



The National Anguilla Club

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# BULLETIN

VOLUME NUMBER TWELVE.

ISSUE NUMBER FOUR.

N.A.C. BULLETIN.

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EDITORIAL

So, Kevin Richmond has been good enough to give us the benefit of his experiences of winter eel fishing. Kevin, mate, you've had it right, cushy! Where were you at Easter? Warm and snug by your fireplace watching the snow? And the rest of you?

No doubt, you would have gathered from these somewhat acidic comments that your's truly was out there braving the elements. You are quite right. 'Twas all worth it, though, for I have got the season off to a resounding start with the capture of an eel. Lake Bala is not exactly the most inviting place at this time of year, but it certainly provided some really beautiful scenery: to see those wonderful Welsh mountains covered in snow sent shivers up my back - though, to be quite truthful, it was that bitter north-easterly and six degrees of frost that caused the shivers. But Uncle Ernie, as ever, was on hand to provide the tonsil lubricant, and that rare brand of fire water kept the jolly old intestines warm even if the naughty bits got rather parky!

I'm not one to commit heroics on my todd, and I must say that spirits (other than Ernie Orme's) were kept high by Arthur Sutton and Dave Holman. Without them we could not have made it. Right, Ernie?

Three people have not been mentioned yet. Of those who went to Bala, they deserve the greatest praise of all. Despite the accusations of being of unsound mind, Arthur, Dave, Ernie and myself knew what we were letting ourselves into; but, Ernie's wife and two youngsters did not. Whenever we felt cold, Merriel had the tea on hand, and if we were feeling a little peckish, she soon came up with a slice of toast or bowl of soup.

Thankyou, Merriel, for all four of us.

With the approach of the warmer weather - honest, it is coming! - our minds are now eel orientated. The GU will see my presence during the close season and I anticipate a return to Llynn Tegid in May. I had hoped for an invite to Bra Lake, but an invite has not been forthcoming! (Sorry, Brian, and sorry for not mentioning the fact that you and Dick Barrett also ventured out at Easter.)

All of these above mentioned bits of wet can be fished quite legally in the close season. But for how long? As "ANGLING" is quick to point out in this month's issue, the Regional Water Authorities are now in the process of drafting new sets of Bye-Laws to cover their areas and replace the old River Authority Bye-Laws. Kent has already succumbed. Until this year, one could legally fish for eels if one was in possession of a Trout licence. Not anymore.

How long will it be before the others follow suit?

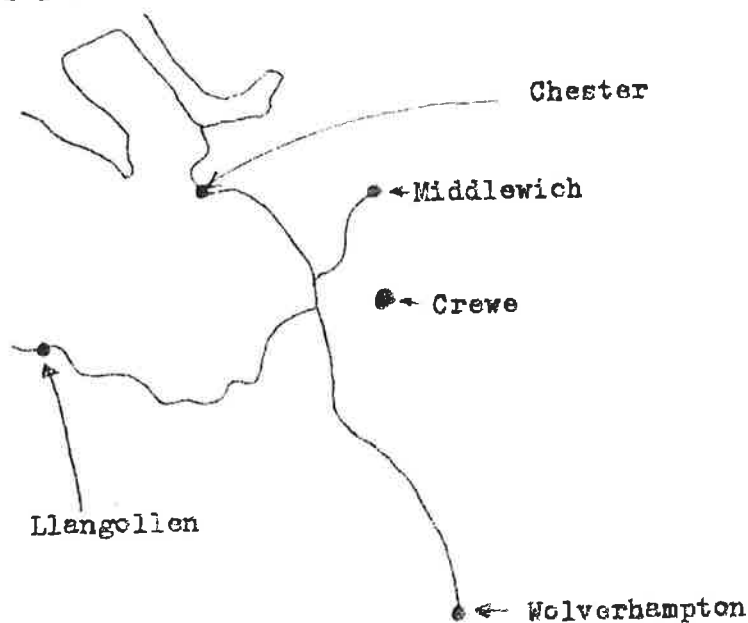
Finally, thankyou all for your kind comments about the Bulletin. But please, do not thank me, I only punch out the words on the keyboard. The people to thank, and I thank them too, are our contributors. Ernie Orme did have one valuable comment to make. The Bulletins are, says Ernie, too big and too regular. He claims he does not have time to read them!

DAVID SMITH.

THE SHROPSHIRE UNION CANAL

By Dave Holman.

The Shropshire Union Canal, or Shroppie as we Cheshire lot call it, consists of three different lengths. Firstly, there is the fast flowing Llangollen to Nantwich branch which joins the Wolverhampton to Ellesmere Port stretch and off this we have the fifteen mile branch from Barbridge to Middlewich. In all, well over 100 miles of canal.



Most of you will know the Llangollen length which flows through Ellesmere. This water is fed from the River Dee and contains millions of small eels but very few good ones. It is the other two which are of interest to the eel angler.

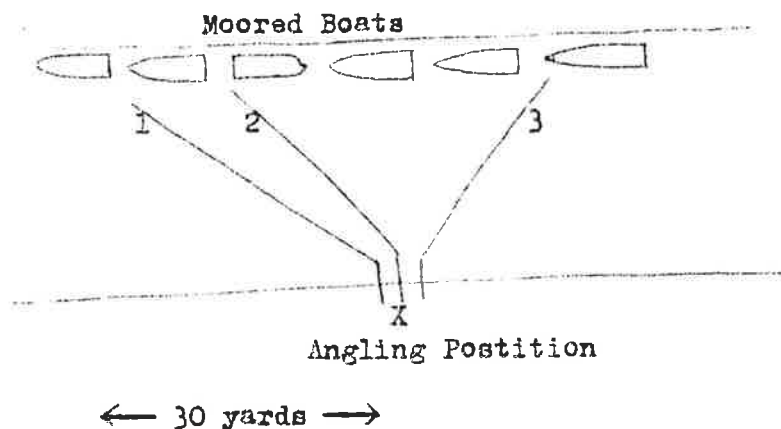
At first glance, this canal is indeed a dismal sight; not only will an outside angler be put off by the armada of boats which constantly plough along the narrow course, but also the very look of that thick muddy water will have him wondering how on earth anything could survive for more than a few moments. Yet the fish survive and seem to thrive in such murky conditions; but it is the eels which really appreciate the blackness and grow to a good size in a water in which every other eel caught is over 2lb. Just how big they grow is always the crucial question. Many are the stories of huge eels breaking up anglers' tackle and escaping. Fair to say that some of them could be true. The biggest eel caught weighed 4lb 12oz 10dm by B.Jackson in August 1970 from Adderley. Other eels caught include two others over four pound (both by me) and a truly enormous list of 3lb+ specimens. But, for me, the attraction has always been the consistency, the continual stream of 2lb+ fish which show in almost all the lengths around Nantwich. It is, indeed, a very poor session that does not produce two such eels.

To the lake or river angler, canals are featureless; miles and miles of the

same empty looking water. Yet there are many features which make a canal. Locks, bridge holes, widens, tunnels all make excellent holding places: particularly bridges, where the canal narrows to a bottle neck and any roving eel must have a chance of spotting a well placed bait. My own favourites, hot spots without equal, are the boating marinas. In fact, any unattended boat moored for more than a few days seems to be a natural hideout for our big eels - waiting, no doubt, for the gudgeon and small roach which often hang around these boats too.

Plenty of loose groundbaiting with small fish around these areas will often increase your chances. Just how many free offerings an eel will descend upon I would not like to guess. But I think the number needed to overfeed an eel will be considerable, so I often feed with forty or so 2-4" fish and a load of chopped worms for good measure. With worm as hook bait, roach and bream are often a real nuisance, so dead bait is my first choice of bait. My preference is for a 5-6" dace - a big bait, especially when you consider that these eels have small pointed mouths with fewer teeth than many of the eels I have seen from other waters.

By talking to other canal anglers from other parts of the country, it seems that their approach to fishing a certain canal area is very similar to methods I have developed over the past five years, that is, always fishing well away from the chosen area to minimise the chance of scaring any wandering or feeding fish. I like to fish with any flow that might be present and will usually set up in the manner shown in the diagram below.



Why the flow direction should make any difference, I still haven't managed to work out, but all the action comes from rods 1&2 and rod 3 usually blanks. From this simple diagram you will see that fishing solo is preferable and if two or more anglers set out together, it pays to fish at least 200 yards apart: a bit anti-social, perhaps, but the object is to catch eels. Should a late rambler or boat pass by during the evening, this can only delay the sport for complete quiet is essential.

If, two hours after dark, you are still awake on that comfortable bed-chair, it definitely pays to move the bait from the shallow far bank to the deeper middle channel where the water temperature can be a degree or two higher. This is where a good thermometer, such as the type used by Arthur Sutton, would prove invaluable.

The large amounts of rubbish lying on the bottom results in many runs being abortive because the eel, on feeling resistance, drops the bait; but, very often, the eel will speed up his run before rejecting the bait and by striking quickly when this happens, the chances are fifty-fifty for connecting, which must be better than letting it fizzle out. Another point to look for, especially during the evening, is signs of large amounts of bubbles streaming from the bottom as the eels move upstream. A bait cast in his path - usually a bunch of worms - should prove too inviting for him.

Anyone who fishes lakes and rivers to the total exclusion of canals is in for at great surprise when connecting with one of these eels. They certainly get up to some antics and the standard tackle of 1½lb test carp rod and 8lb line really let them show their paces; especially at short range, thrashing about, trying to dig into the soft mud, and although the fight is over, one way or another, within a couple of minutes, it is, without doubt, the most exciting eeling there is.

With all these miles of canal, it is obvious that some areas are better than others. Hack Green and Coole Pilot contain masses of small eels, with Audlem and Hurleston providing the bulk of the 2lb+ eels. Nantwich, with its three marinas, produces many good fish with plenty of three pounders, most of which are caught by accident when anglers have tried fishing with worm instead of maggot.

Adderley and Goldstone, an area I fished for many nights some years ago, is in part of Shropshire's most beautiful countryside, and with a reputation for big eels is well worth a visit. No marinas in this part of the canal, so other features have to be tried.

For me, the real cream of the canal is Market Drayton. Just what it is that makes the fish grow, I shall never know. Carp introduced as fingerlings some two years ago are now 4-5lb; roach to 1½lb are commonplace and occasional huge perch to 2½lb - just enough of them to make fishing for perch worthwhile a proposition. Every swim holds a million gudgeon, great fat gudgeon: in fact, match anglers can catch 6lb of these alone in a four hour match with fish going 25-30 to the pound. The eels hereabouts don't go hungry for very long.

Another high on my list is Cholmondeston. Here there is a huge marina which holds countless eels. One also has the advantage of being able to fish a deep bridge swim, a lock and the marina itself all from one spot. Cholmondeston must also be the Mecca for any wandering black slug: on any damp evening it is possible to pick up 500 in as many yards along the towpath, and I have seen many crawl gently to the canal edge and topple in. I have spent several evenings fishing single, double and even treble slug without so much as a nibble, even when a great number of them have been introduced for several nights running.

At Nantwich there are several very popular bream wides where huge amounts of maggots are introduced for groundbait. The eels have a great time moving about like vacuum cleaners mopping up the free offerings and breaking off shortly after being hooked on light tackle. One method I used here was a swim feeder and bunch of maggots on 6lb line. Quite effective it was too. Fishing during the daytime like this (or any other way) used to be very good indeed. No doubt, the murky water cut out any light before it had penetrated more than a few inches; but, with the ever increasing hoardes of boats, the constant use of the locks and the noise and commotion that goes with it all serve to put the angler as well as the eels off, so it pays to wait for late evening before setting up the tackle: even then moonlight boaters are not exactly rare.

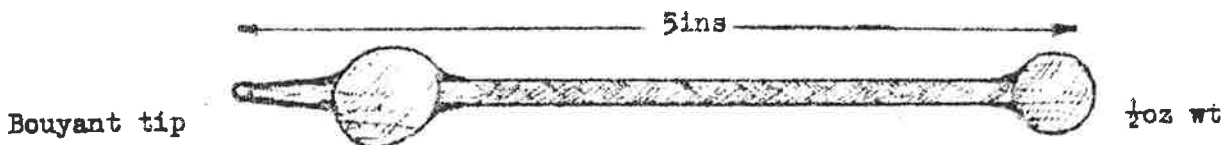
Perhaps the Shropshire Union Canal will never level up to the mass of big eels that the Grand Union has produced, but one of these days, an eel angler in this

area will surprise everyone and land a huge eel of six pound or more. I am confident that eels of this size are present. Perhaps hiding underneath a deserted canal barge awaiting a five inch dace?

### THE STICK LEDGER

By Chris Davy.

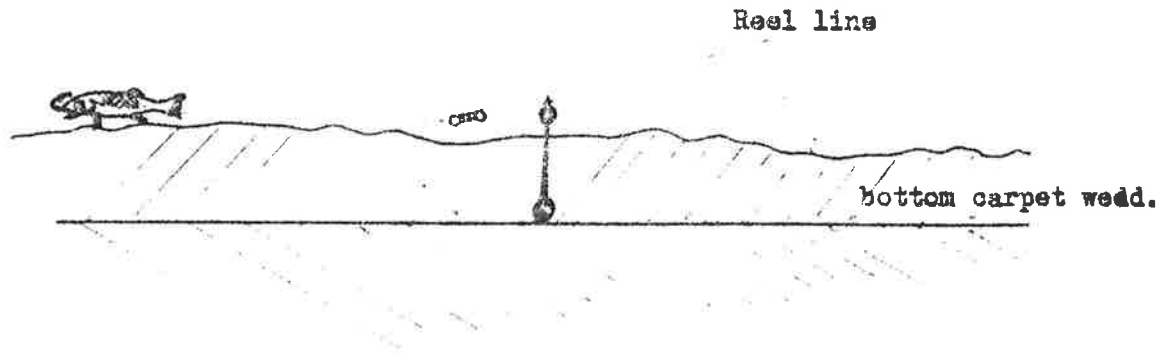
This past season I stumbled upon an interesting piece of terminal tackle called The Stick Ledger. Although it has been around in all its various forms for a long time the basic principle is still the same. For all those of you who are not familiar with its function here is a brief rundown. Basically it is a bouyant ledger weight designed to hold the line clear of the bottom debris. I have seen only one type of stick lead made commercially and this is called, The Bibwell Stick Ledger, it is five inches long and weighs about half an ounce.



THE BIBWELL STICK LEDGER.

I first began using the stick lead whilst ledgering for Tench in a large weedy bottomed pit. When using conventional ledger tackle I encountered the problem of weed clogging the eye of the lead which hindered the passage of line to a taking fish. Needless to say, my success with the Tench was to say the least very poor. (To tell the truth I only caught one.) The weed was of a very tight constructure, comprising of finely interwoven strands that formed a carpet on the bottom of the pit to a depth of 3 to 4 inches. I dont know the correct name of the weed, but I am sure we have all encountered it in one form or another, and have invented a suitable name for it. (I have ) that weed really did cling to the lead swivel and the line and was a real menace. It was then I began using the stick lead to hold the line clear of the weed the very nature by design of the stick lead did this for me and my results very quickly began to improve.

It was then I tried to combine the attributes of the stick lead towards Eeling. I am sure we have all experienced abortive runs on W and DB because weed has clogged the eye of the lead and due to the increase in resistance to the Eel taking line, the Eel has given the bait the elbow so to speak. In these weedy bottomed waters the number of abortive runs can reach a really high percentage and give good cause for concern. Of course these problems only arise when conditions facilitate the use of a lead to reach the distance required. It is when a stick lead is used in these conditions that it really comes into its own. By holding the line clear of the weed and eliminating any weed clogging problems, that the passage of line is clear to a running Eel, that a non abortive run is more ensured, attaining we hope a more higher proportion of successfully hooked Eels.



Cross Section of weedy bottomed water

The stick lead can be easily made from pilot floats, drilled bullets and some lengths of dowel. They can be made in workable lengths up to about 12 inches if required and weights up to 1½ozs which is the heaviest anybody should require. They can be custom built to suit the depths of weed in individual waters. Instead of fixing a lead on one end, you can attach a link swivel to enable quick and easy weight changes to suit conditions.

I have found that they do not in any way impede striking or have any effect on casting ability due to their lack of aerodynamic shape. Another advantage is their ability to hold the line clear of under water snags, such as mussel beds which befell Alan and Arthur at Kingsmead pit, which Alan described in the Bulletin a few issues ago. This coming season will find me using stick a great deal in an effort to overcome the weed problem. If I am fortunate in getting a run from a six pound Eel, then its coming out mate, its coming out.

#### WINTER EELING '75 (Or how to get frostbite)

By Kevin Richmond.

Owing to the mild winter (supposedly the warmest on record), I decided it was about time that I should forsake my warm chair by the fire to go out in search of that sinuous beast, *Anguilla anguilla*.

I hadn't fished for weeks. Through December and the first weeks of January, I sat at home reading my fishing magazines, glorying at pictures of eels being caught by healthy sun-tanned anglers. It was a pleasant way to spend the months: just to poke the sole of my shoe against a burning log, and see a galaxy of sparks shoot up the chimney; to look out of the window and see the huddled figures scurry along the street. I was in danger of becoming more lethargic than I usually am!

To me, winter has always been icicles hanging from trees and frost at the river



bank, making the grass a white carpet - not standing in knee high mud and having gale force winds ripping into my body, freezing up odds and ends.

However, winter eeling had taken a grip and before long I found myself sitting on the bank of a local river. Imagine my surprise when my sensors sounded, resulting in an eel of 1:2, which gave me such a grappling game in the mire that it made female mud-wrestlers look tame by comparison. So, fool that I am, the logical follow up was tried at a local pit - only an afternoon/evening session (cause I'm a coward). I must have had a couple of dozen runs on my double lobs. Total result: a dozen perch averaging the pound, with a best of 1:11. Nice fish, but a bit of an anti-climax.

So the year marched on and we entered February. Then came one of those few moments that make history: "Richmond starts to think."

I hit on a plan to "blitz" the eels in the River Yeo - a tributary of the Taw. There are not many big eels present, but the eels are free-biting - just what I needed. The idea was to fish lobs or deadbaits, but anchor two tins upstream, filling them up with pieces of fish soaked in pilchard oil and use them on a swim feeder principle. I then hit a snag. Have you ever smelt herring, trout, flounders and pilchard oil together? As a small, it was close to visible! It was so powerful that I was sent staggering backwards when I opened the lids of the buckets. Coughing and spluttering, I filled my tins: heaving them into the drink, one felt sorry for those eels!

Out went a double lob and straight away I hit an 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz strap which was cut up for bait. Then followed quite fast sport with fish coming regularly. Whether the eels liked my "groundbait" or just gave themselves up, I will never know, but I had eight eels around the pound mark. The best for that session scaled 1:11 $\frac{1}{2}$ .

A couple of days later I returned, full of confidence, expecting to hit my first "two" of the year. But the best laid plans.....

It was cold. Cold enough to shatter tungsten monkeys. I tackled up with numbed fingers. The end of my line stuck everywhere except through the rod rings. After a couple of hours I began to lose the feeling of my limbs. I decided to give up. I did catch one smallish eel of 0:15 - though it must either have been on its annual holiday from the arctic, or, like me, escaped from a lunatic asylum!

Taking everything into account, the eels I caught were quite small but it is better to catch smallish eels than not catch any at all, and ten eels (irrespective of size) from four trips during the depths of winter is not bad. As far as I'm concerned, the basic problem to overcome when winter eeling is that of developing the right frame of mind. In order to succeed in winter one must be positive in approach - ie. you are not just fishing for winter eels, you are going to catch one, not worrying about small things like exposure or frostbite.

Oh! By the way, could anyone tell me how to get off the stench of week old pilchard oil. I am being chased by every "moggie" in the neighbourhood!

ANOTHER APPROACH TO EEL FISHING

By Dave Holman.

It is now twelve months since I first joined the Anguilla Club and during this time I have learned a great deal about eels and eel fishing. Instead of flying solo as in the past, I have had the opportunity of swapping ideas with eel anglers far more experienced than I.

At the Club trips to Barton and Bala I spent most of the days talking to and watching other members and looking out for useful information to incorporate into my methods.

I learned plenty, and perhaps the anglers I talked to learned something from me too. I hope so. Unfortunately, I picked up not only good ideas but, upon reflection, some very bad ones too. My biggest mistake was to overrate the eel's fighting abilities and the need for such tackle that would stop a horse. I am absolutely positive that it was this that turned many of my summer sorties into blanks.

The theory behind heavy tackle is that a big eel, once hooked, will immediately find some immovable snag and hang on until a break: unless he is shifted straight off the bottom and hauled out at great speed. Indeed, I have witnessed this ceremony several times. This fear that the fish will snag has turned otherwise sane anglers into complete animals, intent only on seeing their prey in as quickly as possible. For this, the tackle is strained to the limits, and strong tackle is needed - indeed, the standard S/U carp rod is sometimes too light - and 15-20lb lines are in order to balance the rig.

Last year, I fished Bala for the first time and it was here that I first realised that heavy tackle was needed. The great depths and heavy boulders made fishing with my normal gear out of the question. Unfortunately, instead of packing away the heavy gear when I resorted back to my normal haunts, I carried on .... with terrible results.

Those eels did not take to that approach at all, and many were the missed takes, twitches that never developed and runs that took only a few feet of line before dropping the bait. In fact, sometimes the alarm would sound for just a moment and next morning I would reel back an untouched bait. Or was it untouched? Very careful examination proved that it had been picked up and very smartly dropped.

Many members I have talked to put this down to the eels not feeding properly, but I had never had these problems before - certainly never on this scale. The odd twitchy half-run, yes, but not the continued negative response my efforts were now receiving.

One morning, I set up my tackle as I would normally do, only this time the rod was parallel to the bank and I carried the bait sixty yards away and allowed the line to sink. The amount of effort required to move the bait against all the resistance was staggering. Little wonder I was having trouble. I tried the same thing with lighter line of 7lb and this cut down the resistance considerably.

For months I had been blaming my blank trips on adverse weather conditions, lack of cloud cover or the effect of moonlight: and yet, these eels must feed sometime, I told myself. The problem was, I had been frightened into using gear which was far too crude, powerful and with all too much resistance at the

vital time when an eel first picks up the bait.

Next, those wire traces came in for closer inspection. They were a vital part of the rig: or were they? A few years ago, I read with great interest, week after week, in the angling press about this subject. Some people insisted on their use, whilst others said they neither used nor needed them. So, were wire traces needed, or were some people over doing the effect of the eel's dental gear?

Last May I visited Barton Broads and inspected a dead eel which had been caught. There for all to see were rows and rows of very impressive teeth - enough, in fact, to bite through any nylon or even some wire traces. No wonder these Yorkshire lads were so keen on wire traces. When I returned home, I caught several eels from my own waters and checked their teeth. Hardly any at all - hardly rougher, in fact, than you would find on most perch. So, here we had it. Some waters held eels which were obviously fish eaters or cannibals - eg Bala or Barton - but the eels of the Shropshire and Cheshire meres, where food is obviously very plentiful and eels hardly faed on fish, they don't need the teeth their Yorkshire or Welsh cousins have.

We have all seen how eels develop differently in different waters. Pickmere eels have under-slung mouths developed for mussel eating; Shropshire and Cheshire eels have very pointed heads, for digging into mud and weedbeds, I think, whilst foraging for food; whilst Bala eels have huge heads and mouths for swallowing those perch they obviously feed so well on. All those eels probably originally came from the same source - the River Dee - and developed these local characteristics as they grew. So, whilst traces are necessary on some waters, it is not always so on others.

About now, some anglers will be saying: "If I fish without wire, I will hook a big eel which will soon chew through my nylon line." But, here lies the problem. I was not hooking any eels to start with, let alone a big one, since using traces, and, besides, I had hooked and landed big eels previously without the aid of a wire trace. I have little doubt the fish are put off by the trace, especially when the eel picks up the bait and when the eel turns the bait round to swallow it - it is not anywhere near as supple as the most springy nylon.

I have tried rigs which had a twelve inch trace all within the dead bait which sprang out whenever heavy pressure was applied, but I honestly believe that on many waters - not all - they are not needed. Those Shropshire and Cheshire meres which obviously hold very big eels, can be very gruelling places with blank after blank after blank without a run. Yet it is very rare not to have some sort of sign during a session. The eels were there alright, but yet they did not take.

I remember one morning looking out from my hideaway at the battery of top class tackle, alarms and equipment which I have acquired or have been given over the years. It had been a perfect night, or so it seemed, and yet not a single run. As a school boy, I push-biked to this same favourite spot with two rods and reels which, between them, had to cope with everything from floatfishing for dace to livebaiting for pike. My alarms were silver paper cylinders and I hadn't even a broolly to keep off the wind. Despite all this, I caught eels; bloody big eels too. I wasn't frightened to let an eel go and tire himself out. "After all," I used to say, "no-one expects to stop a big barbel on its first run."

A big eel when hooked acts like any other fish, with blind panic and a pull away from the force which holds it: and if the water is snag free, what is the problem? Let them have the line. It took me nearly 30 minutes to land my

best eel - timed by my mate Andy - and it was caught on 5lb line. Obviously, I am not recommending the use of tackle as light as that, but merely pointing out that it can be done. Scaling the tackle down means not only less resistance, but also more distance. So, where is the need for this heavy tackle?

The thought was further brought home to me through listening to stories from other Club members. "All he did was freeline double lobs a few yards out in the middle of the afternoon and he landed one of four-and-a-half pounds." or "Soft as you like! I had fished there all that time and he landed one of 5½lb, carp rod and ten pound line. Jammy devil!"

On another occasion, I was fishing a weekend at a local mere when I was awoken by a commotion at the next peg. A bream angler had hooked a big eel and was having trouble landing it. He eventually got it; an eel of 6½lb. He didn't get over excited on seeing it and played it cautiously and well; unlike a friend of mine on the River Weaver, who having played what he thought to be a good pike for quite some time, suddenly saw it was an eel and immediately dug in his feet and wholoped into it. He broke not only the line, but also the rod.

So, for waters like Bala, keep those heavy rods and lines, but think again when you arrive at a more open water. A good balanced tackle of carp rod and 7-8lb line should handle any eel that comes along. Ask Andy Hunter. Those Kenyan eels of 6-12lb were caught on this set up, until the rod was eventually smashed.

Another item of equipment I'm not overwhelmed with is the bedchair. Who would be without their's? I would not, for sure; but, never-the-less, it is a cause of many of our blanks. At first sight, the rods all set up and the angler well asleep seems a good idea. How can the fish be frightened if the angler is asleep? (This does not apply to Arthur Smith, who's snoring is something else!) The problem is that we stay asleep, despite the fact that the baits need changing at regular intervals - especially worms which, after several hours in the water, degenerate into a horrible state.

So, there are a few of my thoughts regarding eels. I am open to any comments you have, but, please, the only one I do not want to hear is the "when I hook a big eel, I want to land it", because, quite honestly, if your mind's made up and this is your dogmatic approach, the blanks will mount up forever more.

How well I remember one September morning on the Shropshire Union Canal a few years ago. I hooked an eel which tried every trick in the book. That fish weighed slightly over three pounds and gave me a fight I shall never forget.

And that, gentlemen, is what it is all about.

\* \* \* \* \*

Like many others, I have always held the contention that the thing that makes the Anguilla Club something special is the variety of views we all hold. In fact, I have often gone as far as to say that if ever eel fishing became stereotyped, I would gladly depart from the fold.

Dave's article implies that we are stereotyped. However, having had the opportunity to chat to Dave about its implications, I know that that is not what he really meant. His comments really do deserve digestion and a serious reply would not go amiss.

With some points I am in full agreement; with others I am not. I shall endeavour to come up with an answer before long and publish the same in the next issue.

But, before rushing to put indignant pen to paper, read through your back issues. Vol 11, No 1, page 3. Anything to add, Chris? (Ed.)

A LIGHTWEIGHT LANDING NET HANDLE

By David Smith.

I've been done! Spunned! Gazzumped!

Lest you are all beginning to think that I've gone off my rocker, I had better explain.

Some years ago I published an article in the bulletin describing the building of a lightweight landing net. Brian Crawford was so impressed that not only did he adapt the design to build his own, but he also wrote about the same in the Angling Times.

Now, lightweight nets are OK provided they fit onto a lightweight handle. I have always found proprietary handles to be very heavy, or if they are light, they are far too short. So, I had a net that would allow me to easily net an eel, but had a handle that eliminated the advantage.

Then, a few years ago, I bought a rod blank from my tame tackle dealer. He was interested in knowing how I was going to butcher the blank to make an eel rod, so I promised to take in the finished article. The poor misguided fool liked the job I had made of it so much, that he offered me the task of whipping rods for sale in his shop. I accepted his kind offer and thereby became much more conversant with the art of rod building.

Now, to lesser mortals such as I, rods were built up from the raw blank; but that is not the case. By chopping bits off 13ft blanks, a variety of rod types can be built. The bits that get chopped off find their way into the rubbish bin.

One day I was asked if I could think of a use for these odd bits. Although I could not, I replied that I did and promptly walked out of the shop with an armful of offcuts. These cluttered up my cupboard for ages. I took a few to the school at which I was teaching and showed the pupils how to make throwing sticks: a pal of mine pinched a few in order to make a frame for a rucksack.

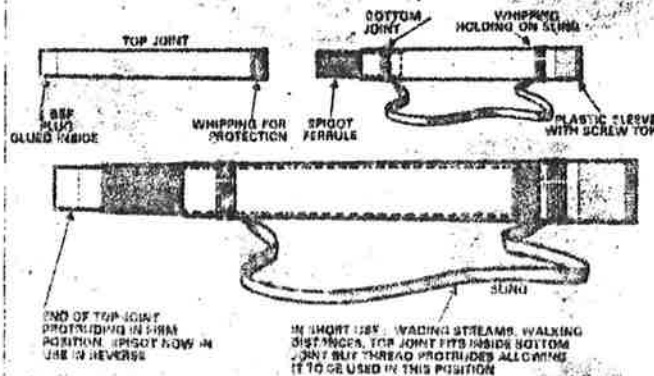
Then it struck me. Landing net pole. By cutting more bits off, I soon had a telescopic pole of about 7-8ft and very light in weight. Shopping around in the local hardware shops soon resulted in the purchase of a tapped brass cylinder and by marrying the two together, there was my lightweight pole.

On my recent trip to Bala, Dave Holman displayed much more than casual interest, so I decided that I would put pen to paper and describe it to all and sundry. "Another Anguilla Club first?" I thought. But no. For there, in Angler's Mail of 12 April, was a piece describing the construction of a landing net pole from them there offcuts!

So, as I said at the beginning, I've been gazzumped. However, I do have certain criticisms of Peter Rayment's design, and since he's beaten me to the draw, I shall at least obtain satisfaction from knocking it. At a guess, you may not be as rich as me and have been unable to have seen the article, so it is reprinted overleaf.

## An extending landing net handle

By Peter Rayment



ONE of the joys of making your own tackle is that you occasionally finish up with a product that is unique, the sort of thing you would never be able to buy across the counter or see any other angler using.

My landing net handle is just such an item—but first let me explain what led up to it being made. I wanted a handle of reasonable length for netting fish from either boat or bank. It had to be adjustable to a length that could be slung across the shoulders when wading a fair distance or wading in stream fishing.

It had also to be light in weight and have a wide diameter at the handle, thus giving a better grip.

Lastly, it had to float. It's easy to drop a net over the side when boat fishing and even in bank fishing it is sometimes necessary to let go of the net for a moment or two and be able to pick it up again when needed.

Those were the requirements and the next step was to get the materials. The main

components, two lengths of hollow glass known as "scep" in the rod-making trade, were obtained from my local tackle merchant.

The other requirements are a short piece of hollow glass for a spigot ferrule and a small brass or alloy plug with a hole threaded to fit b.s.f. as used on the end of conventional landing nets.

The butt joint of my net is made from a piece of hollow glass 2ft. 6in. long with an outside diameter of 1 1/2in at one end and one inch at the other. Into the narrow end you glue another piece of glass about 11 inches in length, leaving half of it protruding to act as a spigot ferrule.

To complete the bottom half of the handle you need some sort of stopper at the wide end, but make it a removable one. I managed to pick up a plastic sieve that fitted over the glass and had a threaded cap, but failing that you could make a removable bung from a piece of cork or balsa.

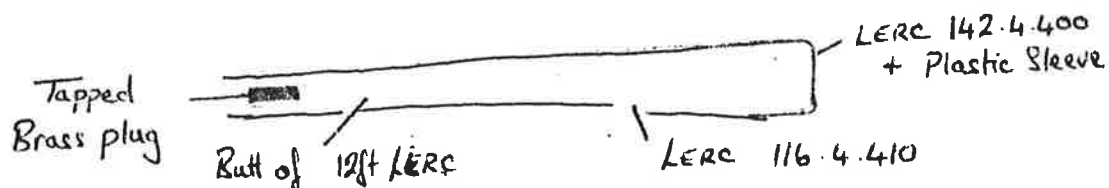
With the butt section finished, you next need another piece of glass for the top joint. It needs to be slightly longer than the butt so that when housed inside it, it protrudes through the spigot while its wide end must fit the spigot in the conventional manner.

Then you need a threaded plug to take the net head and this is glued to the end of the top joint. You finish up with a two-piece handle with the butt comfortably housing the top joint and which can be used at two lengths. The shoulder sling is a simple affair which can be whipped on later.

The biggest difference between this design and my own revolves around the function of the pole. Basically my pole fulfills the same functions as Peter's except that it is designed for fish and not trout: my pole is 8ft, whereas his is a mere 5ft. Netting lightweight trout means that he simply lifts the net out of the water with the fish in it. In contrast, it is my habit to draw the netted fish to the bank. By using a spigot in the manner shown above presents the obvious danger of the business end falling off if the net is drawn as opposed to lifted. Since his pole has been designed for use with a relatively small net when compared with the average specimen hunter's net, even at 5ft the net can be lifted clear.

I must confess that I never thought of the idea of spigotting the sections together, so I cannot really say that I rejected the idea. But now that it has been suggested, I'm glad I didn't waste any grey mata considering it. No, I think the telescopic method is far better and the pole has a much wider application.

My butt section consists of the butt section of a LERC pole No 142.4.400. This is complete with the plastic sleeve and threaded cap. This section is some three feet in length and into it slips a two foot six length of the butt section of a LERC 116.4.410 pole into which slips two foot ten of butt from a LERC 12ft rod.



Fully extended, the pole measures 7'10", but if a shorter pole is required, the top two sections can be removed to give 4'9" and when wading, the top section alone provides a pole of 2'10". This strikes me as being much more adaptable than Peter's version of the same thing.

My pole differs from his in one other aspect. Mine sinks!

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Several members have requested details of a method of stuffing fish and eels in particular. Anti-conservationism, you may say, but if I catch an eel over 5½lbs., I may like to stuff it.

So, please find enclosed an article from Anglers Mail (Jan 1974)....

## SETTING UP YOUR OWN GLASS-CASER

THE first step is to examine the specimen carefully, making a note of any defects such as missing scales or any other physical damage suffered during capture. This will determine which is to be the "show side" of the fish. Notes on colour should be taken as soon as possible after death, since the colours fade quickly.

The fish is then laid on a sheet of white cardboard and all the fins spread in the desired position. A pencil outline is drawn round the fish and three measurements taken along the top elevation—

thickness at the head, centre of back and wrist of the tail. These will act as a guide when shaping the skinned fish at a later stage.

Next take a sheet of brown paper and cut it roughly to the contour line, plus 2 in all round. The paper is then pasted to the show side of the fish using flour and water paste or Polycell and serves as protection during the skinning. When dry, the fish is reversed show side out and skinning can start.

Using the lateral line as a guide, an incision is made with a surgical scalpel starting at the scapular arch (under gill cover) and running down the length of the fish

to the caudal or tail fin. Insert the scalpel gently under the skin and free the flesh in a downward direction until the stomach cavity is reached. Then work in an upward direction until the fish is skinned along its whole length, and as far upward as the dorsal and down to the stomach.

At this point, the root bones of the fins will be met and strong scissors are required to cut through them. The fish is then half skinned, but before you can proceed further it will be necessary to shear through the scapular arch, thus opening the fish at the head. Then, with the free hand underneath the body, the scissors are gently inserted under the backbone and this

is cut through at two points—as near the head as possible and as near the tail fin as possible.

The way is then open to proceed with the skinning and this is best done by starting at the tail end.

Insert the scalpel under the backbone and shear through the flesh as close to the skin of the "show side" as possible. It is most important that the scalpel does not go through the skin or the specimen will be ruined. I have found the best way to prevent this is to put the free hand under the body, when the progress of the scalpel can be felt through the skin.

When the point of severance of the backbone at the head is reached the carcass can be lifted out. You will now have a skin held only at the head with small pieces of flesh adhering to the fin roots which should be cut away with the scalpel. Any flesh still sticking to the skin can be scraped away with a blunt knife but it is important that the silver lining next to the skin is not damaged.

**THE HEAD**

Attention is now transferred to the head. First remove the eyes, and through the sockets, the brain can be removed by twisting the scalpel around inside the skull. Next, sever the red gill rakers and remove them. Take a little time about cleaning inside of the head and remove as much flesh as possible. Finally, wash the skin in running water.

Next, lay the skin on a flat board and, with a sponge, remove excess moisture from the inside. When fairly dry, the preservative can be applied and this is done as follows:

Mix an equal amount of powdered alum and saltpetre (or Borax) and apply to the whole area of the inside of the skin, rubbing it gently in with the fingers and shaking a liberal amount of the powder inside. Next, using commercial formaldehyde undiluted, paint inside the skull, the mouth, gills, and all fin bone roots, taking care that the liquid does not touch any other part of the skin, the work is then wrapped in a

damp cloth and left overnight.

The fish is then stitched with nylon along the whole length of the body, using a curved three-sided needle. On completion a funnel is inserted into the mouth, and very fine sand poured into the body and packed as tightly as possible. Finally, a large plug of plasticine is pushed into the throat to prevent the sand running out, the eye sockets are also plugged.

We now have a fish head and skin filled with sand, which is quite shapeless. This is laid upon the contour outline drawn previously and by gentle patting (with a soup ladle, etc) the skin is shaped to the pattern.

When the exact shape has been achieved attention is transferred to the fins. These should be spread, and posed in the desired attitude and then sandwiched between two pieces of thick cardboard and held by metal paperclips.

A waiting period of about 10 weeks must be allowed for the skin to dry out completely, during which time the specimen should be examined periodically for mould or mildew. Should this appear it can be removed with pure alcohol or methylated spirit. When completely dry the plug is removed from the throat and all the sand emptied from the skin, which, although pliable will retain perfect shape.

The fins at this stage are very fragile and the cardboard should be left in position to protect them from damage. The whole fish should then be treated with one coat of white shellac and left overnight for this to dry rock hard. The cardboard is then removed from the fins and these are reinforced on the underneath with scotch tape. The stitches along the skin are cut and the interior of the skin is half filled with sawdust. On top of the sawdust a block of pine wood is laid and finally the rest of the skin is filled with paper mache (the wood is included to accommodate the fixing screws when the fish is in the glass case).

The fish is then painted with water colours and varnished with artists' picture varnish, or clear polyurethane. Glass eyes are then fitted into

the sockets with plastic wood or plasticine.

It cannot be over-emphasised that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the amateur to reproduce the true colours. For this reason, the setting up of fish is generally regarded as one of the hardest branches of taxidermy. Birds and animals very obligingly retain their natural plumage or fur colour, but with fish those subtle shades and translucent colours fade, and the best efforts of an expert can only be a shadow of the original. Therefore, simplicity is the keynote, and the following notes may be of some help.

The pike is always a firm favourite for a glass case, and fortunately is one of the easiest fish to make a reasonable job of. I use Reeves water colours for the simple reason they can be easily overated with water should things not look right.

First, paint all the fin rays black, and the fins themselves a blend of brown and orange. The belly should be rubbed with very fine glass paper which will produce a better effect than all efforts to paint it. The inside of the mouth and the back and flanks should then be given a heavy coat of "Amatrix" white shellac. This shellac is, in fact, like yellow t'ory in colour and not white at all and will take about 30 minutes to dry rock hard.

To produce the characteristic dappled markings of the pike, take a small penknife, and carefully scrape away the shellac at spaced intervals along the body. These scraped areas will show up lighter than the rest of the body, and also avoid the "painted look."

The whole fish is then varnished with clear rod varnish and those hitherto drab water colours will stand out in a most pleasing manner. (In all cases where varnish is specified, clear polyurethane is a better alternative.)

**'SMOKY' TENCH**

With tench paint the fins black with just a faint suggestion of dark blue, this will give that "smoky" effect. From the dorsal fin to approximately a third of the way down the side use a very dark brown. As you proceed downwards, a light

brown, and the flanks and belly are a blend of yellow and orange. At this stage there will be two distinct "tide marks," so, dip a clean soft rag into water and rub into the light green water colour, then apply the cloth to the fish until the shades merge correctly.

The tench has also a beautiful golden sheen and this is very difficult to reproduce. However, after several experiments the best effect was arrived at as follows. Pour a small quantity of rod varnish into a saucer and into the varnish introduce a minute quantity of gold lacquer (obtainable from any branch of Woolworth's). The golden particles will immediately separate and spread through the varnish.

Stir well and apply the mixture to the fish with a soft clean brush, allow to dry hard, and finally apply a thin coat of varnish. This method is equally successful with what can be termed as the "Pearly Fishes" such as roach, dace, and grayling except, of course, that the gold lacquer is substituted by pearl nail varnish. With fish such as the rudd and chub a combination of the two will produce the "brassy" look which is characteristic of these fishes.

Lastly, a word about the eyes. Glass eyes can, of course, be obtained from a professional taxidermist, but it is not everyone who can contact a professional, so here's what to do. Take a child's doll with the type of eye that is weighted inside the head, on removal the eye will be found to have a convex outer edge, and the reverse side will be flat with a small pip in the centre, similar to a miniature mushroom with a short stem.

With a razor blade remove the original colouring (which is invariably blue), and paint the pupil jet black. From the base of the centre stem to the outer edge, the iris will be coloured appropriate to the species concerned, after which the whole eye should be varnished to prevent the paint from chipping.

**Harold Whitworth**

..... so, if you can adapt this one, I'd be very grateful.

Cheers,

Brian Crawford,  
129 Benland  
Peterborough.

There you are, Brian. I hope that's adapted enough for you! (Ed.)



LAMENT OF A FUTURE CHILD

By Tony Hollerbach.

Why, daddy, why?  
Why did the countryside die?  
Why are there no birds flying  
Up there in the big blue sky?  
Where are the fields, the grass or the streams  
The countryside, you said, was only in my dreams.  
Why, daddy, why  
Did the countryside die.

Why, daddy, why  
Do country people cry?  
When here in town we have no care,  
Although we breathe polluted air.  
Why do they cry, daddy? Why, oh why?  
Is it because there is no grass  
Or no birds flying in the sky?  
Why, daddy? Please tell me why.

Why, daddy, why?  
Why are no fish swimming in the sea?  
Show me a tadpole  
Please, just for me.  
Is there no God living in the sky?  
Why doesn't he do something;  
Make the birds fly.  
Why, daddy, why? Please tell me why.

My little child, don't ask me why  
There are no birds flying in the sky.  
We took all the countryside, we needed the land;  
We took all the fishes, on beaches the sand.  
We took all the hedges, trees and wildlife  
To try and create a world free from strife.  
But don't ask me why birds aren't in the sky  
Or why the countryside did die.  
Please, my little one, don't ask me why.