

BULLETIN.

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EDITORIAL

"What's happened to the Bulletin?" asked the eel fisherman.

"I hear," said the shifty looking character creeping from the shadows of his pog, "that the Scotland Yard Porn Squad has impounded it."

"Do you mean to say that Lord Longford mentioned it?"

The shifty eyes moved around. His lips moved in reply but the words were drowned by the roaring of a Klaxon horn, indicating that the eel fisherman had a bite.

Ten minutes had passed and the two were now enjoying a brew. He had missed another. The slurping of coffee was interrupted as he continued his enquiry.

"Anyway, about this Bulletin scandal, have there been any arrests?"

"Not yet," said the eyes, "but I hear he's helping the police with their enquiries and that means the same thing."

The plain brown envelope landed on the door mat. Unfortunately, he was out fishing and it was his doting considerate wife who found it. Nervously she opened the package, dreading what she might find. Alas, it was as she expected, and, on seeing its gruesome content, wept profusely.

She resealed the envelope and dried her eyes. It would not do for her husband to know that she had been prying into the details of his secret vice. She had heard rumours about such publications and now she, the eel fisherman's wife, knew that it was true. A thought crossed her mind.

"I hope he doesn't indulge in tackle-swapping!"

He returned home after another blank. It was there on the mantelpiece, carefully resealed and, to all appearances, unopened. She did not speak: she did not have to; the look in her eye showed that she disapproved not only of his perverse habit, but also of the sordid contents of the plain, sealed envelope.

An ecstatic glint appeared in his eyes. The corner of his mouth rose in a faint smile and he had to lick the saliva as it trickled down his cheek. After months of frustration, this was it.

"At last", cried the eel fisherman. He clawed numbly at the package like a man possessed. He ripped the paper away, not bothering to open the envelope in the normal manner.

"At last," he repeated, his voice now almost unrecognisable. With a blood curdling scream he collapsed and fell foaming at the mouth. "At last, my bloody Bulletin!"

SUMMER '71

By Henry Hanson & John Szwechlowicz.

The summer of '71 proved to be about the best year's feeling that we have ever had. We say this not only in the terms of the number of fish caught, or of their individual sizes, but also for the people that we have had the good fortune to have met, talked to and fished with.

When we were first accepted as provisional members, we felt that we were dealing with a somewhat unknown quantity. Our doubting minds were soon eased by the many letters that we received and the friendly atmosphere that we found ourselves becoming involved in. Consequently things began to happen fast: arrangements were made with other club members and many enjoyable sessions were had in our part of Lincolnshire.

From fishing with other club members it soon became obvious that our methods and aims were very similar. The one main big difference, however, was in the actual tackle used; our's was one hell of a lot lighter! The tackle we used consisted of 10ft glass Carp rods (test curve 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ lb.) and 10-12lb bs line. In contrast, this year we will be using S/U Carp rods (test curve 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb.) coupled with lines of 14-18lb bs.

The hooks we used, usually Mustad or O'Shaughnessy, were sizes 2-1/0, the size dependant upon the bait size. Prior to last season we did not use wire traces, in fact we had no need for them. We used to use monofilament traces, usually about 2ft in length and of 17-24lb bs. Using these for the last few seasons, we lost no eels due to their being bitten through. Of course, each trace had to be discarded after an eel had been caught on it. With this method we had many eels up to 3:15. From the beginning of last season, however, we decided to change over to multi-strand wire for traces, usually about 15lb bs. Using these had no obvious detrimental effects on our results, although it would have been interesting to have used both type of trace during every session, thus a direct comparison could have been made.

These set ups that have been described were used in conjunction with modified Heron bite detectors, although silver paper was often preferred in high winds as the intermittent buzzing throughout the night prevented us from getting a good night's kip!

Regarding bait, we will use anything, but prefer 3-4inch roach, rudd or perch. This is mainly because they are the most convenient, although we have tried tench, bleak, bream, dace and crucian carp. This year we will try trout, sprats and goldfish!

The actual fishing was done almost exclusively in the many small ponds and pits that are scattered about North Lincolnshire. Most of these waters (all class 2.2.) are reed fringed, open and very similar in character to those which John Harris wrote about (NAC Bulletin 8.3 Nov. 1971.). Hence the majority of them are of a muddy coloration and have open, weed free bottoms, although there are certain percentage of waters, especially near the coast, that are very clear and, as a result of this, very weedy. We have tended to avoid this latter type of water, partly because we preferred the first type and partly because we simply did not have adequate tackle suitable for

fishing these weedy waters. As we are now better equipped, we shall be fishing this type of water a lot more in the coming season. As a matter of interest, these waters which are near to the sea, in some cases not more than 50yds, often have a very high proportion of bootlaces, and any bait, no matter how big, is constantly being nibbled by them. This of course, as I am sure you will have realised, is not conducive to the catching of large eels. Hence, we hope you can see our preference for the first type of water mentioned. Of course, these waters have their bootlaces too (what water hasn't?), its just that they are present in much more manageable proportions.

It should be stated that most of the waters in North Lincs. have a large head of eels of all sizes. To fish them, all you have to do is lob out a reasonable dead-bait to some sort of holding place such as a deep hole, shelf, weed bed, etc. There are very few pike to worry about; we have caught only one (3 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb) in the last few seasons. As long as a fair amount of effort is put in, we often use 4 or 5 rods each, results are bound to follow. This was proved last season by the number of good eels we landed between us. As new members we do not feel qualified to say whether or not our results are good by club standards, but we are really satisfied with them, especially since we both raised our personal best last season. Eels of 5:0 $\frac{1}{2}$ (JS) and 4:13 (HH) added the final touches to a really memorable season.

We have tried daytime eeling (in the muddy waters) and have enjoyed a small measure of success, although we have not really put in any great effort into this aspect of the sport. Of course, we know that Lincs. waters are well suited to daytime eeling, as this has been aptly demonstrated by John Harris.

Most of the Lincs. waters we fish have a good head of bait fish and are relatively easy to catch: until they are needed for bait! It is for this reason that we have started stockpiling deadbaits. They are kept in a deep freeze unit. In this way, we can always get hold of some bait when we need it. If fresh bait is easily obtainable where we intend fishing, then we will use it in preference to frozen bait, though we have not found that using frozen baits has any drawbacks or disadvantages. It may be that they have an advantage in that they can be injected with a particular scent or essence and have it frozen in.

On a final note, it was interesting to read Alan Hawkins' quotes on light tackle in a past issue (NAC Bulletin 8.2 April 1971, Editorial.). As we have never used very heavy tackle, by club standards anyway, might it be that we have had our good results as a direct result of this? It is true that by using relatively light gear we could be hopelessly outgunned by a big eel. This in fact did happen to us last season, although in that particular case the hook pulled out of the dead-bait: but that once was enough, we can assure you!

Thus the question of whether to use light tackle and risk being broken, but probably catching more; or to use heavy gear and consequently catch fewer eels, but land everything hooked is something for the individual to decide. After last season's experiences we know which one we'll choose.

RECIPES (2)

By Lol Derricot.

Lol told me that he had a few more recipes in his book that may be of interest to us. Here are another three. Only one is for eels, the other two being pike dishes. If, like me, your summer's eeling is spent disgorgeing small pike and wondering what to do with the little B's, here is the answer! - Ed.

STEWED EELSIngredients:

2 Eels
 $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of beef stock
 $\frac{1}{4}$ pint of port wine
 1 blade of mace
 4 allspice
 2 cloves
 lemon slices
 1 button onion
 pepper & salt
 1oz butter
 1oz flour
 1 tablespoon of mushroom ketchup
 1 glass of claret or any light wine

Method:

Cook the pieces of eel in a stew pan in one part of port wine to two parts of beef stock, flavoring them with mace, allspice, cloves, some slices of lemon, a very little onion and pepper & salt. Simmer slowly for about an hour, then strain and thicken the gravy with butter and a little flour. Add anchovy sauce, mushroom ketchup and wine. Serve the pieces of eel arranged in a circle, one piece overlapping another, and pour the sauce over.

BAKED PIKEMethod:

Open the fish, clean and scale it thoroughly. Dust it inside with pepper & salt and fill it with butter. Wrap in a buttered paper, lay in a baking dish and bake in a good oven. A pike of about four pounds weight will take about an hour to cook. Arrange on a hot dish, and serve with the liquor from the pan strained over it. If you are liberal with the butter, this is a dish fit for a king.

STUFFED PIKEMethod:

Clean and scale the pike. Make a forcemeat with breadcrumbs, sweetherbs, butter, a few chopped oysters and a boned and chopped anchovy. Season with salt & pepper and a pinch of ground mace. It is obvious that the quantities must depend upon the size of the pike, but be careful not to use too much anchovy. Stuff the fish, sew it up and lay it in a deep baking dish. Pour a large glass of claret over it and bake for one hour or more according to size, basting frequently. When done, dish up the pike. Add the juice of an orange to the liquor in the pan. Strain it over the fish and serve immediately.

THE PURSUIT OF BIG EELS IN RIVERS

By David Wakefield.

One of my first introductions to the common freshwater eel, *Anguilla anguilla*, was on a family holiday to Yorkshire's East coast resort of Scarborough in 1953. My father has been a life-long angler and I was following in his footsteps with the avid enthusiasm of youth, much to the chagrin of my mother.

Each morning we rose at about 04.30 and collected fishing tackle and fresh sandeel bait and walked the two miles from our hotel to a small river which entered the sea a few miles above Scarborough at Scalby. The quarry were supposed to be Sea Trout, and fishing with live sandeel on medium float tackle in the rocky pools on this tiny estuary we caught one or two up to 2-3lbs. Then it happened. In the crystal clear I watched as the sinuous shape of an eel weaved its ponderous way from rock to rock, steadily downstream to the sea a quarter of a mile away. When we got used to spotting these fish about their business of migrating to the sea, we realised that there were hundreds of them. Fishing on the bottom with dead sandeels we took dozens of them up to about 3lbs, and in that clear water the whole sequence of approach to the bait, the take, the run and the fight were clearly visible. In every case the eel spotted the bait, approached it with caution, mouthed it and then shook it before taking the bait properly into the mouth. As soon as the bait had been engulfed the eel turned and ran for a safe spot, such as under a rock.

When struck, the eel would always contest the issue fiercely, apparently trying to disengage the restraint on its jaws by use of its tail around the trace. When this did not succeed, the characteristic spinning tactic was in all cases used at about midwater.

That week we caught and returned many eels. They were all returned as we were proud of the fact that we were "coarse" fishers, and good coarse fishermen always return the catch (even the sea trout). I was a confirmed addict by the end of the holiday.

I have returned to that little river many times over the years and have observed prolific elver runs and adult migrations, and caught many good eels. But now no more as the game fishers moved in and have bought the whole river thereby debarring the wandering angler and eel-man alike, as it is now fly only and very private. But what of the tarns on the Yorkshire moors that this little river stems from? And what about those prolific elver runs? There must be some big eels somewhere in that area that are not residing in the game fishermen's private preserves.

However, I digress for a moment, but merely intended as a background for establishing my own reasons for fishing for eels in rivers.

I have, over the last twenty years, fished the following rivers and their tributaries: the Yorkshire Ouse, Yorkshire Esk and the River Dart system of Devon. From these rivers I have taken many eels, often when fishing for other species, as after all I am (or like to think I am) an all-round angler. However, I must point out at this stage that in every

case each particular river has yielded the best fish from the specialised approach and intent to fish only for eels.

My first huge eel came from the R.Dart in 1965 - long before I was a National Anguilla Club member. This fish came from tidal fresh water below a wier apron and its actual location was a very deep hole under the apron itself, which was flanked by large boulders. It took a paternostered live trout, 4ins long which is, I think, an illegal way of fishing in that river, which was lowered straight down to it from the boat in which I was fishing. The eel was caught at first light and weighed 5:13½. The fight reduced my treasured R.Walker Mk.IV carp rod to a wilting, sloppy garden cane and the 12lb bs braided nylon, which just happened to be on the small Penn 160 reel I used, was put to the ultimate test.

This fish was followed by many eels between 2 and 4lbs., usually taken on fish livebaits, or, lower down, crab baits over the period up to summer 1969 when I returned to Yorkshire.

The next river to receive my attention was the Yorkshire Esk. Now, this river has always had an enormous run of eels, and night fishing the wierpools, where permission was obtained, with big lobworms proved very successful with eels up to 2½lbs.

In search of bigger specimens I turned to the muddy harbour estuary area by the fish dock, bait being changed to herring strip. The result was staggering. Literally hundreds of eels in the period October to February, all feeding on herring scraps, etc. from the boats. But still I could not beat the 3lb. barrier, and when I did, it was with a conger!

That was when I returned to the Yorkshire Ouse.

Now, as a family, we have had a caravan on a farm on the banks of the Ouse for twenty-five years, and over that period I have averaged about two dozen weekends a year on this river and many longer stays plus day trips. This river is my "home patch".

Way back in the mid-sixties I accidentally caught a near 6lb eel below a wier pool when barbel fishing at night. Believe me, until that eel was landed it felt and behaved like the world record barbel. It accepted lobworms and I struck it at the first solid pull. Luckily for me I was fishing open water over a mud bottom interspersed with patches of sand and gravel and there were no big snags.

It ran and hugged the bottom until my arm ached, and when I finally got it near enough to shine the flashlight on it I found I could not get it into my landing net. I managed to beach it and weighed it at the lock house the next morning.

Without doubt my favourite pitch on this river is a slow wierpool slack at Naburn. Over the last few years my fishing companions and I have taken dozens of eels of 2lb+ from here, with the best at 4:2½ last year. We always use worm baits on our No 1 reds and do not allow the eels to run as this is fatal since either the bait is dropped or you are snagged. This is the reason why deadbaits are not so successful. Livebaits, however, are a different matter.

At present we are rethinking our techniques to embrace a startling (in my view) experience that a companion had on the Ouse last February. We were perch fishing a slow deep, mud bottomed slack from a wrecked barge. We used float tackle and small, deep fished bullhead livebaits. Infrequent bites produced

long slow perch runs, and perch to 1½lbs. Then Graham had the bite. His small avon float 'plopped' under and stopped dead still, about six inches below the surface. We waited for the usual run, but it never came. After about fifteen seconds that seemed like fifteen minutes, he struck hard, the rod bent double and the float didn't move! Snagged? No, the float was moving! With full pressure on the 6lb line and Avon glass rod, the line was slowly recovered against a ponderous swaying movement. Then I knew what it was even before we saw it; he had no chance whatsoever. In a few seconds I saw it and so did Graham. A truly vast eel, at least nine or ten pounds, possibly more; shortish, but tremendously fat, its jaws slightly agape with that silly size two single hook in its top jaw.

Graham nearly fainted (he's only 16). I did something far worse - shouted and grabbed the gaff meant for pike. At my shout there was a terrible boiling and the eel shot straight into the wreck: we never saw it or the terminal tackle again, and Graham received very badly cut fingers which became trapped between the reel line and the butt ring.

Now, that was an eel! A river eel, and what's more, it is a resident river eel. Graham will never be the same again. He spent last year (the warmer months) with a 2½lb eel in a huge tank in his garden and fed it on all sorts and watched it, then finally put it into our own private pond (class 2.2) to grow into a record.

Some time in the not too distant future he has a date for a return match with that big eel - that is if I don't get it first. You see, he relies on me for transport, and my baser instincts keep suggesting I leave him at home and stake out that big eel pitch for myself!

To sum up my conclusions on river eels and eeling so far, all of my big river eels (2½lb+) have come from the following types of water: deep, boulder strewn wier pools in muddy tidal rivers (90%); tidal muddy estuaries near a source of food, eg. fish scraps (5%); other wrecks and obstructions in deep, mud bottomed, slow moving swims near to the junction of tidal and non-tidal water, lock gates, etc. (5%).

My conclusions are obvious. For big eels in my type of river you need the following sort of features: deep water; mud, or nearby mud bottom; obvious holding areas in dark secluded corners. To catch them the following tactics are employed; fish early morning to about two hours after sun up; use worm or livebait, and do not wait for a run, using instant strike rigs.

It seems to me that an easily obtained food supply is a big factor in the location of big eels in rivers, combined with comfortable, dark, secure living quarters.

A LIGHTWEIGHT LANDING NET

By David Smith.

There have been many articles in past Bulletins dealing with the problem of getting a run, showing that you have a run and making sure that you wake up in time to know that you have a run! But there is little mention of what to do after that: perhaps an article telling us to strike and winch in the captive is a little obvious. This isn't really my gripe, since the tackle we use, something akin to that used for beach casting, stands no 'stick' from the quarry. There is, however, a problem in transferring the beaten captive from the water to the bin, sack, bag or what have you.

For years I have beached eels and, once on land, grab the trace and pop them into the bin or bag, using a net only to land oddities such as bream that take the bait. Owing to their inherent diabolical shape, bream are difficult to beach. After last year's tactical chats to other members, however, I decided that a decent sized eel net was imperative and I accepted the challenge to try my hand at building one.

I should point out at this stage that I have ten thumbs, and when I began to build my net I quite expected to end up with something not unlike an octopus - arms everywhere! I was not to be disappointed.

As I saw it, the construction of a net involved five major processes, as well as a host of minor ones that are better forgotten. These five were:

1. Attaching the frame to the handle.
2. Having long spreader arms to give a fair size.
3. Obtaining a net.
4. Fixing the net to the spreader arms
5. Having something at the front end between the spreader arms to support the front part of the net.

The third of these problems was solved for me by Ernie Orme, who kindly gave me some netting: but this created another problem - I had to sew it together.

Taking the above processes in order, I set about building my net as follows. I decided that a modified landing net frame would suit my needs. It had to, since I was, and still am, incapable of building one! Now, I had a landing net frame. To me it was just a landing net frame, but I have since found out that it is of a novel type of construction, having an ingenious hinge to facilitate easy folding.

Anyway, to continue, I cut the anterior end of the frame off, leaving only the hinge mechanism and the stubs of the spreader arms. This gave me a mechanism whereby the net would collapse and be attached to the handle.

Having shortened the spreader arms from 18" to 6" I now had to lengthen them again to the required 40". This I achieved with some tubular zinc alloy that I found in the garden shed. These tubes were force fitted over the original stubs, giving me the long spreader arms. The two being connected by a length of nylon chain.

The net was sewn into a bag-shaped object about five feet in depth, with 25lb bs braided terelene line. The top of the bag was folded over and sewn net-curtain fashion to form a tube, which was then pushed on over the spreader arms and chain.

This, then, was my net. It gave me the required size, but had two disadvantages: it was heavy and not unlike an octopus. It did, however, serve the purpose.

With the advent of the end of the eeling season I put my net away and forgot about it until this spring. At Gerry's exhibition I got talking to a couple of Carp fishermen on the subject of landing nets and the problem stared me in the face again. Ernie Orne told me that Geoff Swailes had built a landing net in fibre glass. This, I thought, may be the answer.

At the SGM Geoff gave me a block upon which to work and showed me his net. It looked really good and certainly overcame one of the disadvantages of mine - it looked professional: but it was still heavy.

Back home I was on the drawing board working out how to build another net, using Geoff's block to hold the spreader arms secure as well as provide a point for attachment to a handle. I dug out the octopus to see what I could learn from it.

I suddenly realised that all I was after was an improvement in looks. A fiber glass net frame would be just as, if not more heavy than the octopus, so why not try to tidy my own net up and save many hours of mental strain trying to build a new one? At this stage I put Geoff's block to one side and started again (sorry Geoff).

In order to reduce the weight I decided to replace my tubular alloy spreader arms with cane ones, retaining the same method of folding and spreading. I bought a couple of 'selected' canes from the hardware store, tempered and straightened them, removed the knots, varnished and painted them black, for no particular reason. The cane was then whipped on to the stubs of the spreader arms.

Ernie's net was still to be used, but I felt that it was too deep: five foot meant that it was only a few inches shorter than myself, so I reduced it somewhat. It is attached in much the same way as before.

The net result of this (please excuse the pun) is a large, light net. It has already seen service and has easily swallowed a near six pound pike without showing any signs of undue stress.

There is one major advantage of its being light, it can easily be used to land everyfish. I used to think it strange that match fishermen would net even very small fish. The idea, so I'm told, is to catch those fish that fall off the hook on landing, ie. it is a safety net. This idea is of great value to the eel fisherman who may have waited many hours for a solitary run. What a blow to loose that fish on landing, as happened to poor Ernie on the Whit trip. The moral is simple, always use a net; and if the net is to be used all the time isn't it sensible to try to reduce its weight?

CLUB TRIP TO BARTON BROAD

By Alan Hawkins.

Barton is like a small Norfolk broad that has been lifted from its rightful home and dumped on the inhospitable banks of the Humber Estuary. There are perhaps 10 acres of muddy water, broken up by islands of marshy land and extensive beds of Norfolk reed. Local knowledge is an advantage in negotiating this soggy wilderness, as more than one bootful of slime will testify.

Nine brave souls from the Anguilla Club made their way to Barton over the Spring Bank holiday, and were given a warm welcome by the owner, Mr Murray. We were all inspired by the photograph of an enormous eel netted out a couple of years ago, together with about half a ton of lesser fish to about six pounds, and there was a very real effort by the Club members to spread themselves around the water and cover as many areas as possible. In the event though, only seven fish were caught - all but one on dead-bait. There were, however, plenty of runs, but the eels insisted on carrying their prize to dense reedbeds before swallowing, often involving a journey of nearly 100 yards. They were also rather shy and resented any drag on the line. This made for a lot of abortive takes, and a fair number of immovable objects stuck fast into snags. In the event, the best fish was a shade under three pounds, with two others over two pounds. Things might have been very different, however, if John Harris had landed a monstrous thing he hooked right under the rod tip. But, alas, it dragged the angler down the bank to a snag, where it stuck fast.

On worm it was action all the way. Quite literally, at times it was a run a minute. Most of us had a go at one time or another, and gave up after missing about 30 bites on the trot. Not Dave Ball, however, who stuck it out until he made contact - with a Bream. Fortunately, for the fish, it fell off before the angler could get at it! Equally persistent, John Szwechlowicz eventually took a bootlace to round off his trip.

The weather, of course, was the real reason for the relative lack of success. I am told it was normal for the area, which means utterly appalling. The wind was a cold notherly; strong at all times it perversely rose to gale force as soon as it got dark. There were two minutes of sunshine on the second day but otherwise there was heavy cloud with frequent rain storms. Sometimes the sky cleared after dark, and then it got bitterly cold. So cold, in fact, that this angler, fishing into the wind as ever, switched off his alarm system on the third night because he dare not leave his bed: and lost several eels as a consequence.

Despite the conditions, and the generally poor results, the trip must be ranked as an unqualified success as a club event. Members made a great effort to be there, often involving a very long journey. A special tribute must be paid to Arthur Smith, who had just had a bout of flu and felt far too groggy to fish, but never-the-less came just to provide a lift for his Yorkshire colleagues. As on all Club outings, events were conducted in a rare spirit of good humour, with unexpected offerings of a hot brew to console a shivering fisherman who has just lost an eel. And, of course, Clive Houghton and John

Harris showed to perfection the Yorkshire habit of always turning up at ones' broolly entrance precisely at mealtine. Dave Ball, I fear, cheated in bringing his wife; indeed, his life was in dire peril when, after watching me fish the umpteenth spider out of my cooking pot, announced that he would just "go and flick his fingers around his broolly to order breakfast". The antics of the Tilly lamp bream fishermen, quite a plague in that part of the world, nevertheless provoked endless amusement. Until, that is, the Lincolnshire lads pointed out that it was quite possible for a Jumbo jet to mistake Barton for the floodlit approach to the nearest airport; after this we took the bream merchants a bit more seriously!

Above all, we all knew that we were fishing a water which undoubtedly held an eel to satisfy every one of us. So prolific is this area for big eels that it can be quite unnerving for those of us who come from less well endowed regions. After one long session with the locals, Ernie Orme asked to be excused while he went and had a little weep behind the bushes. I don't think he meant it, but after fishing the Shropshire meres, I know how he felt. Barton is a most interesting place to fish, full of good swims and well worth another Club outing. But this time, let us go in August when the temperature may be above freezing point.

A REPORT ON STANLEY PARK LAKE

By John Watson.

Stanley park lake is 26 acres in size and is divided into two parts connected by boating channels. One end of the lake is heavily wooded giving good cover to the poacher, whereas the other end is only wooded along the roadside, the remainder of the banks being quite clear. It is along these clear banks that fishing is allowed during the open season.

The average depth of the lake is four feet and the bottom is muddy. The boats are a nuisance if one fishes the legal section of bank, but the biggest basket is the bream.

All of my fishing this year has been confined to two swims on the top wooded part of the lake, where occasionally one hits a snag. There do not appear to be any snags in the legal area. The snags are usually in the form of submerged branches constantly drifting up and down the lake, either submerged or partly submerged. It is worst when there is a strong blow, because a strong undercurrent develops.

Over the past six years I have fished the lake only on odd occasions because I could not stand fishing with all those idiots on the bank around me. Due to that fact, I had never caught an eel over 2:6. I had heard unconfirmed reports of big eels being caught, the best being 5:2. The best eel that I had seen landed was 3:8 which I helped land for a young lad last autumn.

My main reason for fishing the lake so early this season (mid April) was because I thought this water offered me the best chance of an eel, having a water temperature of 54. The first session began at 00.30 - I didn't go earlier because of heavy traffic on the road adjacent to the lake and thus the chances of being spotted were great. By first light my friend and I had taken 12 eels including five over 2lb, and one over 3lb; quite a remarkable start. The eels must have been queuing up for the baits! We ran out of lobworms and dead-baits and I ended up using bream guts with success.

The following Monday I fished from 21.00 to 24.00 and took four eels to 3lb, losing three others - one bit through the line, and the other two broke the line that had become frayed by the snags. The following weekend I caught eels to 3:9 on the Friday night and on the Saturday night my friend Paul had one of 3:4 whilst I caught one of 4:0. After this results dwindled a little until the tenth session saw a blank. A thorough search of the banks revealed a break in the undergrowth and we decided to switch our attention to this new swim.

The first session in the new swim produced eels to 2:14; the second was a blank. But then results slowly improved with an eel of 3:1 and 3:7½, topped, on May 21 by an eel of 4:13. This swim, however, fished differently from the first in that baits fished up to 30 yards out rarely produced eels, whilst those fished at long range (sixty-plus yards) produced eels. I have fished this swim with three different companions and on each occasion they finished up waterlicked by fishing normal range while I've had eels at long range. This point was emphasised by my eight eel trouncing of my friend Jin; I believe he will never fish with me again!

The first problem I came across was how to get a leadless dead-bait out 60 yards. The answer was PVA sheeting. The first time that I tried this I had a run that ran and ran until my spool was empty. Naturally I missed it. The following night I had a similar type of run which momentarily stopped four times. Wanting to be sure of hooking the eel, I waited for a longer pause, but it did not come. As the knot connecting 100 yards of brand new line to the backing ran up the rod, I decided to strike. The result was the eel of 4:13. I have not had a run on dead-bait since.

Other problems incurred in fishing at long range include terrific line drag, especially when the wind blows creating the undercurrent; there is also the problem of getting an eel in from that distance - whatever its size, heavy tackle is required. For this purpose I built a couple of new rods. They are SS5 light sea blanks from Going Bros., having an OCW of 4-6oz. Used with 15lb line they are ably suited for handling eels at that distance. Since the lake is so shallow the eels can easily regain the bottom if constant pressure is not applied to them, and, with the number of snags about, this can be costly.

The biggest problem with the lake is the large number of bream, it is packed with them running up to the 3lb mark. Unfortunately, a change in bait from worm to mussel or fish guts greatly reduces the number of eels caught. I have had reasonable success with bream guts (that's all they're fit for). The fishing is slow in consequence and on more than one occasion the run has ended before a strike can be made because the eel has no difficulty in chewing the bait off the hook.

Lobs fished in pairs is the bait, accounting for nearly all the eels, big and small alike. Of nine eels over 3lb, seven have fallen to worm. In all, up to June 10, I have taken 72 eels in 26 sessions. Paul has taken 25 eels in 20 sessions, fishing at normal range.

The reason for the lake to suddenly produce eels is not as remarkable as one would think. In the past it has just not been hammered anywhere near as much as now. Obviously, the water is full of eels and anyone who knows what he's doing can catch them if he spends long enough at it. The lake has direct access to the River Wyre via Marton mere, a water of similar size. No doubt, this water is probably also full of eels, but the banks are extremely bad; and, anyway, I cannot fish two waters at once!

Most of the eels are short and fat rather than long and lean. The longest was 36 inches, having a girth of nine inches. The three pound fish average 32-35 inches long, with a girth of 6½-7½ inches. With the large head of bream and other fish there is plenty of food for the eels, and, as a consequence, the eels are all in first class condition.

Two or three amusing things have happened while I've been there. Probably the funniest was being woken at 7.30 in the morning by the park keeper. I emerged from a tangle of blankets to be asked what the hell I was doing. Due to the fact that I only had three rods set up, he could not have realised that I was fishing!

If there is anyone who would like to have a trip on this water, he only has to let me know and I will gladly put him on the right track.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Fisheries Liaison Group

At the NASG National Angling Conference Dr Peter Hunt announced the formation of the FLG. I wrote to him to find out more about the Group and received the following reply.

"The principal aim of the Group is to unite the angler, River Authorities and Research Institutions so that problems applicable to all three may be discussed and some solutions perhaps forthcoming; if not, at least some guidelines for future research could be ascertained. There is too much duplication and too little communication between organisations at present; rarely is the angler consulted.

If I can be of further help, please do not hesitate to write.

Yours sincerely,
(signed) Peter C Hunt.

Cornish Eels

Cornwall is uppermost in my mind at the present time, having spent two, separate weeks in pursuit of its eels - reports next issue. So it is with a certain amount of pleasure that I find that county uppermost in someone else's mind. - Ed.

Congratulations to Paul Wieczorek on producing a first class article on Cornish eels; I found this to be quite thought provoking (some feat) and one or two points he raised are not peculiar only to Cornwall.

Mention was made of the greater productivity of silted up regions in gravel pits and china clay pits. This ties in with Terry Coulson's observations in a gravel pit in the Thames valley, in which the only productive spot was where the gravel washings had accumulated. Also it bears out the local "lore" at Thrapston pit, which maintains that "the end where the washings are is by far the best." In my experience, however, those silted areas are devoid of weed and I am now wondering if the eels favour the silt for its shelter (easier burrowing), or for some form of food.

Paul commented that his gravel pits hold only trout and minnows, but did not say whether the other waters held other coarse fish sparsely or teeming. If they have only a sparse population of other fish, then it fits in nicely with another pet theory of mine, that is, that one is more likely to find big eels in a water that contains few coarse fish and is very often almost devoid of vegetation. Thrapston certainly came into this category before its demise during '67-'69, when the bream multiplied fruitfully. Such waters in the Midlands are often quite young and are still being worked for gravel. Has Paul any experience of fishing fresh gravel pits that have been flooded for less than 25 years?

My last comment concerns the sighting of two eels together. Popular belief would have it that the eel is a solitary creature between "childhood" and migration. However, I have witnessed the capture of two large (3lb+) eels from the same spot, within the hour, far too often now to give this much credence. I feel quite strongly that eels very often pair up. In 1967 seven good eels came from Thrapston to myself, Alan Hawkins and my brother. Each of us caught, at monthly intervals, two eels on successive casts in the same spot; only one of the seven was solitary. I repeated this feat last year in the company of Nigel Frostwick, and also nearly managed it this year in a water reknown not for its rate of runs, but for its few, large eels: after extracting one of 4:2, I had another run in the same spot. I wonder if Paul, or any other member, has had similar experiences? Not all of my big ones have been paired, but most have.

G, Allebone Road,
Earls Barton,
Northamptonshire.

G N Swailes.

Paul Replies:

Thankyou Geoff for your much appreciated congratulations. The point about silted areas of gravel pits, and the apparent fact that eels have a preference for such areas, is substantiated,

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to some degree at least, by my observations of eels kept in an aquarium. Before I go any further, I would agree that misleading facts can be obtained by observing the habits of eels in an aquarium and applying these to eels in the wild. That being so, I do believe that certain integral points of an eel's make up remain unaltered by the fact that they are in captivity, and are the same irrespective of size.

Reasons for my feeling this way are the apparent coincidences in the eels' habits in the wild and in captivity. From this I have assumed that when the coincidence in question arose in number, it can be safely said to be characteristic of the eel.

Returning to the question of eels favouring silt, my observations of eels has shown they have a marked preference for the soft areas of the bottom of the tank. The reason is, I feel, for easier burrowing. One fact that I feel clinches this is that there are no special food reasons for them to favour that particular area. If, on the other hand, they were out foraging for food and were startled, they would swim around the tank until they reached this area before burrowing. Now, if the eel was in the wild, and the food distribution fairly balanced on the bottom, as it usually is in gravel pits, it would have no reason for moving away from the softer areas of the bottom.

One or two other points I have noticed are that each eel has its own hole to which it always returns. In the event of the hole being filled in once the eel had left it, the eel would, upon returning, promptly burrow once more in exactly the same spot. During the hours of daylight the eel usually lies buried with just its head sticking vertically above the bottom. When it was startled it would merely reverse into its hole. Another interesting point is that the eels would often swim up into the surface weed and pick up food that was there: I do not think they were starved!

The gravel pits down here contain trout and minnows. Coarse fish have been introduced in small numbers over the last few years, and as yet would not have had much effect on the eels.

I am surprised to hear that you find silted areas devoid of weed. On the contrary, down here they are rich in weed growth. Possibly the amount and the source of the silt is the major factor in this apparent contradiction. The silt build up down here is slow and natural: it is washed down from the moors by the streams. Geoff mentions that the areas where the washings had accumulated were productive. This type of silting might not be of a beneficial nature to plant life.

Geoff's theory on the location of big eels meets with contradiction down here as well (sorry Geoff). But I must add that when applying theories like that down here there is contradiction between waters. One water, practically jammed solid with weed, containing few coarse fish yet turning out good eels; another with hefty weed growth and full of coarse fish, again turning out good eels; and still another that fits in with Geoff's theory.

Regarding the point of eels pairing, I must agree with you Geoff. This has also happened to me on too many occasions for it to be brushed off as coincidence. In fact,

after taking an eel I expect there to be signs of another soon after. Again I'll fall back on the aquarium eels. On many occasions I have seen one eel emerge from its hole and start feeding, only to be followed by another. Obviously time, light intensity and food source could all play a part in this, but the point is that when one eel moves off the other follows. Also I have found that the eels have not necessarily got to be the same size. Indeed, I have caught them at extremes, 1lb+ with 3lb+, although in the majority of cases they are of like sizes.

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P A Wieczorek.