

The National Anguilla Club

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# BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

I trust that you have had sufficient time to read and digest the material contained in the previous issue. For those of you who are unaware of what I mean, I should explain that Vol 12, No. 5 was only posted out a few weeks ago. However, rest assured that the quick succession of receipts is but a temporary event. The reason, as I'm sure you are all aware is through the late issuing of the previous issue. rather than become in a continual position of being one issue behind so to speak - i.e. delay No 6 to July - AJS and I have decided to let you have your money's worth. Anyway, the official course has started and the receipt of a bit more reading material will enable you to get out of going!

To me, the coarse fishing season will be something of a shock. Having been fishing throughout the close season in the Welland and Nene area with the regulation hooks with half inch gapes, the ability to use something more in keeping with the normal run of the mill hook will seem very odd and, no doubt, will make me feel guilty of something - I'll keep wondering iff the baliff is going to check the gape of my size 22's and accuse me of abusing my right to fish for cels! It will also be a change to be able to use dead bait. One cannot get very positive bites from small fry when one is fishing single maggot on a 1/0 (although it has been tried) assuming, of course, that the maggot can be persuaded on to a hook of that magnitude without its entrails being extruded and dripping on to the bank!

Did you happen to read in the comics of a few weeks ago the letter by one Nobby (noddy?) Clark (AT June 4/5)? For those of you sensible enough to avoid spending the hard earned pennies on such drivel, Noddy believes that Nigel Frostwicks "mammoth" (to quote Kev Richmond), cannot be classed as a good fish and should be removed from any records because it was caught in the close season. Well done John Holliman for telling him what for. Correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't Alan Dart's record caught in the close season? I suppose Noddy would have that one deleted from all record books too!

In this issue there is one splendid article from Graham Booth mis reporting the facts of the Club trip to Pickmore. I could have used my editorial right and ammended his article to fit the "true" facts, but felt that would be unnecessary as I may be accused of perverting justice. The truth is, Graham, as you well know, Terry Jefferson did not enter the murky depths of Pickmore due to my nautical knowledge. He went in because he was dirty and needed a wash. A drifting boat gave him the excuse he needed. And the boat wouldn't have gone adrift if A.Sutton, Esq. had kept his foot on the rope! Although I do confess to making a lot of people wet in the pub - I gained a multitude of points towards the world chapionship on that one - I plead not guilty to being responsible for Jeffersons swim. So there!

Notwithstanding these minor errors in reporting, I think Graham has done a first class job in capturing the air and atmosphere of that trip.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you all the very best for the coming months and hope that every one catches the calibre of fish that makes it all worthwhile. In my own case, anything over 1lb would be welcome. Nay, ANYTHING would be welcome!

DAVID SMITH

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE 1974 SEASON  
AND A MUCH RELATED TOPIC

By Henry Hansen.

I believe it was Arthur Sutton who once said that as long as he learned something from each season's effort, then he knew everything was alright. He added that the time to worry was when he stopped learning! Last season I learned a lot from my angling activities so might conclude that everything is alright. Unfortunately, the results obtained do not agree with this.

Last season, in the company of Steve Hope, I fished harder and more often than I have ever done previously. You may remember (Bull. 12.1) that Steve recorded over 2,000 rod hours for 35 eels last season: for nearly 2,000 rod hours I recorded only 11 eels.

The reason for such results, be it considered direct or indirect, is quite simply netting. By this, I don't mean that there is hardly a fish left, merely that methods have needed to be changed as a result of the eel nettings. Contrary to some opinions, North Lincolnshire has a limited number of waters that can supply quality eel fishing; but, as Steve mentioned in his article, the semi-professional eel trappers have realised that there are easy pickings to be had. Consequently, our waters are being methodically trapped with literally thousands of eels being removed. It is unfortunate that the majority of waters in our area are perfectly suited for trapping. A competent netsman, with a good system of nets, can very soon vastly reduce a water's eel population.

Also, it is generally uncommon to know which waters are being, or have been netted. These people usually set and empty their nets by night or in the middle of the week - when things are, generally, a lot quieter. Often a water is found to be in the process of being netted when one actually hooks one of the nets or sees their retaining poles! Other times, an angler might casually mention that he saw people carrying nets from a particular water some while back.

Things are as bad as that: and, of course, we have no idea of the full extent of the netting. It has developed to such a stage that when a person asks where I have been eel fishing lately, I simply do not say in case it is passed on and the inevitable happens.

As a result of this repetitive, the majority of waters that I am able to fish are now left with only bootlaces and precious little else. As Steve quite rightly pointed out, unless you are prepared to travel quite a distance, it is a case of having to make do with what one has. To counteract this on our local waters, last season it was only on a rare occasion that I used small deadbaits and I practically never used worm. Steve wasn't so resolute as me and compromised somewhat - hence his better results. In an attempt to find some quality fishing, I tried a great many new waters, with varying results.

I started the season somewhat later than usual - beginning of April - at Cartwright's pit. A full moon and cloudless sky greeted me, so I was half expecting a blank - this I got! This has always proven to be a reassuring start to the season, as after this initial result, things can only improve. It wasn't until my sixth trip (mid May) that I got amongst the eels. Even this was due to my being somewhat conned.

The week before this, Steve and myself had fished Barton Broads and, for once, things looked favourable. We fished a fair way apart with Steve using small

baits as opposed to my somewhat larger offerings. I blanked, whereas Steve had three fish of about 2½lbs, a couple of abortive runs and a bonus 7lb Carp, this latter fish being taken on lobs complete with a 1/0 hook and wire trace - just to rub it in! From these results, it appeared that the eels were somewhat baitshay, and it obviously made sound sense to use these small baits. Consequently, the following week we returned and used small baits, though I did put out one large bait. Of course, it would have to be that night that the bootlaces decided to come out to play! Apart from two small eels of 1:0 and 1:8, I had several abortive runs and shredded baits. But, shortly before dawn I had a good run on my large bait. This I duly hooked into, but my retrieving it was greatly hampered by overhanging trees. To make things worse, my 15lb line caught around some underwater object immediately below my rod tip. I somehow brought the fish to the bank only for it to surface in a reed bed in front of me. I placed it at 3lb+. It promptly snagged me up with the result that the line eventually parted. In doing this it had attached itself to a large reed stem and was safely tethered, though obviously thrashing about under the surface. My first attempt at netting it failed, and the second resulted in the net chord coming adrift. As the water at this point was only about three feet deep, I was left with only one alternative. Consequently, I jumped in after it and felt about with my hands. Anyway, I did not find the damned thing, and received a cut hand for my trouble.

The week after this was Whit and the Club trip was, conveniently, at Barton Broads. It really was an excellent turnout of members and their friends and was quite an occasion. Unfortunately, the eels didn't rise to the occasion and the usual array of bootlaces was landed. I remember Ernie Orme and John Watson landing a decent eel apiece and full credit to them - I don't think Ernie realised the significance of his eel from Barton. There were, of course, the numerous drinking sessions as well as the sight of members engaged in wrestling bouts in the mud! How could I forget Brian Crawford's kind act of recovering my lost eel of the previous weekend. Apparently he found it in his swim whilst clearing a few reeds. It was still firmly attached and very much dead. It measured 36". It also smelt a shade, as I'm sure all who were there will testify - don't you agree, Mr Ball? I offered to let Brian keep it as a token of friendship, and couldn't understand why he refused my offer!

In June, Steve and I joined Market Rasen working man's club and this allowed us to fish their water - as well as drink their excellent, sheep Tartan bitter! This water is a three acre sand pit which has been fished once or twice by other Anguilla Club members in the past. Several good fish were recorded and so Steve and I thought it worth an extended effort. It certainly looks the part - if looks are anything to go on - but unfortunately after a good start results petered out. The water has a large head of small rudd and perch as well as the usual tench and bream. There are also plenty of small hungry jack pike! On our first session I caught fish of 2:15, 2:12 and 2:9; certainly an encouraging start. As mentioned, though, results gradually fell off until it was obvious that the quality eels we were expecting were not going to make an appearance. The reason for this was eventually found in the form of a well hidden overflow between the lake and the nearby River Rase: hence, the eels are free to come and go as they please and the larger eels we had caught were probably of the maximum size that the water held. This agreed with the fact that the biggest eels caught by other Anguilla Club members were also slightly under three pounds. Another curious fact of the water was that the eels would not take perch bait, despite there being plenty in the water: the only fish bait they would take was rudd.

As I was unable to make it to Bala, Steve and I decided on a week at Whitemere the week after the Club trip. But to see how the rest of the Club fared, we decided to nip over to Bala first. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived

(Saturday, tea-time) everybody had gone home, apparently beaten by the weather. Despite this temporary set-back, we still managed to drive back to Ellesmere, have a couple of pints in the Red Lion and then get set up at Whitemere before dark!

The day after we arrived I had a really good look round. What a place! This was my first trip to Whitemere and was, indeed, a whole new experience; compared to my home waters, it was like fishing the North Sea! I've never seen a water with so much aquatic life and whilst we were there, there was still a considerable amount of algae present. As we literally had the whole 60 acres to ourselves, we both used a considerable number of rods so as to cover an appreciable area. These were equally deployed between worm and dead bait, but it was found best to use only worms during the day. This was due to the jack pike being very active during this period. I don't think that I have ever put in such a concerted effort over such a period. My reward for the whole week was one jerky run on worm at dusk. This I missed! Steve was more fortunate and had fish of 1:1 and 3:1 plus several other missed runs.

Steve stayed put for the whole week in the fabled Hawkins swim, whilst I tried several. We were joined for one session by Ernie Orme and it was noticeable that he, as per usual, fished the swim nearest the road. We soon found out why!

The day after Ernie had fished with us, I moved to the swim furthest away from the road. This is the one where the tree hangs out into the water which is deep relatively close in. Shortly after midnight I was abruptly woken by an ominous crashing in the undergrowth.....The Whitemere monster had come to pay its respects! It was fortunate that at this time I was already wearing a pair of brown trousers: to say that I was frightened was definitely an understatement! Luckily "IT" decided not to hang around for very long and soon wandered off, much to my great relief.

The following night Steve and myself waited for "IT" to appear; we were, of course, suitably armed with landing net pole (a la Hawkins) and banksticks! When we heard it coming we waited until it was very close. We pounced. We hit out at everything. "IT" tore off at a hell of a rate, crashing through the undergrowth in no uncertain manner. The fact that it also could sense fear was most reassuring.

We gradually got used to its nightly visits and decided to try to find out exactly what it was. It would often, very quietly, come up behind you, only betraying its presence by heavy breathing. I placed a few slices of bread out one night and they were gone within minutes. This act was repeated with Steve and myself waiting with torches. As soon as we sensed that the bread was disappearing, we switched on our torches to reveal ..... a dog!

This was a very shaggy, tatty looking sheep dog which immediately ran off. What a pity Steve did not have a flash gun with his camera. After this incident it began to make sorties in daylight, though mainly early morning. Once or twice we nearly got very close to it, but each time it quickly shot off. I seemed to get the opinion that it was simply scared of people, probably through having a severe previous owner. It also appeared equally obvious that it depended heavily on anglers for its food supply: any small scraps of food that we left out were soon taken, irrespective of what they actually were.

Looking back at the Whitemere trip as a whole, I am of the opinion that two dozen rods wouldn't help matters any. If the conditions were as when we fished there, its not surprising that few eels are caught. There is simply too much natural food for the eels to have to forage about for anything. We had obviously fished at the wrong time of the season: September or October would probably have been better, when there is less natural food about.

I knew that the eel season was over and that the pike season had started when I caught my first ever night pike (at midnight) from Market Rasen. I took the hint!

I suppose, on reflection, it was a fair season though obviously greatly dissappointing as regards results, but this was partially expected with the methods employed and that a lot of waters were fished. This coming season, though, should show whether our efforts of last year were worthwhile or not.

### LOCKING PIT - OR THAT NASTY PLACE DOWN THE ROAD

By Bob Pountney.

The local Angling club permit describes it as follows:

"Lies on the Weston-Barnwell road. From Weston the pit lies on the left hand side of the road just before the second railway bridge. Access is from the bridge embankment. Cars can be left over the railway bridge where the road is wider."

Locking pit is only five minutes drive from where I live: I wish, however, that it was five light-years away! The two railway bridges mentioned are probably the most dangerous in the west of England. They are both situated on severe bends in the road and extremely narrow. In view of the fact that heavy goods vehicles use this road, the only reason I would park my car anywhere near the railway bridges at all would be if I wanted to scrap it! So, I park it about another quarter mile further on, in a camping site.

After struggling back up the road with all the gear, one now has to deal with getting down the bridge embankment. The permit fails to mention that you have to either climb over or crawl under a rusty wire fence, and then somehow get down a four foot high wall. Once this task has been accomplished, you are ready to sign up with the commandos. A steep drop takes one through the brambles and, yes, you can now see it - Locking Pit.

One can only fish from one side of the pit, which happens to run parallel to the main railway line and but ten feet away. The bank is extremely steep and, when in the act of casting, one has to be careful not to hook the fence immediately behind or, worse still, the main railway line itself - I would not recommend attempting to hook the Plymouth-Manchester express unless an extra large landing net is at hand.

As for the pit itself, it is extremely weedy: in fact, the only way local touch anglers land their fish is by constantly throwing boulders into wherever the fish has got caught up. As far as eels go, I have yet to land one from this water, but the runs are very decisive. The trouble is, for some reason I fail to connect every time.

If ever there was a place for creepy crawlies, this is it. As soon as darkness falls the place is like a zoological insect house, and being a person who has a natural fear of spiders, you can imagine how I feel - I'm sure they see me coming.

Anyone wishing to fish this pit should (1) have an old car they want to get rid of, (2) be an ex commando (or at least have considered joining), (3) like trains, (4) be able to throw boulders, (5) have a natural liking for creepy crawlies - frogs, toads, beetles, spiders, etc. (6) be certified immediately!

To those of you who must be saying to yourselves that this lad Pountney must be exaggerating, I trust you'll get in touch and I'll arrange a special visit for you!

### AN INNOCENT AT HOME

By Nigel Jeyes.

As a recent acquisition to the ranks of the ungodly - you must be ungodly to fish all night! - and even the art of the angle, I intend to see my name in print, innocently commenting on five waters I have fished. This can only be regarded as an introduction to the waters and the speculation and the gossip points must be taken with a large pinch of groundbait and not regarded as concrete facts. As I am going to "hammer" at least four of these fisheries for those beloved wriggles this season, I hope to return to print later in the year with some staggering statements backed by indisputable facts.

Without further nonsensical babbling, I shall attack the meat.

1. A Private Lake. (which shall remain nameless - but if you're interested is at Claysmore School, near Blandford in Dorset). I'm privileged to fish this small lake - a friend of mine is secretary of the school angling club. It's principally devoted to perch and roach (fish up to about 1lb coming out), a few tench were supposedly introduced and in summer it is crawling with "specimen eels" (taken up to 1:4 so far). Before I continue I should say that at deepest the lake is only 3-4ft in summer - and that weed! It goes crazy and the lake begins to look like some kind of aquatic lawn. As the lake is surrounded by trees, bushes and the general verdant growths of a tropical jungle, the bottom is soft and silty with plenty of rotting vegetation, chunks of trees - from twigs to trunks - the occasional sheet of corrugated iron, the odd chair and the odd school locker here and there for good measure. Eels (the name gives me a lovely warm feeling inside, just like a drop of Glenfiddich) in the 2-3lb bracket have been caught by hand wandering about and placed in the lake. I have only used worm so far with any success; always on a long leader as the Arlescy bomb disappears in the silt. I spent one evening using minnow deadbait - taken from my local river - and had plenty of runs which were almost all aborted. When I cranked my terminal tackle back, my pike rod crippled by the strain, I usually recovered a weedbed. Once, however, I nailed one: a superbly conditioned eel of just under a pound! Next time it will be larger deadbaits.

2. Gasper Lake, Nr Stourhead, Wiltshire. A general coarse fishery owned by some great estate or other. 60p a day, last season, or 30p a night. I spent a week here last year and didn't get a single eel - admittedly, only using one rod for them. On one night - 27/28 July - my companion took eels of 3lb, 2lb, and two more at 1½lb. all on bunches of lobworms. There was talk of a 7lb eel having been taken earlier in the year. I made enquiries whilst I was up there, but no one could tell me anything about it. I think it was a distinct possibility (go on, get aggressive, write to the editor!). There are millions of small perch and bream and the pike are netted out; the Anguillas have plenty of food available and little competition. Another acquaintance - who gave up fishing for golf, poor devil! - took an eel of 4:4 two years ago, and ate it; and the baliff called Bill - who is really an Eric - told us of another 4lb+ fish. Bearing all these in mind, I think the potential is good.



3. Turners Paddock Lake. (a few hundred yards up the road from Gasper). I am told this belongs to the National Trust and costs 30p to fish, collected by a Baliff. To be honest, I've never paid, as I've never seen him! That's not quite true: I've seen him once and he told me, in no uncertain terms, with a liberal use of words not found in respectable English Dictionaries, to move my car. Turners Paddock is hidden from the road by a wood and not often fished. At the end of my trip to Gasper, my companion and I moved here for one night - and what a night! We used 12 - 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb bs lines with worm bunches and caught Tench - up to 3:5! Finally he - you thought my "companion" was a she, didn't you! - hooked a wriggler of 2:9. Next night, I got my best to date (don't laugh), one of 3:0 - a beautifully conditioned eel of 0.94meters (or, for Dave Smith's benefit, 37"). I should add two points: one, the lake is very shallow (all mine are) only going about 4 - 5ft; two, there was talk of two five pounders being taken on the same night at the beginning of 1974.

4. Cheddar Reservoir. Cheddar, Somerset. For some strange reason, I am very attracted to this great featureless, concrete bowl. It costs, at the time of writing, 80p per day. It's a Pike fishery but eels of 6 - 8lbs are supposedly to be found lurking within its gin clear depths - according to one Bristol Waterworks Company Official. An Anguilla of 6lb was caught when a small shallow portion was netted: but the "piece de resistance", a 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb wriggly was taken by some specimen hunter during the morning (23rd February) on a secret bait - he also took another of unspecified dimensions.

I haven't really fished Cheddar for wriggles much. The main problem: "One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset" - to quote a waterworks propaganda leaflet - coupled with gin clear water. Heavy weed growth with some algal stuff (Spirogyra I think it was called at school) is another problem: worms crawl in and you clear a few square yards of the bed when you recover your hook. Besides that, Pike like deadbaits, don't they? Even with all these restrictions, I am reckoning on getting an eel or two out this year.

I forgot to mention, an acquaintance of mine slipped over the fence one night, avoiding the guard dogs and the trip wires, and managed to get a 3lb+ out last year aswell. This is where I hope to be on opening day, anyway.

5. River Yeo. around Yeovil, Somerset. Breathe a sigh of relief now, lads, I've nearly finished. I have fished most stretches under the jurisdiction of the Yeovil and Sherborne Angling Association. My suggestion to anyone intending travelling down to this remarkable water is: "forget it". I have tried (you gotta believe dat!) to get a good eel from the river, but the best is a mere 1:3 caught by me and another of 1:4 caught by a friend. I've seen a couple of decent fish - 2-3lb jobs - caught by a nipper and heard of a few more in that range. As far as I'm concerned, getting a decent bootlace of broomhandle proportions from the Yeo is too much like hard work. You can bet I'll be back this year though. I don't know why: s'pose it's the challenge!

Well, that's about it. Remember, my friends, this is not the whole story - the Epilogue will be published one day. May I have a word with you please, Mr Smith? Sir?

THE Mk XVI BITE ALARM (With oppologies to AJS)

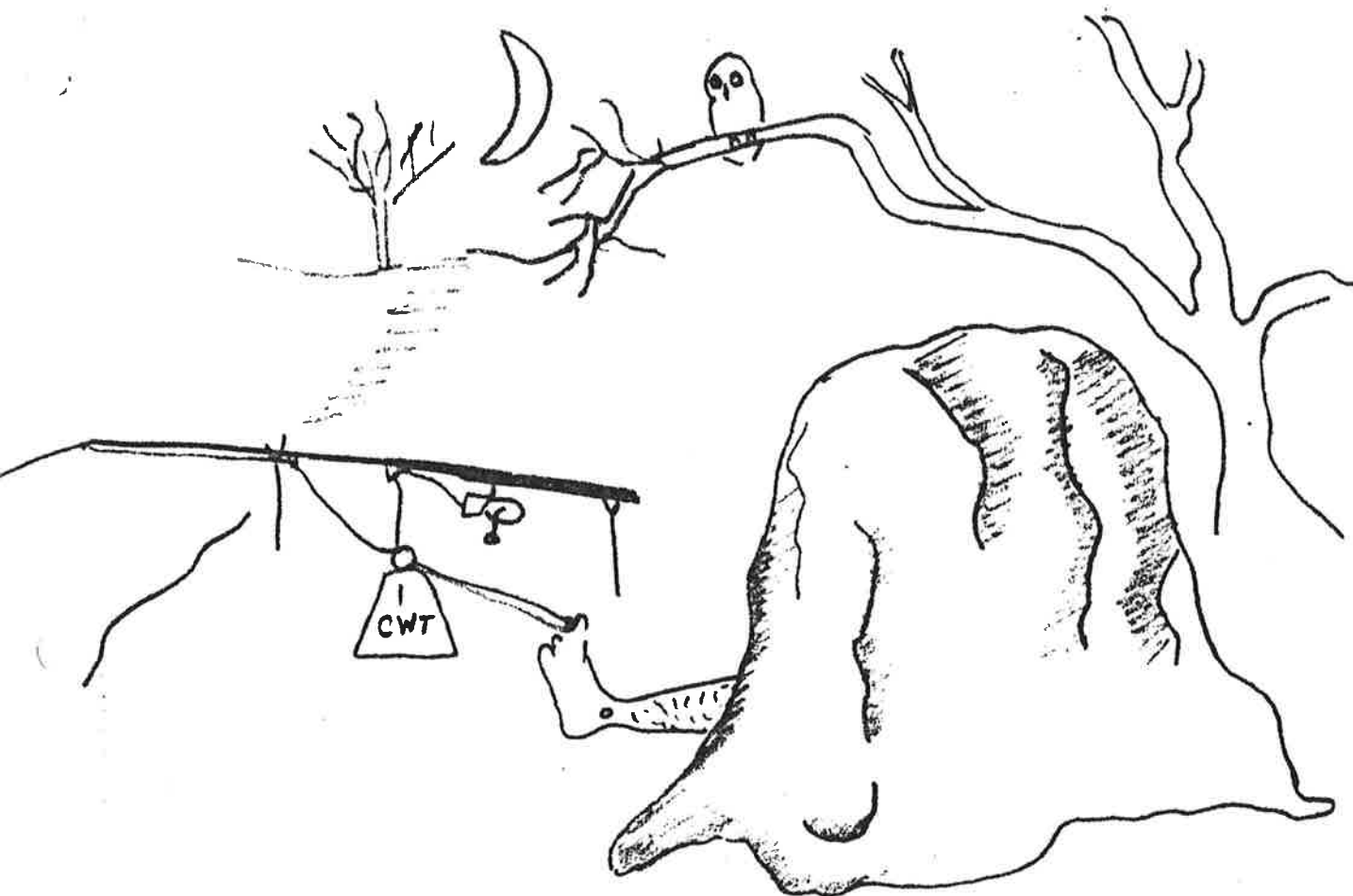
By Dave Holman.

During the recent Easter trip to Lake Bala, it became exceedingly clear that some anglers amongst us were getting false alarms, resulting in their getting

out of their bedchairs. Dave Smith had some half dozen such runs and succeeded in keeping me awake.

The new Mk XVI alarm does away with these frivolities and deters even the most persistent twitch bites.

The assembly of the complete circuit is shown below. Some problem may be had with damp on the contacts, so a quick spray with W.D. Rocket 4/90 is advisable.



You may be pleased to hear that the model comes in an ultra-sonic design, with a range of up to 12ft - dependant upon the length of the leg used.

Unfortunately, no more than two rods can be used with this system as we run out of things to tie on to.

The whole set comes in a presentation pack at a reasonable cost. A special discount is offered to Ernie Orme, pensioners and old ladies.

THOUGHTS ON TACKLE STRENGTH

By Alan Hawkins.

I was delighted to see a fresh and original approach taken on the venerable chestnut of tackle strength for eels. I thought Dave Holman's recent article (Bull. 12.4) was a most excellent contribution, deserving considerable thought from us all. Some of his ideas, especially that one should adjust tackle to suit the type of eel present, as distinct from the type of water, were, I believe, quite new.

Dave said he would welcome a reply from other members, so here is mine. I agree entirely that there is scope for varying tackle to suit conditions and do, in fact, routinely use three distinct sets of gear myself. There are, at the light extreme, carp rods (now SSP 29) plus 8lb line; in the middle "Bass rod" types, casting optimum about 2oz, to use with 12lb line, and at the heavy end a pair of SS5, 3-5oz, rods to use in conjunction with line of 15lb upwards.

As far as I am concerned, tackle should be such as to land the maximum number of eels of a size I want to catch. As Dave rightly says, the number of eels landed is the product of two factors, viz:-

getting a positive run x getting the fish out

If eels are at all sensitive to tackle, and I believe that in some circumstances they are, then it is clear that the two factors in this equation contradict one another. Tackle getting the most runs may land the least fish, and tackle getting the least runs is, nevertheless, best at getting the fish ashore. Because of this, tackle strength is a compromise between two opposing forces. If you are fortunate enough to be able to set out a range of tackle, then I believe it pays to make a conscious attempt to fit tackle to the circumstances.

But here is the snag. What are the circumstances? There is a powerful sting in the tail in the general statement made above - the bit about landing fish of a size one wishes to catch. The eels I most want to catch start at 6lb and work upwards. This is quite different from what I actually catch, which, most of the time, is fish between 1 and 3lb. Now it seems to me perfectly logical to argue that the (relatively) light-weight gear giving maximum returns for the 1-3lb bracket is not optimal for the 6lb plus effort: it may be deficient in the "getting it out" side of the equation.

Hence, should an Anguilla Club member be definitely committed to specimens of a particular size, his tackle should be designed with these fish in mind, and not with the average run of eels. It may be, but not always that this gear is heavier than that optimum for average fish. If it is, then it should be a conscious decision on his part; a deliberate sacrifice in sport for the sake of the big-un.

The question then becomes, therefore, how much loss of sport should we tolerate? What aspects of tackle design make the biggest impact on eels, and what are less important? What sort of equipment do we need to land very big eels?

Let us start with the "getting a run" side of the equation. My own experience suggests there are three factors which are by far and away the most important here. These are the presence or absence of a wire trace, the size of the hook and the freedom with which line can be taken from the reel. Line strength within the 8-15lb range I normally use, generally seem to have little effect.

Taking these in turn, I fully endorse Dave Holman's view that a wire trace is a powerful obstacle to a positive run. I believe, from my own experience, that it is much more offputting in conjunction with a worm bait than with a dead bait. This is fortunate, because it seems to me that a wire trace is nearly always essential for dead bait, but only rarely needed for worms. My reasons for saying this are:

1. That on a dead bait an eel is given the freedom of choice to go where it likes before the angler attempts to bring it ashore. The eel's choice is often (but not always) precisely the opposite of where the angler would like it to be.

2. That there is a good chance of mouth hooking eels on worm. If this is achieved, a trace is pointless.

I take issue with Dave that only the big headed, toothy eels can part nylon line. My own, often disastrous, experience suggests that all eels can do this, but only if they are partially or completely snagged. I do not think eels generally bite through line, I think they crush it: but they need an absolutely tight line to do this - it is very rare for a fish to sever the line in open water. The worst problem in this respect seems to be beds of soft weed, where I have lost fish which would almost certainly have come out if I had had a trace (always assuming I got a run in the first place). The more classic run of snags - the doors, windows and chimney pot of the submersed brick works at Dringhouses, for example - are not the same sort of problem at all. Once an eel is entrenched in there a trace is immaterial. It ain't going to come!

Nevertheless, even if you do accept Dave Holman's argument about eels in some waters being more capable of biting line than in others, there is still very little case for a trace with worm baits. This is because:

3 Waters where worms are a good bait for big eels - ie. lacking a bootlace problem - usually produce small-headed eels. Waters where deadbait is needed to avoid bootlaces usually produce large-headed eels.

Clearly, we would all be happier in doing away with the wire trace if we could guarantee mouth hooking. I don't think we can, but we can go a long way toward it by using a quick strike, two hook rig. I have found that two small hooks - about size 8 - mounted 2-3 inches apart give much more certain hooking with an immediate strike. It is also a very useful dodge if you are troubled with unhookable runs - a change to the two hook rig almost always transforms failure into success. Though, to be fair, it is not an unqualified success for the unhittable run is almost always a tiny eel of 4oz or so, or some other fish altogether. It is, perhaps, better to miss these!

Not only does the tandem rig give you the chance to strike quickly, it also means that even if the eel has taken the bait right down, the top hook has a fair chance of being in the fishes mouth.

However, the two hook method is not, I think, to be recommended in cases where the strike is long delayed. If you have trouble with the zip on your sleeping bag, this is not for you. Thus, the 2-hook rig does not reduce the chance of an initial take, but I do think it is more frequently rejected if the strike is delayed by more than, say, 30 seconds.

In summary, then, my own view is to use a trace always with a dead-bait. I use a trace with some worms only when there is an excessive soft weed problem, and then, reluctantly.

Now the question of hook size. In view of the smallness of an eels mouth, the size of hook we use is often, frankly, ridiculous. Once again, I am much more concerned about appropriate hooks for soft baits such as worms, where the fish can easily give itself severe toothache by chomping down hard, than

for dead bait where the hook is hidden. My own preference is to use a size 4 for double lob, or size 6 for single lob. Alternatively, tandem size 8. However, I know several members use size 1/0 or 2/0 for double lob, and it quite clearly works on the waters they fish. In fact, by threading the worm over the hook shank and up the trace, they need a hook this size to keep the point clear. I have tried this in places like the Grand Union Canal, Kingsmead, etc, and it simply does not work for me. I had a lot of twitches, a few good runs, and missed them all. Last year, I missed 15 runs on the trot in my dozen or so G.U. sessions. I landed nothing! This year in three trips I have returned to size 4 hooks and landed both my eel runs plus some half dozen roach, one pike, one Chub and one tench. On hooks this size it is important not to thread the bait on; simply hook the worm once near the head and once in the middle. Eels are greedy devils. There is no fear of them being content to merely bite off the tail of the lob: invariably, they want it all.

Eel fishermen argue long and hard about the need for strong hooks with eels. Hence, it is said, hooks must be big. In fact, this is no more true for eels than for other fish. As long as the hook will stand the full strength of the line in the normal hooking position (which is not on the extreme of the point) it is OK. Anything stronger is not merely wasteful, it is a disadvantage in that it could put fish off. The "Baitholder Beak-hook" pattern is, to my mind, outstanding. It is not particularly strong, but strong enough. The point is long and fine and can be made wickedly sharp. The shape is excellent for maximum hooking ratios - no other type I have tried has given such a high rate of success.

Finally, the need for line to come freely off the spool. I am sure this completely outweighs line thickness (within limits) in importance. A kinked or buried line, and an inefficient bite detector (especially antenna types!) can, and do, impose far more resistance than the increase from, say, 8lb to 15lb BS. Equally, setting the rod rests so it points along direction of cast, instead of at right angles, can make a surprising difference to drag. As can poor choice or spacing of rod rings. These are things that we can always put right - but we don't always attempt to do so. Why not?

Now the other side of the coin: getting the big 'un out. Is a 6lb eel like two 3lb eels hooked simultaneously? I dearly wish I could answer this from personal experience - don't we all! Certainly, a glance at average club tackle suggests most members believe this to be true. But recent events have made me wonder. Having witnessed the capture of a truly remarkable eel, and having hardly slept since, I have a suspicion that giant eels may be far less lively in the water. I shall not describe this event in detail (for this should be reserved for the captor). Suffice it to say that the violent contortions and machine gun jerks may be absent from such fish. Clearly, they are a very heavy weight and clearly also, they can deliver a crunching thump to the tackle; rather like a conger. Certainly, the few puny 5lb eels I have caught have not been as rippy as a peak condition 3lb. The main tackle requirement has been for a rod and line to pressure a heavy weight into motion, and having enough resistance to absorb a ponderous thump without breakage. In open water, tackle balanced around a line of about 12lb - a genuine 12lb - should do.

To close this piece, I would like to enlarge on one other aspect of Dave's article, which contained a hint about the possible use of ultra-light tackle. If we eel anglers regard 8lb line as light, then ultra-light can be defined as Avon gear balanced around 4-6lb BS. A surprising - astonishing one might say - number of respectable eels have been landed like this. One common feature of such captures is that the angler rarely thinks he has an eel on until he sees it at the net. The eel behaves, and the angler plays it, like

a carp, barbel or big tench. Thus, I hooked a fish on the local River Loddon two seasons ago, using 4lb line and an Avon rod - I was filling in the time between eel runs trying to catch big roach and not very big chub on lobworm. This fish went about 40 yards downstream with nothing at all I could do to stop it. It took a good ten minutes to bring to net, and its long powerful runs had me convinced it was a big barbel. I was staggered to see it was an eel. It lay limp in the water, folded into the net like a piece of wet rope, and only revived after an hour in the keepnet. It was completely played out - it let me extract the hook from the back of its throat without even a twitch. It weighed exactly 3lb.

Now, the Loddon is only about 10 yards wide. Lilies and tree roots grow thick along each bank. Clumps of reeds grow at intervals of a few yards in midstream. At no point would that eel have had to travel more than a few feet to snag me solid: but it made not the slightest attempt to do so.

Others have told me similar stories and I am beginning to wonder whether the frantic back pedalling, snag seeking action we normally get is a panic reaction to enormous pressure. Perhaps if we treat eel gently (and with an Avon rod you can do little else) they may not crash dive into the nearest obstacle. Carp anglers, I believe, occasionally fish very light for exactly the same reason: if they panic the fish they have no chance, whatever the gear; but on light tackle there is a chance the fish will cruise round steadily exhausting itself without ever being panicked into a headlong rush for safety.

I wonder if we should experiment with such gear? Not, I think, when we seriously expect anything very large, for I doubt if a really big eel could be landed on such gear: you simply would not be able to move it, even in open water. But, for 2 and 3lb fish, ultra light gear may give us some interesting experiences. Not to be attempted, of course, without a prodigious landing net!

#### EEL HOT SPOTS - FACT OR FICTION

By Tony Hollerbach.

Is there such a thing as an eel hot spot? - i.e. a place where eels can be caught more consistently than another. In my experience of eel fishing in the Rushden/Bedford area, I have mostly fished the two major rivers in the area - the Nene and Great Ouse. I have fished the Ouse from Bedford to Bletsoe (a distance of about 15/20 miles by river) and eels appear to be limited only to certain areas. I have made a point of examining these areas fairly closely.

At Bedford and a few miles upstream at Clapham, all eels taken have come from the very sluggish water having an average depth of 10 feet. This part of the river is extensively used by boat traffic, and the eels have come from the main navigation channel. Nevertheless, there are only about five swims that produce eels in any quantity: eels are taken from other swims, but not to the same degree.

Above Clapham, the river is extensively locked and not used as much by pleasure craft. As a result, the nature of the river changes. At Bletsoe - an area I fished last season to, almost, the exclusion of everywhere else, eels are caught under conditions differing from those at Bedford. The current here

is faster and the average depth is shallower, being only 5 to 6 feet.

At Blotsoe, there appears to be a genuine hot spot. This is a stretch of river some 20 yards in length with an average depth of 10 to 12 feet - ie approximately twice the average depth of the rest of the stretch. From this hole I caught twice as many eels than from any other swim.

Having read Alan Hawkins' article - Eel Sense (Bull. 12.3, March 1975) - where he outlined some of the experiments carried out by scientists on the eel's senses and, in particular its sense of smell, (Alan says that an eel can smell a single lobworm in Lake Bala) I wonder if water turbulence creates a natural food collecting point to which the eels are attracted by their sense of smell. This would make the area a natural hot spot. Alternatively it may have been my groundbait concoction attracting the eels, although I did catch eels without using groundbait. However, I had groundbaited previously so, maybe, there was some left in the hole.

Could tagging experiments prove whether or not this is a true hot spot?

#### REPORT OF THE NAC EXPEDITION TO PICKMERE

By Graham Booth.

The 1975 Spring Trip to Pickmere, near Northwich in Cheshire, was well attended, there being seventeen members and nine others present, namely Arthur Sutton, Brian Crawford and family, Ernie Orme, David Smith, Arthur Smith, Terry Jefferson, Chris Davy, John Bell, David Kneec, David Holman, Richard Hudson, John Watson and wife, Alan Billington and girlfriend, Nigel Joyes, Bob Croxall and wife, Bob Jackson and wife, ex-NAC member John Harris and myself.

It was unfortunate that a gibbous moon shone over the mere for almost the entire duration of the Friday night. This, I feel, was largely responsible for the total absence of eels on this first night. Richard Hudson, however, did manage to catch an eel of 2:9 some two hours after dawn at around 7am. Most members who saw this fish expressed their great astonishment at the curious formation of its mouth, the lower jaw being retracted to a position almost directly below the rear of the upper jaw, giving the mouth an underslung appearance somewhat similar to that of a barbel. Certain members expressed the opinion that this was possibly an adaptation to enable them to feed on the vast quantities of mussels, which the mere contains, more easily.

Personally, I feel that this explanation is rather unsatisfactory for several reasons, not the least being that I know of many waters similarly endowed with mussel beds where the eels display no such abnormal characteristics. Arthur Sutton kept a couple of these specimens with the intention of despatching them to Liverpool University for inspection by the boffins there who are working on eels. I think it will be very interesting to hear what they have to say about this strange phenomenon.

Apart from Richard's capture, several members had a run or two during the hours of darkness but all were either missed or not struck at all, owing to the fact that the angler concerned was asleep - a far more leisurely method of eel fishing which Terry Jefferson tells me he read about in the Angling Times!

The following day saw the arrival of several members who were not present on the first night. One of these was Ernie Orme who had cunningly conceived a plan which enabled him to avoid spending a fruitless night's fishing should the weather promise to be unfavourable. In accordance with this plan, after hearing the weather man's dismal tidings of an exceeding dearth of cloud and an alarming dissipation of heat, he sought to convince us that he had certain professional duties to attend to at the ludicrous hour of one-o'clock in the morning! One in the morning, forsooth! Does Ernie think we are so gullible as to believe that people work at such absurd times? Never-the-less, on this weak pretext uncle Ernie forewent the pleasure of a blank session and lay snug in bed instead. Next-day, having satisfied himself that the weather had taken a turn for the better, our intrepid Ernie arrived at the water as fresh as the proverbial daisy while more dedicated (and less sensible) eel hunters were staring bleary eyed at the beetles crawling amongst their greasy breakfast utensils. But, in the words of the poet Burns: "The best layed schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley", and uncle Ernie (it must be added along with everyone else) met with his just desserts; an inglorious blank despite the warm, cloudy conditions.

Actually, it is not true to say that everyone had a blank. For one thing, Arthur Sutton had five slimy, flat things and a little, slimy, green thing. Also I caught a strange object (a slimy, long thing) of mass  $1:6\frac{1}{2}$  which, to say the least, was of an extremely odd configuration. Most of those who beheld this creature were of the opinion that it was, at some stage of its life at least, an eel. It was, however, generally felt that no eel in the accepted sense ought to be possessed of a number of right angled bends along the length of its body. Nor was it felt that it was altogether natural for an eel to give the impression that it had been held between two vices, one at each end, and twisted round and round rather like the elastic bands which drive the propellers of certain kinds of model aircraft. In comparison to these features the fact that, like Richard's 2:9 specimen, it too was unsure of whether it was supposed to be an eel or a barbel and had, by way of a compromise, developed a mouth which was redolent of the latter, did not appear to be unduly abnormal. I think Dave Smith summed up the impression which this ghastly specimen gave when he stuck his head under one arm and cried in a twisted, demented voice: "It's the bells, you know!" Clearly a fine specimen of *Anguilla Quasimodus*!

After the traumatic experience of perusing this shocking creature, many members sought solace within the confines of the local licensed premises. It was here that Dave Smith introduced us all to a quaint old game which is played by the natives of deepest Surrey. The object of the game, it appears, is to see how many people one can soak using only a pint of beer. It seems that extra points are scored for each packet of cigarettes which are rendered unsmokable. Dave Knee deserves praise here for the sporting way in which he allowed himself to become our editor's major target, although I do believe that the total number of people soaked was in excess of five and to crown this superb beer throwing feat, an almost full packet of Senior Service was completely saturated. After participating in this ancient sport and having exhausted our respective repertoires of risible anecdotes, our intrepid band rolled out of the hostelry amid sighs of relief from the bar stewards who refused to serve us with the last round just because it was a minute after closing time.

On arriving back at the lake, some bright spark - I think it was me - suggested that a National Anguilla Club ride on the dodgems was just what was needed in order to finally convince the already amazed residents of Pickmere village that here indeed was the biggest set of loonies ever to descend upon the poor unsuspecting community.



Later that afternoon, Terry Jefferson gave us all a great laugh by jumping fully clothed into the lake up to his waist. The object which brought about this rash deed was an untethered boat rapidly drifting lakewards. This was largely due to Dave Smith's immense nautical knowledge which was exercised when he chose that well known sailor's knot - the running half-tangle - to "secure" the craft to the tree.

For the thirs and final night of the expedition the weather reverted to clear skies and a full moon. It was, perhaps, none too surprising, therefore, that once again dawn found us celless. Richard Hudson, however, gave a repeat performance of the first night by winding in one of his tackles in order to pack up his gear, only to find that a wonderful specimen of 1:10 had attached itself to his size 2 Goldstrike.

Although it was painfully obvious that we had failed miserably in our mission of catching the Pickmere eels, I must say that the trip as a whole was a great success. One can only employ the critereon of actual enjoyment when evaluating the success or otherwise of such a function as this, and I'm sure that everyone present had an absolutely splendid time: the wit; the conversation; the mere company of so many great characters, both old friends and new faces, constituted more than the necessary ingredients to guaratee a roaring success. In fact, many elder members were of the opinion that this was the best NAC Spring trip ever.

To conclude, I will simply say this. If the summer trip to Bala turns out to be half as enjoyable, then it will be an unfortunate member indeed who does not manage to attend.

#### THE RESTRICTION

By Arthur Sutton.

The year was nigh past, this day was the last,  
In the east a great star shone bright,

An old angler gasped - his breath failing fast  
"Will this be my very last night".

"Will I never again feel the rain, see the trees,  
will I never again cast a line?

Be as one with the river, the birds and the bees,  
Or take part in this great sport of mine?"

Those words were his last, his life's cycle past  
And all was serene where he lay.  
No more lines would be cast, no more fish would be grassed  
The old angler passed peacefully away.

An angel did appear as the night's end drew near  
He prayed as he knelt by the bed.  
A heavenly host sang softly and clear  
As, with reverence, the angel said:

"Welcome my friend, let's to heaven ascend  
You are granted good sport as your right.  
Have good fishing my friend now you've reached journey's end.  
Oh, one thing though - NO FISHING AT NIGHT!"

A BIT OF PREMEDITATED RULE BENDING.

By; Terry Jefferson.

There's this water you see, it's only a few miles from where Chris Davy, Ken Goward and I live. We've known about it for years but up to now, we've been under the impression that it was very much a closed shop, with permits being almost impossible to get hold of.

However, this year, Chris made some discreet enquiries as to the possibility of our getting hold of some permits. He found out that it might not be as hard as we thought, provided that we went about it the right way, and so it was we set out the other week on one of our infamous 'recces' cum pub crawls.

Our first stop was at the water in question and not one of the local liquid establishments. We gave the place a good looking over for some time and then moved on in search of the house where we could enquire about permits. We found the house without too much difficulty but it appeared as though the residents were out, so we walked down the alley at the side of the house to have another look at the lake from a different angle. Then, as is our usual routine, we argued at some length as to who would ring the door bell and ask for a permit, as we weren't sure what type of reception we would get.

The odds were heavily stacked against Chris, cause he's smaller than Ken and I, so he pressed the door bell hoping that the house was empty. He looked decidedly worried as the door opened, but the pleasant old lady was quite patient and didn't mind waiting till Chris untied his tongue and managed to explain that we were enquiring about fishing permits.

She said that if we would care to go to the back of the house, all would be revealed... we couldn't believe our luck when she started filling in the permits, it seemed too good to be true, but we began to have second thoughts when we read through the fishery rules. Not to be deterred, we paid the money, and before we had gone twenty feet, we had sussed out about half a dozen ways to bend if not completely break the rules.

Night fishing is allowed, but it states in the rules that a night permit has to be applied for before each session, we have since found out that it is not really necessary to do so.

Another rule states that an angler is allowed to use one rod only, but there again, we have now found out that you are allowed to use two rods which will save us from breaking the rules with alarming regularity.

Another rule states that no tents or tent type erections are allowed, ( I wonder if that includes Penthouse and Mayfair? ) that may rule out the use of our homely 'bivs', it's nice to have the comfort of the 'bivs' on some nights, I think we should be able to get by without them once in a while though. It might make for a pleasant change to rough it!

There are a couple of other rules which are a bit awkward but we shall look upon them as minor technicalities.

The water itself is a very well established gravel pit of about five acres, and it holds an excellent stock of fish. The Essex record carp came from this water, about 31:00, and there are quite a few carp of over 20:00 also. There is also an excellent stock of big Crucian carp and Tench.

The eels are very much an unknown quantity, though we do know they are in the water. The best we know of for certain was caught a couple of seasons back and weighed 4:08 though we suspect that a 6:00 plus eel was caught there last summer.

We are really looking forward to fishing the place as it is one of the few waters in the area which doesn't get too crowded, and any disturbance or leaving of litter results in instant suspension.

So we had better be carefull how we bend the rules.