

Wending My Way Back To Wyreside.

My mission to bag a twenty pound carp began in September 2007 when I landed three eighteen pound fish in as many weeks and almost had my pole broken by a fourth which escaped with most of my elastic. It was at that point that I decided to take carp fishing more seriously and target the species in earnest rather than just putting out my carp rod as an after thought. The sight of the largest of these fish – an 18-10 Common - coming up to the surface for air after a twenty minute battle will remain with me for ever as will the gasp of ‘bloody hell’ which came from the man on the next peg when he saw the three foot fiend in my net.

My approach to carp fishing had not changed much over the season and although my records showed that I had caught more fish, I had to admit that few had weighed over ten pounds.

A wise man once told me that, ‘if you always do what you’ve always done, then you’ll always get what you’ve always got’, and I presume that the principle applies just as much to fishing as it does to anything else. I decided, therefore, to try, not always doing what I’d always done, but to use some fresh baits, visit new venues, and fish exclusively for carp during some sessions. I could remember being impressed by the lake at Wyreside Fisheries back in 2006 when I collected a leaflet after a Wild Boar session ended early due to bad weather. Luckily the leaflet was still readable inspite of it residing at the bottom of my draw for two years and having a somewhat dog-eared appearance. Without more ado, I rang the fishery, explained that I wanted to catch a twenty pound carp and listened as the voice at the end of the line told me that two twenty pounders had been caught during the previous week. On the strength of this information, I bought a day ticket for Thursday 18th September and re-read tatty leaflet to prepare for the session. I planned to arrive at 9am use three rods with different baits and stay until it got dark or I got fed up.

The morning of the 18th started later than anticipated as I over slept and only woke for my first cup of tea at 8.30. I have always believed alarms to be instruments of the devil and having recently taken early retirement, they have happily become a thing of the past. After a shower, shave and shredded wheat my sedan was packed and I was wending my way back to Wyreside.

Arriving at the lake at 10.35, I collected my ticket, purchased the required barbed hooks and parked in the space reserved for peg 10. I was astonished to see only two other anglers at my end of the lake having gained the impression that the place was habitually heaving. The lake was picturesque with paths and pegs maintained to a high standard with aerators switching on and off to ensure that fish remained healthy. To my mind conditions were perfect, warm though dull with only enough wind to create a slight ripple on the surface and even though I could not see any fish moving around I thought that my chances were good.

I had already planned my bait strategy, with rod 1 using 14mm Marine Halibut Pellet, rod 2 using Fresh Octopus and Squid Boilies and rod 3 using cut down Tiger Nut Boilies. Each cast was supported by a small PVA bag of boilie fragments to increase attraction around the hook bait. Rods 1 and 3 were put in the margin to the left and right of the peg as near to the bushes as possible with rod 2 in out front in an area that frequently showed bubbles rising to the surface. Both rods 1 and 3 were carp rods and I was confident that they were capable of handling big fish. However, the same could not be said of rod 2 which was my trusty Bluefox and normally reserved for silver fish. Although I had up graded the line to 12 pounds, I knew that the rod would struggle with a large fish..

The silence was suddenly broken by the sound of a van in the parking bay on the opposite side of the lake. Two camouflaged carpers got out and proceed to carry their gear to a nearby peg. I learned in conversation that one of the two was called Bill and had come to Wyreside for the first time to try his luck. The other was a regular visitor to the lake and spoke in glowing terms about the size and quality of its fish. Both were keen carpers and quickly gave the impression that they had caught more twenties than I could count on both hands.

The two listened as I told them of my longing to land a twenty and each made reassuring noises like, 'I'm sure you'll get there in the end', and 'the secret is to use a good bait.' With further comments about the length of a piece of string, and the number of beans that make five, they disappeared to get on with the business of the day. The next few hours passed quietly apart with odd bleeps from each alarm indicating that fish were moving around in the swim. I rebated my rods on an hourly basis and cast to the same spot every time so that plentiful supplies of free offerings were placed in each swim.

The sun came out after lunch and feeling warm and full I settled back in my chair for a nap. Although I had not appreciated it before, carp fishing was quite restful, with most time being spent either waiting, or better still sleeping between bites. Given my growing interest in siestas, it struck me that I had perhaps found my ideal activity.

On balance the squid and octopus bait appeared to produce more beeps than the others and I wondered whether I should change all rods over to this bait. However, on reflection I decided to leave things as they were given the fact that carp are greedy and eat most bait if it is presented correctly and if, of course, they are hungry.

At 3.45 a large flock of gulls flew over the lake and their droppings hit the water like a shower of rain. Fortunately I was not a causality of their excretions on this occasion although I have not always been so lucky.

At 4.01 the alarm on my left-hand rod indicated that something had made off with my marine halibut pellet. The run was short and swift and unfortunately my reaction time was far too slow to stop the fish diving in to the roots of the willow. It sat on the bottom under the tree and was just not for moving. I swore to myself as I realized that I had allowed the odds to shift dramatically in flavour of the fish and that I now had little chance of landing it. However, the fact that I could feel it moving meant that it was still hooked and therefore that I was still in with a chance.

Bill came running to see what was going on, he had heard the unmistakable sound of my Delkim and knew that I was in to a fish. Unfortunately the look on his face told me that he considered my chances to be poor. He shook his head, gave a sharp intake of breath and looked thoughtful. 'You could try slackening your line,' he said after a few seconds, 'the fish may think you've gone and swim back out again.'

I knew that his advice was designed to help in my hour of need, but was painfully aware that if the fish did not follow the same route out of the willow roots, then my line would be even more tangled than before. However, using the 'beggars can't be choosers' principle, I dutifully reduced my tension and as if by magic, out swam the fish.

We caught a glimpse of a powerful tail as it left the roots and powered off towards the centre of the lake and I carefully increased the tension again and adjusted my clutch in an attempt to slow the run and keep the fish away from my middle rod.

'I think you've got your twenty,' said Bill, 'from the size of its tail and the bend in your rod I'd say it was getting on for thirty.'

I said nothing but concentrated on playing my monster with all the skill I could muster. I was happy to let it circle in the open water as I knew that each time it did so it reduced its energy reserve and improved my chances of landing it. However, I knew from bitter experience that hooking a big fish is easier than landing one.

At one point it swam under the line of my Bluefox rod causing the alarm to sound. Happily a tangle was avoided as Bill pulled in the line and put the second rod out of the way.

I played my fish for the next twenty minutes keeping it well away from the submerged roots which may well have saved others in the past. Little by little it moved up in the water and nearer to the bank and eventually my eyes confirmed what my aching arms had been telling me, it was indeed bigger than anything I had caught, or for that matter seen, before. It rolled over the line in a last bid for freedom exposing its huge head and big belly and making my line twang like a plucked guitar string. I held my breath and carefully maneuvered it to the waiting net and with a strong lift the leather carp was mine. Not at all happy to be out of its watery home, it thrashed its body angrily as a gesture of defiance but calmed quickly when I covered its eyes with the net.

I stared in awe at the fish that minutes before had just been a figment of my imagination. What luck! On my very first trip to Wyreside I had bagged the giant I had been after for a year. The carp was fin perfect with no blemishes or marks to suggest that it had been a previous visitor to the bank and for all I knew it may not have been out of the water for years.

I carefully lifted the lump in to my waiting sling and Bill lifted it clear of the mat. It weighed exactly 25 pounds and I realized that I had not only caught a twenty but I had also hit that magical 25 pound mark as well. Did this mean that my new target was thirty?

I and my new personal best leather carp posed happily for a photograph that would soon take pride of place on my shelf and be admired by anyone who was prepared to show an interest.

I drove home that night tired but content in the knowledge that my Wyreside session had taught me that in angling as in anything else, we must try new things if we want to progress and bring out the best in ourselves.

I'm sure I'll be going back next year!

Alan Harvey.

23.10.08.