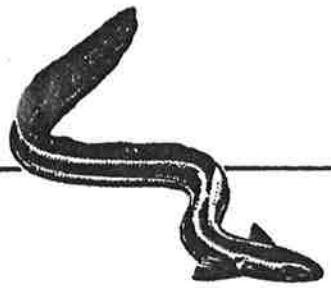

The National Anguilla Club

# BULLETIN

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LIST OF CONTENTS.



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EDITORIAL.

The Chairman, as acting Editor, has asked me to write the Editorial for this issue of your Bulletin - a job which I most willingly accept - for it does give me the chance to say one or two things which I would otherwise be unable to say. So bear with me for a while and try to excuse my literary inadequacy.

First of all, I do most gratefully thank all those members who invited me to join them on their home waters during the summer. 'The best laid plans', as usual, went to pot, and I was unable to take up many of your offers. However, I do thank you all and I look forward to the coming year. My other commitments will be few in I975 and I should be able to hop around the country a little more. I would particularly like to thank Alan Hawkins and his good lady for their hospitality. Such people as these I hope to know for a long while to come, and I sincerely hope that I am not always on the receiving end of such generous hospitality.

Your many letters are always well received at this end and I do always try to reply to a particular letter within the week. Unfortunately, I have been without my faithful typewriter recently and the mail has piled up unansered. I am hoping that before too long I can get back to my normal routine once again.

I do file all your letters most carefully, and from time to time try to read in them a general theme - if indeed there is one. There usually is, and again this time I find it to be the awareness of you all of the important part which is played by our several social events. Many of you mention how very much you cherish the lasting memories of past Club trips etc. It would seem that, like me, you too are sentimentalists at heart. Something which we need not feel in any way ashamed - for surely that alone represents the greater part of the 'spirit of angling'.

You may recall, from our last A.G.M., what Alan said regarding the pressures which 'our way of angling' is increasingly asked to endure. Now comes the news that several of the new Water Authorities are to discontinue any form of close season angling within their respective areas. It would appear. from what I have been able to learn from legal people, that the close season angling for eels on the G.U. canal within those boundaries affected by the old Nene and Welland River Board is safe. But FOR THE TIME BEING ONLY. Those persons who see it as their duty to prevent such close season angling will be doing all they can to stop the practise. I expect that, almost without mention in the Press, meetings will be called towards that end. Let's get it clear - YOU will most certainly NOT be asked to attend. For very obvious reasons. I would therefore ask you all to be increasingly vigilant and report to this office the very moment that you are aware of any such move. If publick meetings are called we have the right to send representatives to present our views to such a meeting. Naturally we can only exercise that right if we are aware of the meeting being held. It is very largely up to you - individually. Keep your eyes and ears open - and do not hesitate to use the telephone if neccesary. Very rarely is my telephone unmanned. Very shortly my wife will be able to record all calls from members.

Elsewhere in these pages you will find a piece by me concerning Your Bulletin. Please do read same, and try to act on the advice given.

And so, the I974 eel fishing season, which was never very kind to me, died a very slow death. Optmistically, I was to continue until the end of October, but having sufferedd four very cold and dismal blanks in succession these old bones of mine forced me to pack it in. All the same, I have learned one or two new tricks this year and that cannot be a bad thing . Here's to great things ahead, for you all.

A.J.S.

## MARSHALLS FARM POND.

by Henry Hansen.

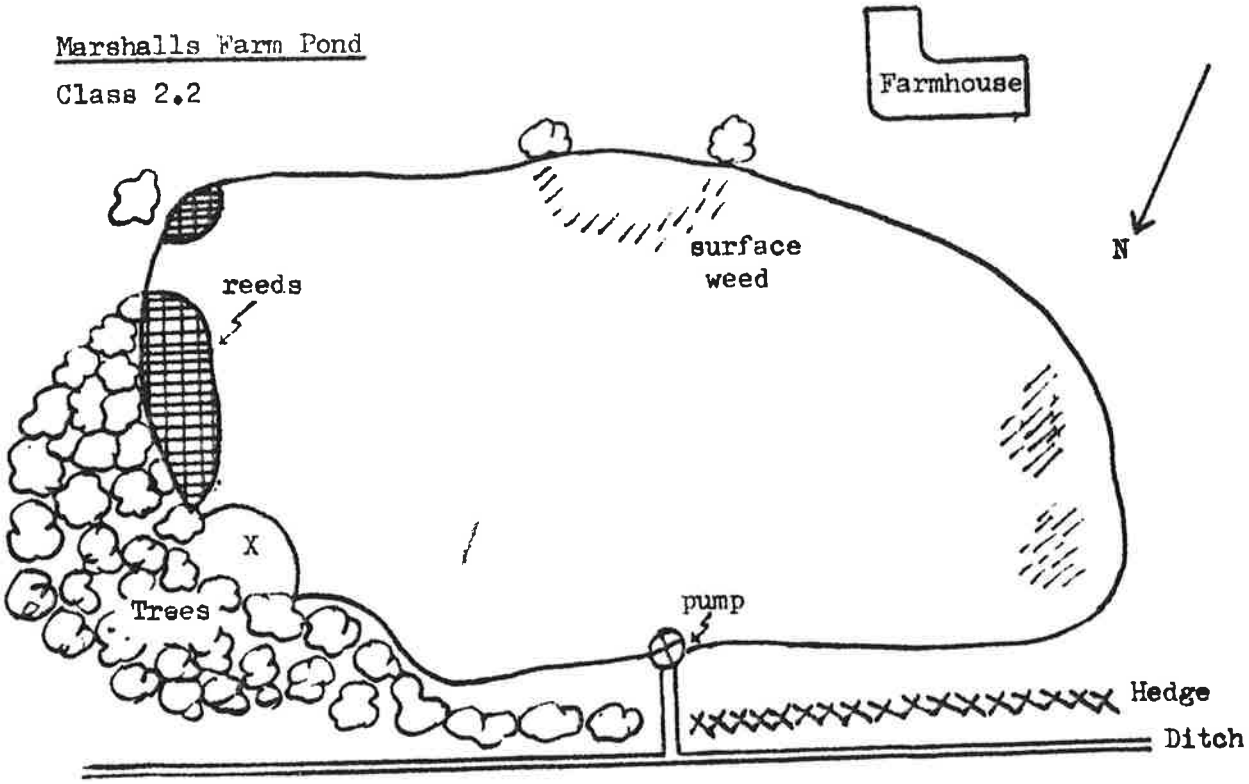
It was with great interest that I read Clive Houghton's article on Trees Pool (11,2 page 17), for at the time I was in the process of writing a short piece on Marshalls. It immediately appeared (at least to myself) that there exists a great deal of similarity between the two waters, whilst at the same time they appear extreme opposites.

Within the text of this article I have made comparisons between Marshalls and Trees Pool; at this point I should point out that these thoughts are purely my own and are based on my own experiences of fishing Marshalls.

But first, for those who do not know the water, a brief description. As implied by its name, it is a farm pond of approximately two acres that can be fished on a day ticket. The water itself is muddy and 'boasts' a good head of small roach and bream, there is also quite a number of small pike. As regards eels, the pond used to be full of them, from vast hordes of bootlaces right uo to fish of 5 lb plus. The water also abounds in duck, geese, moorhens, rats and other farmyard wildlife. Like Trees pool, the water has only one or two smallish patches of surface weed but there are two reed beds at one end. The bottom of the pond is fairly even (being four or five feet right under the rod tip) and consists of thick mud. Halfway along one bank is a pump which is used in the Spring to rid the place of excess water (see diagram). This water is 'lifted' out of the pond and into an adjacent ditch via a system of ducts. (Incidentally, the farmer has often told me of the pump being jammed solid with eels every Spring) Apart from the Winter months, this ditch is practically dry all year round, but as it leads directly to the nearby Louth Navigation Canal (which teems with bootlaces) it is presumed to be the major access point for elvers

Marshalls Farm Pond

Class 2.2



John Swechlowicz and myself have fished Marshalls for about five years, although we have not, except for one short spell, subjected it to any prolonged stints of angling pressure. The first time John fished it he managed two fish of 3:0 & 2:8; I went the following weekend and had eels of 3:2 & 2:8 - certainly an encouraging start. Several more sessions were spent there and a fair few fish were caught, with the average being about 2:10. In June 1971 we fished the water fairly extensively and recorded fish of (in order of capture) 2:5, 2:6½, 2:15, 3:13½, 5:0½, 4:13 & 3:4. Shortly afterwards, several other Club members spent a weekend at the place and caught several fish, with the best being 2:12 and 2:2. During the following seasons we fished Marshalls only five or six times but we still managed to catch fish, although the largest was only 2:3½. Quite obviously, the number of eels was on the decline, it was simply getting fished out. Last season I fished Marshalls once, landed no fish but was broken by an eel that managed to gain the sanctuary of those weed beds! All the fish mentioned, except two (2:5 & 2:6½) were taken on dead-bait, mainly roach and rudd, with perch a close third. Dead-bait was a necessity as the place abounds with bootlaces, these being easy enough to catch if one perseveres with worm.

John and I did most of our fishing from one swim, marked X on the diagram. This is a small mud bank, about 10' x 6', and is surrounded by trees of an orchard, t e edge of this 'platform', where it meets the water, has a slope of about 50 and is particularly tricky to negotiate if the surface is wet ( especially as the water is deep close to the bank at this point). We fished this swim for a number of reasons; it looks the best, since it is flanked by reeds and has deep water inshore. It is sheltered from the common easterly wind of North Lincolnshire, by the surrounding trees. But foremost it is the only swim where a small measure of privacy is obtainable, thus avoiding the barrage of questions, shrieks of horror etc that usually occur when Club members set up for a nights' eeling. Consequently, we usually crammed seven or eight rods into this swim; it might sound bad but the actual area of the pond which can be covered from this swim is quite substantial. The only times that we had any trouble were when we had to net eels, as it was necessary to get into the water and net the fish before they came into contact with the other rods. I well remember the occasion when John had a fish of 3:14 on. I carefully negotiated the muddy bank and stood in the water with the net. But for some reason John decided to swing it out without telling me, this resulted in the eel tangling itself around my neck! I managed to free myself and then threw it over my head to John, who fell upon it like a man possessed. The eel tangled itself around John's bedchair and snapped the line; in his haste to subdue it John toppled over ont the remaining severn rods. This caused one heel of a mess - as I'm sure you can imagaine, what with me still frantically trying to get out of the water (my waders were leaking), John wrestling with his eel, and every bleeding bite indicator buzzing and beeping away.

Whilst John and I were fishing Marshalls, several friends were also trying their luck and they also did fairly well, They managed fifteen fish of two pounds plus, the best being 3:12, 3:8 & 3:1; again, all the eels were taken on dead-baits.

Over the four seasons that Marshalls was fished frequently (according to my own personal records) there were 41 fish over 2lb plus, with 14 3lb plus eels. The two best fish were 5:0½ and 4:13. Unfortunately, a lot of these fish were caught at a time when we didn't keep detailed records, so exact figures and rod hours cannot be produced. But clearly, for our part of the country, Marshalls is (or was) an exceptional water.

I say was as I believe that it is now largely fished out as regards two pound plus fish; of course, the large head of bootlaces still exists. Although I know that there are still one or two very big (5lb plus) eels left in the water, contacting these would probably require a great deal of effort.

As in the case of Trees Pool, Marshalls produced a lot of good sized eels (to deadbait) and very briefly looking at the statistical side of things the median and spreads of the two waters are almost identical. But had the results of my friends been included then I think the median would have come out slightly lower than Trees Pool. Of course, if worm results are included as well, Marshalls is very much lower than Trees Pool. Trees Pool must have been a truly great fishery from the point of view that there was no bootlace problem - often at Marshalls the bootlaces would have a go at even large deadbaits, as is their motto, 'if you can't swallow it, maul it.' I well remember the 1:0 eel that engulfed a 5½" perch - what an anticlimax that was! (This being the only eel under two pounds that was taken on deadbait).

Unlike its Yorkshire counterpart, the eels at Marshalls fed better, if not exclusively, at night. This does not mean that daytime eeling was not tried because it was; it resulted in fish of 2:4, 2:10 (mid-morning) and 2:8 (mid afternoon). The coming of daylight at Marshalls usually means that eels stop feeding and jack pike take their place. Of course, there is always the exception, John's five pounder was taken an hour or so after dawn. Regarding the pike, we never experienced any trouble with them at night; in fact night time pike trouble is uncommon in our part of Lincolnshire.

Comparing the eels Clive and John Harris caught and the fish John Szwechlowicz and myself reported (on deadbait), it is quite obvious that Trees pool has a rate-of-catch of over three times as fast as Marshalls. Taking four pound fish only, the rate is over four times as fast. It would therefore appear that Marshalls and Trees Pool are poles apart as regards this aspect of eel fishing. But it is interesting to note that the maximum size fish caught from each water was identical (5:0½). I would be greatly interested if anyone could explain the very sharp rate-of-catch differences between the two waters. Perhaps these Yorkshire eels are three times as easy to catch!

The other noteworthy difference, not only between Trees pool and Marshalls, but between Yorkshire and Lincolnshire waters in general, is the size distribution of the eels caught. From what John and Clive have both written, it appears that the large eels usually come on the first few sessions, whereas in Lincolnshire, and especially at Marshalls, the bigger eels invariably come out after many sessions (if at all!). This difference greatly puzzles me. Perhaps it is partly due to the density of bootlaces that exist in the two types of water - I don't know - but if any member should care to comment I should be extremely interested.

*

Comment.

One minor privilege of being editor is that I get first bite at the cherry when it comes to participating in debates started by others. I hope Henry will not object if I add a few thoughts here - after all, he did ask for comments.

The great difficulty in trying to make the sort of comparison above is the lack of hard data for Marshalls pit. It is, as Henry will know,

a bit difficult to be sure of one's conclusions unless the figures are to hand to prove them.

Now, as far as rate-of-catch is concerned, the three-times difference quoted overlooks the fact that the total rod hours fished were also quite different. Only 416 RH are on record for Trees Pool, whereas 1,064 are down to Marshalls. And this 1,064 is almost certainly an underestimate, since Henry states some effective eel fishing was carried out by non-members, and that Marshalls gets a fair hammering from other anglers who also may catch an eel or two from time to time.

In small waters of this type, rate-of-catch is not a constant inbuilt characteristic of the water, but changes as each session leaves fewer eels for the next man to catch. The rate starts off fast, and then slows down - see, for example, Totham Pit in the last Bulletin. This means that the longer you fish the water, the slower the overal rate becomes, simply because towards the end one is just adding more and more blank hours to the total. Hence, the difference between Marshalls and Trees Pool may reflect no more than the difference in rod hours put in. In the former, the water has become fished out, and hence very slow; in the latter, this point has not yet been reached.

Turning to the other point Henry raises - big eels not coming first - one possible explanation occurs to me which the authors may like to take up in a future Bulletin. Trees pool, I suspect, was very much the ideal water; a small clay pit which, as far as eel fishing is concerned, had not been disturbed to any significant extent for years. Marshalls, on the other hand, may have been otherwise. I get the impression that a lot of people fish Marshalls, and almost inevitably some must catch eels. Such disturbance may affect the ideal result; the eel population may begin redistributing itself (see, for example, my article on Trees Pool in the last Bulletin) and a rather different pattern of results may emerge.

Alan Hawkins.

## TRENDS IN BIG EEL CATCHES

by Brian Crawford

1974 has been a superb year for big eels, but big eel catches could decrease steadily for the next three or four years.

For a dedicated eel angler, this is indeed quite a statement - but I have what seems to be unquestionable proof. I will illustrate this by first listing all 5lb plus eels reported in the angling press and to me privately, and then compare the total with all 5lb plus eels reported for the past 14 years.

Eel Record -8:10- caught by Alan Dart at Hunstrete Lake in 1969

1974 Notable Eels

| lb.oz | Month | Captor | Location | Bait |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8:2 | August | B.Leak | Burgess Hill Lake, Sussex | Cheese |
| 7:6 | July | B.Dudley | Lake at Eastleigh, Hants | DB |
| 6:11 | June | D.Green | Fritton Lake, Suffolk | W |
| 6:10 | June | A.Wilkinson | Wolverhampton Resevoir | W |
| 6:8 | June | P.Smith | " " | W |
| 6:8 | August | J.Housden | Corringham Water, Essex | Meat Paste |
| 6:4 | July | G.Dennis | A Kent Water | Luncheon Meat |
| 6:2 | July | R. Frankcam | Thrapston Gravel Pit | W |
| 6:2 | July | M.Topliss | Hadleigh Lake,Suffolk | DB |
| 6:1 | July | J. Powell | Marsh Lock, R. Thames | Cheese |
| 6:0 | August | J.Bourke | Pit at Downham Market | Livebait |
| 6:0 | August | J. Dunien | Barton Broad | Eels' head |
| 6:0 | June | R. Wearing | River Cherwell | - |
| 5+15¾ | May | D.Northway | Mouth of R. Exe | Peeler Crab |
| 5:15 | July | R.Frankcam | Thrapston Gravel Pit | W |
| 5:11 | August | M.Brown | West Country Lake | DB |
| 5:10 | June | L.Breakspear | Birmingham Water | DB |
| 5:10 | July | G.Booth | Yorkshire Water | DB |
| 5:5 | August | R.Watcham | Herts Lake | DB |
| 5:4 | July | M.Thomas | Dunware Pond, Somerset | DB |
| 5:4 | July | D.Kelly | Cheshire Water | W |
| 5:3 | August | A.Bradshaw | Leg-of-Mutton Dam, Lancs | W |
| 5:1½ | July | G.Booth | Yorks. Water | DB |
| 5:0 | July | S.McCarthy | Wrightlington Pond, Lancs | Maggots |
| 5:0 | July | M.Topliss | Hadleigh Lake, Suffolk | W |

List of 5lb plus eels caught per year since 1960

| | |
|---|---|
| 1960 - 61 | 6 |
| 1961 - 62 | 13 |
| 1962 - 63 | 5 |
| 1963 - 64 | 5 |
| 1964 - 65 | 3 |
| 1965 - 66 | 1 |
| 1966 - 67 | 11 |
| 1967 - 68 | 16 |
| 1968 - 69 | 9 |
| 1969 - 70 | 6 |
| 1970 - 71 | 2 |
| 1971 - 72 | 5 |
| 1972 - 73 | 8 |
| 1973 - 74 | 15 |
| 1974 - 75 | 25 (to the end of August) |

(Sources - National and Local Angling Press plus Anguilla Club Records)

(Note - Many big eel captures are not reported each year and hence make the numbers low. The general trend should still show through, however. 4lb eels have not been included since the number not reported may be very large. Using available 4lb reports, the indications are similar.

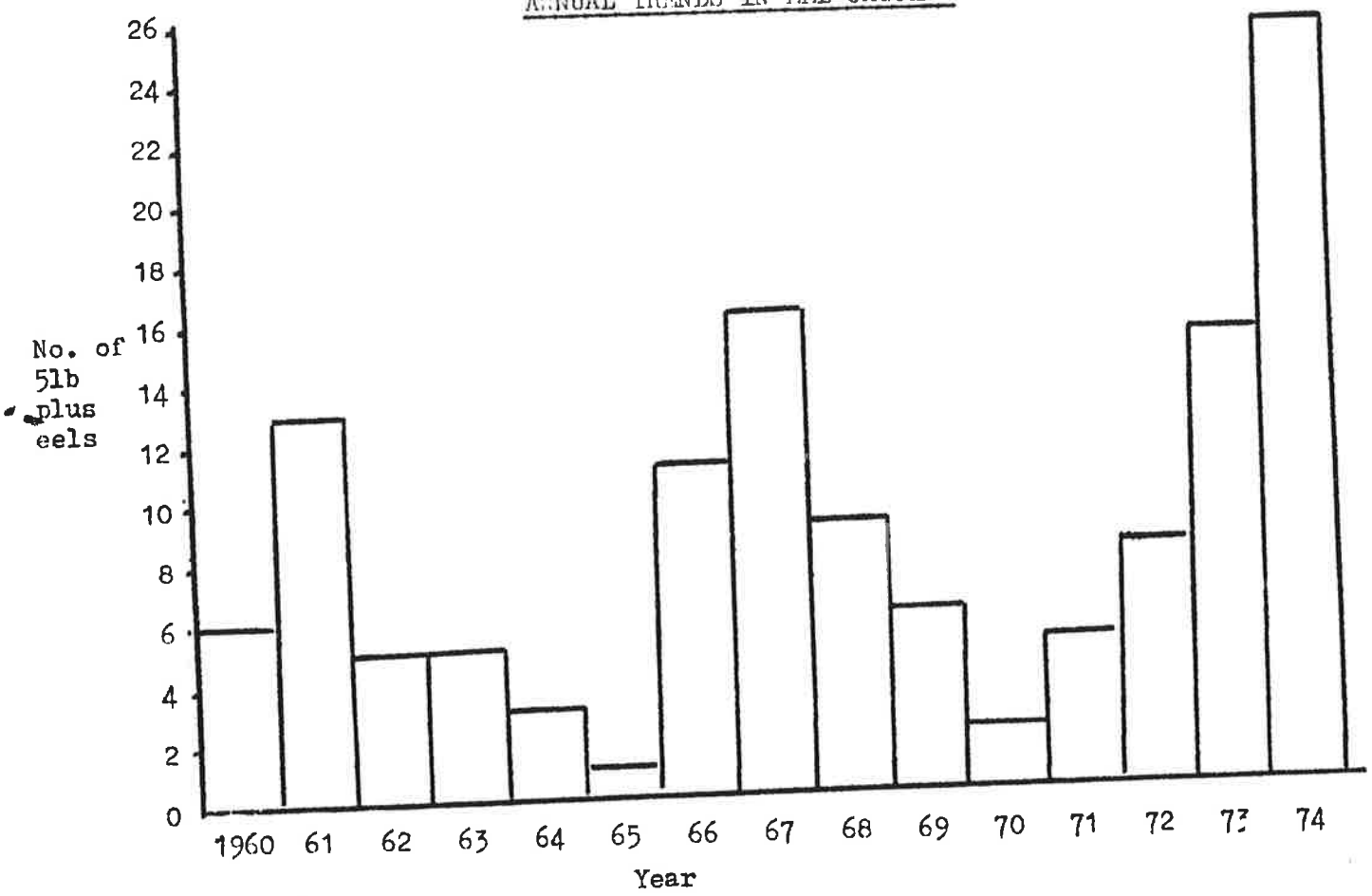
When the results are transferred to a block diagram (histogram), the yearly trend is easily seen (overleaf); each vertical block represents the number of 5 lb eels caught (or reported) for that year.

The peak is obvious every six or seven years. If this trend continues, by 1978 only three or four 5lb eels may be caught. The question is - is this a genuine effect, or is there an alternative explanation for these figures? The pettern is consistent, even when we go back further in time. The addition of 4lb plus eels also gives corresponding peaks.

Notice, however, that the peaks are gradually increasing; this could indicate a bumper year for 5lb eels in 1980 - the best ever.

1975 still looks like producing many good specimens, with perhaps 15 - 20 being reported; after that, well, can we anticipate a decline in sport?

ANNUAL TRENDS IN EEL CATCHES



## SETTING THE HOOK

by Graham Booth

I am sure that no-one doubts the futility of spending long days and night by the waterside in pursuit of big eels only to be let down at the crucial moment by some inefficiency of one's tackle, or by a lack of thought and research into one's basic tactics.

In this article I want to deal with just one particular aspect of the techniques involved; what to do when an eel has picked up the bait and a run is in progress. I am referring to the problems involved in converting the greatest possible proportion of runs on DB into hooked eels, since I have thought for some time now that the standard proceedure when deadbaiting for eels is rather a hit and miss affair.

All eel anglers fail to connect with runs from time to time. But, providing the proportion of missed runs is not too great, the angler will probably accept them philosophically and continue to fish in the same manner, using what I think can be called 'normal' deadbaiting tactics. By normal, I mean using small fish of various species between three and six inches in length for bait, threading them onto the trace in such a way that the hook, usually a size 2 or 4, protrudes from the fishes mouth. When a run occurs the angler waits for some time until the eel is judged to have turned the bait, at which point the strike is made. By this time anything from 30 seconds to over a minute may have elapsed and the eel may have travelled almost any distance. In a number of cases I suppose that this process is reasonably satisfactory.

It was, however, eminently unsatisfactory at the water on which I did most of my first really serious eel fishing during the late 1960's. The reason for this was that this particular water was choked from bank to bank with dense milfoil. In order to fish, a pitch had to be cleared; initially, this would take six or seven of us armed with a punt and two five foot spiked drags three evenings or more to clear a hole of even modest proportions. Subsequently, the pitch had to be dragged once a week as the weed soon drifted back in.

Fishing in such close proximity to the weed, as dictated by the size of our cleared holes, meant that a run had to be struck more or less straight away. Otherwise, the eel would reject the bait on feeling the resistance of the weed against the line. Because of this, the majority of runs were, at first, missed, although we did catch four eels between 3:4 and 4:10 - quite enough to spur us on to try and solve the problem

Multi-hook rigs were tried but it wasn't long before we realised that they were not the answer as they usually caused an even quicker ejection than did the resistance of the weed. So instead we started to use short sections (normally around 1½ inches in length) of small fish, for instance, roach of about four inches. These were threaded onto the trace so that the hook emerged in the normal way. The theory was that such a small, compact, bait would be engulfed immediately the eel picked it up so that a strike could be made as soon as a run occurred - just as if one were fishing for carp.

Using this method, we contacted a far greater proportion of runs on our water.

In 1971 the weed in the lake mysteriously disappeared, almost without trace. We continued to use section deadbaits, however, testing them against full sized ones, because we felt that section baits might result in a better proportion of hooked eels even when it was no longer necessary to strike quickly. This we found to be true, and I haven't used a whole fish as bait for eels since. I'm sure that my section baits have given me a far higher success rate on the strike, without causing any reduction in the number of runs experienced. The eels seem to like section baits just as much as whole fish. Possibly they like them better - certainly I feel that eels should be better able to smell them from a distance because the blood and natural juices are allowed to escape, whereas with a whole bait they are, to some extent, trapped inside. Even if a whole bait is perforated with a baiting needle, the surface area from which these juices can exude is nowhere near as great as with a fish that has been cut in two.

Even when fishing a snag-free water with this type of bait, it is not uncommon to have an eel reject the offering if it is allowed to travel too far. This is one of the major problems when using whole baits, of course, as it is necessary to allow a running eel to travel for some distance in order that it should turn the bait and start, or perhaps complete, its swallowing process. This is the only way of ensuring that the hook is actually inside the eel when the strike is made. What often happens instead is that the eel's suspicions are aroused, and instead of swallowing the bait, it ejects it. The longer and further a run continues, the greater are the chances of bait rejection.

This last consideration caused me to wonder whether, in fact, the most efficient method would be the old tactic which was used when fishing near the weed, i.e., an instant strike.

One factor that seemed significant in this respect was that several of the eels we had caught when using the quick strike method had actually swallowed the bait before moving off. (This I think is the only reasonable interpretation of an eel hooked in the stomach after taking no more than a yard of line). I believe that this can also happen when using whole baits. It occurred to me that many eels caught by the angler using whole baits might have swallowed the fish before giving any indication of a run. It may be that the eel feeds in a small area for several minutes and then moves on, for no apparent reason, to a completely different area. Anyone who has observed carp or chub feeding may have noticed this type of behaviour.

In support of these ideas, it has often occurred that during the period immediately before a run, the buzzer has emitted three or four short bleeps. Striking when the run starts has usually produced an eel hooked in the stomach. Surely what has happened here is that an eel has picked up the bait, swallowed it, continued feeding awhile, and then moved off. Only then does the angler percieve a run.

If this is correct, then allowing an eel which has not swallowed the bait before moving off on a run might produce an ejection in a greater proportion of cases than we think; it could be that eels which do this have had their suspicions aroused and are making for a place of refuge before eating the bait, probably a hidden weedbed or a submerged snag. This sort of obstruction is, of course, likely to foul one's line before the eel has had a chance to swallow the bait - thereby causing rejection.

Another point in favour of the quick strike is, of course, that it is much easier to set the hook on a tight line at close range, than on an (almost inevitably) slacker line at long range.

Naturally, we are only dealing with cases where the eel has not already swallowed the bait before moving off. Eels that have swallowed the bait are almost certain to be hooked regardless of striking method.

At the moment, I am not sure whether, using section baits, it is better to strike immediately, or to delay - when fishing open water. Time and experiment will, I hope, reveal the answer. Clearly, if a quick strike does prove successful, it will answer a number of problems; those of bait rejection, eels running into snags, and having to be landed over long distances. Comparison of quick and delayed striking should give the answer, and I look foreward to the time when I can adopt a consistent method in full confidence that it works.

*

## US AND THEM

by Dave Holman.

Canals, those neglected mud courses through our land, mean leisure activities for a great variety of people, amongst which eel anglers and boaters are just two.

The eel angler needs no introduction; he is beyond dispute the most lovable and affectionate creature you will ever meet (and also kind to his mum). The boaters? Well, if other canal anglers will bear with me I will compile a list of the various types for the benefit of our lake fishing relatives.

No. 1 boaters, and most feared, are the "I've paid for it, and I'm using it" type. He's still mad from paying out some exhorbitant fee and complete with Freda and the kids he's off to cover as many miles from base camp as possible. Don't think that a little thing like darkness puts him off; with a long range beam soaring out in front he spends long hours bumping along the banking. Hurling smelly deadbaits and abuse only makes our carrot-eyed friend more determined to carry on, admiring the countryside and writing out "wish you were here" postcards to friends until he finally vanishes beneath the next bridge.

Then there's the chap who rarely uses the boat; it's moored correctly along the banking and should the opportunity arise and our friendly boat owner cop for 'a bit of sport', its Saturday night, giggles, and the bottle of scotch hidden in the toolkit. He's no need for engines and the like, but on several occasions has been disturbed by our friendly hero, who's only trying to drop a gudgeon deadbait by the side.

"Jack, Jack! There's someone out there!"

"No there isn't, darling, it's only a rabbit or something."

Meanwhile, fast back-pedalling, our eel angler trips over the mooring rope and falls in a heap.

"There is someone out there! Have a look Jack, a peeping Tom!"

Shortly afterwards Jack appears, complete with torch, and scans the area. Meanwhile our angler type is hidden in the hedge.

Maybe he has buggered the fishing for a while, but you can bet you won't have done his chances any good either.

'Captain Birdseye' is the only name for the third variety of mariner. Far too common for comfort, he comes complete with navy-blue peaked cap (recently aquired from a smooth-talking gent at the local marina for a lot of money) He's easily distinguished, always shouting nautical terms, such as "port to aft", or "backward and lea". He may know what he means, but his family certainly does not, and as a consequence the boat blunders all over the cut.

Manoeuvering into a lock with 'old salt' at the helm is well worth watching as he usually ends up facing the way he came.

The we have the considerate boater; he sails past at full spate and as far into the opposite bank as he can, churning up all the muck, and shouting "aaarr-do!" as he does so. He usually comes complete with Butlins holiday badge and "We've been to Llangollen" stickers.

Unfortunately the rarest type (in fact, to my knowledge there exists only one) is a small blue boat that chugged past two wet and sorry looking anglers one Saturday evening, many years ago. On board were two good-looking female types (the best kind). The boat took a turn and moored up for the night about 50 yards away. Our two friends, being thick, but not slow, abandonned the tackle for a more common pursuit.

So let them share our canals, the boaters aren't that bad. The great load of B.....s, and it's a rotten rumour that I filled Jack's boat with toads one night.

So if you see someone with a brace and bit heading towards the local marina, it's only me sinking a few - unless, of course, it happens to be a little blue boat.

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## LONDON GRAVEL PITS

by Alan Hawkins.

Several interesting and thoughtful articles have been written about waters that are fast, or small, or both (like women, members seem to prefer 'em that way). But, alas, the small clay pit beloved of the northern angler is scarce to be found down here, and even when it is, it never seems to contain any eels. Instead, still water eel fishing for the past few years has meant gravel pit fishing; waters often well over 100 acres in extent and waters which demand a quite different approach from the 'blitz-krieg' approach of the north.

A glance at O.S. maps of the area around Staines, for example, shows almost as much water as land. Much of this water is gravel pit; the remainder is largely metropolitan reservoir or park lake inaccessible to the unsavoury habits of the nocturnal eel-man. Gravel pits, however, generally can be fished - albeit with some elasticity of interpretation regarding rules on night fishing, gorge baiting, and other despicable acts. Faced with a choice of about 50 possible pits, the question of where to begin looms very large indeed, especially since a decision means a committment to at least ten full sessions, perhaps a season.

The vital question to be answered in choosing a water is one of access for eels. As will be appreciated, the Thames serves a vast watershed, and elvers can get a bit thin on the ground in the more remote waters of this basin. In fact, I do not know of one totally enclosed lake (of any type) in this general area which supports enough eels to make angling really worth while. The problem is complicated by changes in the Thames itself. Eel anglers today are fishing for the eels that arrived in the '50 s and early 60 s (eels grow rather slowly) and at that time, elver runs up the Thames seem to have been very poor. Now, probably as a result of a much cleaner estuary, elvers appear to be arriving in force; bootlaces are a menace in the Thames for the first time in years, and the prospects for the future must be good. But at the moment, the changing numbers of eels presents a mixed blessing. In our still waters, the pathetically few decent eels that do exist are becoming heavily outnumbered by the new influx of smaller eels. Small eels can, and do, present a real obstacle to the capture of bigger ones.

So, although the situation may change in the next few years, my own view is that no water lacking a running outflow is worth fishing at the moment. And even there, one can come unstuck. Well we remember West-Drayton pit! The river Colne flows right through this water; just a couple of miles downstream the river can give quite spectacular sport from eels. But at West Drayton - not a stir.

Anyway, careful map reading, direct observation, questionning of local anglers, and study of local records will eventually lead to choice of a water. So one Saturday afternoon, you arrive with a vast heap of gear, drive several miles around the pit looking for the car park and eventually arrive thouroughly disheartened at a water that stretches as far as the eye can see in all directions. Or if it dosen't, a quick sortie round the bank shows that what you thought was the far side is only an island -

the pit opens up hugely on the other side.

Several events can occur at this point. You can flee for home, totally dispirited. This is wrong, but understandable. You may dump your gear in the nearest comfortable swim on the 'may as well start somewhere' principle. This is also wrong - except in pouring rain, when it is right. You may set off armed only with rod, reel and depth-o-plug, notebook and pencil. This is correct, but strenuous. Ahead lies a forced march across a wilderness of vicious scrub and rusting machinery; long minutes stood with your boots in unmentionable slime and nettles up round your head while black despair tells you that you are completely and irreversibly lost. But stick at it, my friend; at least the mosquitoes are pleased to see you, and at the end you will have cleared the first hurdle - you will have a mental picture of the water as a whole.

Very few of these pits are simple in shape. Most are highly irregular, with many islands, promontaries and bays so that in extreme cases the water can almost be regarded as a series of lakes connected by narrow channels. But whatever the nature of the water, eels are unlikey to be distributed at random through it. Normally, they will be located at one or more definite features, and the first job is to catalogue the features on offer so that a systematic campaign can be made. (Obviously all the features cannot be found at once; in Kingsmead, for example, I doubt whether we have found a tenth of them in two years angling).

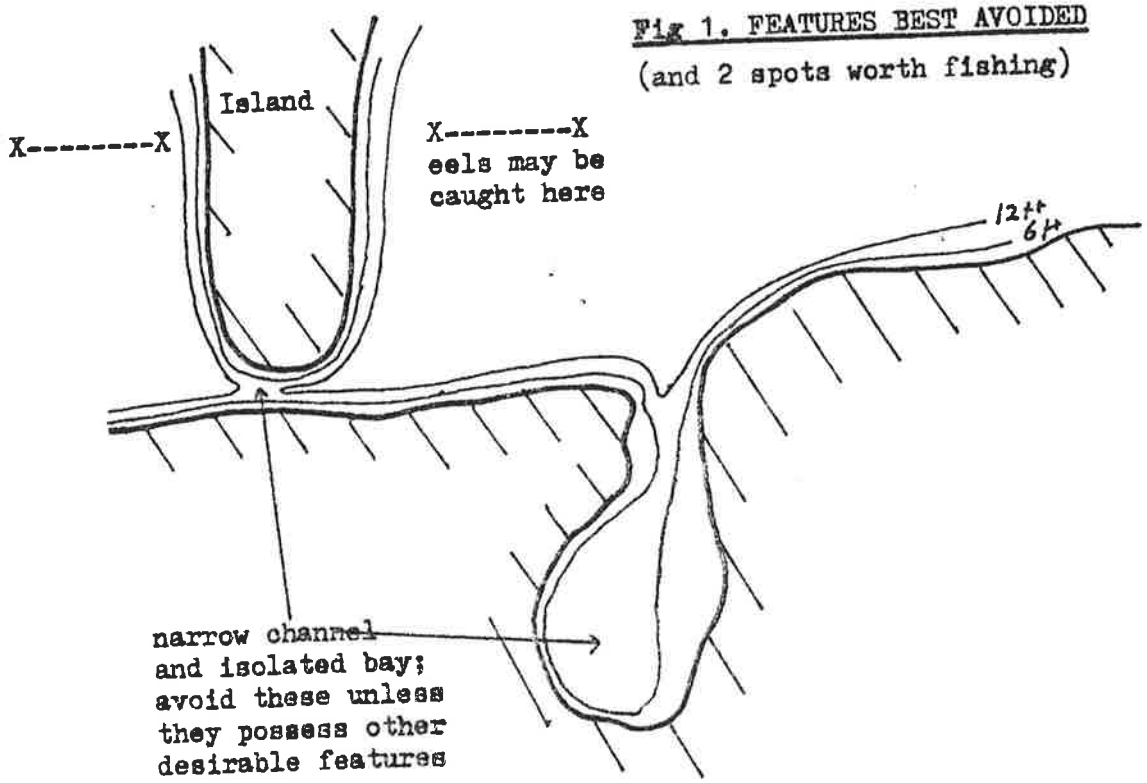
What are these features? One thing to say straight away is that part of the process of swim choice is an art, not a science. Most of us - some more than others - can develop an instinctive 'feel' for a swim; on a first walk round a pit I usually find two or three spots which seem to be right without any definite evidence to support the impression. Such instincts should, in my opinion, be allowed full play. Quite often a swim chosen by instinct has later shown to possess just the hidden feature necessary to attract eels.

Fortunately, I believe we can do a great deal to reinforce instinct. Several years experience suggest a number of guidlines to apply when sorting out a gravel pit. Number one on my list is a negative feature - where <u>not</u> to go. My own records suggest a pretty strong distance effect in large pits; simply stated, the further you cast, the better. Generally speaking, the first 35 yards offshore seem dead, though I had better add the proviso that true margin fishing, within 10 yards of the bank, may not have been tried often enough to prove it worthless.

This distance effect rules out narrow channels between, for example, the bank and an island, or a small bay of about 2 acres or less - particularly if this bay is approached by a narrow channel, or is shallow. (See fig 1.). The rule may occasionally be broken if the channel or or bay possess other desirable features, but this is rare.

Other things being equal, the ideal swim should command a large area of water. The end of a point, or promontary, often satisfies this requirement. I don't think that there is anything magical in this, simply that eels are likely to be few in number, and the larger the area covered, the more likely one is to be caught.

Fig 1. FEATURES BEST AVOIDED
(and 2 spots worth fishing)




There is, however, rather more to choosing a swim than casting as many baits as possible the maximum distance off a point (though this can work at times). Preferably, the chosen swim should also posses one or more of the following features:-

1) A submarine ridge or plateau, at least 30 yards out.

2) A change in bottom type - a silty area, for example

3) A mussel bed

4) A deep water channel.

Taking each in turn, offshore ridges are a common feature of most gravel pits. They may, however, be small in size, and careful work with the depth-o-plug is needed for their accurate location. The ideal ridge (in my opinion) should be about 5 - 9 ft below the surface in a basin of 10 - 15 ft (gravel pits are almost never deeper than this. It helps, I think, if the ridge supports a growth of soft weed on top, especially if the surrounding basin is weed free, or nearly so. The way to fish such spots is not to cast on top of the ridge, but at its' foot, just where the water starts to shelve up. It is my opinion that eels travel around the base of such ridges in search of food; perhaps, indeed, they live there, and highly accurate casting can pay rich dividends in such situations.

A modified version of the ridge swim is the island swim. Baits placed at the foot of the drop-off alongside an island sometimes find eels - as in the spots marked X in fig. 1. Such spots produced fish to both Arthus Sutton and myself earlier this season at Kingsmead, whereas the narrow channel (25 yds) between island and shore produced nothing, not even a Sutton special 12oz pike. Indeed, had it not been for the unfortunate fact that Arthur landed his eel, that island would have held the reputation of a six pounder. As it was, it was an amazingly

fit three pound fish that lunged into weed rooted on the shelf off the island, and then worked its way backwards aginst 15lb line and a tight clutch. It is worth noting that when the eel finally started to yield, after a full ten minutes' struggle, your worthy editor was so overcome with exitement that he leapt headlong through the reeds with the landing net - into water a great deal deeper than he had bargained for.

A final variant of the ridge is the 'mouth of the bay swim' You may find a bay which steadily shelves to quite shallow water at its' extreme end. If the gravel pit is typical, rooted weed is confined to depths of less than about 8-9 ft; the main body of the lake is uniformly deeper than this, and hence weed free, but the margins, and shallow bays and ridges support dense growths of Elodea, or Potamogeton (mainly P. pectinatus or P. berchtoldii). Hence at some point, the bay is overgrown with weed. The way to fish such swims is to place baits at the beginning of the weedy part (see Fig. 2), and then appeal to whatever god you happen to support that the eel runs out of the bay, instead of into it, when taking the offering. Once again, the bay is no use unless it is good and big - a little effort that you could throw a stone across merits not a second glance, in my opinion.

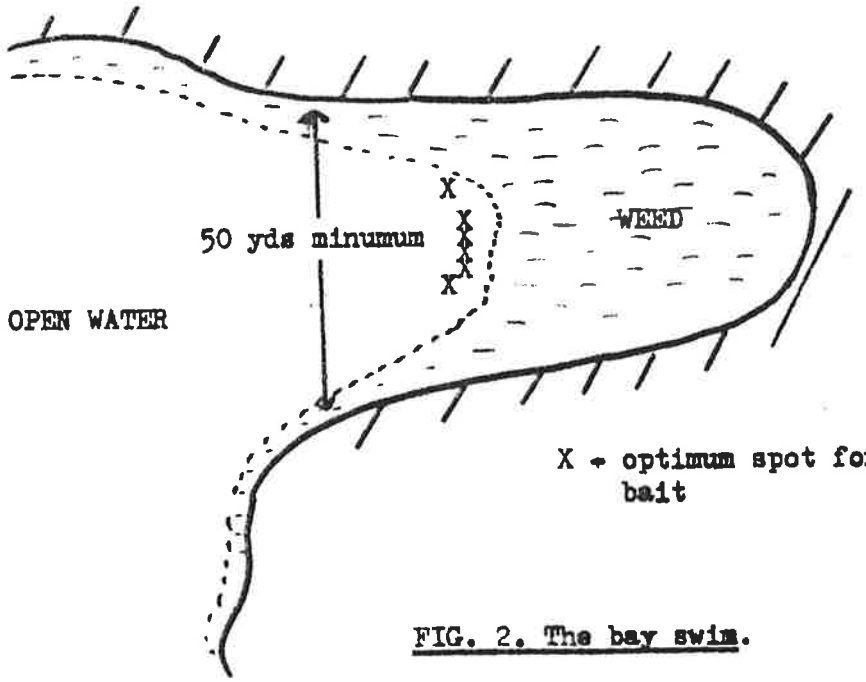



FIG. 2. The bay swim.

Turning to the second noted feature, a change of bottom type, the old hands of gravel pit angling always used to reckon that the gravel washing area was the undisputed hot spot of any pit. For the uninitiated, this is where the silt-laden water returns to the pit after passage through the gravel washing plant. Sometimes, such places are clearly advertised by notices like 'Danger, quicksand, keep away!) In other cases you have to find them for yourself.

In a well established pit, the silt will have built up a substantial spit, giving an area which shelves rather gradually into deep water instead of the sudden descent typical of most of the bank. There may, however, be a distinct shelf at the far end of the spit, so that in profile it looks like Fig. 3.

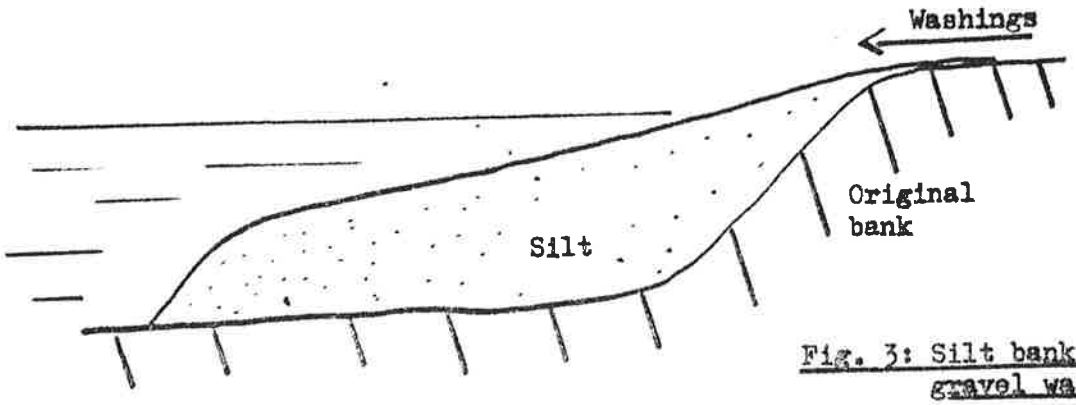



Fig. 3: Silt bank from gravel washings

Such places are often well worth fishing for eels, though in my somewhat limited experience they may not be all they are cracked up to be. The gravel washing area produced nothing, ever, to proper eel anglers at Meadowfield (though gravel-workers claimed prodigious catches on hand-lines) A superb washing area at a pit near Maidenhead similarly failed to produce anything - though in this case the rest of the pit yielded precious few eels either. At Kingsmead, where the gravel washings are almost a seperate lake, quite rapid sport can be expected (at least one run a night), but nothing much above two pounds has yet come from the area.

Mussel beds are both a joy and a curse. For a start, you often don't know they are there, until you get a succession of runs one after the other, and mysteriously break on the strike on nearly all. Eventually, your size 2 hook returns with an outsize swan-mussel shell embedded on the end, and then you know. Eels, especially in Wraysbury 2 pit, seem to be particularly thick around mussels. The trouble is, sooner or later your line falls between the shells of this wretched bivalve. As soon as the line moves the bloody thing slams shut like a vice and it's goodbye eel! A broken line with a series of tiny serrations near the point of breakage is a sure sign of mussel trouble. I don't know a certain cure for this; Arthur Sutton suggests one or more small barrel corks above the trace to keep the line up out of harms' way, and this may be worth a trial.

Deep water areas are a precious, but rare thing in most London pits. Depending on the water, at least 90% will be absolutely constant at 10, 12 or 15 ft; apart from the occasional ridge or island, the bottom of these pits is splendid in its monotony. (But of course, the rarity of features makes them much more valuable when found). In fact, the only deep water channel I can speak of with any authority is the famous 'boat channel' at Kingsmead. This is a channel, perhaps 200 yards long and 40 yards wide (it varies a bit in places) lying between the main bank and a series of islands and promontaries. Here, the gravel barges ply up to the extraction plant during the day - and sometimes, when the wind is in a particular direction, and the gravel men have been careless with the ropes, they ply back down again during the night! I was reduced to near hysteria one dark and windy night when, looking up after an hour or two of somnolence, I beheld this monstous shape bearing down on me, blotting out the sky as it came. They are big, these barges, like a battleship at night.

Anyway, the boat channel at Kingsmead goes down to about 16 ft, which is substantially deeper than the rest of the pit at about 10 ft. It also has a more silty bottom than most areas, and a lot of swan mussels, so the mere fact of greater depth may not be its true attraction for eels. Whatever the reason, this channel is a most reliable eel swim along all its length. Nevertheless, it is true to say that it is only faster than the rest of the pit for medium eels (about 2 lb); bigger fish can be caught as fast elsewhere.

I deliberately ommitted the most important feature from my list since, alas, it is not necessarily available to all. I refer, of course, to Arthur Sutton's flask of tea. For several weekends on the trot it was most potent magic at Kingsmead; to it I owe the capture of eels of 3:10, 3:4 and 2:10, plus several smaller efforts. The proceedure is really quite simple. You fish in a spot handy to Arthur (for his flask is usually nearby). You wait until the time is ripe for a run - normally about 23.30 when the traffic out of Heathrow has ceased to thunder overhead at the rate of two a minute, or, alternatively, until Arthur has had a run and landed a small pike. You then stroll quietly down the bank carrying your own cup (most important this, since like all men wise in the art, Arthur rarely carries a spare) and look thirsty. A few convincing imitations of a man lost in the Sahara for a week will usually do the trick. Let Arthur fill you cup (never, under any circumstances do it yourself; it would spoil his pleasure at seeing the the most capacious mug in England), take a few sips and note the sound of your oscillator screaming down the bank. No need to hurry, flask-of-tea eels invariably come out.

Sad to say, the magic began to wear off slowly towards the end of the season. Perhaps, Arthur my old mate, we should try coffee next year.

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YOUR BULLETIN.

Believe it or not, we are now in a better position to produce a regular issue of the N.A.C. Bulletin than ever before. I hope that at the 1974 A.G.M. we will be able to tidy up the arrangements for producing same. I sincerely trust that you wil all play a part, for without the neccesary articles etc from the members all the good will in the world cannot produce a magazine which is enjoyable and readable.

Some of you no doubt will either have or have access to a typewriter. You ca help enormously. If you can type your piece on to a sheet or sheets of paper of the size we are using here (A.4), we can then scan the original and produce a stencil ready for duplicating. The work should be boldly typed in Black. Any sketches should be done with a Black ball pen. Remember to leave an ample margin on the left hand side of the sheet of paper, and room at the top of the page for me to enter the issue number and the page number. I can supply you with this size paper. Please ask. A.J.S.