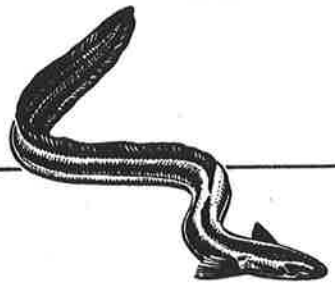

The National Anguilla Club

BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

A water temperature of 45°F this last weekend almost persuaded me that I might catch an eel on my pike tackle. Not that I did, of course, the change from large to small live-baits merely resulted in a change from small to very small pike. Nevertheless, it emphasised the fact that the new season is not so far away now, and that this is the time to make plans for the coming campaign. It is worth reminding ourselves that the data obtained from the session-report scheme over the past few seasons puts us in a very favourable position to make such plans. Indeed, the progressive improvement in the catches of the Club as a whole over the last three years may well be due, in part at least, to our making good use of the knowledge we have aquired.

Even so, there are many gaps in the puzzle. One of the major parts of any scientific investigation is to try and sort out all the different factors which may be at work so that they can be systematically investigated one by one. A pessimist may still say the the eel is the most mysterious of the fish angled for in this country. I believe this is no longer true, and that the apparent abundance of knowledge of how to catch eg. roach (or bream-for the benefit of the Grantham group), is largely an illusion derived from the superficial nature of the investigations upon them.

Thus one may go out roach fishing, catch nothing, and retire saying "the wind was in the wrong direction". Another may say "the wind was OK, but there was too much cloud." Both would be happy, and both probably wrong. A member of this Club, failing to catch an eel, does not have this happy excuse any more, because we have a lot of data to suggest what conditions are most suitable. A failure in perfect conditions leads to the suggestion of another factor, or factors, at work which deserve attention. One may not be happy in this situation; one may in fact be damn miserable, but one does know that a new factor exists and can therefore look foreward to a time when it may be resolved.

It is unfortunately in the nature of things that the solution of one problem tends to raise another. Some of the problems we are now beginning to come up against may not be resolved for a long time yet, if indeed at all, but I am sure that there are many ways in which we can usefully obtain more information which will be of genuine practical help in our angling. For example, we must be one of the most conservative groups in the country in terms of the baits we use:- worms and fish being almost the entire repetoire. This has had one advantage, the accumulation of data on these two baits means that should we be a little more adventurous in the future, we have a soundly based standard with which to compare anything new. Not that we should carry this to absurd lengths;-as in the case of one rather undistinguished fisherman who swears by pickled onions as the best bait for tench at Sywel resevoir. He is, in any case, the victim of a fraud. Two rather more successful anglers, who shall be nameless, became gradually more exasperated each Saturday as this gentleman hotched ten yards up the bank towards them each time they caught a fish, (an achievement he was never known to accomplish), until he was practically sitting on the same basket as the nearest of the two. On one famous occasion the two anglers arose especially early and dragged a vast tub of pickled onions to the pitch, where it was sited in a prominent position. As luck would have it, several fish were landed before the uninvited third party hove into view and began to migrate up the bank towards them. A great show was made of baiting up with onions;- which were secretly withdrawn and replaced by worms when he wasn't looking. In the end, to the enormous delight of the conspirators, a pickled onion of mammoth size was cadged by the dupe, and as far as is known he has used them ever since.

All this aside, with, I believe, a substantial amount of information collected for stomach contents last season, we should get some idea of what master Anguilla choses to eat in the waters we fish. I, for one, am

looking foreward to seeing this report in the hopes that it will give some pointer to a new bait worthy of trial. The point is, we have no a priori reason to suppose that worms and fish are the only baits which would prove successful; there may be another item as good or better than these which would provide a useful alternative. Of course, the more people there are prepared to take part in such a trial, the quicker we can get results. Should enough people express their interest, there is no doubt that a definate programme could be arranged.

Another somewhat disquieting fact is that we have no idea as yet whether grounbait attracts eels or not, even though it figures large in the methods used to catch other fish (dare I mention bream again?). There is no denying that the sort of mess we might consider suitable is not to be prepared by the faint-hearted, nor I would think,a suitable object to store in the fridge- the shrieks of rage from my better half still echo in my ears after a pint of the comparitively innocuous maggots escaped all over the Sunday joint! Once again, however, there is no reason to suppose that it would not result in an improvement in catches, and I am convinced that it should be given a fair trial.

If a reasonable number of members was prepared to have a go at one or other of the ideas discussed above, then some of the precautions needed for solo ventures could be relaxed a little. There would not be the same requirement of two or more identical sets of tackle to enable one to take part. Each one would act as a control for the others, and we could aim for a broad result of unusual bait versus worm and dead-bait, or all unbaited swims versus all baited pitches.

One may feel, with justification, that our eel-fishing is difficult enough, without adding further complications to it. It cannot, however, be denied that for the progress of the Club to continue, we must always seek to extend the scope of our enquiries, building on the foundations of the knowledge already obtained. The session report scheme has run practically unchanged for three years now; there is obviously a limit to how much information can be gained from it alone.

Perhaps, therefore, I could ask each one of you to write me a note, it need only be brief (though preferably not rude), to let me know if you are in favour of either of the two suggestions above, and to say whether you would be willing to take part or not. The next Bulletin could then have a valuable section discussing the replies, and suggestions as to how the projects could operate should sufficient support be forthcoming.

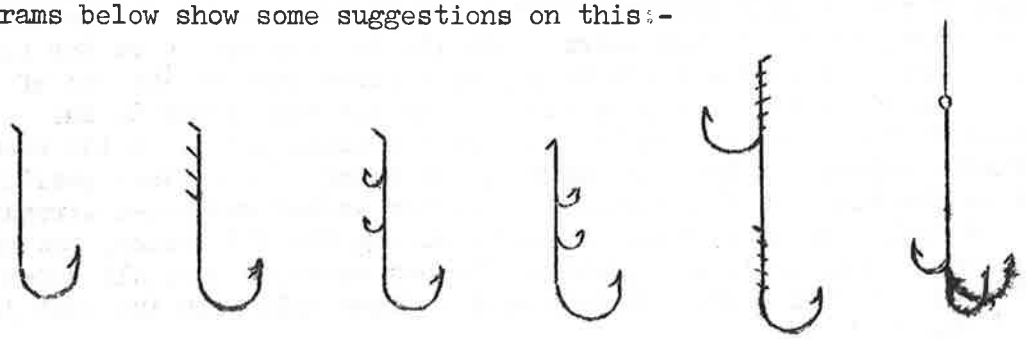
To change the subject completely, it is hoped to include in the next issue a special feature on electric bite detectors; in particular the 'sensor' part of the gadget. Should any of you have a design which you think worthy of the attention of your fellow members, I would be glad to hear from you, and drawings would be especially valuable. Since we are mainly concerned with the detector unit, a thought dreamed up by Geoff Swailes for the noise producing part may be passed on here. His suggestion is that one should use a minature tape-recorder, with a loop of tape containing a suitable phrase to awaken even the most comatose of us. "Wake up, you stupid b....." may be enough for lighthearted occasions, for the rare event when a run occurs on a mammoth dead-bait one might reserve the opening bars of Beethoven's fifth symphony, played at ever increasing volume. Alternatively, a seductive phrase from a langorous female voice may prove effective in arousing some of us, to mention no names of course.....

Alan Hawkins.

HOOK TACKLES FOR WORMS.

by Brian Knott

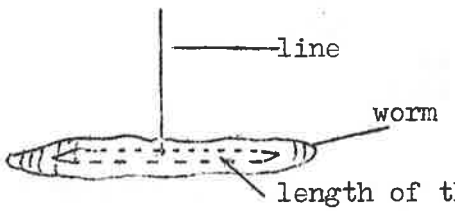
When thoughts turn towards the types of hooks required for worm baits, there are two factors to consider. The first is the ability to hold the bait, and the second is the hook's ability to retain its hold on the eel when driven home by the strike. Of the two, the second consideration is obviously the more important, but the other also deserves some attention. One answer is to adapt the reader's favourite hook to give it better bait holding powers. The diagrams below show some suggestions on this:-



A. B. C. D. E. F.

Example B shows the barbed-shank hook which has far more bait-holding power than the orthodox hook as in A. A vast improvement is shown in examples C and D, personal choice governing the side of the shank on which the smaller hooks are soldered. The Pennel hook set up as in E is by far the most flexible. To increase the bait capacity, the treble in F can be used. The one big arguement against this is that if the eel breaks the line or trace it may be left with both jaws locked together, an occurrence many of the readers may have witnessed with Pike. I feel this is a moral aspect the reader must decide for himself.

If the reader lives in an area that has a close season ban on eel-fishing then he will find much scope for experiment with plastic or bone hooks, if considered strong enough. This is an aspect that may have to be investigated thouroughly, as a legal technicality may be involved here. I refer to Byelaw No. 9 on the Great Ouse River Authority rod licence which states:- "Fishing for eels by means of rod and line during the annual close season shall be permitted provided that no hook or other metal appliance is attached to the line." To my knowledge, the design shown below is the only way round this ticklish situation, bearing in mind that the idea is far from original.



Before the aforementioned idea is dismissed as ridiculous, the author would like to recall an incident in the Club's history. A now departed member requested fresh ideas in the way of hook tackle and in response to his demands was sent a pre-set mousetrap, complete with trace, in a well wrapped packet. In due course a reply was sent in answer to this loaded parcel, simply worded; "I suppose you tink dat's fuddy".

Getting back to the subject proper, it must be emphasised that this article represents the basics of hook tackle for worms, and many variations and improvements can and will be put foreward by other members. The presentation of the hook tackles must also be considered according to the required position of the bait in the water. Some would perhaps be more suitable for ledgering than paternoster and vice-versa.

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Yorks Sub-Group Report: THE PROJECT AT COWICK BRICK PIT.

Part 1, mapping the water, by Chris Bowyer.

The type of survey described here could be undertaken by any sub-group which wanted detailed knowledge of a water. A word of caution, however, one inevitably loses much of the mystic feeling of the unknown by mapping a water in the detail described here. Familiarity, as they say, breeds contempt.

It all began during the winter of 1969 with a meeting in the comfort of Arthur Smith's home, when we decided that the great amount of information to be gained from such a project would be of enormous value to the group. The first thing to decide was where to do it. As this was to be the first attempt, we did not want a large water, or a river because the bed of this can change considerably from year to year. We all came round to the conclusion that a small brick-pit would be the ideal place. Cowick seemed the natural choice, and had the advantage of being in a central position with respect to the homes of the members. A certain amount was known already. Arthur had fished it on several occasions during the '68 season, and had caught several reasonable fish, and on the one occasion when all three of us fished it together Cowick yielded half a dozen eels with the best just touching four pounds.

Another factor which weighed heavily in our minds was the well authenticated report that during the big freeze-up of '62-63 some very big eels were found dead when a small pond a mile away from Cowick eventually thawed out. The chaps who used to fish it claimed to have completely filled a wheel-barrow with the six largest eels, the best of which went 11lb.

Apart from the usual run of stunted roach and perch found in most of the brick pits up here, Cowick had something of a reputation for big eels. One aged gentleman stated that in his youth he was able to sense when the big eels left the pond, and used to sally forth with a hurricane lamp and pitchfork to capture them from the field behind! (After my dismal results of last season at this pond, I wonder if I might not have done better to cast a dead-bait to the herds of eels grazing in the field).

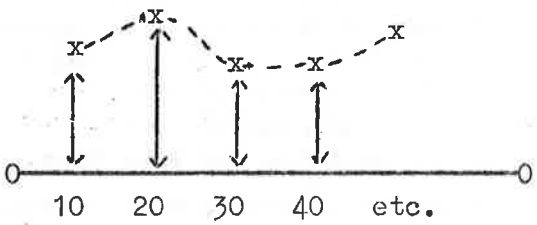
Having obtained permission from the Club secretary, and from the farmer upon whose land we would trample, the second Sunday in April saw us all at the water with a mountain of gear. We had decided to do the survey early so as to avoid it clashing with fishing trips later on. The equipment was as follows:-

1. Two 200yd. balls of thick non-stretch twine with red nylon wool tied at 10yd. intervals along its length.
2. Large sheets of graph paper.
3. Note book and pencil.
4. Prismatic compass (Army type).
5. 60ft. tape measure.
6. Small rowing boat.
7. Four sets of marker pegs marked in units of ten up to two-hundred.
8. Six stout poles.
9. Five bamboo poles which could be joined end to end by ferrules to act as a depth guage. The first one had a weight on the end. They were marked at 6inch intervals in sequence, to give a total of 25ft.

It was a blustery, cold, day with frequent squalls which later were to nearly drown the mug in the boat (Alan Hawkins). Even so we found to our dismay that some twenty anglers were fishing the water when we arrived. They proved suprisingly co-operative, even to the extent of moving their baskets when we wanted to drive in a peg where they were sat. We usually persuaded Arthur to make such requests, we felt he would be unlikely to be refused.

The first step was to drive in two corner posts, one at each end of the arbitrarily chosen first bank (the north bank). The posts were placed so that a straight line between them did not touch the water's edge at any point.

A piece of the twine marked at ten yard intervals was then drawn tight between the posts and tied to them. This established the first base line for the survey, and was drawn in to scale on the graph paper. To map the position of the water's edge, the tape measure was used. At each ten yard wool marker the distance from the base line to the water was measured, care being taken to run the tape out at right angles to the length of twine. These distances were then recorded as a series of points on the graph paper inside the base line already drawn. Joining these points up gave an accurate scale map of the shape of this first bank. The diagram below should make this a little clearer.



0.....=corner posts.

_____=base line.

↕.....=distance from line to water.

x.....=position of water.

---------=line joining points to give shape of bank.

(Before leaving the first bank, pegs were driven in at ten yard intervals along it, ie at the places where the distance measurements-x-were taken. These were to be used for the depth estimation,-see later).

Having mapped the first bank, the compass was brought into play to set out the line for the second. The compass bearing between posts one and two was noted down, and 90°was added to this to give the bearing of post three from post two so that this second line should be at right-angles to the first. With one of us standing at post two holding the compass, another was sent to the far end of bank two with a corner post. He was then sited through this compass, and waved from side to side until he was on the correct bearing, where the post was situated. This second line was then drawn in on the map, twine attached to the posts, measurements taken and pegs knocked in as before.

The process was repeated until the pond had been completely surrounded by a set of base lines all at right-angles to each other. The number of such lines required, of course, depends on the shape of the pond. At Cowick three lines covered three-quarters of it, but the irregularity of the 'back' bank caused us to make several dog-legs in the line to keep it within range of the 60ft. tape. However one lays out these lines, the principle remains the same,- to enclose the water in a regular shape of known dimensions which can be plotted on a map, and then measure the shape of the water with reference to this system of straight lines.

When measurements of the outline were complete, it was time to start on the depth survey. Here the presence of three people was an essential to do the job efficiently. As will be remembered, pegs marked 10, 20, 30, etc, had already been driven in along the banks at the points where'shape' measurements had been taken. Care had been taken to arrange things so that peg 10 on one bank was opposite to peg 10 on the bank on the opposite side of the water, 20 opposite 20 and so on. One of the lengths of twine was then stretched right across the pond (across its shortest axis for ease). One person stood at each end and held the string tight against the pegs. The third person then travelled across the pond in the boat alongside the string, taking a depth measurement at each ten yard marker along its length. The string was then moved on to the second set of pegs and the process repeated until the whole water had been covered. Thus the water had been effectively divided up into ten yard squares, and depth measured at each intersection.

Completion of this marked the end of the first part of the survey, the results of which are shown in the map on the following page. The fishing results, and their interpretation are covered in the next part of this report.

Yorks Sub-Group report: THE PROJECT AT COWICK BRICK PIT.

Part 2, results for 1969, by Alan Hawkins.

As will be apparent from the previous piece, the making of the map opposite was a considerable undertaking which put the Group under something of an obligation to flog the water to justify their efforts. It may as well be admitted now that in terms of angling results alone our work can hardly be justified. In terms of the information gained, however, the story may be different, a feature that the reader must judge for himself.

Broadly speaking, the purpose of making the map was to enable us to locate the position of each cast we made during the season, to record the position from which each fish was taken, and to see if there were any spots which were more favourable than others. Having done this, we then intended to try and correlate the results with features of the bottom of the pond, in the hopes that they might shed some light on the 'holding places' discussion which has occupied our attention in the Bulletin for some time.

In order to do this, of course, it was necessary to devise some system of recording data to correlate with the map. In that the scheme we came up with appeared to work rather well, it seems worth while to set it down here for the possible benefit of others who may wish to try a similar project. Copies of the map were mounted between transparent sheets of perspex and issued to each of us. At the water-side, a sheet of tracing paper was firmly fixed over the top of the map so that the features of the map showed through it. Two reference crosses were drawn in on the paper over the reference marks on the map; this meant that the tracing paper could accurately be re-aligned with it at a later date. The position of one's pitch was drawn in as an arrow pointing to the pond margin at the relevant place. Each cast was recorded as an open circle-O-on the tracing paper above the position on the map where it was considered the bait had landed. It could be argued that one cannot estimate distance and direction accurately enough to do this reliably, but with the help of the map to line up various features of the bank with the position of the cast, we feel that the errors involved here were not so great as might be imagined. Alongside the circle was recorded the rod no. and the time of the cast and cast no. for that rod, eg-

O R1.C1. 22.30. This means that rod one was cast to the spot recorded as O at half past ten in the evening.

If a run occured which was missed, a line was drawn across the circle and the time of the event noted, eg-

Ø R1.C1. 22.30-23.00 This means that the angler had a run at eleven-o-clock which he missed.

If an eel was caught the circle was blocked in, the number of the fish as it appeared on the session report recorded and the time noted eg-

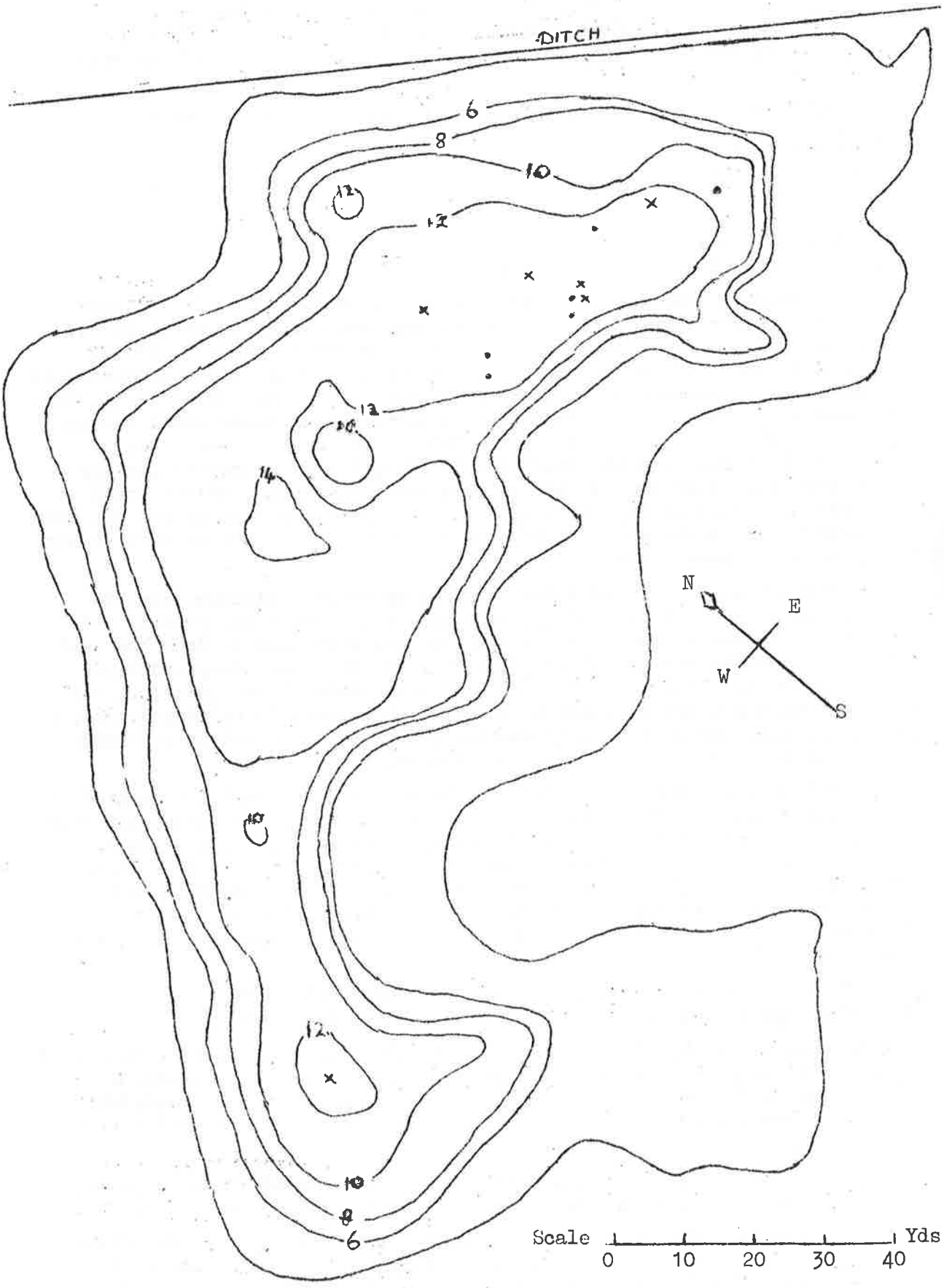
● R1.C1. Eel 1. 22.30-23.00 This means that the angler caught his first eel of the trip on the first cast of rod 1. at eleven-o-clock.

Subsequent casts to the same spot as before were recorded using the same code at the side of the paper away from the area occupied by the map. They were referred to the correct position by the phrase-'as R1. C1.'(or R2.C1 etc.)

The normal session report was filled in as usual, and this supplied information not recorded on the tracing paper such as the details of the baits used, weather conditions etc. The information on the tracing paper was designed to correlate unambiguously with that on the session report.

Such a scheme records a vast amount of data. The depth to which analysis of it can be carried, however, depends to some extent on the number of fish taken. Thus it is theoretically possible to compare the results of different spots at different times of day, and see if one can detect a net movement of eels around the pond during the course of a trip. Unfortunately, the fact is that only six eels were caught during the whole season for a total of 229 RH.

WEST COWICK CLAY PIT.



Key:- contour depths in feet.
x=spot where run was missed.
•=spot from which eel was landed.
bottom type:- less than ten feet deep-hard.
more than ten feet deep-soft.

20/4/69. A.H.

Thus we have to confine ourselves at the moment to considering only the factors which can usefully be examined in the light of this small amount of data. Should the water produce better sport in the future some of the more intricate features may eventually be considered.

For 1969, then, the overall result from Cowick was as follows:-

Total RH.....229½.
Total Eels .....6.
Total RH. Worm...98½.
Total Eels Worm...6. Missed runs Worm.....5
Total RH. D.B...131.
Total Eels D.B....0. Missed runs D.B.....1

Undoubtedly the water fished extremely badly last season, in striking contrast to the year before. The absence of any sport on D.B. may partly be explained by the fact that we were unable to catch many suitable baits of less than 4½inches; on the one occasion when the author yet again demonstrated his great skill by extracting a roach of 2inches, a run was had within an hour of his casting it out, which with typical expertise was missed conclusively. To bolster up the data a bit, it was decided to take into account runs missed as well as fish landed. There is, in fact, little danger of getting a run from anything other than an eel in this water due to the almost total lack of sizeable fish of any other species. No fish other than an eel has ever been landed by the Yorks group on lobworm or fish bait, nor do we know of any other anglers who have achieved this.

A glance at the map reveals that the bottom shelves steeply from the edge to reach a depth of 12-14 feet. Much of the centre of the pond is relatively flat, and accumulation of detritus and soft clay on this has lead to it having a soft, sticky, nature. The sloping parts are stony and hard. A rocky promontary divides the main area of deep water almost into two, and was considered a feature well worth exploring as a possible holding place for eels. At one end, the pond is very shallow (6ft. or less), and is so choked with weed as to be unfishable during the summer.

An obvious experiment, therefore, is to compare results from the hard sloping substratum with those from the soft, flat, and deeper parts, and this formed the first aim of the project. To some extent we can claim to have arrived at a conclusion on this already, bearing in mind that further data would obviously be useful. Drawn in on the map are the points from which eels were taken (·) and the places where runs were missed (x). What is not obvious is the amount of time spent fishing in these two areas, this is set out below:-

Total RH in deep water.....148. (More than 12ft.)
Total RH in shallow water..... 81½. (Less than 12ft.)

Thus nearly twice as much time was spent fishing in the deep water with a soft bottom than in hard shelving regions. Since, however, D.B. was an almost total washout as far as results were concerned, it would be more profitable to compare fishing times on worm alone. Here the distribution of rod hours is more even:-

Total RH. Worm in deep water.....53. Eels + missed runs.....10.
Total RH. Worm in shallow water.....46. Eels + missed runs.....1.

Bearing in mind that the single event outside the deep water occurred right on the edge of it, and was in fact a minute bootlace of 0.2½, whereas the other eels were all of reasonable size for worm, the evidence appears to point rather strongly to the deeps as being the best bet.

Not only were the successes restricted to the deep water, but also very largely to a small area of it. It is not entirely clear as yet whether this is a valid result, or one arising from the fact that nearly twice as much time was spent in this small region than in the whole of the rest of the deep water of the pond. It is interesting to note that the admittedly restricted

data for the 1968 season shows a similar enhanced rate of catch in this area and during this year it was possible to catch eels on dead bait as well as worm. Thus, whilst the evidence is by no means conclusive, there is some indication of a preferred feeding ground in this water. We are, of course, anxious to try to confirm or deny this with more information which it is hoped to obtain during the next season. The possibility that one small part of an apparently uniform region of bottom may be selected as a feeding ground is rather interesting and would obviously repay further study.

Cowick is one of many small clay pits in this part of the County, all of which owe their existance to the boulder clay left behind from the last ice-age. This deposit is centred near York and gradually thins out in an Eastward direction from this city. The result of this is that the ponds become gradually deeper as one approaches York, culminating in Dringhouses where depths of up to forty feet are to be encountered in places. All, however, have many features in common, both in the nature of the pit, and in the fish they contain. As a result of this, the information gained from the work at Cowick finds many practical applications in our angling of other similar waters. For example, Chris Bowyer and myself arrived at a completely unknown water near Howden last summer, and having ascertained that it was a clay pit immediately knew a great deal about it. As the water lies about the same distance from York as Cowick, we knew the depth would be very much the same, and all we had to do was to locate the area of 14ft water to be fairly sure of choosing a suitable swim to fish. As it turned out, nine eels to 2:14 were landed between us; it is doubtful if this would have occurred without the experience gained from Cowick.

Thus the project at Cowick has been of value to us not only for its own sake, but also for the insight it has given us into the features of other ponds in the region around it. With any luck, the project is by no means over, and we look foreward to obtaining more information to that already gained in the hopes of extending our knowledge of the feeding habits of the Eel.

*

THUNDER.

by Brian T. Knott.

So much is being learnt by the projects and scientific approach of the club-members:- a foreward-looking way of thinking. For a change I did aome research into the past, delving into the realms of folk lore and hear-say. Time and again the subject of thunder arose; its effects and results.

Let me quote from an article about a professional eel-trapper, Tom Metcalfe of Holywell, Huntingdon. "He stores eels in a box which he lowers into the river. Once after a heavy thunderstorm, he lifted his box out of the water and found that all the eels he had caught were dead. From this he concludes that eels need to keep on the move during a thunderstorm." In the same article, Tom Metcalfe also maintains that it is during a thunderstorm *, or immediately after one that the best catches are made. Truly the words of an expert. It is a fair bet that many of the members have been advised by an old local that the conditions were ideal, that is, thundery. Not being the brainy and knowledgeable type, I have no great understanding of atmospheric or barometric pressure to which these ideal eel conditions are sometimes attributed. One could say that the atmospheric vibrations caused by the thunder are a valid reason for disturbing the eels enough to compel them to move around, but not enough to put them off the feed. Personal experience and intuition have lead me to believe that two simple facts are behind the eel's behaviour in the aforementioned conditions. Firstly there is the rise in temperature that produces the thunderstorms, usually after a spell of constant temperature. Secondly there is the fact that it is extremely dark

Only a thunderstorm or thundery weather can produce this absolute blackness that makes the angling a little less comfortable, but the angler a lot more optomistic. I am quite willing to listen to any scientific theories on this and am sure they will revolve around light and temperature, and not that the God of Anguilla is in close proximity creating sonic booms.

Incidentally, as a footnote to this article I would like to give a last quote from the article concerning Tom Metcalfe, eel trapper. "Best time to catch lobworms is after a thunderstorm." Any theories.....?

*

THE RELUCTANT LIVE-BAIT.

by Ray Brown.

We were based at the tunnel mouth; along with Arthur I believe these spots are holding places for big eels. The first night had been most spectacular. I had caught my best eel yet-4:9-and Dave had been broken by an almighty fish that had made short work of his 13lb line.

Apart from false alarms, the only event of interest during the second night was a visit from the village policeman. Thieves had been stealing live-stock from the farmers near to the canal and he had mistaken us for them. After a cup of freshly brewed coffee, and an interesting discourse on night fishing laws, he left. We lay back and listened to his footsteps grow fainter as he plodded his way back up the seperate tunnel to the village. Hardly a village really, just a few houses, a pub, two shops and an old manor house that not long previously had been converted into a biological research station.

On the third night the weather turned. Instead of balmy moonlight, flashes on the horizon heralded the approach of a storm. We pegged our umbrellas down in pessimistic anticipation. The last traces of the day had gone, being replaced by a tense, inky, blackness. The bite alarms were adjusted so we should not be bothered with 'wind bites' all night, and the company settled down to wait.

After a few minutes I noticed Dave and Pete whispering furtively to each other. Without doubting their moral for a moment, I enquired as to the subject of their secret conversation. I was rapidly enlightened to the fact that both had suddenly and simultaneously developed a strong desire to quench their thirst, their requirement being for something more potent than coffee, and anyway the pub was only five minute's walk away! Feeling shattered after two consecutive night's fishing I volunteered (?) to stay on guard for bites. After promising not to return empty handed-bottle wise-they departed.

One minute later, the faithful rod-guard was fast asleep.

The storm blew on overhead harmlessly. My unassailable fortress of blankets and groundsheets keeping me safe from the raging elements overhead. I dreamt; the fury of the storm interwoven into the fabric of the nightmare. Of the mouth of the tunnel as the yawning pit in which lurked the unspeakable horror of my childhood fears. Of the sound of it coming and trying to run andd not moving at all. Of the panic at being unable to escape its terrible approach.

Suddenly I was awake, staring out of my shelter at the tempest outside and fighting down the waves of nausea and fear left over from the dream. The groundsheet had been blown off me and it was the rain on my face which had woken me up. But what was that noise? I stood up, trembling with fear as much as cold. I had got a bite; my buzzer was indubitably buzzing. I walked shakily to my rod and picked it up. Collecting my thoughts I reasoned "will take a minute or two to swallow a four ounce roach," waited a while and then I struck.

The temporarily displaced fear returned. The Dennis Pye pike-rod was as effective as roach tackle, but a slow pulsating foroe informed me that a large fish was slowly and surely swimming towards me. I strained my eyes, peering into the tunnel mouth, but the darkness was absolute and I could see nothing.

And then I heard it. As in my dreams, minutes earlier, and reinforcing their terror, unearthly noises emanated from the tunnel mouth. As if in harmony with the insane chorus overhead, a frothing, gasping noise came closer and this time I knew I was not asleep.

I picked up the lamp and switched it on. My dream had been but a dress rehearsal:-two orange ovals eighteen inches apart and swaying from side to side in unison were advancing towards me. Frozen with terror I screamed hoarsly into the the howling wind,"Pete! Dave!".

Then, like a miracle two raim soaked figures appeared, panting and breathless. "Thought we'd run back now, this will hold out all night;- what the hell is that!?....as the light from the flickering lamps fell upon the heaving creature rearing awesomely from the water.

Pete grabbed a bank stick and smashed it down on the creature's head. With a shrug of indifference it slid its head over the concrete edge of the tow-path, and heaved the rest of its massive bulk out of the water with a thud. We were trapped,-between the hideous slimy body of the gargantuan eel and the tunnel mouth.

Dave hurled a bottle of ale at its ugly head which shattered and embedded black splinters of glass in its snout. A slimy soup of beer and blood oozed over its face. It advanced with a slow, menacing, oscillation of its head. Pete aimed a kick at its skull; his wader was ripped open and blood, this time Pete's, dripped onto the tow-path.

I grabbed my ramaining weapon,-a heavy steel rod rest. I aimed for its eyes, but with a cat like agility it evaded my swipe and caught both hand and rod-rest in its snapping fangs. The weapon was dropped in agony as I tore my hand away.

Then Dave had the life-saving brainwave. "Quick, the primus, unscrew the cap and tip the parrafin onto my sleeping bag. Dave and Pete fumbled with matches, while I, nearly overcome by pain, kept the beast at bay with an open umbrella. Eventually it was lit. Dave seized the flaming mass, and, hair afire, hurled it at the head of the monster before us. Like a malformed seal, it caught the torch in its mouth as it folded over it.

Hissing and gasping the dying creature reared up the sheer brick wall, hung there trembling for a moment and then fell with a deafening splash into the canal behind it. The current carried away the body, on its last journey, back into the tunnel.

I heard a noise from above and looked up. A torch shone down. It was the village constable. Overcome with relief, I collapsed onto the wet bank.

Awakening was in comfort in a hospital bed. Next to me Dave was sitting up, his head a mass of bandages. Further up the ward was Pete, his leg in plaster.

"Ah well, Dave,-I reckon we'd better say it was those sheep thieves who attacked us with their dogs, they would keep us here for ever if we told them the truth."

"Yes, I suppose so. I reckon we are the only ones who know who the real sheep thief was, aren't we."

And in the tunnel, near to the discharge pipe for waste growth hormones from the biological research laboratory, a huge bloated body lay trapped against a rock.