping it close to where I had seen the fish. The size of the ripple pattern told me that these fish also were substantial, and I wondered whether I would

have much chance with a boilie in only a foot or so of water. However, given the rule that 'a moving carp is a feeding carp'; it was certainly worth a go.

The day went pleasantly by with more carp rolling in the shallows but no runs. My silver fish swim was also very quiet with no bites to speak of and no sign of fish moving. Unperturbed, I soldiered on, rotating baits, feeding the swim with various attractants, but it was all to no avail. No silver fish were caught and no bites were produced. However, as is so often the case in fishing, just when I was starting to think that I had had my lot, I had one of the most explosive carp takes that I can remember.

I actually heard a splash of water before the Delkim fired, as an energetic carp powered off like a torpedo across the pool. Lifting the carp rod I felt the fish pull hard as it ran to escape, but with a good hook hold, 12lb line and a 2.5lb test curve Fox Warrior, it was on a looser. It tried to swim towards the 'Private Fishing' sign in the centre of the pool but having already been caught on that one; I kept it in the open water where I could allow my clutch and rod to do the work.

In less time than it took with my carp off the top, it was soon in the net and on the bank. The 7-2 Mirror was immaculate; its mouth was perfect and contained the 'curtains' which told me that it may not have visited the bank before.

I photographed my second prize of the day and returned it quickly to minimize the stress of being caught, perhaps for the first time. It swam away, apparently unaffected by the ordeal and I packed up and left grateful for my very special day at Wild Boar.

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