

THE PIKE HUNT CONTINUES!

I was itching to get back to Rutland and continue my search for deep water pike. Unfortunately, the weather had other ideas. I didn't make it back for over three weeks due to a succession of winter storms over the Christmas and New Year holidays. This meant the pikes' location was unlikely to be the same as before my enforced lay off. I had to start all over again! The water level had risen by some five feet; the inlet pipe was working again after month's out of service. The restored flow also coincided with bitterly cold weather with the result that the piped water was very cold and saw the reservoir's temperature drop a further 1.5 degrees to 3 degrees..

Obviously, I had to start in the deep areas I'd visited on my previous trips. I had managed to convince Shimano's predator ace, Matt Boast, to join me for this adventure. We targeted depths ranging from 60-80ft drifting through areas I knew held shoals of baitfish at that time of year. My selection of suitable weighted lures had increased somewhat since my last visits and I had had plenty of time to prepare while waiting for the weather to settle. Matt and I proceeded to search each area using slightly different approaches in an effort to find a winning combination of depth, speed and lure pattern. Our efforts were slightly hampered by the lack of wind can you believe? Our drifts were painfully slow so we were not covering much water, which is a good thing when you know where the fish are, but, when you don't, it's frustrating!

Our lack of drift speed was also affecting our presentations. I had weighted my lures to control their depth as the drifting boat drew them through the water. The resulting line drag would lift my lure off the bottom and would hold it horizontally as it slowly fell through the water back to the bottom. This slow undulating retrieve allowed me to search the bottom 10ft layer of water. Fortunately, by early afternoon the wind had picked up a tad which saw us move from the basin up into the North arm where I hoped the better water visibility would aid our cause. I'd avoided the South arm due to the inlet being situated there bringing cold and coloured water running down its length. I imagined it to be a poor choice for pike. However, if we'd been fishing for zander, it would have been a good choice, as it offered both flow and coloured water. Zander love current and their eye sight is far better suited to hunting effectively in coloured water.

Finally, after 5 hours I got a gentle tap as my lure dropped to the bottom. A typical zander bite I thought, but, as I picked up the retrieve again, I got a solid hit "Fish on!". As the rod took on its 'fighting curve', I started to wonder what I had hooked! If it was a zander, it was a big one, but, I was not convinced and as it surfaced, a low double figure pike came into view. It was a very welcome sight as it had been a hard slog all day, but, we were happy and encouraged, we renewed our efforts! At least we had a depth [67ft] and an area to work on. Despite this, we were unable to attract any more interest from the pike before the day came to an end.

On our return to base we heard that the zander action had been 'hot' with one boat catching 30 fish, with several weighing over 5lbs! We also heard of another boat catching a pike and losing another around the inlet, so my decision to avoid that area was unwise, what did I know! I only imagined that the flow had drawn a lot of food fish, hence the spectacular zander fishing and in turn drawn the pike, maybe?



Another 'deep water' pike for Andy

EXTREME WEATHER PIKING

Unsurprisingly, I couldn't wait to go back to Rutland after the previous trip. I felt that what I'd learned the previous week would give me an edge. I felt sure the pike had moved away from the main basin and into the arms. I had two days to find out if I was right or not? On my arrival, I saw Andy Black, a very experienced pike angler. Andy informed me that he felt the pike had moved from the deep water and were now slightly shallower and likely to be found in either arm. So, with this information confirming my own thoughts, I left the boat harbour full of confidence.

I was fishing with Bogdan Pascaru from the Angling Trust. Bogdan is a very keen and experienced lure angler and he must be keen as he had accepted my last minute invitation without any hesitation! If you knew the weather forecast for the day, wet, wet, wet, you'd know why I'd had such a problem getting one of my usual boat partners to join me!

My plan was to fish the North arm initially working around the feature I'd caught my pike from the last time out. I was also keen to fish the inlet in the South arm after what I'd learned last week. The North arm produced nothing and with such short days at this time of year, I didn't want to waste too much time there as there was plenty of water to search in the South arm. The fleet of zander boats, which had been congregating around the inlet, had dispersed by the time we put in our appearance. I was still using a large curly tailed shad similar to those I'd caught on, on previous trips. Bogdan was switching between pike lures and zander baits in an effort to attract a take. We made several drifts over the boils that surface above the inlet pipe. After yet another drift, I had a gentle take which I connected with instantly, 'fish on!' It was not a big fish, but, what was it? Up popped a plump zander! I was surprised it had taken my 20cm bait, but, although it was not what I was after, I was very pleased to get any fish. A short while later, a strange thing happened! As my Savage Real Eel surfaced, I noticed a Brook Lamprey tangled on the belly treble hook! I could only imagine it had been pumped in through the inlet pipe from the local River Nene.



This Zander had a big appetite



Brook Lamprey are a rare sight, especially in a reservoir

The weather as forecasted was nasty and wet and as the day eventually petered out, we done one long, last drift across the South arm which took us through a huge range of depths from 30 - 70ft in an effort to eliminate the possibility that the pike had gone much shallower. With minutes to go and as we approached the shore in 40ft, I had a thumping take that unfortunately came 'unbuttoned' half way up from the bottom!

Back at the harbour, the few stragglers who had stuck it out to the end, reported a very slow day as well, so not much could be gleaned from the events of the day. I needed now to get to my digs and dry my kit out before tomorrow!

The Friendly Fisherman' is the home of "predator tackle", owned by Andy Lush; the store is in Tunbridge Wells TN1 2PS.

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