

Anguilla



The Official National Anguilla Club Magazine!

Volume 47
Issue 1

The National Anguilla Club - The Eel Specialists - Established 1962

An Interview With Mick Bowles

Inside This Issue Of Anguilla...

WHY EELS - SOUTH DEVON EELS - NIGHT FEVER- CRANE FARM - AT THE BOTTOM OF KEV'S GARDEN - DAVID O'SULLIVAN
A SCOTTISH FAIRY TALE - CHRIS DAPHNE
A TALE OF THREE FIVES - STEVE DAWE
SO, WHY DO YOU GO EEL FISHING? - JOHN DAVIES
FUNNY ANGLING STORIES - MARK PARKER
EELS IN SCOTLAND - CHRIS DAPHNE
THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY EATING - MARTIN DORMAN
WOMEN! KNOW YOUR PLACE - ANDREA O'SULLIVAN

*Anguilla Winter 2008. Volume 46 Issue 2***Contents**

4	Editorial	Nick Rose
9	The Presidents Page	Steve Richardson
10	Secretaries Report	Mark Salt
12	Records Officer	Steve Dawe
13	Membership Update	Tug Wilson
13	Internet Update	Dave Smith
14	Why Eels	David O'Sullivan
18	A Scottish Fairy Tale	Chris Daphne
21	A Tale of Three Fives	Steve Dawe
29	So, Why Do You Go Eel Fishing?	John Davies
31	South Devon Eels (Cream Teas and Monsters)	David O'Sullivan
35	Night Fever	David O'Sullivan
39	Funny Angling Stories	Mark Parker
43	Eels In Scotland	Chris Daphne
46	Crane Farm	David O'Sullivan
49	The Importance of Healthy Eating	Martin Dorman
53	At The Bottom of Kev's Garden	David O'Sullivan
56	Women! Know Your Place	Andrea O'Sullivan
Fish-In's		
59	Winter Fish-In	Barry McConnell
61	Northants Fish-In	Barry McConnell
65	PAC/NAC Joint Event	Jon Neafcy
66	Cambridge Fish-In	Tug Wilson
68	The Mick Bowles Interview	Rod Hillyer
79	The Gunge Pages	The Mole
84	The Pink Ponces Gallery	
85	Products	Nick Rose

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Editorial

Nick Rose

Well here we are another mag and your season should be in full flow. I would like to say thanks to all the contributors to this edition and stress to all the others that we really do need your stories and thoughts to put in the mag. I have been in touch with some of our old members via the wonders of the internet. Ryan Tingay contacted me but mainly Brian Knot who passed on to me some of his old photos of some prominent members Terry Coulson and Arthur Sutton and we think George Moss also himself and Ryan Tingay.







He also sent in some cuttings from his local paper which may interest you all.



Eels in danger

By DANIEL MANSFIELD
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THE humble eel, a creature that has become as synonymous with Ely as the great cathedral, is facing a worrying future as new figures reveal there has been a 99 per cent decline in their numbers.

Reports released by The International Convention on the Exploitation of the Sea (Ices) have suggested that the number of eels has slumped so dramatically in the last 20 years that they are now considered outside safe biological limits, a desperate plight for the city's most famous resident.

Things weren't always so bad, however, at the time of the Norman Conquest eels were as abundant in Ely's River Ouse as the population who fished them – with records from 1087 suggesting that as many as 52,000 of the mysterious creature were pulled from the river in one year.

In more recent times, the plight of Ely's founding fish has worsened immeasurably and, in the last 20 years particularly, numbers have fallen so sharply that the Marine Conservation Society has put the eel on its red list of endangered species.

All of the eels that end up in Ely come originally from a single spawning ground in the Sargasso Sea near Bermuda. Eel larvae (known as elvers) follow the Gulf Stream and North Atlantic Drift to return to Europe before they head towards the UK's freshwater rivers and, in Ely's case, the Great Ouse.

Increasingly over the last 20 years fewer and fewer of the fish have made it back to the river and, so far, it is the deep-sea

fisherman who have taken much of the flak for the decline that has left the once thriving eel-catching industry on its knees.

East Cambridgeshire's last remaining eel catcher Peter Carter, thinks other factors may also have contributed.

"To be honest I first noticed a significant change when the old wooden sluice gates were replaced with modern concrete ones, the elvers (juvenile eels) were no longer able to get through, he said.

"There are other factors at work though and I think over-fishing and a destruction of the eel's traditional habitat have both taken their toll.

"When I first started, I could catch a stone of eels overnight but that is more like a month's catch now, these days there are only three eel catchers left in the whole of East Anglia."

Mr Carter's concerns were echoed by the Environment Agency which is trying to combat the slump by transporting large quantities of elvers from the Severn Estuary on the west coast of the UK to the RSPB reserve in Minsmere, Suffolk.

The action could all be too late for the fading eel, but Mr Carter still holds out hope. "I don't know what will happen in the coming years but I'd like to think that there will be a change because it would be a great shame to lose them."

Fears over eels ban

PROPOSALS to ban eel fishing in the Fens have been described as "heartbreaking" by "Eel Man" Peter Carter.

Mr Carter can trace his eel-trapping heritage back 500 years. He has spoken out against suggestions made by the Environment Agency, which wants to impose a close season on eel fishing, and local fishery experts, who want to ban eel fishing altogether.

Mr Carter, 44, is believed to be the last trapper operating in the Fens and only a handful of other fishermen are allowed to net eels from the River Great Ouse.

He said: "I've spent my whole life around the rivers and it would be gutting if I lost the reason to be on the river."

"I go out in the early morning and evenings and it would be heart-breaking if I had to stop.

"It is a family trade. My daughter is 12 and she comes out with me.

"I would like to think I could live the rest of my life out on the river and I hoped I could pass my eel license on to my daughter.

"I do a lot of demonstrations at schools and teach the children not just about eel catching but about eels themselves.

"I tell them about the history of



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"Eel Man"
Peter Carter
can trace his
eel-trapping
heritage back
500 years.
Photo: HELEN
DRAKE

the eel, its lifecycle and where they go.

"With me, the eel catching doesn't just mean the money, or little of it.

"It's about being on the Fens, talking to the children and public, and the history that goes with it."

Scientists say eel populations are at less than 10 per cent of 1970s lev-

els. A parasite which infests the creature's swim bladder - which it needs to regulate its depth when swimming at sea - is believed to be responsible.

A letter to the last handful of licensed eel catchers from David Moore, chairman of the Anglian Region's Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee,

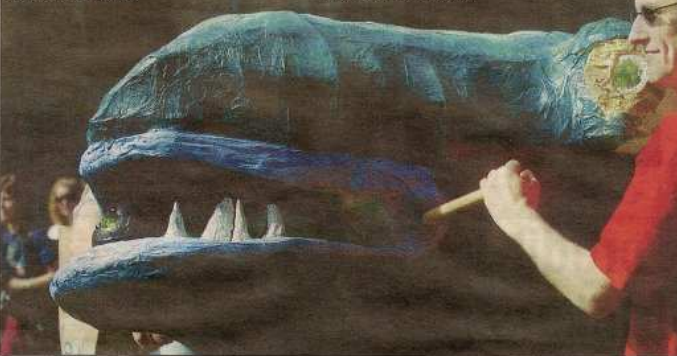
said the number of young eels returning to East Anglia's rivers from their spawning grounds were at their lowest-ever level.

It says: "Members recommend that commercial eel fishing should be ended and that anglers should return alive all eels they catch until there was an improvement in eel stocks."



Eels are us: Ellie the Eel makes an appearance at Ely's Eel Day. Left, Clare Chacksfield and son Connor, 4. Below left, budding town criers show off their skills.

Picture: Nathan Durrill 556746-41/54



City proves it has the eel-good factor

EELS were honoured in a day of bank holiday fun as Ely celebrated its traditional Eel Day with a little help from 10 town criers.

Mascot "Ellie the Eel" led the colourful procession from the cathedral down to the waterside along the city's Eel Trail Heritage Walk on Saturday.

Ely's Samba Band and 10 town criers also joined the procession before gathering on Jubilee Gardens for a whole host of eel-related activities.

And the 10 loudest town criers battled it out in the city's annual town crier competition.

Families also enjoyed musical performances, children's theatre groups, historical re-enactments and pottery workshops.

The Environment Agency had displays on the creatures, including a tank of real eels and local eel catcher Peter Carter was on hand to show off his catching

equipment and eel baskets.

Tracey Harding, tourism team leader at East Cambridgeshire District Council, said: "For many, the eel is synonymous with the Isle of Ely."

"For example, the city paid over 80,000 eels to Peterborough for stones to build the cathedral - that is a lot of eels but then it is a big cathedral.

"So it makes sense to us to celebrate the humble eel and its part in our history.

"The day is all about

celebrating Ely's culture and traditions and encouraging awareness and use of the Eel Trail.

"This year Eel Day was part of a whole weekend of entertainment which we hope to build on each year."

The Ely mini-festival also featured the Ely Cathedral May Day Concert on Saturday night and Great Ely Fun Walk organised by the Rotary Club of Ely (Hereward) in aid of Sue Ryder, Strada and Diabetic UK on Sunday.



Big day out: top, Amy Doherty, 2, with dad Jason Doherty. Above, members of Funk It Up dance group.

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Peter Carter with the Bishop and the eels at Ely Cathedral and, far left, Susan Bowden-Pickstock as Ethel, Cannon Alan Hargrave and the Rev John Sansom who play King Anna.
Photos: SUPPLIED



Eels for Etheldreda

THE Bishop of Ely was presented with a basket of eels as part of the city's annual Etheldreda Day. "Eel Man" Peter Carter made the presentation to the Right Rev Dr Anthony Russell on Saturday at Ely Cathedral, which is cele-

brating its 900th anniversary this year. He said: "I didn't get a lot of time to talk to the Bishop, but he congratulated me on my journey. "He told me the eels would be released back into the river. "I had punted 22 miles to join the parade, battling a

head wind and the flow of the river, but hopefully it has helped me to raise money for the East Anglia Children's Hospice." The annual procession through the town celebrates the life of Etheldreda, who founded a monastery in Ely in 673. She died six years later.

The procession began at Jubilee Gardens and made its way through the town, following actors and actresses re-enacting the story of Etheldreda's life. It ended at her shrine in the cathedral and was followed by a Eucharist in the Presbytery.

I would like to express my gratitude to Brian for sending these in and I hope he has plenty more.

I think this is going to be another great read for you so good eeling and I hopefully will see you on a fish/in or a meeting.

Nick Rose.

Rod Hillyer with a 5.08



Presidents Page

Steve Richardson

Welcome to yet another NAC 'Anguilla' publication.

June is here and the weather has finally started to get warm and more importantly stay warm after what seems to be months of north and easterly winds and constant cold.....this winter has seen an unusually cold pattern, shades of years ago in my youth when it was always cold. My understanding is that the eel fishing has started slowly results wise and this can seriously be put down to the harshest winter we've had in many a year.

Having just, literally, come back off the club's first fish-in of the membership year, it would seem that the eels are now feeding with some degree of confidence and are moving well. The fish-in was a cracking event and the guys involved managed to make the weekend very enjoyable...a good social event but also some serious tactics applied by everyone...even 'The Jockey'.

Products Officer, Nick Rose, will be sending in an order for club merchandise in the next few days, so if you require a club logo tee shirt, hooded sweat shirt or a mug (we've waited for years for this product) then contact Nick ASAP as it'll be a fair few months before another order is placed.

Our Secretary, Mark Salt, is doing splendid work on the eel promotion and club awareness front. Mark is either replying to in-coming mail, forwarded e-mails, attending meetings, presenting slide-shows and appearing on 'Talk-Sport' radio. One can only take their hat off to him and I'd like to personally thank Mark for his intensity and enthusiasm in dealing with these issues....hopefully, he'll also find time to fish as well.

The last magazine was very well received judging by the feedback that came my way and I'm sure that you'll all enjoy the contents of this publication as well. My thanks to all the contributors and to the Bulletin Team as a whole.

Before I end this short report, I'd just like to say that the AGM was superbly attended and this committee, elected by those members present, will endeavour to perform to the standard that past committee's have set.

Not a deal left to say but I'm sure that my next President's Page will be a deal longer with my over-look of the season past. Hopefully, I'll meet a few of you on further club fish-ins during the rest of this season.

Good eel fishing to you all this coming season....mines started well with a four pounder and if I can manage a couple more topping this specimen, then I'll be a happy bunny indeed.

Steve 'eelfisher' Richardson, President 2009.

Secretaries Report

Mark Salt

General Secretary and Environment Officer Report

Hello all

You will recall that I covered the IFM conference in some detail in the last newsletter, and the final paragraph mentioned that I had approached the Angling Trust (AT) asking for support in our efforts to ensure that the following Eel Management Plan initiatives are commenced at an early date and carried out quickly and effectively:

- the restocking of elvers upstream of barriers
- the construction of elver passes and bypassing of barriers
- reducing and preventing entrainment (getting chopped up by hydro electric turbines).

Mike Heylin presented this to the AT board in May, and they have agreed to support us, subject to an outline plan of our proposed actions. I have now prepared this, and submitted it to the AT, and await a response. I would hope to be able to move forward on this soon and will keep you all posted. Any help or suggestions here will be most welcome.

What else has happened since the last magazine? Well, we continue to use the angling press and forums to bang the drum for eel conservation, and we featured on Fisherman's Blues (Talksport radio) a couple of times talking about the plight of the eel, and handling and unhooking tips, and received good support from Nigel Botherway, the presenter. We will use the programme again in future to update listeners on the "Save the Eel" campaign.

We were in the Anglers Mail again this week talking about eels, and we will continue to try to get the club mentioned as often as possible to attract more members, and keep our profile high.

. Our esteemed Internet Officer, Dave Smith, managed to upset Neville Fickling by suggesting (on the pike & Predator forum) that he should stop selling eels for bait via his tackle business, and then I managed to upset him as well by suggesting that he was only interested in profit. Fortunately, this resulted in several mentions in his column in Angling Times and in Pike & Predators, which was great publicity for the club, and also earned us many messages of support from anglers. I counted the "fors and againsts" on one of the forums, and 70% of the anglers that posted supported our plea to stop using eels as bait. The episode ended with Keith Arthur supporting us in his column in Angling Times, and if we are to believe the old adage "any publicity is good publicity" then it must have done us good. It was fun, too!

I have presented the NAC Roadshow at another large club meeting local to me, and have another PAC region (Thames Gateway) lined up for September. The show has changed a lot since it was first put together, with many more photographs, and seems to go down well. It is free to clubs, but they can (and so far, all have) make a donation to the NAC. If any of you know of a club who would like us to present to them, please let us know. It spreads the word and generates income. There is a downside, however. One of the audience at the recent roadshow in the Lee Valley was so inspired he went and fished for eels the next week and caught a 5.2! To make matters worse, it was the water that I first fished for eels when I started. I'm not sure that I want to encourage too many anglers to tackle eels locally, so in future I will stick to venues farther afield!

In closing, I'd like to thank all members for their continued support, and all committee members for their continued hard work, especially the bulletin team, who do a sterling job on the mag. Oh, and our new Membership Officer, Tug Wilson, who is now employed by the Angling Trust as a Regional Organiser, and has managed to start a new job, move house and sort the membership all at the same time. Well done.

Tight Lines

Mark

Steve Ricketts with a new P.B of 6.13



Records Officer's Update

Steve Dawe

Well I think everyone will agree the start of this eeling year has been one of the slowest for some years, I started in January and fished most weekends not getting my first Eel till April. Scanning the forums it has become obvious that eel anglers countrywide have been going through an eel recession but hopefully a later start might result in eels feeding well into the start of winter. I feel I have to mention the Shatterford Eel the claimed 10lb that caused a great stir with the Angling Times seemed to have lost 2lbs in the Anglers Mail. This Eel be it 10lb or 8lb is still a fish of a lifetime and congratulations must go to the angler in question, it is however such a shame that the photograph was so appalling.

I have to date received only 1 catch report form which strangely was from myself, so I will fill in this report based on information received and information gained by fishing with some of you.

Steve Dawe on the 18/04/09 landed an Eel of 4lb 2oz this was taken on live Roach from Upper Tamar then on the 29/04/09 till 30/04/09 Steve fished Trinity Waters landing eels of 1lb, 1lb, 2lb 2oz and 3lb 10oz. Then at a secret Golf Club Lake a two night session on 20/05/09 produced 3 small Eels up to 1lb, Steve then visited Spires Lake on 23/05/09 landing a new P.B of 5lb 8oz this fish fell to Dyson Rigged Roach deadbait. The next successful trip was on the 29/05/09 at Upper Tamar where eels of 2lb 2oz and 2lb14oz were taken on Dyson Rigged dead bream. On the 3/06/09 Steve landed Eels of 2lb 2oz and 2lb12oz from Creedy Lakes both eels being taken on Dyson Rigged lobworms, a return to Creedy Lakes on 12/06/09 produced an Eel of 2lb 4oz again on Dyson Rigged lobworms.

Mark salt had a lot of runs on 29/04/09 and despite hearing Eels screeching across the lake it took him till the 30/04/09 to land his first Eel a 3lb 8oz specimen on Dyson Rigged deadbait.

Barry McConnell started well this season landing Eels to 5lb something, before being struck down with a serious virus not a STD before Mr Duffy comments. Barry and the Zandavan struggled down to Cornwall and on the 20/05/09 the Journey and the struggle paled into insignificance as Barry struck into a secret golf club eel of 8oz this was followed up on 21/05/09 with two more Eels up to 1lb. Barry also landed a nice Brown Trout and a small Mud Pig. Unfortunately I cannot comment further on Barry's catches as he went deep under cover in darkest Cornwall.

New member or soon to be new member Jon staple landed a new p.b on his first ever specific Eeling trip on 11/06/09 the Eel of 2lb 9oz was landed by Jon who's fishing time is limited to days, after a lot of research. I am really pleased for him as he has put a lot of effort into the planning of this capture from a Somerset water.

Nick Duffy had a good trip at a certain quarry in May loads of 4s and a 5lber think he had a good gilley with him though.

I am sure many other members have caught Eels but I cannot report them if they are not forwarded to me. Most members probably keep their reports back to the end of the year and I can only hope that I get some in at that time

Please fill in your catch reports even if the year has been a blank!

Membership Secretaries Update

Tug Wilson

Having gained employment with the Angling Trust our membership secretary has, moved house and had some major problems with his Internet Service Provider... and still managed to look after an ever growing list of members. And organise what should be an eventful fish-In... (editor)

Membership is currently 75, of which 30 are new members. Of the 60 members we had last year, 45 have rejoined, exactly 75%, which I think is a pretty good return. With a steady trickle of applications we may even break the 100 barrier this year, if not that has to be the target for 2010.

Internet Update

Dave Smith

It's not been the most enjoyable year on a personal front, but things are beginning to work themselves out, because of this my time to maintain the website has suffered. Not that you'd notice from the facts and figures!

We've had almost 1 million hits on the website since it's inception in April 2009. with 85,000 of those unique visitors from over 60 different countries.

Now that Anguilla 47.1 is complete I'll be switching my "spare" time to developing an all new website, with a few additional features.

The website we have currently is working fine, but due to the background code it can take awhile to update any new stuff, and when time is lacking it means that updating the site has to take a bit of a back seat, the new layout should mean that I can update certain parts of the site very easily, maybe even when I should be working and possibly even via phone when I manage to fit in the odd fishing session! Expect to see the new website up and running by the end of the year.

Don't forget I always need new material for the website so please drop me an e-mail with anything you'd like to see.

Why Eels?

David "Slippery Sully" O'Sullivan

Why Eels! (?)

Picture the scene...

I race home from work; the house is empty! I run up to my room, open the wardrobe door and pull out the secret compartment at the bottom. I look at my stash like Fagin in Oliver Twist. Feeling slightly dirty, I then select two well thumbed editions of the British Eel Anglers Magazine to take into the bathroom with me.

I lock out the world and run the bath taps; my train of thought rises with the steam. My solitude is complete as I get into the bath, but then I hear an angry hand banging on the door.

"Are you reading those BEAC mags in the bath again?"

"No!" I say guiltily, hiding them under the towels. It would be far less embarrassing to be caught reading adult art literature, so I shout back, "I'm reading Gigantic Jugs of Joy!"

But she's not buying what I'm trying to sell.

"Is it 'The Disaster of a Season' article by Mick Bowles?"

"No! No!" is my reply.

"Then it must be 'The Obsession and Golden Season' article by Kevin Richmond"

Damn, I am undone and the game is up! She hands me my dressing gown and I trudge despondently back to my room. But how did it come to this? Well, let me begin.....

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away....when I was knee-high to an elver, I saw my first LIVE eel, on a family holiday in Ireland.

My father is from County Cork and we took a trip out Blarney way.

We were standing on a bridge over a small river; the water was shallow and clear and it was a bright summer's day. (Wot? No rain in Ireland?) I saw these eels circling underneath the bridge and asked my Dad, "What they? What they?"

He said, "Eels, son. Eels," and I knew from that moment, my way was never going to be quite the same again. We even tried to catch one on one of those orange crab lines, with a big piece of cheese. I remember feeling incredibly frustrated even then, as I watched them carry on swimming arrogantly around the bait, ignoring it completely. I have had many more Hamlet Cigar moments like that since.

I became fascinated by the freshwater eel and its complex lifecycle.

I went to the library to get more information on these magical and mysterious fish. I bought Brian Crawford's "Catch More Eels" back in 1975. The more I read, the more extraordinary the eel's life seemed. So the next stage was to see one up close and personal; to touch one and to be captivated by this strange and beautiful creature.

It meant only one thing - I would have to take up FISHING!



Only a baby- but how beautiful is the colouring on this eel?

My first eel came at the tender age of 14 and what an eel it was! A fish of exactly 4lb from a lake in south Devon caught on a single lob at 10:45 pm on a flaming June night.

Layers of yellowy red
Recede behind the trees.
The sun now goes to bed
With the once warm breeze.

I hear the rushes sweeping
To and fro on the salty air.
And whilst others lay sleeping,
I'm no stranger there.

After one almighty struggle, I remember running to our caravan with the eel safely in my net.

I was shouting, "I've got one! I've got one!" as I ran. My parents (bless them) knew it was my dream to catch an eel and fully expected to see a bootlace in the net. They were truly amazed at the size of the fish, my Nan was in shock and the dog got scared and ran outside when the eel made a groaning noise, like a low growl. The caravan was right beside the lake, so we weighed it again then sent it on its way.

The rest of the holiday just passed me by in a bit of a blur, but it's funny that at the end of the week, the local publican mentioned the lake had been drained the year before and all the eels removed. How little they knew?!



Back where it all began- 26 years later.

I was spoiled by that magical first eel, because for several years after that it was close encounters of the bootlace kind. At 18 years of age, the bright lights of town on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday night beckoned so I was face down in a curry at two in the morning, rather than on the bank side. I remember weaving my unsteady way home looking up at the night sky, and slurring drunkenly, "It would have been a good eel night tonight." Wasted years? Well, not really- they got me where I am today.

So, to sum it up, Why Eels?

1. They are so mysterious and beautiful.
2. They do your head in when you are fishing for them
3. They throw the rule book out of the window.
4. They make the expert look like a fumbling, bungling amateur.
5. No-one has ever seen a wild eel lay eggs, or seen an eel egg hatch.
6. They find their way into the most remote and inaccessible water courses. Yes, they do cross land on a damp night- read Thomas Hardy's poem "Nighttime in Mid Fall".
7. It's an incredible journey. Why aren't there more nature programmes about them? Because they don't know enough about eels, their lifecycle or how they migrate such huge distances.
8. There is no feeling like a screaming run on a canal at midnight, and the fight is truly awesome.

When anyone asks me Why Eels, I have a strange, far away look in my eye. I don't have an inner light, or instinctive feel for where the big eels are, or a unique and amazing ability to hook, play and land specimen Anguilla. But I do have a passion- it's not a curse, but a gift from God, and that's eely good.

Slippery Sully.

The Eel

Autumn leaves lay on the lake,
Shadows lengthen and daylight take.
Darkness descends without the moon,
For the last great journey is very soon.

The nocturnal world goes about its way,
As the silt bottom stirs, and without delay
The deep and weedy water is ready to reveal
It's mysterious occupant, the eel.

Twisting and turning without a sound,
Across the rain soaked ground,
Finding the river so instinctively,
And once more returning to the sea.

It was a brief encounter years ago,
When I caught you and let you go.
And as midnight now falls, I go to rest,
Unaware of your incredible quest.



A Scottish Fairy Tale

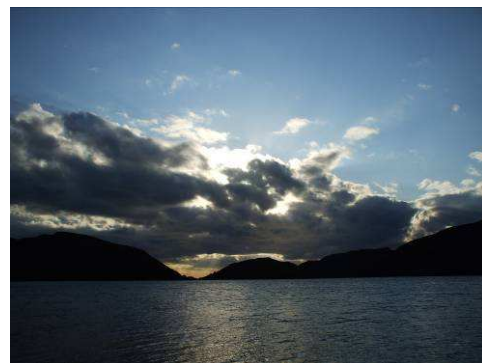
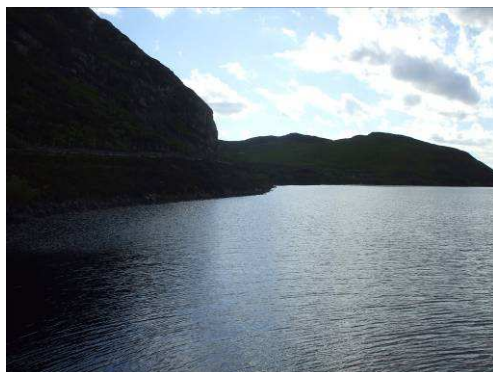
Chris Daphne

Where do I start?

Well, there is a loch not too far from my house, and for some reason I had this belief that there had to be a big Eel in there, lurking amongst the various remains of many accident, cars, vans and even a lorry. You wouldn't think that it had so many secrets. It is not big water, although what it lacks in size it makes up for in depth - 120m at it's deepest. I knew Eels were present because we had caught quite a few during electro-fishing operations on the outlet stream. The problem was getting permission to fish it as all waters here are fly only and angling is geared towards the native populations of Trout I had already gained access to another local water as it is part of a research project I set up. I asked the local angling club and they gave me permission not only for the loch in question but every water they had.

I have had 3 sessions on my other water and was really pleased with fish of 2lb 5 oz, two at 1lb 4oz and another four smaller Eels. I felt it was only a matter of time before I would get a four pound fish (my target weight) as this was my first sort of pioneering year in the hunt for Eels. Now don't get me wrong, I am no expert, my tackle and tactics aren't the best as I am limited to the tackle available in the very few shops that stock anything resembling coarse tackle. I have picked a lot of stuff up from the Eel fishing forum, chatting with various members etc, what a great site and a great bunch of people.

Anyway, to the night/day in question. June 15/16 2009. After speaking to a few guys on the phone, namely Scott (Ashy) and Mark (who kindly gave me Barry's number) and Barry, who gave me a bit of advice on tackling some of these highland lochs (cheers mate) I felt the urge if you know what I mean. I decided to have another crack at my usual water but as I was travelling past the loch in question, it looked spot on. On with the brakes, half an hour later and I'm fishing. Trout head section on one rod, tail section on the other. I was fishing a point, so my rods were parallel to the roadside bank which was to my left. Rod 1 was cast 20 yards or so out but towards the road so in effect my bait would be on the steep slope in about 15-20 foot of water Rod 2 was just whacked out into the deep open water to my right.



At 1 am I had a single beep on the alarm as the indicator rose slightly, I picked up the rod and felt a very slow nod, nod, nod. Something was definitely mouthing the bait. It then slowly and purposely moved off, the baitrunner gave that familiar tick tick tick as line started to slowly peel off. In sweeping movement engaged the reel and swept the rod back to which it replied by hoping right over. I knew then that it felt like a decent fish. It kept really deep, the rod just kept banging. It's got to be four I kept saying. As it got closer it really started to pull back, I had the net ready but it wasn't my big net, I wasn't really expecting anything major. What a carry on trying to get it in, I couldn't really see how big it was, all I know is that every time I thought it was in, it just backed out. I honestly thought I was going to lose it at any moment. But I didn't, it flopped in. It was mine.

I got up on the bank and had a look and I realised it was at least a four but I didn't realise how big, it wasn't a long fish but man it had some girth. All sorts was going through my mind, "things look bigger in the dark" (so the missus says) "Eels look bigger than they really are" etc etc. I thought, right I'll hold it till the morning, get my boss who is the senior biologist, she can photograph and we will weigh it then. Sorted. I had numerous runs until about 0430 but to be honest with you, I couldn't hit a barn door. I packed up at 0430 and put the sack/net into some deeper water in the shade so as not to stress it. I couldn't do anything else until 0900. The missus checked that the sack was still there when she went to work (that's devotion for you).

Moment of truth. All this time I was thinking maybe it wasn't that big, perhaps I was just getting over excited. I met the boss and off we went. We decided to anaesthetise the fish so as to not stress it any further; this would also make handling a lot safer for the fish as it was quite lively now.



In the anaesthetic

By this time I was getting anxious, what did she weigh? Is she okay? Allsorts, finally we zeroed the scales, I had checked and double checked them at home, weighing various items of a known weight to make sure they were accurate.

At first the scales went round to 6lb 4oz before settling at bang on 6lb 2oz. I looked, double checked, no way that's near the Scottish record, no way. I weighed it again, got the boss to read it 6lb 2oz. I was ecstatic, my biggest ever Eel, first time on the water. Unbelievable. I still can't believe it now as I write.



And here she is. A beautiful creature.



Release

To conclude, maybe I was lucky, right place right time. Who cares, you have got to be there and make your own luck. I just kept things simple, nothing fancy, straight running ledger to a size 4.

Many good things will come out of this I hope, it has certainly got the tongues wagging in the village, if it raises the profile of this magnificent species then I don't care whether it's a record, she went back fine and strong and that's all that matters. She was my dream fish.

Lastly can I just thank all the guys who I have spoken to in the last few weeks, for all your advice and help, you know who you are! It's hard going up here when nobody cares about these fish. And thanks also to the NAC for all the sterling work. Please, please keep it up.
Signing off Tired and happy.

A Tale Of Three 5's

Steve Dawe

A Tale of three 5s

This is the story of my three best eels to date all very different but also all very special. The first of these eels was caught many years ago and although I fished for eels occasionally my main quarry back in 1998 was carp, at this time I was a bait tester for SBS Baits and fishing several Southwest waters containing large Carp. My eel fishing was confined to the third rod when things were quiet as this always produced a few runs which seemed a welcome distraction to the hours of silence emanating from my carp rods.

This particular trip was in July and was the second day of a two night session. The weather was not playing ball with conditions similar to the surface of Mercury, the Carp basking just out of range. In those days you had to cast your rod out! I think if I remember right I always used the excuse they were just out of range but this time they were and even if they weren't they were too interested in spawning to eat.

The water was the forty acre Lower Tamar Lake. Basically a round man made reservoir from 3 to 8 feet deep and very silty. I had fished the lake since the age of 14 and had an extraordinary trip there in 1982.

A friend and I had been dropped off by our parents and we set up on the dam wall with our ledger gear. Shortly after casting, the Bailiff, a wrinkly old sourpuss turned up to check our tickets. We had received a few bollockings from him in the past as we always sneaked up to the river connecting Lower Tamar to the then trout-fished Upper Tamar.

This river was always full of big rainbows and we would quickly catch enough to cover the cost of our tickets.

The downside was running the gauntlet of the bailiff who had a sixth sense with regards to young whipper snappers poaching the trout. His trusty Black Labradors, Laurel and Hardy would quickly alert him to the fresh rainbows wedged down our waders.

This resulted in an immediate ban from the water.

Luckily his memory was dreadful and within a fortnight he wouldn't know us from Adam.

As he approached we prayed his memory was still not his greatest asset. Laurel and Hardy bounded over and checked us for trout - nothing wrong with their memories.

"Morning Lads" croaked sourpuss, "tickets!"

We showed our tickets and made small talk. Sourpuss then asked us if we would consider doing him a favour.

A big carp had gone down the spillway into the small overflow pool. He wanted us to try and catch it and return it to the main lake. Our prize would be a free days fishing.

We accepted the offer knowing full well that sourpuss' memory would work against us this time as he would never remember offering us free fishing. We were intrigued to fish the small pool anyway, so off we went, that day we landed over 100 eels from the pool.

The eels ranged from 8oz to about 1lb 8oz and most fell to worms or cheese. As soon as I cast out, the fairy liquid bottle top would fly up. It must have been paved with them. We released all of the eels into the main lake. We never came across that carp, but I have a horrible feeling that the snake pit of eels might have had a mud pig buffet.

Anyway I have digressed back to the trip in question. The Carp weren't feeding so it was out with the trusty eel rig. The bait was worms soaked in minamino.

I banged this out towards the middle of the lake. Midday approached and the Sun was unbearable, under the brolly it was shaded but sauna like, conditions like this sap the energy right out of you.

Suddenly the Optonic wailed for attention, the line was steadily leaving the spool, I managed to muster the strength to get to the rod, struck to nothing but realised I wasn't carping with this rod and the bale arm was open. Try again and this time the rod hooped over.

Line was still leaving the reel but via the clutch. This must be a carp I thought. No way could an eel take line like this then out in the lake. The unmistakable elongated shape of an eel tail walked across the flat surface.



5lb1oz of Personal Best Eel

The eel was bigger than anything I had ever hooked or seen; a monster! All my conceptions of eels went out of the window in a split second. This eel had taken line, fed in the middle of the day in bright sunshine and impersonated a tarpon. This must have been a rare eel indeed. After netting this magnificent creature, a few of my fellow carpers wandered over for a look.

They were all suitably impressed, but none more than me. I was mesmerised by this beautiful yet powerful creature.

We quickly weighed her and at 5lb 1oz it was 3lb bigger than any previous eels I had caught.

As the eel swam off, I decided eel angling would be my destiny. I wanted to catch more eels like this; after all how hard could it be?

I now jump forward in time.

Yes, how hard can it be?

Well it's the winter of 2006 and I have been eeling for several years now.

I have landed some great eels and learnt an awful lot about the elusive Anguilla but not beaten that fish of 1998.

The more you learn about the eel the more you realise that catching big eels requires so many variables - to be in right place and even when everything else falls into place you still require a large portion of lady luck.

The longer my eeling goes on, the more time I feel I want to put to it.

I therefore decided to fish through the winter as carp were once thought to be uncatchable during this period.

The waters I chose were quarries close to my home; my thought process was that at 60 feet deep the water temperature should stay fairly consistent. I also planned to fish daytrips not nights and to fish through the warmer parts of the 24hr period.

Up to Christmas 2006 I managed a few small eels to worms or maggots but nothing to the fish baits.

I was still confident and as eels were the only species inspiring me, I would stick it out.

January 2007 and snow came. Not much, but enough to coat the moors and surrounding fields.

Wow, an opportunity to catch an eel in the snow. So it was off to the quarry. Strange how an idea conceived at home by the fire quickly loses its appeal while you're sat by a freezing cold quarry.

I must be mad.

This particular day it was dam cold, my fingers and toes had divorced me so there was no way I was risking having a pee.

One of my favourite sayings invented by Derek Trotter and stolen by the SAS is *He Who Dares Wins*, and I dared but alas didn't win.

The following weekend came and despite the moors still having snow on them, the lower lying land had thawed, the easterly wind had disappeared and the January sun was quite pleasant.

My confidence was back. It usually was come the weekend as following a blank a quick read of John Sidley's book puts me back on track.

I turned up at the quarry and surprise surprise, I was the only person there. It's not a very productive water for anglers and the myriad of snags quickly send people packing.

This was another water I fished as a youngster and I do know it very well. In summary, very deep, full of snags and the most difficult water to catch bait on I know.

I set up the rods and put them out on lobs while I set about trying to catch one of the twelve roach in the lake.

At 11am something amazing happened. The super fine float rig armed with a single maggot dipped below the surface. I struck into silver treasure in the shape of a roach.

As this was such a rarity I quickly returned the roach to the deep cold waters. However, it was now attached to an eel rig! I placed this rig under a marginal tree on a ledge in 12 foot of water; the other rod I kept on lobs in about 35 foot of water.

At midday the roach decided to go for a bit of a workout and for a full ten minutes pulled the indicator up and down even with the Delkims on low sensitivity. They constantly beeped.

This is normally the sign of an approaching predator.

The roach fell silent. Was this a sign that it was resigned to its fate ending in the belly of an eel or was it just knackered?

A further ten minutes past before the mystery was solved.

The Delkim gurgled into life, but this time the roach was not the culprit, as line disappeared into the depths.

I calmly picked up the rod and let the line run through my fingers.

The strike was met with solid resistance and line was begrudgingly taken from the reel.

I couldn't afford to let the fish get down to the many snags that litter the lake bed. It seemed like stalemate, the rod pulsed in a full ark but I couldn't gain line and I held the spool in the hope of thwarting any further descent of the eel.

After what seemed like an age, the eel tried a different tactic and swam toward me; an error on the part of this wise old fish.

I was quickly able to retrieve line and keep her moving. The head of the eel broke the surface. The head of a monster I thought.

It was indeed a special eel and after it was netted I could see the body did not match up to the head, but this fish would surely smash my long time PB.

I unhooked the eel and placed her in the landing net in the water so I could calm down and carryout the all important weighing procedure.

After a period of meditation - also known as a fag - I weighed the eel and she weighed 5lb exactly, incredibly close.

Although a bit disappointed that this magnificent eel didn't break my P.B, I remembered that this was a winter eel, caught by design and was reward for my perseverance.



5lb January Eel

This eel proved that winter eeling can produce good eels and also that eel angling pays you back in the end.

It only takes one fish like this to make all the blanks worthwhile. The eel gods require their pound of flesh before bestowing their highest rewards upon us.

Now to the final eel in my trio of 5s and we have to jump forward to this year. Following a very poor winter campaign, which produced a grand total of no eels, I thought this year may be tough.

I planned to fish exclusively for eels this year, except a couple of shark trips that I do annually or should I call them 10 hours of chucking chopped up mackerel into the sea, while I haemorrhage money from my wallet.

Anyway, despite a poor start, a return to my old stomping ground of Upper Tamar in April produced my first eel of the year at 4lb 2oz, the only run of the night, but who cares when there fish of this calibre.

Then I had the pleasure of spending a couple of days with Mark Salt attending the eel conference at Bridgewater and fishing the night at a local water.

I managed four eels to 3lb10oz and Mark had an eel of 3lb 8oz.

The strange thing was that we both hooked the 3lb eels at the same time and after them we never had anymore runs, despite having runs constantly up to that point.

I can only surmise that upon seeing Mark, the eel reported back to its eel brethren the terrifying site that awaited them on the bank.

The next big fishing adventure had been planned with Barry McConnell.

We were to spend two nights on a two-acre lake in Cornwall that was reputed to contain monster eels.

Upon arrival we found out just how far the lake was as the girl on reception advised us that the lake could be found at the bottom of the 7th Tee. Yes, we were to fish in the middle of a golf course. We eventually found the lake and probably broke several golfing rules by walking across the fairways.

The lake really was lovely and very eely. Night fishing was only by special arrangement and as the lake's carp were low doubles we surmised that it was not fished very often. Another reason it's not fished very much was the price. Barry did try explaining he was from the North but it still cost us £36 each. Bait was easy to catch even though Barry did consider them a particularly ugly strain of roach.

Barry quickly landed a boot, which we hoped was a one off, but it was not to be, as the lake seemed full of small eels that would feed all night and leave your rig baitless and tangled in a slimy mess.



The Golf Club water too good to be true!

On the plus side, during this trip Barry convinced me to use the Dyson rig and to consider the use of a wire trace. I have always been set in my ways with the methods that have worked for me, but perhaps its time for a change?

So, upon my return home I was eager to try the Dyson rig out. I had been away for three days and would be pushing my luck to do another overnighter.

So I needed a water that I could fish for a short evening that contained a few eels.

I settled on a water that is only a five minute drive from my place. You can only fish till sunset as there is strict night fishing ban. This complex contains two small ponds that were once trout lakes. The biggest lake is just over an acre and full of carp and tench. The smaller lake has produced eels to 3lb to me in the past, but my best from the top lake was 2lb 4oz taken in July 2000.

So, the venue looked good for a four hour trip. The weather was sunny and warm and upon arrival I found the carp were grouping up in the shallows preparing to spawn. I decided that I would fish this area in the hope the eels would gather there too for an easy feast of spawn. This area was about three to four feet deep and the far margin was a non-fishing area and heavily overgrown. I put one rod on this far margin with Dyson-fished roach deadbait and the other in the middle of the lake again on Dyson-fished deadbait.

The first run came in about 10 minutes and turned out to be a perch of 1lb 8oz.

There never used to be perch in this lake, but there's not a lot I could do about it. They had been stocked illegally.

Over the next few hours I had four more perch up to 2lb.

It was now 20.30pm, I only had an hour left at the water and perch were getting to the baits before the eels.

I don't dislike perch, in fact I think they are stunning looking fish and a worthy species within their own right, but I was there for the eels.

The perch suddenly stopped taking the baits, unless of course I had caught them all?

At 21.00 hours will still no more activity I started to pack up, when at 21.15 the far margin rod was belting off.

This was no perch this time.

I struck into what was obviously a good eel. A huge area of bubbles and debris frothed on the surface. The eel then ran towards the back of an island. I felt confident in the tackle and was able to play the eel rather than bully it. There were no immediate dangers at this lake, so I would take it steady.

The eel fought well and I knew it was a special fish.

After the netting, I lay the eel on the mat and was stunned that it was extremely thick from its head through most of its body.

I didn't want to tempt fate, but inside I really felt that this was the fish I had waited over ten years for.

I put the eel straight on the scales and at 5lb 8oz it was a new P.B

I was stunned. I rang my wife who was also genuinely pleased for me.

As the light was fading fast I had to be off the water.

I didn't have time to set up the tripod for the pictures so I would have to find another angler.

I placed the fish in the landing net and back into the water.

I walked towards the car park and came across the last two anglers loading their car.

I asked if they would mind photographing an eel for me.

They obliged, but were somewhat mystified why anyone would want to photograph an eel.

Upon returning to the swim, I laid the eel on the mat. Both of these anglers were amazed and the one now holding my camera asked what type of eel it was,

"It's a freshwater eel," I answered.

"Oh, I thought it might have been a conger," came the reply.

Oh my god, I have just asked a guy to take a picture of my biggest eel in ten years who believes that a conger eel has somehow managed to leave the bowels of a Second World War shipwreck in the middle of the English Channel and set up home in a carp pond.

Please god, let all the money I spent on the camera eradicate the cockup that this guy is about to do to my picture.

In fairness I really appreciate that these guys came over and done the shot. It didn't come out too bad, they just need to go home and study their Ladybird Book of freshwater fishes.



5lb 8oz P.B Eel (not a conger)

Well, that's the story of three very special eels, all very different in many ways. The first one coming from a 40-acre reservoir in tropical conditions; the second eel coming from a deep quarry in the middle of winter and the third eel coming from a tiny carp pond on my doorstep.

As an angler I have tried to analyse these captures, to try and find some common factor and my findings indicate a big eel can show up when you least expect it, from waters with no history of large eels.

To give yourself the best chance of a big eel, you need to stick with it through the rough and smooth and discover the eel potential of a water yourself; not via hearsay.

I have discounted far too many waters in the past that have no history of big eels; I won't be making that mistake again.

So, Why Do You Go Eel Fishing?

John Davis

How often is that question asked, especially by other anglers? I've lost count how many times it's been said to me; even nowadays this very same question is generally followed by "do you eat them?" or "do you kill them?" Let's be honest, if they have never caught an eel, or don't know anything about them it can be a pretty pointless task giving any sort of answer unless they show some kind of interest in what they've asked.

So why do we spend hundreds of hours every season, fishing mainly at night for a fish which at best could weigh around four pounds and usually somewhat smaller, with five pounders and above being exceptional beasts that we can only dream of catching each year. Plus, blanking can be, and is, a way of life. One missed run can be all you have in a nights fishing, so why on earth do we do it? For me, it started out like this.

One of the first fishing books ever brought for me was the Ladybird Book of Coarse Fishing. It was a birthday present from my grandma. I was 13-years-old and had only just started fishing.

It's obviously very dated by today's standards but it's a lovely little book.

On page 36 the eel makes an appearance and it immediately made a long lasting impression on me and I hoped I would soon catch one.

It didn't take too long because less than two years later, in 1978, I competed in a fishing match on the River Welland and had one!

In fact I weighed in over 5lbs of them, not one of them was bigger than 4oz.

On the subject of books, there are three books which first inspired me more than most to fish for eels; the first is Catch a Big Fish by David Carl Forbes, a book I read and re-read from my school library. The chapter in that book on fishing for eels really sums it all up nicely.

The second is called Top Ten, edited by Bruce Vaughan. It's a compilation by leading anglers of the day and the chapter on eels by Dave Holman really gave me the bug. And lastly, Canal Fishing by Ken Seaman. This little book has a great piece on eels. Each of these fabulous books mentions the National Anguilla Club and some of the famous anglers who were members at the time. Once again though they are all a little dated, but I would still recommend them to be read by anyone who would like to take up the exciting challenge of eel fishing.

The first sizable eel which graced my net wasn't caught by design, but while on a family holiday in 1979 to the East coast at Ingoldmills near Skegness.

The fish weighed all of 1lb 8oz and fought harder than all of the three and four pound tench I'd caught that day.

It would be several years later before I deliberately set out to catch one, after witnessing a three pound eel caught on sweetcorn by an angler fishing for tench on a local water.

My first target when I started eel fishing was just to catch one.

Even though I had taken plenty by accident while fishing for other species, I needed to be specifically eel fishing to make it count.

For my first 'proper' eel fishing session I went on to the local canal where I knew I could catch one or two.

In fact, catching eels of up to two pounds or so out of the local canals was fairly easy and after a few months of eel fishing I had my first over three pound. After starting to seriously target eels, especially on new waters, the benchmark I set for myself was three pounds.

I personally think that's an achievable size on any water containing eels. This might be considered a low weight for some of the more seasoned eel anglers, but for me when I'm out eel fishing a three pound fish is a good result for any effort I put in. As we will mostly fish for eels in the dark, which for me is lucky as I like to fish during the night time, we share that special time by the water after the sun has set, in which another world so seldom seen by non-fisher folk exists.

For me the whole eel fishing experience is to be out in the dark.

I know plenty of eels and big eels for that matter which are caught during the daytime, but it's only really when that fat old sun starts to sink that I begin to feel more confident

Like most of us (I believe), who fish for specimen fish, I set myself targets and try for a personal best each year. Hopefully one or two will be achieved, however, there is a golden rule to this and that is to enjoy my fishing, and not take it too seriously, well not too seriously anyway.

Most of the time you will probably be the only one specifically targeting eels on your chosen water, probably others may have done it before you, but hopefully not.

It is however a good feeling sitting back, waiting for that first bit of action, knowing that you're doing something a little different from the rest of the crowd.

My own enthusiasm in fishing for eels is even more increased as the eel is now the only fish available to freshwater anglers with any kind of mystery.

Not only are they so unlike any other fish, you can never truly know the size of the eel that may grace your net. The chances are that the eel you could catch has most likely never been caught before, or will do so ever again, all add up to the fascination of fishing for this amazing fish.

I personally don't really have a favourite type of water, but if I was limited to just one or two places, canals are at the top and the next would be any old estate lake.

Both of these places have a timeless quality about them and exude a certain atmosphere - ageless and eerie.

It's these historic venues which hold a special place in my heart, even before I became an addicted eel fisher.

Generally speaking though, I will fish for eels anywhere, I will even make an exception to my own self imposed rule and fish those awful overcrowded, barren, bland, carp type waters which unfortunately dominate angling today.

The actual catching of the eel can be fairly simple.

Most waters will generally have a population of eels and just like all other species of fish they can sometimes be ridiculously easy to catch; on the other hand they can be the most frustratingly difficult of all fishes to target.

The amount of eels in any chosen water is all part of the eel angler's dilemma on how to approach their chosen venue. Personally I try to keep away from the over productive small eel venues and fish the places with hardly any eel history to them. All the eel fishing techniques that I use are pretty standard and most of the time everything is kept simple. The John Sidley rig and Colin Dyson's adaptation of Vic Bellars perch rig suits me fine.

As for baits, worms must surely be the best eel bait of all time, with small dead bait a close second.

Of course, like all things in life it's each to their own, we all have our own style of fishing for eels and the tactics which we prefer.

Well, now I've tried to explain what drives me to fish for eels, so from one eel fisher to another: "Why do you go eel fishing?"

South Devon Eels

(Cream Teas & Monsters)

David "Slippery Sully" O'Sullivan

It is Saturday 13th December; I am six floors up in a swanky (?) hotel in Warwickshire. I am planning on gate crashing my wife's Christmas Do and should be safe to make my grand entrance when the disco starts. Eight cans of Stella are staring at me as I wait like a lonely rock star, counting down to show time.

The Do will be mainly women and I will be treating the ladies to my Ted Baker suit, pink shirt, infamous pink shoes and socks and glitter- a lot of glitter (all over).

The shirt always comes off; I hope my wife has prepared them for what lies ahead.

I check myself in the mirror for the 32nd time and say, "Damn I look good!" but in reality I look like a right ponce. But when has that ever stopped me before?



Pretty in Pink?.....perhaps not!

With 2 hours and 8 cans to kill, my mind starts to wander and I am inspired to right yet another article, for I have secretly hidden my notebook and pen in the overnight bag. (I promised her there would be no more typing before Christmas)

So here goes....

I have been known to get on the great silver bird to sunnier climes, but every year I am still drawn to South Devon, after all this is where it all started. I still pay homage to that overgrown, neglected lake where I caught a 4lb and then a 3lb eel a few years after that.

Later, my parents chose to holiday in a different location but we were still near a lake and I hoped there were eels there too. It's funny but as a kid the

summers seemed hot, sunny and endless, but now I can be sat on the beach on my summer holidays, in my shorts, in the howling wind and rain while every other sane person has long since pegged it indoors. However, I refuse to move because after all, I'm on holiday and it is AUGUST.

For the last two years I've gone back up the M5 after two weeks of indifferent weather only to find the second I pull off at junction 9 the sun bursts forth again.

It was shining on the way down too, until we reached Bristol, then the traffic and the rain clouds took over. I sat in the holiday cottage and cursed the weather on Teletext for the whole 2 weeks.

The summer of '97 was very different. The whole family had come down and we had taken over three holiday cottages in the village around the lake.

On the first evening I went down to the little bridge with the sluice gate at one end of the lake, and looked across the rest of its 180 acres. The sluice was full and was clearly jammed up with debris further under the bridge and looked much deeper and more still than usual. I then saw a small eel basking in the late evening sun, on the surface.

The following evening I was back out there with a can of tuna. I dropped in small chunks, straight down near the crumbling brickwork of the bridge supports and I didn't have to wait long before the eels came out to investigate.

I stood there feeding them until it was too dark to see anymore.

The next evening I put more tuna on the other side of the sluice, in a real shallow area on the other side of the reeds and again they came.

I climbed down to the waters edge - and this is the mind blowing bit - I was able to hand feed one of these eels.

It actually took bits of tuna out of my hand. I even tried to grab another which looked about 2lb, but it was like trying to grab a bar of soap - it just shot off out of my hands.

So it was on the beach by day and feeding eels by night because the lake is a nature reserve and can't be fished from the bank sides.



Tuna Surprise!

One night my brother-in-law and his mate, Nick, (both obsessed carp anglers) came down armed with a head lamp, line, hook and lob worms. Down went the tuna and out came the eels.

Then it happened - the unbelievable.

Whilst a small bootlace eel was eating the tuna a massive eel came from nowhere, grabbed it and took it down a hole. We stood there absolutely

stunned. It must have been at least 6lb and it had just taken the smaller eel right there in front of us.

Nick immediately put the line down with the worms on, into the dark and foreboding hole. Bang! It was on! After a few savage and violent pulls the hook came back with the worms stripped clean from it.

Twice more, the same thing happened...but no eel on the other end. We tried again the next night but this time there were no takers for the worms and the big eel just poked his head out of the hole, like a conger down on a wreck, arrogantly refusing to take the bait.

Towards the end of the holiday, I had a log moment (which sounds bad but it's not what you think!) I was standing on the other side of the lake (which is now so overgrown you can't get near the waters edge) where I threw some tuna out and then came back at dusk. There was nothing to see, other than a long log floating near the tuna...you've all heard something like this before...because after a moment or two I realised there hadn't been any log there before.

Then it moved.

It happened so quickly, yet seemed to be in slow motion; my hair stood on end as I watched it slowly leave the scene. The size - well I don't know, but honestly it was massive and there's more evidence to support this monster sighting. I have a book about the area, and I quote:

"There are also many eels lurking in the mud at the bottom where there is a fine food supply available to them. In the 1950's there was a spate of stories about a monster eel that had been spotted on a number of occasions. It was believed to have been longer than the typical rowing boats used for fishing there."

The last evening before we came home, I stood at another part of the lake where the tourists feed the ducks and swans. In the twilight I saw two small eels swimming around in the shallowest water feeding on the discarded pieces of bread left by the ducks.

A young couple stood behind me and mumbled something about eels. How dare they?! They were MY eels.

The following year and we were back again, same time same place and I was there ready with my tuna to feed the eels again.

How gutted was I when halfway through the holiday the sluice was unblocked and the water began to flow free and fast again?

I felt like that couple from Tamworth on Bullseye who had just lost out on Bully's star prize (let's have a look at what they could have won) a speedboat! But then again - what use is a speedboat in the Midlands?

So in the immortal words of the great Jim Bowen- smashing, super, lovely!

And with that, here is my tribute to this special place in South Devon.

The Lake

This scene is like a paint box, long since spilt.
The hills are like a colourful, patchwork quilt
Of brown, gold and green around the ley,
And the sky boasts orange, dark blue and grey.

She was once the rolling sea's only daughter,
But now a beautiful haven of fresh water.
A priceless jewel in the West Country's crown,
Where even the sun is reluctant to go down.

It's spring, and otters, unnoticed by the world, play
In the reed fringed margins of the lower ley.
The mischievous water snake glides the water ways,
And the pike, by the reed beds, pretend to laze.

Whilst hidden migrant warblers sing their song,
Kingfishers flash past and then are gone.
Swans gracefully advance, ducks splash and seagulls scream
Into the bird watcher's long sought dream

Your three thousand years, what are they to me?
When I give my short span and sight to thee.
Yet I will pause life's fast playing tape
For you, my sanctuary, and you, my escape.



So what can Buster see that I'm missing?

Slippery Sully

Night Fever

(Or The Night is the Only Time I Live)

David "Slippery Sully" O'Sullivan

They say the night is for owls, bats and ladies of negotiable affection, but what about eel anglers? The mysterious, nocturnal hunters of the night.

The Night Stalker

The day is just an endless blank
Until the dying of lighted skies,
And just before the sun has sunk
A magic dances in my eyes.

It's like a strange, magnetic force
That brings me here at night.
But what alters my normal course
Is beneath me out of sight.

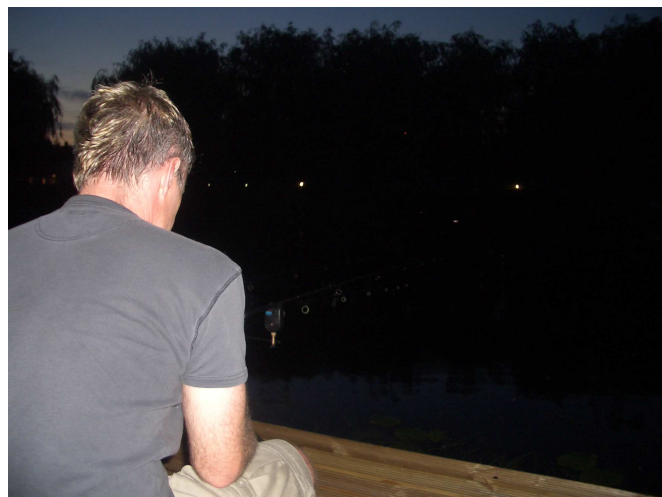
To dream here is to wake,
And to be consumed by this place,
To touch the surface of the lake
And to calm a troubled face.

I hear the eel rolling upon its side.
Its music won't let me forget.
The echoes from the depths you hide.
And your beauty that graced my net.

It must be the kid in me, but I've always liked staying up late. There is something surreal or just plain mad about sitting alone at the bank side in the dead of night.

It once occurred to me that it would be really good and much more considerate if eels fed more during the day or were more active in the winter months. But would I want to miss out on all those warm, summer nights- not likely!

I am free, not only am I at one with nature, but spiritually I'm on another level. A peace descends, but quickly disappears as daylight breaks.



People think you can't see at night, but it's amazing, once your eyes adjust to the darkness there's no problem. For me there is no better atmosphere on the bank side at night; everything comes alive- the undergrowth is so noisy, fish splash wildly on the surface and no two nights are the same.

God the artist does not put his brush away after the sun has set. Time and scenery do not stand still, for a hanging picture is not His will.

There are no green, rolling fields, or endless pale blue sky. He works on after dusk as the heavy clouds form and disappear and the stars pierce the violet canopy overhead with the moon watching on, soulfully smiling on the lonely angler below. (Bloody full moon- why don't I ever remember to check the moon phases!!)



I read with interest in the NAC magazine about short sessions, because they suit me fine. I like to be off before the dawn (not that I have to return to my coffin or anything!) but I've got to be able to function properly the next day. I have to have a smile on my face and not be grumpy, or this little avenue of pleasure may forever be cordoned off. When you blank you seem to be more tired- something I know too well. But I've perfected the art of "automatic pilot" conversation when people talk to me the next day and generally say yes and nod in the right places.

I've lain in the bath at 4.30am covered in eel slime after catching a 3lb 10oz from the canal and a week later I caught an eel of exactly 4 lb from the same spot.

Again, more slime and bubble bath.

It's amazing but the next day I was on such a high at a mate's barbeque -not from the excitement of catching such a good eel the night before, but more from the fumes of the Christmas aftershave I'd soaked myself in to get rid of

the eel smell. The point is I wasn't at all tired, but everyone else was after listening to me all afternoon.

Now for the other side of midnight.....

Falling in is the obvious thing- been there and bought the tee-shirt...and then used it to dry myself off with.

My shoe is still in that farm pond somewhere. Dog muck in the dark - it's always going to be me so don't anybody else bother checking their shoes. It's been on the end of the rod, I've sat in it, walked in it - it's been everywhere - in fact I can still smell it now.

I nearly took my eye out once when the bomb flew back and caught me. Trying to pull it free from the bushes is like going back to the firework after you've lit the blue touch paper or staring down the end of the hosepipe wondering why the water's taking so long.

My brother-in-law asked me what I was doing, fumbling about on the towpath in the dark. "I'm looking for my eye," was my genuine reply, as I couldn't see for quite a while. There's a picture of me somewhere with a 2lb 8oz eel and a 6lb 8oz zander and a really big black eye. My brother in law insisted that we go to Warwick hospital, which isn't wise at 2.00am on a Saturday morning. It was full of drunks and I was amazed at how many girls in short skirts were throwing up in those funny looking grey hats.

We were watching Argentinean football until half past five in the morning in the waiting room and all that was left in there was a scruffy looking bloke, with a fat black eye, who smelled like Grimsby fish market on a hot day. The doctor didn't believe I'd been fishing that night and thought I was up to no good.

I've seen some very dodgy characters and some funny goings on whilst night fishing and some of them have come with me.

The most recent disaster was a canal boat full of drunken idiots wedging the boat under a bridge for half an hour whilst they tried to turn it round and letting off fireworks at the same time...and all this 30 yards from where I was sitting.

If a brass band and majorette team had marched down the towpath practicing their big show number, they'd have made less noise than that boat load of halfwits.

When I was approached at night by a rather big bloke I thought he was going to ask to borrow my wallet, but instead he started to ask what fish were in there.

Turns out he'd just taken up fishing and was looking for new locations. When this big bloke said, "You've got some bottle, fishing out here on your own," it did make me think - if he's nervous and would never think about doing that kind of thing, I suddenly felt a bit vulnerable. But that's the nature of eel fishing and I'll take my chances with the bats and the owls, but the ladies of negotiable affection are off limits.

The Eel Men

They move in mysterious ways,
Where obsession elusively strays.
And they closely guard a secret
That comes to life with the sunset

The sun descends into the ground,
Like a golden coffin without a sound.
And then the two shadowy figures appear,
And I alone know they are there.

There are no voices from the muggy shade,
Just a light whisper the breeze has made.
And yet far across the moonless bank side,
I know the strangers freely hide.

I cast a knowing and kindred eye,
Then leave under a darkened sky.
I return again at first light,
Only to find them gone in the night.

My life seems like an endless maze,
How I wish I walked in mysterious ways.
And the water looks like one big grave,
Because there's no magical dream to save.



My only vice- a passionate kiss after midnight.

Slippery Sully

Funny Eel Stories

Mark Parker

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the gravel pit...

With snow on the ground and all the eels tucked up in their winter beds, Mark Parker uses the time to regale a few funny stories, rather than wasting time on the bank...

Being early February and with the weather outside my Peterborough home currently 1.3 degrees combined with a 30 mph easterly wind, who could blame me for not venturing out of my front door to fish for eels?

Not many, I would say!

So, with this in mind, I thought I would regale you with a few funny stories that as a professional angling journalist have come my way over the past few years.

The curious tail of the expensive maggot feeder

The first one involves an older gentleman who rang the magazine one afternoon to heavily berate me about a recent feature I had written about fishing with a maggot feeder.

He pointed out that as a Features Editor, I had a responsibility to the readership to tell them how expensive it is to fish certain tactics and that as he was a pensioner he was finding it very difficult to afford to fish this method.

“Why?” I asked him curiously.

“Well!” he replied; his voice tinged with anger, annoyance and indignation. “It costs a fortune, something that you’ve seemed to conveniently neglect to say in the piece.

“I am currently using at least two to three dozen maggot feeders every time I go fishing.”

“How”, I asked.

“Tell me what you are doing and I’ll try to help.

“What lines and hooklength are you using?”

“A 6lb mainline - Maxima - and a 4lb Preston Innovations Powerline hooklength,” was his curt reply.

“Well, tell me about the water you are fishing. Is it very snaggy or weedy?”

“No, it is a typical commercial carp water.”

Now I was stumped - reasonable line strength, balanced hooklink and no snags or weed.

“How is the feeder tied onto the line?” I enquired, now very much grabbing at straws to find the underlying cause of the problem.

“I’ve got it free running on the line with a bead protecting the swivel knot, just like you illustrated in the article.”

Now I was stumped. A long, uncomfortable silence filled the line
“When you wind in to re-fill the feeder are you cracking it off on the cast?”

“When I what...” he replied.

“When you wind in and re-fill the feeder, are you cracking it off on the cast?”

“Oh!” he said. “I don’t wind in until I go home.”

“So how are you using 25 to 40 feeders every session?”

“I am filling them with maggots and catapulting them into my swim, stupid!”

How does one hair-rig a rat?

My second story involves a reporter from one of the angling weeklies. This reporter is not exactly the sharpest tool in the box. In fact he’s a bit like Leonard Cohen - dead but still alive.

Being a member of the Catfish Conservation Group, I heard through the grapevine that a certain southern Stillwater had become infested with rats, so much so it resembled one of the more infested areas of the mythical town of Hamlin.

The rat infestation had become so bad that there were literally dozens of them swimming across the lake’s surface. This had prompted the catfish into taking them off the surface, because they were an easy meal.

Seeing this happen on a regular basis, it incited two bright sparks, currently fishing the water, to start using rats as their hook bait.

After a few weeks, the rat infestation had grown worse and one of the hapless pair, having spent so much time by the water, ended up contracting Weil's disease.

This I thought was quite an interesting story, especially for an angling newspaper.

I felt it was up to us - as journalists - to report incidents like this, to keep people informed when a fishery could possibly become a health hazard.

I therefore approached the young journalist in order to tell him about the story I'd heard, so that it could be included in that week’s paper.

After listening intently to the story, the young journalist in question looked at me rather bemused and confused, before replying, “...were they using live rats on the hook!”

Beware Dick Walker, especially when he’s bearing a game pie!

The third story involves three journalists from the Angling Times of the 1970s.

The three people in question were (the late and very great) Chris Dawn (who used to write Angling Times' famous Dawn Report), Peter Maskill, and John Wilshaw.

The three gentlemen in question had been invited for an evening meal at the late great Richard Walker's house. With all three of them being fairly keen field-sports enthusiasts, the promise of enjoying one of Dick's famous game pies was too much for them to turn down.

After a very pleasant evening of wine, pie and song, the three protagonists' - John, Peter, and Chris - enjoyed what John later described as one of the best game pies he's ever eaten.

After saying their goodbyes the three of them left Richard Walker's Biggleswade house, before making their way back to Peterborough.

After only 10 minutes into the journey, Peter screamed that he needed to stop the car.

As soon as the car became stationary, Peter bolted from it like a scalded cat before clearing a nearby hedge like a Kentucky Derby show winner.

After getting back in the car, the three lads only made it another couple of miles before all three of them needed to stop the car.

This time they were all forced to scatter.

This pattern of behaviour went on through the entire journey and for the next three days.

Apparently, the words 'Indian Ink' don't even come close to what the three lads were experiencing.

A couple of days later, John, who used to edit Dick's copy for Angling Times, spoke to the man himself regarding the game pie that they had enjoyed at his house a few days earlier.

After filling him in regarding the state of all three of their upset (to say the least) stomachs, Dick said, "Yes, it was a little bit gamey, I will give you that. "It is probably because I left the birds to hang a little bit longer than I normally do.

"I generally leave them to hang for around about four to six weeks, but knowing that you three liked it 'gamey', I left them for about five months until they rotted off the string!"

Possibly the best hookbait in the world?

The final story also goes back to the 1970s and involves a little bit of a Nutter, to say the least.

The gentleman in question used to have a thing about perch apparently. He used to ring the Angling Times on a regular basis in order to inform them how many perch he had killed that week. The angler in question believed perch were evil and needed to be wiped out.

This should give you a bit of an idea as to the mental state of the man.

However, this one particular week, he rang with a rather different story.

Fishing a local pit - which at the time had no form for throwing up specimen fish -, he'd managed to take a number of decent eels and a couple of pike from the water.

The eels were between three and five pounds while one of the pike weighed 29lb; the other weighing 32lb.

The editor of Angling Times at the time sent a journalist and photographer down as soon as possible.

Meeting the guy on the bank they started asking the usual questions regarding the bait, tackle and tactics he was using.

When it came to his bait however, the angler said that it was something he got from work, with a rather sheepish look on his face. He then rapidly glossed over this fact before going on to tell the journalist about the type of tackle he was using, where he cast and when the fish was caught.

After being with him for around half-an-hour, the journalist needed to find out exactly what bait he was using for the story, especially as it had managed to take such an impressive catch from a relatively unknown and historically poor pit for pike and eels.

After much cajoling, they managed to persuade him to open his bait tub. What greeted the two of them were small strips of pink and grey meat, resembling chunks of pork fillets.

The journalist asked him, "You say you get this bait from work. Do you mind me asking what you do for a living?"

"I assume by the looks of it that you either work as a butcher or in an abattoir?"

If only this were the case!

It later transpired that the angler was actually a mortuary attendant and for the past few months he had been giving his clients more of a burial at sea! Within the hour, our perch-hating, cadaver-fishing pike and eel angler had received two doctors' signatures and was on his way to a local mental asylum.

As far as I know, he's still there. Probably luxuriating in the Ray Mumford memorial ward?

As I said at the start of the piece, with the weather outside being diabolical - as I look out at my window it is just started snowing - I'm writing this at home with a steaming cup of coffee.

I love my fishing and especially my predator fishing as much as anyone, but even I am not mad enough to go eel fishing in the snow.

This season I have managed to get on Kevin Maddock's Crackers Meadow syndicate, where I hope to take a new personal best catfish, of which apparently run well into the 60lb bracket, and hopefully a few large eels. But as the start of that syndicate is still six weeks away and this summer even longer, it'll be a while before I set my hooks into either of these slippery and wily beasts.

I hope by the time you read this in the new issue of Anguilla, that your seasons are going well and I hope mine will follow suit also.

Hopefully my next article will be more about catching eels, rather than simply relating some of the amusing stories that I have been witness to over the years; either first-hand, or passed on to me through other angling journalists who have now retired.

Eels In Scotland

Chris Daphne

An Introduction

I really got into Eels and the sheer mystery of this creature many years ago whilst fishing in my native Yorkshire. Eels were plentiful in fact you couldn't have a days fishing without getting a bootlace, in fact Eels were actually banned from weigh ins in many of the local matches.

I remember many a night spent in Titty bottle park, Otley where every Friday and Saturday night we would all be lined up waiting for the tell tale bites to come. We never took any bait as lobs were also plentiful from the park flower beds. We weren't bothered about size really; we just wanted to catch Eels.

At 17 I joined the Navy and fishing really took a back seat although I did manage to get out every once in a while, although I was really after anything that came along. Upon leaving I met my wife and moved up to her neck of the woods - the Scottish highlands. Fishing was forgotten as I couldn't really get into chucking bits of fluff about. I targeted Pike and where possible Perch, coarse fish don't really exist this far north. I never gave Eels a second thought (what a fool).

8 years later I am as far North as you can get, after studying fish farming and fisheries management, working for various salmon fishery boards and trusts I find myself in Sutherland working for the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust with a chance to study Eels and perhaps make a difference to the lack of knowledge and interest in this magnificent species.

Status

Some of you may have read the desktop survey carried out by Dr. Shona Marshall and Dr. Duncan May (this can be found on the website). Very little commercial fishing goes on up here although it does go on, catch records are non existent and as Eels are not considered economically and socially valuable when compared to the money spinning Salmon or Trout, data on populations etc are very sketchy. Eels are recorded when caught during electro fishing surveys but these surveys are geared towards juvenile salmonids. Data is scarce.

The WSFT area covers Loch Hope in the North right down to Achiltibuie in the South and includes all water courses flowing west. Nearly all water courses contain Eels, these rivers are generally small but there are also literally thousands of Lochs and small lochans. There used to be Elver fisheries on some of these rivers but these have long since gone along with any catch records.

Angling in the area is by fly only so no-one has really had the privilege of catching one apart from the odd chancer fishing with worm. Most people know nothing about the Eel except that they eat Salmon eggs and Trout Eggs and they taste good when smoked, I intend to change this or at least try.

Project

When I was offered the job I was given the opportunity to come up with project ideas on whatever I wanted. After browsing the NAC website and reading various articles I felt the Eel should be given more credibility, I was sick of studying Salmonids and felt that other species should be looked at as they do get overlooked.

After conducting a habitat survey of the Geisheil burn and its tributaries I thought that this system would be a good choice to carry out a survey on the Eel population. There are no protocols or survey designs for Eels so any methods I came up with could be of use in the future. In addition there would be scope to get local schools and other organisations involved and so raise the profile of the Eel.

This was my idea...

1. Monitor the Elver run. This was to be done by trapping Elvers and working out the recruitment.
2. Monitor the Silver Migration. Work out the escapement.
3. Monitor the Yellow Eels. Using various trapping methods and Electro fishing. (I also got permission to fish for them. Thank you Dr. Balfour) any yellow Eels caught would be tagged and length, weight, jaw size, eye size would be recorded.

Environmental factors would also be recorded along with habitat etc. The project is to run for 3 years and is funded by Scottish Natural Heritage. From these captures and subsequent data, it is hoped that an assessment of the population can be obtained, management plans can be produced and successful methods can be used on other systems.

The project started this year, traps have been out since March, and trapping has been unsuccessful so far although water temperatures have been very low. I had a few exploratory trips with rod but managed only trout with a few possible dropped runs. Confidence was low, I wasn't even sure Eels were present in the Loch; they were present in high numbers in the burn below. There is a bit of a barrier at the lochs mouth but I was assured that this was passable. On May 22 after a prolonged warm spell I decided to have another crack with the rods, my father joined me also, he likes catching eels also. We had a few Trout on worm baits, at about 2130 my dad had a bite and we both commented that it looked a bit Eely, this was on worm, he had a few takes like that but nothing was hooked. At 2330 my Trout head was picked up and it screamed off resulting in a nice yellow Eel weighing 1lb 4 oz. Now I know this isn't big but it was my first Eel in 18 years, I couldn't do anything for 10 minutes, I was so relieved, and it meant Eels WERE present. My confidence shot up, I had another 3 that night and I lost count the number of bites I had. Some were probably

Trout but I just didn't care. The other 3 Eels were all silvering which I thought was a bit strange especially as the smallest was only 8oz.

Now I know they are there, and as the water warms things are looking up. The traps have been removed as I am gearing up for the Elver run (anytime now) I will still be out with rods on a weekend though.

SAVE THE EEL

As part of our remit on education we are currently running a project entitled "A fishy tale" which involves getting all the primary school children out into the burns/streams and looking at all the life in them including fish and invertebrates, habitat and land use. This has been very successful and the kids have loved it. I have been teaching them about the Eel and its decline and this has really got them interested, in fact we took them electro fishing and they were more interested in Eels than the other fish, especially when one of the Eels started devouring a trout in the bucket 2 minutes after it was caught - predation in action.

This got me thinking, I thought it might be a good idea if a poster competition could be arranged along the lines of Save the Eel. They would be gaining by learning about the species, winners could get some sort of prize and also winning posters could be printed/issued/ e-mailed in angling establishments/shops/papers/mags etc. The schools education organiser was certainly up for it as it follows on from what they have been doing. I am on the local biodiversity action forum and funding may be available as it is a project involving the community about a priority species. Funding may be available elsewhere; this would have to be investigated. I think it would be good if the NAC could get involved also this doesn't have to be in my area, I personally think it should be a national project. A win win situation for all concerned in my opinion.

I know it all sounds a bit sketchy, but I'm still in the process of working out how to organise it, its time to do something about the Exploitation of the Eel and where better to start than with the young uns. Over to you

Steve 'eelfisher' Richardson's 4.01 Stanwick Eel



Crane Farm

David "Slippery Sully" O'Sullivan

Forget a windmill in Suffolk or a manor house in Dorset, and what's the point of a sea view when I need fresh water? The Lake District does get mentioned but I manage to quell that mutiny every time (and no-one dares mention Wales). Well, Slippery did it again! I managed to persuade my wife and friends with an idyllic location for our annual long-weekend break.

Crane Farmhouse lies at the end of a no-through lane half a mile from the village of South Cerney. There are no houses nearby so no neighbours!! And guess what? This wonderful old Cotswold stone farmhouse has its own 15 acre private lake! (Though I must point out that when Slippery Sully fishes outside Warwickshire he gets a nosebleed and becomes dizzy and disoriented)

We arrive at 2.30pm on Friday afternoon, without getting lost on the way- which is surprising for us as it's on the middle of nowhere, but I did have Andrea as the satnag. We then had the difficult task of bagging the best bedroom before our friends followed on later in the evening. Would it be the one with the enormous bed, or the bath you could fit a small whale in. Well, after hours of indecision and soul searching it come down to a couple of basic facts- since I would hardly be sleeping in it anyway a big bed was of no use to me, and I hoped to be covered in eel slime so the bath won it!

I was out on the jetty at 4.00pm, and with all this water to cast in to, I could make as many bum casts as I liked and fish the way I wanted, and there wasn't another soul about to annoy me. If I got fed up I could go back in the house for something to eat or drink, and just wind in the rods and leave them out there. So it's ironic that I was just about to cast out when the caretaker arrived.

"Alright, mate?" I nervously said. My pessimistic nature expects him to say "Oi! You can't fish the lake!" and my weekend would be ruined. But instead he says, "If you catch any trout would you please put them back?" "Yes- No problem!" I sighed with relief. He then went on to tell me there were too many pike in there. I quizzed him about eels, and right on cue he said adamantly there were no eels in there as there was no way for them to get in or out. "Aha!" thought I. "That means there are some monster eels in the water." As Andrea always reminds me- Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. He told me it only got fished once or twice a year, and with that he said "The lake is all yours. Good luck!"

It's funny that the next day, when we took a walk around the lake we found a small river running feet away from one side, 3 gravel pits within spitting distance and a disused canal on the other side of the track leading to the farm. No way for them to get in or out, eh? My @**e!

It's getting dark, and Helen and Lofty arrive just in time to see me catch a 10lb pike on roach head from the shallow bay right by the house. Mark arrives at 9.30pm having just come back from working in Austria. Even though he was tired he was still the last one up as usual, with a can of lager in one hand and a glass of port in the other like Rowley Birkin Q.C. from the fast show- he was very, very drunk.

The group venture out to get a takeaway curry while I stay behind. I have to drink their expensive lager first, as it's in front of my worms and cheap lager at the back of the fridge. I sit in the huge conservatory dreaming of Anguilla and I couldn't wait

to get back out there after a curry. Unbeknownst to me they have gone to the pub to wait for the longest takeaway in history. The curry eventually arrived and I hoovered it in record time, and whilst everyone else settled in for a film night I headed back out again.

No moon, but plenty of stars and a cold wind made it a little uncomfortable (n.b. I am making excuses already for the inevitable) I catch a couple of perch- both at just over 2lb each and called it a night at 2.30 am only to find them all still watching films, in front of a welcoming, roaring log fire.

Got up Saturday morning to find Lofty on the jetty, on a mission to catch silver fish (or just A fish) True to form he blamed the gin clear shallow water on his failure, despite some nice trout and perch swimming around his bait and under the jetty.

Saturday night was our theme night- Heroes and Villains. I came as Spiderman's alter ego, Lofty was Zorro, Mark was the killer from Scream, Helen came as Cruella De Ville, and Andrea donned an 80's wig and dressed as a pirate. After a lot of food and (some)drink, I bade my farewells and fished a nice spot which drops off to 10+ foot. Another 2lb 3oz perch on lobworm was the result. Excuses again, despite being a lovely sunny day it got very cold at night. I was sick of the Plough(saucepan) and the Bear and had Don McLean singing something about Van Gogh and starry nights in my head all night. They look even brighter in the middle of nowhere with no light pollution around.

It was Gloucestershire's stars that night,
That gave strength to my tired sight.
And safely the dreamer reached his home,
Knowing this eel-man was not alone.

I had a nice, hot bath in the wee, small hours although I don't know why I bothered as I was back out again at 5.00am, smelling of worms and dead fish. The mist came up thick and fast all around the lake, like a Sherlock Holmes movie pea-souper, but then it got more like John Carpenter's The Fog and I could hardly breathe. Bright sunshine followed for the rest of the day. I caught a jack of around 5lb, and a brace of nice perch, both at 2lb 4oz. (It's funny how they all weighed virtually the same in this lake)

Accompanied by a tuneful thrush,
The morning dew wets his brush
Which dampens the canvas of the land.
God then paints the day by hand.

It was my last throw of the dice on Sunday night. I had to catch my eel. Conditions seemed much better- it was still, warm and there was no moon, and I even managed to place the baits exactly where I wanted them. It promised much but yielded little. Well, nothing actually. I had tried everything I knew (which isn't a fat lot) and given it my best shot (which again isn't a fat lot).

As I walked back in the dark, my head torch picked up the green reflective eyes of the rams kept in the fields surrounding the farmhouse. They started to gather together and walk towards me. But the mood I was in, this was one fight they were not going to win. I still legged it though, only pausing to raise two digits- erect and rampant- in the direction of the lake, in a final childish gesture of defiance. Andrea could tell from the look on my face when I got in, that my dream was over. I joined them for a can or two in front of the roaring fire, and the world began to look a whole lot better.

We left on Monday morning, in the rain, all agreeing it would be great to go back again later in the year- perhaps September/October time.

It would have been the cherry on the icing on the cake to be able to write this having caught an eel, but the main purpose has been to tell other big eel enthusiasts where this place is and what a great weekend you could have there. It is an incredible location teeming with wildlife- woodpeckers, cormorants, grebe, chaffinches, wagtails, squirrels, bats, buzzards, foxes, tufted ducks- the list goes on...Andrea had to remind me not to concentrate so much on what I hadn't caught but enjoy what I had, as there is a danger in not seeing the wood for the trees (or the fish for the water). Still, what does she know.....



The Farmhouse



The Lake



Not an eel



nor are these.



Stabbed for drinking his lager.



My spidey-sense was dulled by lager.

Slippery Sully - South Cerney April 09

The importance of healthy eating on the bank (or what a poor 2008 I had.)

Martin Dorman

Firstly can I wish all fellow NAC members the very best of luck for 2009.

Unfortunately my 2008 was a very poor season, due to being out of the UK at the best times for eeling – basically I was only home when it was cold ! So apart from a few late season carp and tench I did not catch anything much to talk about.

My only contact has really been reading the NAC magazine; as by the time the November ‘social’ Meeting had arrived I was abroad again. I really must try and attend March / April’s A.G.M., if I am home, if nothing else so that I can check out these new all singing all dancing indicators of Mr McConnell’s.

So, I was thinking about what article I could produce as I had caught little, not had chance to try anything new out or even had enough trips to notice any trends or patterns in feeding/behaviour (by the Eels anyway).

It suddenly occurred to me that I have never, in my considerable fishing literary experience, read an article on bankside nutrition and cuisine.

I racked my brains hard (which didn’t take long!) and could recall no TV programmes - other than Huge Furby Chuffingstall killing a jack pike from a nearby river - about how a celebrity chef turned up and cooked healthy meals for a private Carp Syndicate or an Open Match (I hereby retain all rights on this idea) and thus improved the Nation’s health yet again. So I thought I would give everyone my own take on this subject, one very close to my heart.

Firstly and foremost it is still possible to have a nutritionally balanced meal on the bank with very little effort and occasionally without even having to take any kind of stove – so there are no excuses for eating badly in the outdoors. All foods, as we all know, can be broken down into the constituent parts they are made up from and what ‘Food Groups’ they fit into.

Vitamins – these are essential for various bodily functions and health. Some more of the well known ones are as follows:

Vitamin ‘G’ – this is probably the most important vitamin and can be found in sufficient quantities to give your R.D.I. (Recommended Daily Intake) in such food stuffs as pork pies, bacon, chips, crisps and various take-aways in general.

The technical Latin term for this vitamin is ‘Grease’.

Medically this is required for the ‘greasing of one’s lungs’. This is known to operate in tandem (probably by enzymes or some such) with Vitamin ‘N’ (or ‘Nicotine’ in Latin) to allow large quantities of spittle or flem to be expelled in a healthy regular fashion.

Vitamins 'B' and 'C' are very closely related and can be found in quantities sufficient to meet your R.D.I. in the excellent foodstuffs they take their names from; bread and chips.

Vitamin 'L' is needed, in reasonable amounts, to facilitate awareness – for example after three days of no bites and towards the end of a session when one needs a 'pick-up' that caffeine cannot provide. It has a well known side effect of 'euphoria' if taken to excess, but this can also affect the Inner Ear / balance faculty.

Vitamin 'L' only became popular in the 1970's and is found mainly in liquids bearing the Latin name 'Lager'.

Obviously fruits have high levels of various R.D.I. I always recall the traditionally made 1970's 'pop' called 'Bing' (from 'Silver Spring'), made from only the best quality 'Bingberries' – just as granny would have made it. Apart from Vitamins, for your body to function correctly with a good blood pressure (to stop those arteries flopping about), it also needs plenty of the chemical Monosodium Glutamate (or M.S.G.). This is becoming harder to find in the modern world's love-affair with unhealthy / unprocessed food. The few places selling this essential element now tend to be 'pound shops' where packets of instant noodles can be purchased, often as cheap as ten packs for a pound in cash.

Usually the cheapest give the best chance of obtaining your R.D.I. Also I have read that several Chinese Ingredient Shops are seeing a gap in the Health Food market and those 'Asian Tigers' are leading the way yet again by stocking Food high in M.S.G. for the more discerning shopper. Usually found in the packets with no English words on, a skull and crossbones symbol and where the packaging is rotting are the best to go for.

If you are very lucky and shop around, you might even be able to find food stuffs with the R.D.I. of Vitamin 'M' (Latin – Melamine).

The last important food group is that which helps you to stay awake for longer and to allow suitable loss of concentration to help the biteless-time pass quicker. This consists of two food groups often found together, but now not so readily available as in the health-conscious 1970's when they could be easily found in all food and were (probably) the reason why Britain was a lot 'Greater' then – as shown by the TV series 'Life On Mars'.

Colourings and Preservatives have had a bit of a bad press and amazingly it is even considered a good advertisement if the product does *not* contain a sufficient R.D.I. of so called 'E' numbers. The 'E' actually stands for Excellent foodstuffs and the gradual phasing out of these 'E' numbers is already been medically proven to be turning us into a nation of people with normal attention spans, able to sleep and concentrate properly – that's what happens when you mess with nature. I only hope the Government sees sense and starts giving out free sweets for school kids (like they used to with milk in about 1887) so that they can enjoy the nutrition offered by such foodstuffs as 'Space Dust' and blue Smarties.

Now we all know the essential foodstuffs for healthy living on the bankside, one must learn how to be able to obtain these foods in adequate amounts for our R.D.I.

If the procurement and lugging around of a stove is too much, then there are two other methods of getting nutrition.

Firstly you can order in a takeaway, but ensure that they deliver; to avoid disappointment. It helps if you are fairly near a town or large village for this. The best method I have found is another useful close-season tactic, this is to leave the marker-rod and/or echo sounder *at home* (plenty of time for that old nonsense when you start your fishing session) and prioritise the collection of take away menus (both that deliver to you and collect only) nearest to your venue.

This will give you plenty of time in the Close-Season to make the essential preparations ready for Opening Day i.e. which ones deliver, is there an extra charge, do you get a free bottle of Pepsi for orders over a tenner, which ones are cheaper – especially checkout the ‘bargain meals’ in case you are expecting guests for dinner in your swim- fishing need not delay your ‘networking’ but your guests might need to bring wellies.

This preparation will avoid the tragedy which befell me last season when my club lake opened (April 1st) where the one and only local takeaway was duly rang by yours truly (on day three of a very quiet session, when bangers ‘n’ beans were not going to ‘cut-it’), only to find to my horror that the number was unobtainable!

I later found out that it had closed down during the winter.

You see; use the Close Season time wisely and you won’t be disappointed.

Secondly, you can take your own food to the bank in the form of a packed lunch or frozen food. The packed lunch offers a good chance of obtaining all your R.D.I.s’ as long as you ensure you do not put any fruit or salad in.

To be a ‘salad dodger’ is now seen as a criticism in today’s mixed up world, but do not listen to hear-say and just ensure you take plenty of bread, greasy meat and crisps. Cap this off with a high-sugar drink such as a ‘Fat-coke’, Lucozade or one of the new high caffeine drinks and you have a nutritionally well balanced meal.

On day sessions I much prefer the options that the frozen food selection can give.

My top tip is to wrap up your extra large family pork pie with your lagers and hey presto – perfect food every time! The choice is endless really; pies, pasties, bakes, lager, cider and even Alcopops (to encourage the young to take part in fishing of course).

If you are lucky enough to have a stove then you can create your own culinary heaven on the bankside. Stoves can be brought for anything from under a tenner for a butane single burner (in winter you occasionally need to stuff the can down your jumper to warm it up!) all the way up to a ton or so for something Delia Smith would be worried about damaging.

The more expensive ones use a mixed gas cylinder so that it'll still go in winter, usually. The best cooking gear is the non-stick pan sets that Argos occasionally sell - this is because you can clean them on the bank with your leftover drinking water and don't run the danger of, next session, finding you have left them in the dishwasher. The best canned food is from either Morrison's, Nettos or Lidl. Here you can find all sorts of palate tempting delicacies such as all-day breakfasts (several varieties), Bangers 'n' Beans, just beans, chilli beans or err...low fat beans. There are other varieties available such as Curries, stews, rice for desert etc. but these do not always have the same R.D.I. of Vitamin 'F' - for keeping the Sleeping Bag warmed up during use.

De-hydrated noodles are useful as an emergency foodstuff (especially if brought very cheaply - see earlier notes) and are best left in the bottom of the food/cooking bag until they have expired by at least two years and are a last resort after the dog-level blackberries, near your swim, have all gone. At the same time we must not forget hygiene as we are all aware of the dangers of Weil's disease and the extra problems caused by a dodgy tummy when fishing.

I always carry a pack of hygienic wet-wipes with me to wipe my hands before eating or even making myself a drink. Usually it's best, before using a wet-wipe, to drop it on the bank whilst you hit a run and/or leave it to dry in the sun before use. This ensures you do not taint your hookbaits.

Also I have tried leaving my extra large family pork pie at the bottom of the un-insulated food bag, until day five of a summer session, to ensure it is nice and sweaty and high in Vitamin 'S' - Salmonella.

I hope you have enjoyed my suggestions for eating healthily on the bank. It's a varied and fascinating subject that we should all treat with the seriousness it deserves and the very best of luck to you all for the forthcoming season.

Martin J. Dorman.

Dates For Your Diary

**Cambridge Fish-In 18th – 20th
September**

Piking 2009 – September 26th 2009

Winter Social – 22nd November 2009

AGM - 28th March 2010

At the Bottom of Kev's Garden

David "Slippery Sully" O'Sullivan

At the bottom of our garden, there is a rickety, old shed which hides a multitude of junk and broken things I can't be bothered to take to the tip, a big tree, a fence and a poo pit (anyone who has a large Labrador will know what I mean by this) At the bottom of Kev's garden is the Warwickshire Avon, and a stately pile of bricks known as Warwick Castle.



Warwick Castle at Sunset

At this time, there is nothing rushing
For the tired, fat sun is blushing.
And the clouds softly canter by
Into a shady corner of the sky.

It stands a proud and wondrous sight,
So noble in the dimming, dusty light,
And the old Avon beside it settles to sleep,
Their secrets like the stars, distant and deep.

At night, ghosts of the past my groan,
And at dawn disappear into the coldest stone.
Yet it's sunset that gave those magical times,
Which married together a thousand rhymes.

On a late Saturday afternoon, as I drive over the bridge, I strain my neck to look over at the river. Warwick Castle is not my main concern, as I look down to see Kev's landing stage and nearly smack into the car in front. How many times have I seen Japanese and American tourists taking pictures of the castle from the bridge? It's like Stratford-upon-Avon on a Sunday afternoon. It's the "don't-walk-in-front-of-the-tourist-taking-the-picture" show. Mr. Shakespeare has a lot to answer for. If you don't get out of the way pretty

sharpish your face could end up on a kitchen wall in Tokyo for years to come.

The view from the bridge is so famous it's on thousands of postcards sent around the world every year. It's funny that when you have the finest medieval castle in England on your doorstep, you tend to take it for granted, but I've been lucky enough to actually fish in that picture postcard.

The river always catches my eye first. Then again, I'm in love with all types of water- apart from the stuff you drink -yuk! (unless it's hot and got a tea-bag in it) I've known Kev since school and we both share a love of fishing, although he prefers carp for some reason which escapes me. I can't understand why he would go all the way to France to fish for carp, when you've got monsters at the bottom of your garden- an old woman 2 gardens down hand feeds them (her babies) and a 35lb was taken just the other side of the bridge. Hmmmm.



(view looking back to the bridge from the landing stage, at dawn)

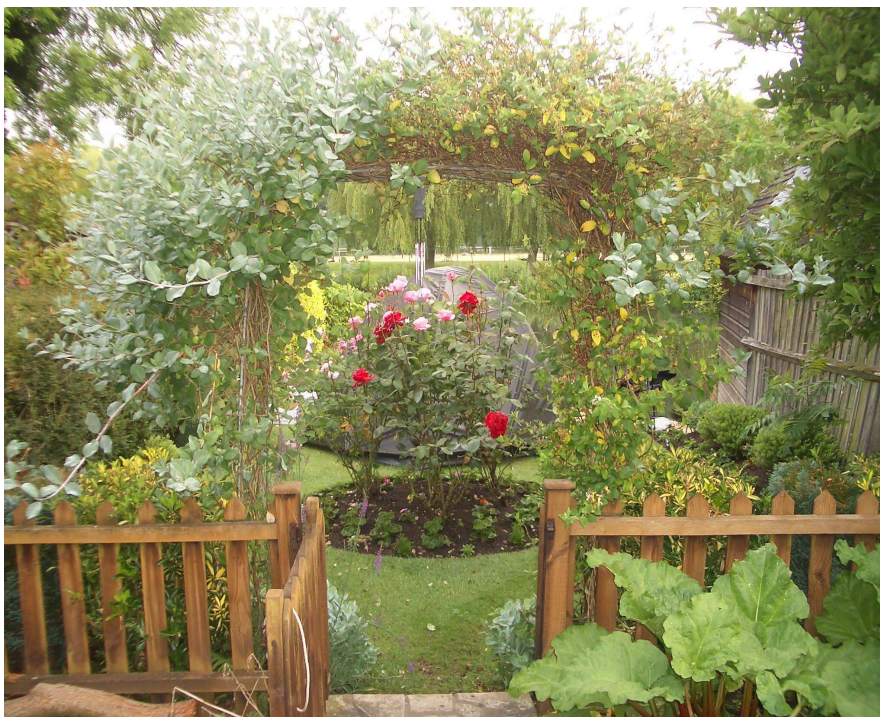
September 1st 1984 was the first night fish on the landing stage, and to this day I've never caught a smaller eel (although I came pretty close on the canal this year- my wife thought it was very sweet and had no trouble picking it up as he was such a little one -the eel, that is!) Since then, Kev and I have enjoyed many nights in bootlace heaven. It was a place I could always count on to boost my tally for the season. I've caught many eels 1lb and under, and many more 1lb 8oz-2lb 14oz. My best eel there is just over 3lb, ironically caught at 1.30pm on a cloudy and humid day. I still believe an eel of 4-5lb is down there, or may be even bigger.

Whilst fishing for eels, (I only ever fish for eels and I only ever will) I have caught some big carp, chub, tench, perch, bream all on worm, and pike and zander on dead bait. Kev has persevered with boilies but I always caught more on the natural bait, like worm. I was really pleased for him a couple of years back when he landed a 16lb 8oz carp. Kev's neighbours have also let us

use their landing stages as well, so more of us could fish all night. At this point, I must thank Kev's mum and dad for their incredible hospitality- it really is 5 star fishing, and the cooked breakfasts in the morning were spot on. I've ingratiated myself in to Sunday dinners and family barbeques, been topped up with cups of tea through the night and Kev's dad, John has also brought down a cold box full of beer to keep us happy as the sun set.

We've even been serenaded by Anastacia, Simply Red and Rod Stewart for free when they've played at the Castle (but Hucknall was getting on my nerves by the end of the night- I had eels to catch and he was making a right racket) We've also sat there watching our own spectacular fireworks display. Our mate Ivor, who isn't into fishing, always comes down with the curry and Dave generally turns up for the beer. My wife has come down night fishing a couple of times, and we've sat watching bats, swans and kingfishers darting up and down the river. There was even a muntjack deer in next-doors garden at 3 in the morning, kicking the fence which scared us all witless (or something that rhymes with that anyway!)

I've only fished there once this year on a cold, late September night. We both caught different species of fish, and I was pleased Kev caught a carp again, but for me it was an eel no-show for the first and hopefully the last time. Kev spent most of the night in a heated bivvy- and his bite alarms let him sleep through as we caught most of the fish during the day. At 2.00am I went back in to the house- a cold and weary figure. I sat on the sofa, and decided I had to go back out as I realised there was no place on earth I would rather have been than on that landing stage in the dark and in the rain which had just started. At 3.00am I looked up at the Castle, which was softly lit from beneath, to hear the bell tower clock chime the hour, and memories of all the times I'd fished there before came flooding back. I was well and truly blessed.



(Kev's bivvy at the bottom of his garden, on the Avon)

Women! Know Your Place!

Andrea "Mrs Slippery Sully" O'Sullivan

The recent NAC AGM in Kegworth has inspired me to write about what it's like to be an Eeling WAG- from a woman's perspective. It may even help some poor, unsuspecting young woman understand the etiquette of an eeling session before falling in at the deep end, so I hope it helps to bridge the male/female divide!

THE WAGS GUIDE TO EEL FISHING

1. Be prepared to walk for miles to what appears to be the arse end of nowhere, for a fish you may never get to see, and to have to carry stuff that doesn't even belong to you.
2. Feel free to make the effort to look nice, but don't expect it to be noticed. Even eel anglers find it quite hard to see details like that in the dark.
3. Wear comfy shoes
 - A) because of the walking (see 1. above) &
 - B) because he won't stop to pick you out of the mud when your stilettos have sunk in. Again.
4. It's fine to take a book or magazine to read as long as you don't use a torch to read it when it gets dark. It puts the fish off.
5. Also don't expect a conversation when it's got dark and you can no longer see to read your book. It puts the fish off.
6. And don't keep getting up and down to walk around and explore to stave off the boredom either. It puts the fish off.
7. So does muttering under your breath. And breathing. Apparently.
8. Whilst courting couples (& even some of those less "stuck in a rut" married types) might normally be expected to take advantage of a quiet, moonless night alone outdoors, for some nocturnal naughtiness, the eeling WAG should understand that no sane eel angler would ever contemplate leaving his rods unattended- **EVER**. Even if it is just for 5 minutes. Tops.
9. It may be June and the middle of summer, but this is England and it will be cold. Wear thick socks, a jumper, a fleece, a warm coat and take a sleeping bag to sit in. And another coat to be safe. Moaning about how cold you are is considered unsporting and is utterly pointless anyway.

10. When it gets dark, things will start to move about in the bushes all around you. They will make strange noises whilst they do this. Don't panic and flash the torch about trying to see what it is and if it is trying to get you. It puts the fish off.

11. Try not to be squeamish. There will be worms, maggots and dead bait (fish) and they will smell. Trying to set the worms free when he is not looking does not go down well, as he has either

- A) dug them up himself or
- B) paid for them in cold hard cash

If he warms the maggots up in his mouth the good old-fashioned way on a cold night, simply remember not to kiss him later. Similarly if he scrapes up a rabbit or hedgehog from the road on the way there, he is not planning to give it a decent Christian burial, but has just saved a few quid on ground bait.

12. Ground bait is an important part of laying the foundations for a good nights fishing. If he comes home with 2 tins of Whiskas salmon in jelly, it does not mean you are getting a kitten together.

13. Whilst the awesome majesty of the starlit canopy, and myriad host of celestial bodies overhead may leave you speechless in wonder at God's magnificent creation, an eel angler is more likely to be pissed off and grumpy that the stars are out and there is no cloud cover. It puts the fish off.

14. The delicate matter of needing a wee can be handled relatively simply, as long as you are prepared to embrace nature. If it's a short session finishing just after midnight, it's perhaps best to practice your pelvic floor exercises and simply "hang on to it" until you get home. However, if you find yourself on an all night session, you have 2 options to consider.

Option 1) abstain from any and all liquids for 24 hours beforehand so your kidneys shrivel up to the size of a peanut.

Option 2) You will have to "go behind a bush"

There is no dignified way to do this, so here are some top tips...

A) Don't wear anything complicated to get out of- you will be balancing in the dark, on uneven ground, in the cold so you don't want to hang about unnecessarily.

B) Don't wear shoes you really care about. (beware of splash back)

C) Take the torch with you. The bush or tree you decide to use for cover may well be the one that things were rustling about in earlier, so use the torch to check the coast is clear. However, please don't flash it about like you are in a disco. It puts the fish off. (*Andrea have you ever heard of a shewee?* (www.shewee.com) ed.)

15. Never try to land an eel for him (unless you have an extremely secure relationship, broad shoulders and thick skin) The second you lay a finger on his tackle (fishing) -including the net- you are accepting sole and ultimate responsibility for the consequences of failing to land what could potentially be the eel of a lifetime- even if- and I cannot stress this strongly enough- even if **HE** messes up and loses the eel on the way to the net,

IT WILL BE YOUR FAULT AND HE WILL BLAME YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR NATURAL LIFE.

Jesus will forgive you anything, but an eel angler won't. He may say he has, but he will look on you everyday as the one person who lost his dream fish, and he will hate you with every fibre of his being and a passion you can only dream of.

16. If you are good at knots, you can show how much you care by untangling the line when it's got in a mess. His head torch is very useful for this in the dark. However, your false nails are not. If you lose one, please don't waste valuable torch battery time crawling around trying to find it. It puts the fish off.

If you find nature fascinating, enjoy peace and quiet and are prepared to rough it a bit in the hope that you may just get to see one of the most fascinating, mysterious and beautiful fish God created, then the life of an eeling WAG can be very rewarding. Gargantuan shopping trips and being papped coming out of some swanky restaurant may not be part of the territory, but your photo may well appear in an eeling magazine one day- although probably not "Hello" !

All the best this season!
Andrea-(a.k.a. Mrs. Slippery Sully)



Bivvy, Curry and Bed Chair-luxury fishing- apparently my snoring put the fish off.

NAC Fish-In's 2009

NAC Winter Fish-In 2009 - Port Talbot Docks, Wales. **Barry McConnell**

It has been the coldest winter for over 20 years and the temperature has been so cold that most stillwaters have been frozen over and angling has ground to a halt.

Most of us haven't wet a line for weeks and our annual get together at a warm water fishery proved most welcome.

The waters at Port Talbot Docks are warmed by discharge from the coolers of two burners at the steelworks. Only one of these was running when we arrived but this was still enough to raise the water temperature to 12 degrees.

The weather turned mild and a pleasant warm wind and sunshine welcomed us to the fishery. With spring in the air, all present felt inspired for the coming eel angling season. The fanaticism for eel angling amongst members also helps to charge ones enthusiasm so much that summer seems a long way off.

The dock flows into the sea which served us up with an eerie, damp, cold fog that advanced like a solid wall until it blotted out the view; yet the bright dockland lights could still be seen faintly through the mist. A Stephen King movie comes to mind.



Ten members turned up to enjoy a good social and plenty of winter eels were caught. Though no larger specimens were landed, it was great to be getting plenty of eel runs in the middle of winter.

As previously on this water, sea baits such as sprat, mackerel and sand eel proved the best. Wayne Staddon had stopped off at a nearby ragworm farm and arrived with an interesting array of quality sea baits from this local supplier. They had showed him the ragworm rearing tanks which get invaded by eels that come up the outflow pipe then hide in the tanks to gorge on the abundance of king rag.

We all got a few runs and enjoyed some action.

There is a large population of smaller eels so plenty of action can be had on smaller baits. A larger bait for a bigger eel seems the best option but it didn't work on this occasion. We will be back.

Jansen Bostock caught the biggest eel at 2.04. He caught another of 2.00+ and two smaller ones.

Nick Rose caught four eels and estimated the largest to weigh 1.13 and 4 drams, while Barry McConnell had five eels, biggest 2lb+ (and that zander); Wayne Staddon caught one small eel of about 8oz; Tug Wilson - two eels to 1lb+; Pete Drabble - four eels, each one weighing about 1lb-ish; Neil Wilkinson - two eels to about 1lb; Mark Salt - one small eel. Dai Evans blanked and Mark Taylor blanked.

It is interesting to note that the two Welsh NAC members were the only two to blank. They never seem to do too well on home ground, so perhaps we will see them on other fish-ins this year as they may fare better when playing away.

We had our licences checked by the environment agency. This episode raised plenty of gunge which I'm sure the mole has heard all about by now. ...

A massive tanker ship that had been filling at the dock all day moved off and turned round to create a huge vortex that stirred the swims up. Soon after this a far more interesting craft was seen manoeuvring the same waters. Though this boat was much smaller it proved far more interesting.

Our very own Wayne - gadget man - Staddon has got the most amazing nippy little adapted bait boat that does tricks like in James Bond!



Steve Pitts was unable to attend on the set dates and was so keen to fish there that we managed to persuade the reluctant fishery manager to let him go on his own a few weeks early.

He had a good haul of eels to 3.04 and according to the fishery manager his behaviour was exemplary.

Such is our reputation at this fishery that it can now be considered an NAC water and any members can fish it anytime so long as it is booked prior to turning up.

Only the NAC ever get to night fish this fishery. When/if you want to fish there just phone me Barry McConnell on 07919 316 457 and I will arrange it.

NAC Fish-in Stanwick Lakes Fisheries – Elsons Lake 12th – 14th June 2009

By
Steve 'eelfisher' Richardson.

Members present:

Nick Rose, Pete Drabble, Barry McConnell, John Davis, Roy Piggott, Neil Wilkinson, Graham Wilkes, Steve Richardson, Andrew Rose, Wayne Staddon, Kevin Payne.

Friday 12th June, 10.00am...work ended, filled the car with eel fishing gear, a few provisions to get me through the weekend and hit the M1, then A14 and make my way to Stanwick lakes, just outside of Irthingborough, Northants.....no traffic jams, easy drive, fishery gate found and the weekends fishing begins.

A quick walk around the fishery to decide upon an area to fish from was in order, so off I wobbled and almost immediately I came across Nick firmly tucked into the first fishable swim. He'd been there since the night before and had already had two eels around one and a half pounds each, both taken on worms, in the night from the margins. We sat and chatted about the prospects and then I took myself around the lake to see if any particular swim took my fancy. There were a couple of swims between Nick and the next occupant, one John Davis, whose swim had the contents of a very large tackle shop firmly spread about it. We chatted about encroaching old age and the obsession to take stupid amounts of fishing tackle on sessions with us.....obviously neither of us the wiser for our age.

I left John to get set up and a few more swims up found Graham and Neil sharing a point swim together...their choice looked very inviting but every swim so far had features that caught the eye and I continued to walk around the lake in search of one that jumped out at me. I reached the far end of the lake and the said swim was there before my eyes....mind made up before I had even seen the other half of the lake.....a swim that couldn't be interfered

with by anyone if they fished either side of me...perfect. I walked the rest of the lake, finding Barry typically encamped in a jungle swim on the very slim far bank and further round the lake I met up with Roy, who had the other half of the large tackle shop that John had left behind....Lord knows how they and all the gear got in the same vehicle.....lastly I found young Andrew and it seemed that between him and his Dad, they had sewn up the first corner bay of the lake...sensible tactics I thought.

So, full circle and back at Nick's swim, I cadged his barrow and went back to the car for my gear and once loaded up, I made my way to the far end of the lake and got set up and, regardless of being baitless, I found myself quite excited at the prospect of the next two days eel fishing. I boiled a kettle and made my way back to Nick's for a coffee, some catch-up and to see if any worms were on offer.

Now I'm ever the optimist but even I should ensure that I take a supply of worms and not be levelled to scrounging a few lobs from fellow eel anglers, who had obviously made sure that they had good supplies. If we were all like me, no one could cadge off anyone....so my thanks to Nick and Graham for their generosity....and the offer from others at the venue.

Whilst having a coffee with Nick, Graham came round to us and prised £5.00 off us both for a slush fund for the biggest eel of the weekend. £45.00 was in the kitty and if it wasn't won, then it would be donated to the club printer appeal. When Graham had secured the money and wandered off, Nick informed me that Andrew had just caught a 17lb common off the surface using floating bread...I told Nick that I thought that too big even for section deadbaits (although perhaps John and Roy might not have passed on it if it went on offer) and elected to fish the car-park lake for a few small baits....and my goodness, they 'were' small. Still, as I said to Andrew, small baits are better than no baits and so with a cadged supply of worms (8) and twelve small rudd (1") and a roach (2") I made my way back to my swim for some 'snap'. On the way I traded four rudd for six lobworms off Graham and decided that worm protection was a top priority over the next two days.

In the meantime, Kevin Payne and Pete Drabble had turned up and had settled into swims on the slim far bank.

Back in my swim, I cooked some bacon sarnies and decided on a two rod attack...one with three lobworms and one with a roach head. Both rods were marginalized, one left of swim and the other to the right, both in four feet of water, one foot out in the lake. Both were legered hard on the bottom.

I stayed awake in my chair all night and never had a bleep on either alarm or got to see how my new 'red' Barry McConnell 'rollovers' worked. At 05.00am I decided to pop on the bedchair and get a couple of hour's kip before considering the day ahead. I rose at 9.30am due to the sun beating down on me and stopping me from nodding off completely. Kettle on, rods wound in and a quick walk back to Nick's for a coffee and to see if anyone else had managed an eel. It transpired that Kevin had taken one of 1lb 12oz on worm.....some nice tench had been caught and Pete had lost a big pike at dawn.

Around 11.00am I went back to my swim, re-cast the rods, one with one lobworm (worm saving tactic for the coming night) and the other with the tail end of the dispatched roach from the night before....and commenced to sunbathe and generally catch up on my sleep as it was my full intention to stay awake again the coming night....only this time I was going to use three rods.....all I needed to do was scrounge a spare reel from someone, although that could wait until later.

At 2.00pm I had a take on the worm rod which turned out to be a very nice tench....best guess, and no idea really why I didn't weigh it, a big 8lb'er or possibly a low 9lb'er.....either way it was a cracking fish.

'Save worms' being the chant of the weekend, I declined re-casting the rod out and fished for another hour on the deadbait rod to no avail. Kettle on, yet another walk to Nick's for a coffee and to see where the spare reel might come from. (Remember, there were two large tackle shops in two swims on the lake, so I was reasonably happy with a successful outcome.) On my way round I came across Roy, who volunteered a reel for my services. The condition of the loan was that if it caught the largest eel of the weekend, the winnings were split between us....I agreed, without reluctance, because that's the kind of guy I am. Roy said that he'd be watching me all night and I said that if that rod produced an eel, then I'd shine my red LED at him for notification. (One wonders if he lay awake watching me all night.)

Saturday evening came quite quickly and I put the two rods back in the same positions as the previous night (since starting fishing the night before, I'd been pulping in a pouch of live maggots every hour or so over each rod continuously even when they were not actually fishing) This time I again fished three lobworms on the right hand rod but elected to fish a legered rudd livebait on the other rod to my left. The third rod was an off-bottom CD rig with three lobworms on in the swim next to mine. (Worms were now getting very low in numbers...maybe, if I was lucky, I'd be cadging again in the middle of the night.) At 8.00pm I had a take on the legered worm rod which snagged me in the overhanging marginal trees. (Golly gosh jeepers...or something similar came from my mouth.) I re-cast with three lobworms again to same spot. At 8.30pm I had a take to the CD lobworm rod and once again was done by the marginal trees.....best to think tench I thought but secretly I was thinking 'there goes my chance'...with a few choice swear words mingled in.....Re-cast with three lobworms...now only have two worms left and it's only 9.00pm.....oh dear.

I decided that a can of cider was the order of the moment. Then had another and had some sausage sarnies. It was quiet except for the carp anglers on the other lakes checking their alarms every ten minutes and the obligatory carp 'take' that took the angler in question an age to respond to.....oh yeah, and a nightingale in my corner of the lake singing every now and again. The rod's stayed quiet but it seemed that some of the lads were getting some action of sorts, perhaps John's five hour weed raking session in the afternoon had paid off?

At 1.20am the legered worm rod was away and I had an eel of about 1lb 12oz...joy at having caught an eel, at least I hadn't blanked. I sent a text Nick to inform him and he sent his congratulations....so far he'd not caught. Last

two worms on the rig and re-cast to same spot. Maggots pulsed in over all three rods yet again and sit back and kettle on.

2.10am and the livebait rod bleeped. Ten minutes later it bleeped three times. Then it ripped off and simply one toned. Instant strike, eel on and it felt a good fish. A cracking scrap and she was netted at the first attempt. She was lip hooked and was a broad-headed type. The scales showed 4lb 1oz.....a very happy man indeed. I sacked her with the other eel and popped them both into the other lake behind my swim. Kettle on and another text to Nick. Nothing occurred after that.....and I wasn't bothered at all. A good weekends fishing from my perspective.

I settled onto the bedchair at 3.30am and tried to force sleep but it never came. I nodded on and off and when I next opened my eyes, Roy was standing in my swim.

"You had a 4.01 then"

"Yes"

"You've won the money"

"Nah, someone will have caught one bigger I'm sure"

"They haven't yet"

"They will"

"Was it on the rod with my reel on it"

"Nope"

"B*****'s"

"What"

"Sorry, well done mate.....by the way, I had a 3lb 11oz eel last nightand I thought I was in the money before I heard about your fish."

Match fishing, don't you just hate it!

Time to pack away.....Nick comes round as I'm doing it...."you alright"

"Yes" says I".

Nick looks at me and says "Neil has just had a 4lb 4oz'er, a new PB"

"Fantastic" says I.

"We'll do the photos together then" says Nick....."okay"?

"Yep".

Tackle back in car.....shake Neil's hand and congratulate him.....what better way to do a PB than with your mates on an NAC fish-in.....cracking.

The 'action' on the lake 'was' John's results of raking his swim...four eels in the 2lb range and some nice tench. Andrew managed to wrinkle out another carp, a mirror this time and it weighed in at 17lb 10oz...a lovely bronze beauty.

Top marks to all who attended....thanks for a great weekend's fishing.....results wise and company wise.....long may the NAC reign.

PS....Anyone wanting to make an offer on a hard-back copy of John Sidley's Beekay eeling book....I have a mate who is selling one...good condition.....contact me and I'll tell my mate.

North-West Eel Overnighter

Jon Neafcy R/O Region 31 PAC GB

Last year we held the first joint event, a social summer nights Eel fishing on a Northwest canal for members of Region 31 PAC GB & the North-West Region of the NAC, the event was well attended and the pike lads dusted their rods off which often lay dormant in the summer months, learned a bit on Eel handling and Eel welfare and a few nice Eels were caught giving them an option for local summer predator fishing. Since last years event we have had the joint summer predator evening talks including the Pike Anglers Club, Catfish Conservation Group, National Anguilla Club & Zander Anglers Club all under one roof on the same night which was a great success. Due to the interest in & the enjoyment gained from the Eel overnigher it was decided between myself & Peter Waterfield (North-West R/O NAC) to make the Eel overnigher an annual event, this year there would be a trophy for the biggest Eel caught.

After a bit of pondering it was decided to keep the same venue as last year, for several reasons, car-parking, decent venue for Eels over 2lb whilst being a runs water, miles of fishing, a pub on the bank (always a good thing) & easily obtainable fresh bait. The venue has also in the past produced the odd Eel over 3lb to over 4lb. The restaurant owners kindly permitted us to park a few cars overnight on their car park. The event was promoted within both regions PAC & NAC and via the parent clubs.

Peter Waterfield offered to do the driving so we paired up, we would arrive at tea time to allocate car-parking spaces, (this would also give me time for a pint or three me thought! Well I wasn't driving and I did say this would be a bit of a social too) A few of us had a bit of a jolly in the pub beer garden before setting up, chatting pike, Eels and Catfish and having a bit of a catch up, until the weather changed and the rain set in. Despite the bad weather (throwing it down with rain as it did last year) 9 lads from Region 31 PAC turned up and three Eel 'experts' from the NAC. There was as always a mixed range of ages and different angling types and methods employed. Mark Smethurst from the NAC demonstrated his ultra mobile approach to canal fishing with his push bike and lightweight gear, on which he has previously covered up to 90 miles in a weekend on helping him get to the remotest of spots whilst keeping him fit at the same time! There are plenty of likely looking areas and features to fish to along this stretch and we meandered outwards at our leisure setting up camp every now and again by out chosen features.

My lot came at 11pm, with a confident take on a fish bait promptly missed, the lad next to me Dave Mc C managed one about 1lb 8oz around midnight on lobworm. One of our other lads Keith Dutton found the fish with several runs including a bonus pike coming his way he lost a decent Eel too but managed a 2lb 1oz winning the day, as far as I know unless anyone has gone 'secret squirrel' on me those were the only two Eels caught. Everyone who attended enjoyed the event and myself and Peter Waterfield of the NAC are already looking for a venue to hold next years event and hopefully we will get a bit better weather too. I am looking forward to next years event already.

Tight Lines - Jon Neafcy R/O Region 31 PAC GB - Wigan Piker

St Ives Lakes Fish-in - 18-20 September 2009

The NAC has kindly been offered the chance to fish St Ives Lakes in Cambridgeshire for the weekend. This is ***strictly a members only event*** and members are permitted to arrive anytime after midday on Friday 18 September and should be off the premises by noon on the 20th. Cost is £5 per head.

More famous for its large carp, particularly its most famous resident the Fat Lady, the complex actually consists of 12 lakes, some of which are connected and range from vast open pits to intricate, Lilly-lined waters of a few acres. Ten of the 12 lakes are available to fish this weekend, some of which are only normally available to a lucky few full syndicate members. All contain eels in numbers, with some nights resulting in action throughout darkness, and a number of big eels being confirmed caught by carp anglers this year, this really is an opportunity to see out the eeling season in style. The 2 main syndicate lakes, the Lagoon and the Shallow Pit, are out of bounds but the remainder are all available to NAC members attending.

A full list of rules is available on their website (www.stiveslakes.com) and a copy will be given to all members attending, but the main ones are:

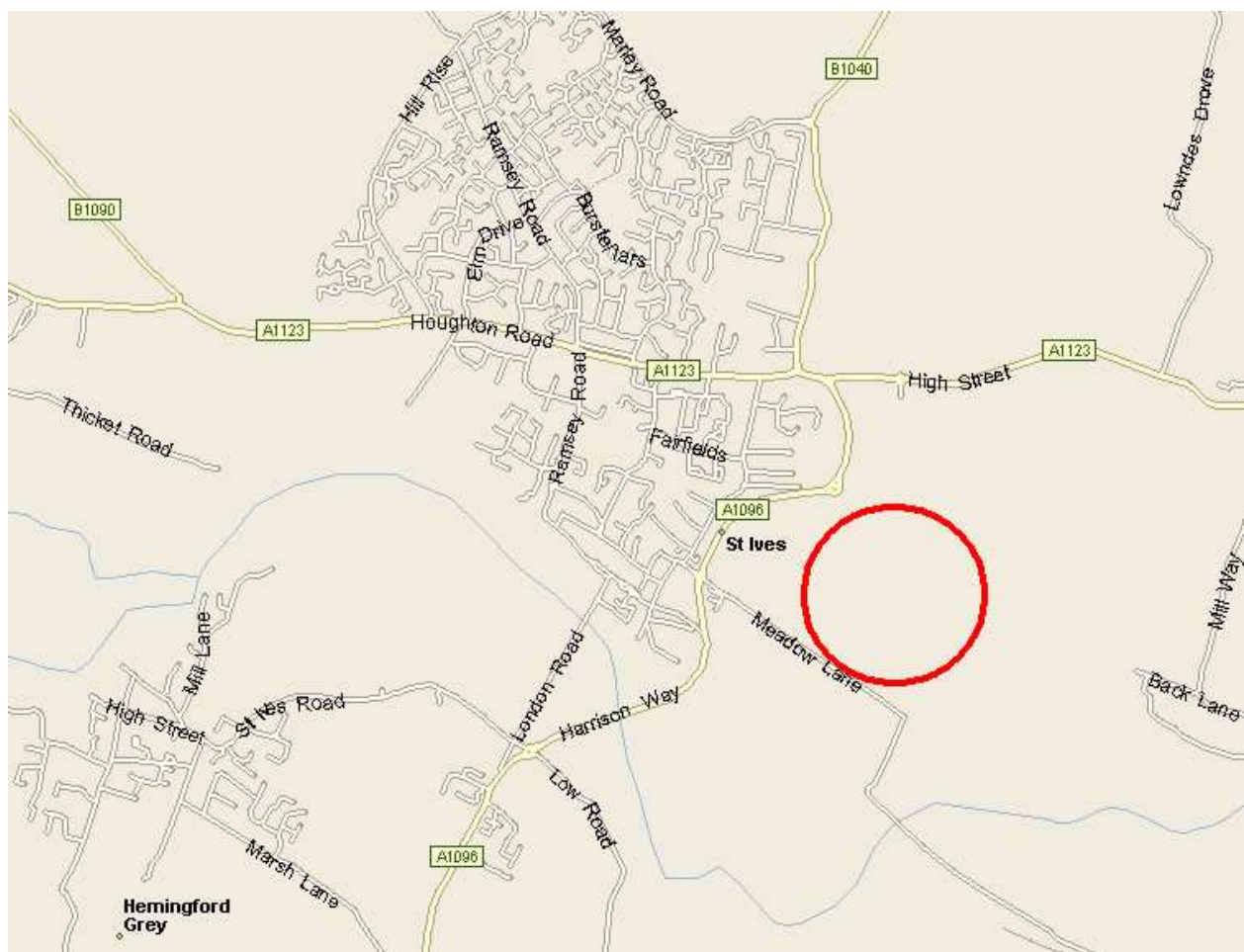
- No more than 3 rods to be used at any one time. Anglers should observe a 2-rod limit on Andersons, Ivo and Lowry's lakes.
- Ensure you have sufficient EA Rod Licences
- Do not leave baited rods unattended
- No livebaiting and do not bring live fish to the fishery from external sites (bait can be caught relatively easily from **some** of the lakes)
- No booze or drugs

The site is large and spread out, but is largely secure and very well run. In view of this, and subject to the weather, a BBQ will be held on the Saturday lunchtime, in the car park adjacent to Shallow Lake.



To book your place, please contact Tug Wilson either by phone (0772 555331) or email (membership@nationalanguillaclub.co.uk).

Directions: Turn off the A14 at the junction signposted for St Ives onto the A1096 (in-between Huntingdon and Cambridge), go straight over the first roundabout, over the river and turn right at the 2nd roundabout (signposted Gravel Works) into Meadow Lane. Drive down Meadow Lane (you will see Meadow Lake on your left), after a while it turns into a rough, pot-holed road, keep going until you reach a work building on your left with Marshalls on your right, immediately after the works car park on your left you will see a big gate with a sign for St Ives Lakes on your left - this is the entrance. You will need to get the combination from Tug to get in. Once in the gate follow the track straight ahead, soon you will see Shallow Lake on your left and the car park straight ahead after a couple of hundred yards. This is where you arrive, but there are numerous car parks throughout the fishery. Post Code - PE27 5JE - will get you to the end of Meadow Lane.



An Interview with Mick Bowles

Rod Hillyer

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICK BOWLES.

By Rod Hillyer.

Today is Wednesday, 8th April 2009. It's a classic early Spring day; sunny, occasional bursts of cloud, with a sharp edge to the brisk wind making it feel colder than it actually looks.

I am sitting beside a lake set in a quiet country park, just outside Southampton. Sat opposite me is somebody who very kindly accepted my invitation to do a one-off interview for Anguilla, after nearly 12 years away from the eel fishing scene.

His name is Mick Bowles.

Mick, now aged 53, was the dedicated secretary to the British Eel Angler's Club for over 17 years, before it eventually folded in 1997.

I last met him in 1992, when I was 18 years old, and he generously drove all the way from Kent to my house in Croydon, where I lived at the time, to sell me his Send Marketing canvas bivvy.

Most of you will have heard of him, some of you regularly fished with him and others have netted his biggest eel to date!!

Mick was long term pals with the late, legendary John Sidley and often fished with him through the 70s and 80s; between them they oversaw the successful "Put Eels Back Alive" campaign throughout this period, that also won John a special conservation award from the Angling Times in the late 80s.

Mick's track record with big eels is second to none.

His biggest is the 8lb beast he caught from Sussex in 1986. This sits at the top of a list that also includes two 7lb+ fish. He quite simply dedicated most of his spare time to pursuing monster eels during the Summer months, when not attending to his full-time BEAC duties. His determination and tenacity to succeed on some very hard waters was incredible.

However, in contrast to the single-minded, serious side of Mick Bowles there is the side that most of us know him for and that is his trademark up-beat and larger-than-life personality.

He is certainly one of the most comical characters I have ever had the pleasure of meeting and he hasn't changed a single bit.

So, here we are sitting in the Spring sun, feeling totally stuffed after a nice, slap-up lunch in the nearby café and Mick is here clutching an old, white envelope.

Inside this envelope are some very special photographs of some very special eels. Some of these have never been published before. I'm chomping at the bit to have a look at them, so let's begin...

RH: *What made you start fishing for big eels, Micky and when was this?*

MB: I started serious eel fishing in 1977. It was after I had spent a bit of time on a certain Kent pit called "Greensands". I drove up to this lake most evenings, parked my car next to the swim and just chucked out a float rod, 5lb line and single lobworm, fishing for anything that came along. I was fishing into night, so I used those betalites glued into the top of my little float. I started catching these large eels up to about 3lb after dark and really liked the scrap they gave me. I was most impressed with them.

With this in mind I went back with scaled-up gear and tried to catch a bigger eel. From this point on all I ended up catching was massive tench!! Yeah, I was getting these big 7lb tench most evenings. One day whilst weighing a big tench this bloke comes along and asks what I'd caught. I tell him it's a 7lb tench and he couldn't believe it. This bloke was, of course, Jim Gibbinson and after this he virtually lived up at "Greensands" catching amazing bags of tench and bream.

My biggest tench from here weighed 8lb and at the time was a gigantic fish.

After this I moved onto "Johnson's" and Leisure Sport AC "Larkfield", Kent. I really had my eel head on now. I cast worms and deadbaits into the deep water and caught eels all through the day. At this time I didn't own a bivvy or sleeping bag. I just sat under an old fishing broly.

Mind you, I wouldn't fish these waters nowadays with the amount of thugs down there nicking your gear!!

RH: *You, John Sidley and Gerry Rogers were the main guys behind the launch of the "Put Eels Back Alive" campaign, which led to the formation of the British Eel Angler's Club. Tell us a bit about this, Mick...*

MB: Well, John launched the Campaign in 1975/76 because even then we felt eel numbers were declining. It was also to educate other anglers to treat the freshwater eel with more respect. I contacted John to see if I could help him out with the project and he invited me up to fish at Westwood Park with him for a weekend. This is about May 1978, now. I remember fishing next to him on the famous dam wall. I think I caught a couple of 2s and 3s. John, as usual, out fished me and caught a huge bag of eels. All I could hear day and night were John's hub caps clanging away as the coins fell after an eel run!! It was a great session; he was quite simply one of the nicest blokes you could ever wish to meet...down-to-earth and always willing to help you out, was John.

Anyway, in 1980, myself, John and Gerry launched the British Eel Angler's Club which turned into a hectic and full-time job for us. It was nice to have a couple of different clubs, the NAC being the other one, for eel anglers because the eel was at last getting the following it deserved.

RH: *When did you meet the infamous Mr. N. Asty, BEAC's very own Scandeel monger (NAC's equivalent is The Mole)? What's his real name and what's he doing now?*

MB: Mr. Nasty was based on a real-life character I met up at Johnson's Railway Lake in the Summer of 1976. He was called "Fat Bob" or sometimes, "Big Jock". He was a professional car thief and controlled a highly organised gang of like-minded individuals!! No joke.

He was built like the proverbial brick house and nobody messed with him. He was Kent's equivalent of the Krays!! A real hard nut.

Now, Fat Bob loved pike and pike fishing. He was fanatical about them and was always bailiffing the Railway lake, making sure there were no noddies fishing for them, for fear of one of them deep hooking one of the real biggys living in there at the time. There were 3 different 30+ pike in this pit, back then; it was an incredible pike water.

When I first met him he asked me what I was fishing for. I told him I was after eels. He promptly told me I was a "loser" (or words to that effect...). You didn't argue with him so I thanked him and called him Sir.

His favourite phrase was " I'll de-arrange your face if you don't put that pike back". He owned a dark green campervan and quite simply ruled Johnson's Railway Lake in the late 70s. His pet hates were transsexuals and noddy float anglers.

What's he doing now? Time in the local nick!!

His non fishing hobby is Violence!!

RH: *Brilliant stuff, Mick...Ok, so you've taken us through the 70s into the 80s, which leads us up to a very special period in 1986 when you landed your biggest eel to date, an 8lb whacker from Weirwood. Talk us through this special session, mate...*

MB: Yeah, well my ambition up until now had been to catch a 6lb eel. I had been up to Norfolk a couple of times and caught a couple of big 4s. These were on small deadbaits from the Broads. One of these 4s was my PB at the time. I remember phoning John Sidley while I was in Norfolk one night to tell him I'd had my first 4!! The mosquitoes up there were a bloody pain in the arse, too.

Anyway, I decided to research a few new waters in my quest for a 6+ biggy. One of these was Weirwood Reservoir in Sussex. At the time this was only open to trout anglers. It was run by a bloke called Colin Simpson, who also controlled coarse fishing at nearby Ardingly, where I had been doing some fishing. I asked Colin if the BEAC could hold a one-off weekend Fish-In for eels in July 86. Surprisingly he said yes and I couldn't believe it because this place was untapped.

It had never been night fished before!! It was also the source of the River Medway which meant eels had access. More importantly at the time there were no pike in there, so the eels had free reign over the tons of little stunted coarse fish present. It was built in the early 1950s, so it wasn't massively old but I just felt it would do a biggy based on neglect, no pike to compete with and massive amounts of food.

On the day of the Fish-In there was only me, Matt Johnson and John Calverley who attended. Me and Matt wanted to fish one bank near the dam wall, whilst John Calverley decided to fish the other bank further down. I must admit when I arrived I really didn't have a clue where to set up. I mean this place is just enormous, it's bloody massive. However, I always remember John Sidley telling me on big waters try and set up near deeper water, especially if there is a dam wall, like at Westwood.

So, that's what me and Matt did. The walk along the dam wall with all our gear was a nightmare...it just went on and on!! We set up a distance away from the wall because of the concrete slipway and dense beds of eel grass lining the adjacent bank.

When we got to our swims it looked bang on. There were masses of fry in the edge and the odd dead fish had been blown into the dam corner, too. I clearly remember the really warm wind blowing into my face, a South Westerly I think. I could even feel the warmth coming off the water.

That night I had been getting runs but missing them. I was getting pissed off because there were stacks of fish leaping all around my baits but I hadn't caught anything. In the early hours I decided to rebait the rod cast long towards the dam wall with 3 fresh lobworms. I then chucked them about 10-15 yards out from the bank towards a huge shoal of fry topping in the dim light coming off the nearby boat house. I set my bobbin and Optonic and started walking down to Matt for a chat. Just as I got to him my Optonic sounded a good, steady trot -off on the rebaited worm rod.

I wound down and hit this run. From the off it didn't feel anything like an eel. It zoomed about all over the place, fighting more like a carp or tench.

I played this fish for a bit and then suddenly everything went slack. I thought I'd lost it and so I cursed my luck and started reeling in very quickly. All of a sudden, just short of the bank, my rod buckles over and I realise I am still attached to something!!

Quickly I pump this fish in and shout to Matt to get my net. Matt then wades in with the net because the water was only inches deep for quite a way out. His remarks throughout the netting process were an absolute classic and went something like:

"Mick, it's an eel"... "Mick, it's a big eel"... then it hits the surface properly, madly spinning around and Matt goes... "****ing hell, it's a monster!!"

The funny thing is as soon as Matt put my net in the water the eel shot like a rocket straight into it!! It must have thought it was a big snag, or a big bed of eel grass or something. Amazing...

Right, so we've got this incredible creature in the net. The first thing we did was walk it right up the grassy bank about 40 yards away from the water, just in case!! We flicked on our head torches and it was an incredible sight. The size 2 hook was nailed in her bottom lip. At this point I knew had my 6+ at last but didn't realise how big!! We carefully transferred it into my specially designed giant keepnet (18' long and 32" diameter rings) and tied the top together about 30 times with a large length of string that I'd saved for this sort of occasion, so the eel wouldn't be able to wriggle out the top of the net.

At first light, we all packed up and properly weighed my eel. On 2 sets of Avon scales it went exactly 8lb. Neither of the buggers with me would give me an ounce over...it had to be 8 exactly!!

I was absolutely over the moon. It's funny 'cos I remember we had to rush the photography of me holding it because a massive thunderstorm was quickly approaching over the dam wall towards us. I could actually hear the big rain drops hitting the water's surface behind me!! Anyway, the pics came out very well, considering.

Amazingly, I still wanted to catch a 6lb eel, even after this!!



Mick Bowles and his 8lb eel from Weirwood Reservoir, 1986. His biggest to date.

RH: *Thanks for sharing that with us, mate. You mention Matt Johnson and it's great to have him in the NAC today and still eel fishing. He must be proud to have been apart of that little piece of eel angling history...Right, moving now from the late 1980s into the early 90s, you soon entered another phenomenal run of big eel catches when you joined a new syndicate water in the "hush, hush" (at the time) Kempton Park vicinity. Tell us about these and why you reckon Kempton was such a good water for big eels.*

MB: This would have been 1992, I think. Yeah, June 1992. I started fishing Kempton with Maurice Steeles, who had been catching some big eels from the place in the preceding summers. Kempton Lake was about 12 acres and anywhere from 12-14 years old.

It was incredibly rich with dense weed beds, full of masses of shrimps and snails etc. I remember it had a very good pH which is why it was so fertile. Now, I have a theory on why the eels grew so big in this place in such a short space of time. After this lake was dug and it filled with water, like I say, about 14 years previous to 1992, there was nothing in it apart from natural weed growth and small snails and shrimps. There is a little brook running alongside the lake on one side which is how the little eels must have got in there. I reckon these baby eels got in and then feasted on the masses of natural life. Eventually sticklebacks appeared but generally speaking the eels had 12 acres of food to themselves!! Later carp were stocked and grew very big indeed but well after the eels had grown to a considerable size.

This is where you can get young waters coughing up big 6s and 7s because the eel's growth rates are quick and unhindered. It's the same thing with lakes where carp anglers are dumping in masses of HNVs and pellets; the eels will wax on the fat over a short period of time.

However, if you're looking for a double figure eel, a real monster, I don't think you can beat fishing a really ancient place, one that's 90 odd years old

because it means the eels in such a venue have had a huge time span to put on weight. If it's really old and full of food, with no competitors, then an eel could grow enormous.

Anyway, back to the fishing...June 92. The 1st night there was this big firework display next to the lake. Well after the fireworks had ended, I caught a magnificent eel of 6lb 11oz on worm bait. This was just as it was getting light, if I remember. I was absolutely chuffed to bits!! This was taken about 25 yards out, against a big gravel bar where a carp angler had conveniently left his marker float from a previous night session!! Just after the 6:11, I had a 3lb 2oz eel on worm bait fished close in under a bush, in daylight. When the bailiff came round he congratulated me and I jokingly told him he shouldn't have gone to all the trouble of doing a welcoming firework display the night before, for me!!...Ha, ha.

One thing I was doing with my rigs at this time was using those Richworth Attracta leads. You know, those leads which you could attach dissolving capsules to, which would release oils and flavours around your hookbait and attract eels in.

Yeah, I was filling my capsules 50:50 with fish-feed inducing oil and the old, discontinued Lazy Ike worm scent. The Lazy Ike worm scent was the best. It was pure liquidised earthworm with no chemicals mixed in. It smelt so pungent and had little bits of crushed worm in it. Amazing stuff it was. Far better than ACE or the other companies that did worm scents. Anyway, I would cast these attracta leads out with the oils and you could see flat spots on the water's surface where your rig landed!! I would sit there, waiting for a run, feeling so confident because of these big scent trails coming off the leads. I wouldn't go eel fishing without my attracta leads, in the end. Brilliant little things. Don't think you can get them now...

So, I had a great result the first weekend with a 6:11 and 3:02. It just got silly after this...

I returned the following week to the same spot and caught another cracker of 7lb 1oz; on worm bait again, cast up to the gravel bar. This was just after midnight.

You won't believe it but the following week I did it again...this time I got a 7lb 3oz eel. Same bait, same spot!!

What was even better with the capture of the second 7 was Steve Richardson was on hand to witness it. Good little story here. He turned up for a session just after I had the 7:03 and congratulated me on the capture of my 7lb'er. I then said "Blimey, news travels fast round 'ere...", Steve comes back with "what do you mean, you caught it last week...". He was obviously talking about the 7:01, not my 7:03!! I took great delight in telling him I'd caught another 7lb'er since then!!

It didn't stop there because the following summer in 93 I had a 6lb 10oz eel along with a couple of 4s, and lost a couple of biggys in the weed. That was the problem with this place. You could wait for days on end for a run, get a take, hook a big eel and then lose the buggie in the dense weed beds. Kempton was a very, very hard water. I caught some good 'uns but the hours involved per fish were ludicrously high.



Mick with a 7lb 1oz eel from Kempton Park, 1992.

That second summer of 93 at Kempton was bloody hard work. I was almost living up there most weeks. It was getting to the point where I was chatting to the ducks and rabbits I was so bored!! That's another problem here. There were rarely any other anglers up there in the week and so there was nobody to talk to. After 10 blank sessions you start to question if it's really worth it. I think after I caught that 6:10 I endured the biggest run of blanks I'd ever encountered. I was hooked on the place and kept thinking if I have a break now and fish an easier water nearer home for some runs, it's sod's law that this will be the time when that real biggy goes on the munch up at Kempton.

In hindsight, after my 6:10, I should have taken a break from the place and fished an easier water for a while, just to get a bend in the rods because I really felt I was burning out of my eel fishing. I was losing my motivation quickly at this point.

RH: *I know at this stage of your fishing it really didn't help you losing a monster at Weirwood, did it? You reckon it was the biggest eel you've ever hooked??*

MB: That must have been about 1993/94, I guess. I was sometimes going straight from Kempton Park to Weirwood, back to back.

On this occasion I had set up in my 8lb eel swim again, I think. I got this run on worm at night and struck into it. It's weird because this fish was just coming in like a sack of spuds in a dead straight line towards me. I got it in to the edge and put my head torch on. There, in front of me, was quite simply the biggest eel I had ever seen. I could clearly see its huge, white belly spinning around and its eyes and mouth. This eel was a lot bigger than my 8!! It was at this point I started mucking around, trying to shuffle my landing net into place with my other hand. Then, it happened...everything went slack and I heard my lead fly out the water and whiz past my ear!! The eel was gone. I was gutted.

I don't like to put weights on lost fish but I reckon judging by that massive girth I saw and comparing it to my 8, that Weirwood eel could have been a "double". I packed up there and then, and went home.

That swim near the dam wall at Weirwood was a good one. I reckon it's because all the natural food and scum gets blown down there and gets trapped in the corner. Basically you've got a mile and a quarter of bank leading down to the wall with stacks of debris and dead food regularly blown in there.



A lovely shot of Mick returning one of his 7lb eels to Kempton in '92.

RH: I know the loss of that Weirwood eel really aggravated you, as it would any of us!! Unfortunately, the burn out in your fishing was coinciding with the BEAC entering a dodgy patch, too. Did this lead to the club folding?

MB: Yes, that's right. 2 or 3 very hard seasons of eel fishing coinciding with me being flat out, running a club on my own (John Sidley had sadly passed away by this time) was really getting to me. You can't run a club the size of the BEAC by yourself. Also, the club subs were barely covering our expenditure in the end.

There was nobody willing to take over the responsibility at the time and I had quite simply had enough. I had to make a decision and sadly it was the end of the road for the BEAC. In 1997 I called it a day and the BEAC folded.

RH: *Thankfully, we still have the NAC and a team of people who have steered this club from its demise. Otherwise there would be no club at all for the eel angler, nowadays. A huge pat on the back at this point for the likes of Nick Rose, Steve Richardson, Mark Salt and Dave Smith who have kept the NAC afloat...*

We're sadly coming to the end of this interview, Mick and I just want to ask if you have any desire to return to angling now or in the future?

MB: At the moment I don't have the time or money to return. This is simply because of increased fishing syndicate prices in my area. I could fish local day ticket waters but invariably they're just commercial holes in the ground, full of stunted, glorified goldfish (carp). The safety factor of fishing locally is a concern, too. There are lots of gangs that operate on local waters and nick your gear. It's even too dangerous to go to my local football pitch and collect lobworms at night, for fear of being whacked over the head!!

If I did return to my fishing, I would adopt an "all-round" strategy. I would fish for different species based on weather conditions. I have the greatest respect for the guys who can wake up one day and say "today, I'm going after big tench" and then the next day, they're chasing big barbel on the rivers.

I certainly wouldn't focus on one species all the time. I've been there before and burnt out.

That's not to say I wouldn't eel fish, again. I most definitely would but it would be split up with fishing for other fish, too.

RH: *Well Micky, that brings us to the end of a great interview. I have been totally captivated by these special episodes of your angling adventures over the last 30 odd years. I know these stories will have captured the imagination of more than a few of the NAC members, too!! All that remains is for me to say a massive "thank you" for this opportunity and I wish you all the very best for the future, mate. Cheers Mick.*

Before I go, I will leave you with some Quick Fire questions that I asked Mick at the end of the day and some of his answers will definitely cause a giggle or two. Enjoy...

"QUICK FIRE" ROUND WITH MICK BOWLES.

1. ***Favourite eel fishing weather?...***Humid, low cloud cover, dull light intensity and a bit of drizzle. Wind coming from the South/South West. You can feel the heat coming off the air and water. Same conditions in which I had my 8 from Weirwood.

2. **Best eel bait?**...Worm bait. Bunches of 2-3 lobworms. You can catch a DB feeder on worm but you won't catch a worm feeder on DB.
3. **Favourite fishing gear for eels in the 80s/90s?**...Rods: PK3s, Reels: Mitchell 4450Zs, 11lb Sylcast line, 18lb Marlin steel wire traces, size 2 Mustad Beak 92641 hooks for lobworms and size 1-2 O'Shaughnessy hooks for DBs, Delkim Optonic conversions with opened-up fairy liquid bottle top bobbins on line with open bale arm. Monkey climbers if it was really windy.
4. **Favourite eel water?**...Westwood Park because it was set in beautiful surroundings and you could always catch lots of 2s and 3s, with the chance of a biggy. Also, Leisure Sport AC "Larkfield" in Kent.
5. **Best remembered eel session?**...Obviously when I caught my PB 8lb eel at Weirwood in 1986 but also at Ardingly in 1989 when I caught 19 eels in one night. This catch was recorded on the old BEAC Fish-Ins video 1989, now redone by Barry McConnell on DVD.



A great head-shot of one of Mick's big eels.

6. **Favourite meal while fishing?**...Luncheon meat and baked beans/spaghetti. You didn't have to muck around cooking luncheon meat and you could use it as bait!!
7. **Longest eel session?**...9 days at Ardingly with Tony Bailey and Steve Markwell in 1989. This was also caught on film on the old BEAC video.
8. **Funniest fishing moment?**...1st one was when I was fishing at Weirwood. There was a trout angler fishing just down from my bivvy. Behind him were these sheep munching on the grass. All of a sudden the biggest ram in the flock bolted over to him and butted him up the arse!! Brilliant. 2nd one was when I was fishing at Leisure Sport AC Darenth in the 80s. I got this belting run and started playing this carp in towards me. It was making a right old noise, splashing around on the top. Anyway, the chap on the other bank, opposite me, shouts across "Yer In??" and I shout back "Yes please, 2 sugars!!". 3rd one was

- seeing an old BEAC member Malcolm Roots fishing on a sloping bank and getting a dropped run, he quickly sat up on his bedchair and launched himself feet first into the lake, like a lifeboat!! Brilliant stuff.
9. ***Favourite “pin-up” lady star you would most like to share your bivvy with?...***Jennifer Ellison (Brookside fame) or Kate Bush, when she was a bit younger.
 10. ***Favourite fishing brew?...***Coffee or Stella Artois.
 11. ***What attributes would your perfect eel water have?...***Nudist camp on one side, house full of nymphomaniacs other side, a railway line next door(for train spotting...one of my non fishing hobbies), track record for big eels, road access for curry delivery/beers, safe to fish with no thugs/muggers and some grass nearby where I can collect big worms at night for bait.
 12. ***Most scary fishing moment?...***1st one was during the hot summer of 1976 at Johnson's. It was in the middle of the night and a massive electrical storm hit us. I was sitting under my bivvy on a metal chair. All of a sudden, a bolt of lightning hit a bush on the island 60 yards away from where I was sitting. The bush burst into flames!! I packed up double-quick and went home. 2nd one was really terrifying and nearly cost me my life. I was piking up at Johnson's in the depth of Winter in 1977. I slipped into the water and it didn't take long for me to start losing warmth and energy. I was desperately splashing around but getting really tired and worn-out. Luckily 3 other anglers heard the commotion and ran round to drag me out. I don't think I had long before I would have eventually drowned. I was very lucky.
 13. ***Best accidental fish captures, whilst eel fishing?...***Pike 23lb, Carp 23lb, Perch 3lb, Roach 2lb 14oz, Rudd 2lb 3oz and Tench 8lb...all on size 2 hooks and wire traces!!
 14. ***Favourite music?...***Trance, House & Garage.
 15. ***What would you do if you won the Lottery?...***I would hire out the QE2, fill it with lots of very nice looking women and take off on a 6 month tour of the world.



Mick with a 7lb+ eel from Kempton, 1992.

THE GUNGE PAGES

BY

"THE MOLE"



The Gunge

Well thanks a bunch to all those people who told Spike they would send him gunge via e-mail as the poor old bugger cannot remember owt lately and unless he writes things down they disappear into the air. As you can gather not much was sent.

Anyway here are the dregs of gossip that filtered back.

Our Gen Sec Mark "Spawny" Salt had a tale to tell re his date/fish-in with Steve Pitts for the article last year. Apparently he put Steve in the "2 six's swim" and left him to it so he could set up himself in the next swim. 15 Minutes later Spawny was seen on the platform pinning a naked Mr Pitts to the ground looking up his spotty arse while Pittsy was head under the water gasping for breath. The excuse was that Steve had dropped his car keys in the lake. Hmmmmmm

In order to keep Pittsy even longer at the lake, by some strange coincidence, his tyres were flat on his car. Hmmmmmm. Beware an invite to fish with

Spawny unless you're into BDSM and water torture.



Port Talbot Docks

The Port Talbot fish-in was interesting when the EA arrived to check licences. In the words of Spike (ALL NAMES DISGUISED) he noticed two suited men walking down the bank and commented they must be EA men. At this point 2 members (one a big eel expert who catch's a few big Zander, is called "Only the Lonely" and the other was a respected pillar of society and superhero nicknamed after a bat) ran the full 200yards to their rods but they had been noted by the EA. Another member who is a respected douser of fires from Cheshire went visibly White as he had a licence but only ONE. Apparently all his waters in Cheshire only allow 2 rods only (crap excuse). Luckily Mark Taylor was setting up and the bailiffs thought the two illegal rods were his. Mark, having blanked over the weekend, did say that the eels caught on the on licensed rods should be his as legally they were. The respected pillar of society and super hero man later owned up to also fishing without a licence in Wales years ago and getting caught. If only his new employers knew of his previous.

While all this was going on Spike was arrested and cautioned coz he didn't have his papers with him. His excuse was that he was deflecting all agro away from the other illegals. He was given stick all weekend to the point he was so that worried about his integrity, he sent a copy of his your OK letter from the EA to all the committee saying all was well and he DID have his licences. Wayne Staddon, who was fully legal, had set up and his home for the weekend was a sight to behold. Take a look at the photo, it doesn't do it justice.

It consisted of an ex army rain coat/paca-mac pegged with old wooden pegs to an old brolly. He even brought a wheel barrow of rubbish with him to blend his swim in with the rest of the fishery. His better half Suzy is usually there to keeps things tidy and boy can't you tell she was absent.



Mr Drabble arrived and much to Barry's, '200yd runner extraordinary' Mc Connell, amusement, his car was sporting pink ponce hubcaps and valve covers. Barry, his long time friend and lover, hadn't seen him for months due to Pete being totally infatuated with his new woman and proceeded to take the Mick. In an effort to deflect the grief from himself he offered Baz a fag of dubious origin and lit it with yet another pressy from er indoors a Pink lighter. They both got wasted on the said dubious substance and later in the day Baz came to Spawnys bive with a, as Spawny puts it, a soft toy zander. He was obviously very relaxed and very happy but not for long me thinks, as once again Spawny was fishing on a platform with thoughts of Mr Pitt's rear firmly in his memory. No more info is available but Barry didn't sit down for the rest of the weekend and carried on talking gibberish much like Pete funny enough. Must be the herbs.

On Saturday at 6.30 am, (in the middle of the night according to Spike), Duffy rang and told Spike he couldn't make it to the fish-in coz he was away with his new love staying in a 5 star hotel and he couldn't speak long coz she was avin a shit. Could spike advise him on mountain climbing as Spike is an old hand at climbing mountains all over the world (He's too f—king old now though). Anyway the mountain Duffy and his girl were going to ascend was the Malvern Hills. Spike told him it wasn't as big as his manhood and he could do it on one leg, Duffy failed and after 4 hours trying, retired to the pub.

Duffy is fast becoming a major source of gunge and in a recent call to Spike, again said he couldn't speak long coz he was painting his misses toe nails. Spike gave him grief big style and good as gold she got the hump and sent a proud photo of her feet.



Duffy is doing pedicures at all the fish-ins from now on. (Spawny may be interested if it is on a platform). He is so much in love he has set up home and turned her house into a “small holding”

(Strangely appropriate see Pink ponces photos of his y fronts) He has chickens and a new sausage dog, all he needs now is a pig and he has a breakfast.

His latest scam is as an eel fishing guide. He has taken out Spawn (Mark Salt), Sully (Dave Sullivan), The shovel (Dave Smith) and son the Trowel, Spike, (Nick Rose) Ade Lees, Wayne Staddon and the Jockey (Mr Wilkes) with everyone blanking. Mind you on Spawn’s trip please prefix a W on Blanking as they were fishing off wooden platforms again.

Duffy again invited Spike to fish a secluded estate lake in Shropshire; Spike was doing his bit at the swamp in a field called “The Go Fishing Show” alongside Barry and Richo promoting the NAC. Barry was selling his DVDs and Rollovers and he paid for the stand. So he arrived just before dark and blanked. Duffy failed to tell him that it was a day water and that the local club members had had 2 fours, threes and a few other two’s during the day. He then proceeded to ponce about in a pink pair of baggy soiled Y Fronts and even had a photo taken with an eel (see pink ponces page) which he says he caught HMMMMM.

The Jockey (Graham Wilkes) attended the winter social and ordered two breakfasts for himself and the superhero Batman. Then told everyone that it was free coz they were throwing it away as it was late. This miffed the rest of the lads who paid £20 each for theirs. Our President then received a phone call later that week from the hotel saying that a “Small, Shifty, Cockney” had not paid up this bill. Steve has now settled their bill and the Jockey “hasn’t”. Eel Presidento is not pleased and £40 short in his pocket. What a brill description of the Jockey though.

The jockey has taken Batman under his wing and took him to one of his local waters to try and catch a PB eel.

He caught a 16lb 2 oz Zander.

As you may have read in the Times the story as told by Batman was, “He as a dedicated Zander specialist used a special new low resistance rig he had invented and like many other zander specialists always insists on freshly killed baits and usually gets” as he puts it “All my success with fresh baits and normally don’t bother with frozen baits, but it certainly did the trick this time.

He carried on. "I targeted an area just yards from his bank and used Barry McConnell's Rollback (wrong name) indicators."

The Jockey was well pissed, they were Eel fishing, and it was his water, his baits, his choice of peg, he even told him where to cast and netted the Zander for him and as Graham put it "NOT A BLOODY MENTION".

Good natured Graham helped out again at the Stanwick fish-in again saved Batman a swim and again caught his bait and told him where to cast and netted the eel at 4lb 4oz. Still "NOT A BLOODY MENTION". Duffy has lost his fish guiding service to the Jockey now. Dave "The Shovel" Smith cannot catch eels during the summer but all he could catch during the winter while Zandering is eels. Maybe he should go fishing with the jockey on one of his guided tours for eels and zander.

Batman at the same fish-in nearly had the local fire brigade there when he sparked up his latest toy, The Kelly Kettle. Smoke covered the lake and every half an hour he managed a single cuppa for the on lookers. Pete Drabble was seen with tears streaming from his eyes but it wasn't the smoke - it was his herbal tobacco falling out of his top pocket and into the lake as he bent over his rods.

The Jockey in his usual small, shifty, cockney way organised a bet at Stanwick, £5 each all moneys to the winner of the biggest eel on the week-end.

Roy "Tax Dogger" Piggott has shown since his Port Talbot fish-in biggy that he has a very competitive attitude to the fish-in biggest prize. On the last night at Stanwick he managed a creditable 3lb 11oz and was spotted skipping round the lake with a spring in his step and a grin on his face. That was until he reached Spikes swim who took great joy in telling him that Steve Richo had had a 4lb 1oz. The look on his face was a picture, he even rushed round to check and asked our Club President if he had weighed it properly and did he want to check it again. El Presidento wasn't really bothered about the cash though as he was just overjoyed to catch a proper fish and not one with barbel. Richos joy was short lived coz as the 10am dead line approached and the cash was slowly edging closer towards his pockets, a yell erupted from the Kelly kettle swim and the Jockey was heard to shout as he netted the eel "Neil WE have won the cash!!!" As yet we don't know if the Small, shifty cockney has released the cash to Batman.

Finally, there is another competition going on in the club between Duffy and our own poet laureate Sully. Take a look at the Pink ponces page and you will see Sully's rather dapper suit. Not to be out done Duffy posed with an eel wearing a pair of baggy, soiled, pink Y fronts and waders. Andrea?, the long suffering wife of Sully, has asked Duffy to stop coz she thinks Sully will get arrested trying to outdo him. Duffy's response was he has no chance as he cannot catch eels that big to pose with. We all wait with expectation.

PS Please send in your gossip and gunge

Already in for the next Gunge, Sully's pink response, photos of Spawny on a platform and the Jockey as you have never seen him before.

The truth is very important but so are lies.

Go for it Lads.

The Mole.



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