

Six of the Best.

A good fishery is one which provides pleasure by allowing quality fish to be caught by a competent angler.

Littledale Hall fishery provides wonderful tranquility and over the last four years has produced six of my personal best fish not to mention some of the most astonishing tussles that I have ever had.

I have summarized some of these events below in the hope that they may be of interest to others who enjoy fishy tales.

Perch. 2-13. 23.02.07.

When I turned up at ten past nine on a dull Friday morning with my shiny Maver Pole in one hand and a tub of worms in the other, I had no idea that a personal best (PB) Perch was on the cards.

It was only my third session of the year and I knew it was far too early in the season to land much more than a few pounds of silvers with perhaps the odd carp if I was lucky. I remember the session well, not only because of the PB but also as I forgot my carp pellets and therefore had to improvise with feed. I knew that some larger perch were showing as three days earlier I'd landed a 1-9 stripy on lob worm so I was hopeful for another.

The fish were slow to start biting that morning and it took a couple of hours of careful baiting before I landed my first fish: a shiny silver bream of 1-8. I knew that I had to be careful with feeding as without carp pellets I was forced to use a mix of chopped worm and sweet corn which was quite heavy for the time of year.

Things soon picked up and it wasn't long before I was shipping in a steady stream of bream with bites becoming more powerful with time. Not being a very experienced 'pole man' I was pleased with the way the session took shape. I was particularly pleased by the way the pole allowed me to position my float identically each time and I quickly realized that pole fishing was a precision business. My yellow pole elastic stretched further each time I hooked a larger bream with the best of 2-4 providing an impressive account of itself, given that bream usually pull in like plates.

The session progressed steadily and my catch rate was reasonable given that it was still February and I was only using a trace of free offerings. By 3.45pm I'd caught 11 bream and a small roach of 3 ounces. The temperature was starting to fall from a high of 10 C and although there was no wind I was starting to feel noticeably nippy. My swim died and I started to wonder whether feeding was over for the day.

At 4.15pm my float went under for the 13th time of the session and as I lifted my pole I realized that I had hooked something with a bit more 'go' about it. The light elastic was soon pulled out to its limit as the fish, which I assumed to be a small carp made a rush for

the weeds. As I tried to haul it out of danger, a spiky dorsal fin broke the surface and I knew that I was in touch with a stonking stripy.

I took it very carefully not wanting to lose the fish and after a fair old scrap that could have gone either way several times, I managed to lift my monster clear of the water. To my surprise the digital scales showed that my PB had now increased to 2-13 a full nine ounces above the previous one and looking at its mouth I realized why my swim had dried up at the end of the session.

I quickly took a photograph and slipped the giant back to perhaps become a PB again one day.

Rudd. 0-13. 18.06.07.

I have always loved rudd and well remember as a 13 year old boy catching hundreds of them from a small farm pond near my home. The pond, which looked like a puddle, went under the strange name of 'Dead Dogs' and was absolutely teeming with small fish. I remember that during the late afternoon it was 'one a chuck' with a worm being swallowed as it touched the water.

Even now I see the fish as one of the most beautiful in our waters, though few anglers target the species these days. Today the rudd records stands, I believe, at 4 pounds plus although anything over a pound is considered as a specimen fish.

Most of the rudd I have caught in the last four years have taken my bait 'on the drop'. They tend to be surface feeders and as I usually fish for larger specimens on the bottom, I rarely catch them. That said they can provide explosive takes on light tackle as they snatch the hook bait and swim off at high speed.

Monday 18th June 2007 was a warm, still day, with the morning forecast claiming that there was a slight chance of rain early on. That being the case I arrived at Littledale later than usual at 11am with the aim of pole fishing for silvers. I had decided to use sweet corn and small cubes of spam that had been rolled in cocoa powder to stop any sticking.

I also planned to put double plastic sweet corn out on a carp rod with the aim of tempting a monster or two. I had tried plastic corn several times before with little success, but knowing that some big carp had been caught on it in the past, I decided to persevere.

The day was productive with six bream to 2-8, seven carp to 4-9, thirteen roach to 0-12, two rudd to 0-13 and one small perch. The total catch of 44.8lbs was one of the better bags of the season, particularly as it contained a PB rudd.

The 13 ounce rudd was spectacular. It snatched a single grain of corn on the drop during the late afternoon and stretched my pole elastic far more than would be expected given its size.

Three years later the photograph still has pride of place on my wall as it takes me back to my youth and reminds me of my old 'Dead Dog' days.

Crucian Carp 3-2 and Common Carp 18-10. 28.10.07.

One of my most memorable sessions ever took place on Sunday 28th October 2007. I don't generally do week-ends at Littledale as they tend to be busy with lower catch rates. However, as the lake was fishing well I decided to put in an extra visit. This later turned out to be one of my better angling decisions as astonishingly the pool was quiet, produced almost 53lbs of fish and gave me two new PB's.

The day started late, as is often the case following my early retirement the year before. I arrived at 10.15am and managed to get my first tiger nut boilie in the water by 10.30. I knew that October could be a good month for carp and I was hopeful that some of the better pool residents were 'stocking up' for winter.

The air temperature had risen by two degrees since my last visit and a gentle breeze from the north told me that the shallow south end of the lake may well contain some feeding fish. Moreover, a second angler occupied my preferred swim so the shallow end it was.

Within minutes I noticed two good sized carp topping near by, perhaps sampling some of the food particles the wind had carried.

The day started steadily on my match rod with a stream of nice skimmers falling to pellet and several small roach taking maggot. The carp rod, however, did much better. Five fantastic carp came around lunch time, with the best being a cracking common of 18-10. The fish fought like stink and tried hard to snag my line in the lily pads. It splashed in the shallows on the opposite side of the pool and got so close to the bank that at one stage I thought it was trying to leave the water.

Eventually I got the net under it and realizing that it was close to my PB, I carried it carefully it to my mat for weighing. My previous best common weighed 18-8 and amazingly came from the same place some six weeks earlier. Lifting the sling clear of my mat I realized that my personal best was now 18-10 and I quickly carried my trophy to the nearest angler for a photograph.

I saw the expression on his face change to shock as he saw the size of my catch and I could not resist feeling smug when he told me that 'he had not yet had a bite!'

'Well that's fishing for you', I said using a phrase that I had once heard in a similar situation.

'A fantastic common', he yelled, as I carried my prize away to be released.

'I'll see if I can get one'.

'Good luck,' I shouted back as my monster made off to his mates.

Back at my match rod I tried to improve my catch rate of silvers. I replaced the hook bait, added a few freebies to the swim and sat back in my chair reflecting on what had just gone on. It was one of those rare moments in fishing when you are able to bask in your own glory before returning to the reality.

Nothing much happened for some time but lifting in to a bite I suddenly felt a strong fish pull line from my bait runner which luckily was switched on. The fish was fast, powerful and very hard to stop on six pound line and it shot this way and that in an attempt to eject the hook. As it came up for air, I thought it looked like a small but deep common, but as I pulled it over the rim of the net I realized that it was actually a magnificent crucian. My scales revealed a weight of 3-2 and the realization that I had bagged a second BP started to sink in. I just could not believe it, two personal best fish in succession, I had almost increased the old PB by a pound.

I again carried the fish to the same angler for a picture and smiled as he told me it was the biggest crucian he had ever seen in his life. I said nothing but knew that it was the biggest I'd ever seen as well!

Grass Carp. 9-15. 13.10.08.

Littledale once boasted two grass carp, stocked by the owner five years ago to help with weed control. Sadly one died so only one remains.

I had heard stories about a nine pound grassi being caught in 2007 by an angler using floating crust at the shallow end of the lake but never thought much of it.

On Monday 13th October 2008 I had no idea what sort of day lay ahead as I set up two carp rods. I had recently started to focus on carp during the autumn period when they are eating loads to help them through the colder months.

My plan for the session was to compare the catch rates of 15mm tiger nut boilies (TNB) and 14mm marine halibut pellets (MHP). I tried to make most of the conditions the same for each bait although of course, the 'experiment' was not totally 'scientific' as different swims were in use. I had used both baits previously with success, but never tested them side by side. I find MHP difficult to drill, but once it is on the hair it tends to last for ages. TNB on the other hand is softer and can crumble during the drilling process. Of the two, I have always thought TNB to be more attractive to carp as it breaks down in the water more quickly and is easier for them to eat. I hoped that by the end of the session I would know whether or not my hypothesis was correct.

The day looked ideal for carp fishing, with a slight wind blowing towards the shallow end and only two other anglers at the other end of the water. I always feel that the selection of swim is slightly less critical when carp fishing as one can easily cast to other swims if necessary. That said, Littledale is not large and with its high stocking density one can usually catch well in most places.

I decided to target the central channel on this occasion with baits well separated to avoid tangles. I did not have to wait long for my first run and at 11.55 I was playing a powerful common that had taken my MHP and was swimming for the island. I managed to turn the fish and after a fair old kafuffle, I netted, weighed and photographed my 10-10 prize. The MHP had got off to a flying start with the first double of the day so I quickly replaced it, added a new PVA bag and put it back in. As I bent down to take in the slack and adjust my hanger, I was startled to see line disappearing rapidly as a second fish made off with the bait. I immediately snatched up the rod and made contact with a fish that was smaller but still able to pull line from the bait runner rapidly. It was feisty and I had to pull hard to stop it swimming behind the island. But luckily it was not too long before I had my second common under control, weighed and back in the water. The short, fat fish of 7-12 swam off at top speed showing no ill effects of its capture.

The MPH was clearly doing well with over 18lbs of common in just over an hour. I wondered whether things were going to continue in this way for the rest of the day.

I recast the second rod again putting the bait near to the centre of the lake in roughly the same place that I had produced the first fish. The alarm attached to the first rod had remained totally silent so far so I decided to move my TNB closer to the margin on my left where I had seen signs of fish rolling. The move paid off as I landed two commons of 4-6 and 4-2 and three mirrors of 9-8, 6-8 and 6-1 on TNB over the next four hours. I had now caught almost 50lb of fish with tigers bringing about a dramatic change of fortune and producing 50% more.

As five o'clock approached the sun sank and shadows started to spread across the shallows. Shoals of small fish were rising and several large carp were swimming near the surface around the lake. I noticed something of size wallowing at the end of the lake so I quickly dropped my TNB in its vicinity. I knew that the water would only be a foot or so deep and full of the debris taken there by the breeze. I hoped that my bait would be visible in the murk although carp are known to possess a highly developed sense of smell and can detect microscopic food items

Within minutes my TNB was picked up by something sturdy which created waves as it swam directly towards me. I took in line swiftly removing slack and taking away any chance of escape. The fish fought frantically, mainly near the surface and moved so far down the pool that it was in danger of becoming tangled with my other line. It was sometime before the fish, which I thought to be a common, took the characteristic gulp of air before making a last ditch attempt to run. Obliging it swam parallel to the bank where I was able to lift it in my landing net and complete the capture.

It was only at that point that I realized that this fish was weird and not at all like a Littledale common. It was long and slim with a head that appeared out of proportion with the rest of its body. It weighed 9-15 and therefore, not being a double did not qualify for a picture and given the precarious nature of my batteries, I foolishly did not bother. This was a decision that I later came to regret when in conversation with the owner's son I realized that I had actually caught the only surviving Littledale grassi.

I started to pack away the carp rod that had just been in use thinking that that was it for the day. But I was wrong again and suddenly off went the alarm on my MHP rod with a 5-4 common that obligingly came in straight to my waiting net without much fuss.

Toting up my statistics I realized that I had landed just over 64 lbs of carp with TNB out fishing MHP by almost 2 to 1. What a day.

Roach. 1-5. 13.03.09.

I have caught very few large roach and my records show that the majority fall within the range of 4 to 8 ounces.

However, very occasionally I do have sessions when the better roach show well and are prepared to come to my net.

So it was on Friday 13th March 2009, a Littledale session which inspite of its date produced nearly 39lb of silvers and carp and as shown in the table below included my best big roach bag ever.

Roach	Bream	Mirror Carp	Common Carp	Rudd
1-5	2-12	6-8	4-14	0-8 (2)
1-0 (2)	2-0	5-13		
0-14 (3)	1-0 (2)			
0-12 (3)	0-12 (2)			
0-8 (5)	0-8			
0-4 (2)				
0-2 (2)				

I arrived at the pool at 10.15am and was fishing by 10.30. My plan was to use some newly released 14mm chocolate malt and tiger nut boilies on my carp rod and to fish with maggots on my match rod.

I assumed that as the water temperature was still only 7.7 C, it would take some time to get the silvers going. By spraying maggots, a few at a time, I hoped to encourage a feeding response in the water column around my hook bait.

By 11.15am I saw evidence that my approach was working with a few small roach being taken. Bites tended to be rapid and mainly took place as the free offerings and hook bait sank through the water at about half depth. I missed many of the bites, but occasionally felt the weight of a more substantial specimen as it snatched the bait. Thinking that the heavier fish were carp I continued with the approach but tried to quicken my reaction time with the hope of success.

I suddenly caught a one pound roach followed by another in quick succession. I could not believe my luck; I had only caught two roach of a pound in the previous three years of fishing and unbelievably I had just caught two in quick succession.

Then it happened. My float sank again and lifting my rod I felt a heavier fish shoot off to my right. At first I thought I had hooked a heavier bream, but I quickly changed my mind as the speed of this fish was greater and it appeared able to change direction very rapidly. Pulling it up to the surface I glimpsed red fins and immediately knew I had hooked a whooping roach. I instinctively knew that a PB was on the cards and I very carefully netted and weighed my red fin. My mouth fell open as the scales showed that I had landed a 1-5 roach, improving upon my previous record by two ounces.

I photographed and returned my superb specimen which swam off at speed showing no sign of it ordeal.

All in all the session yielded 18 roach with half weighing 12 ounces of more. It was without doubt my best roach session ever and one I will probably remember forever.

Alan Harvey.
04.01.10.