

Issue 9  
Mar-May 2016

# Off the Scale



Casting a new eye on angling

# Editorial

It is that time of the year again (already!) when Nature suddenly begins to rouse from her apparent slumber. The fishing prospects for most of you, whatever you prefer to target, will get better and better from hereon in. The trout season is now well and truly open; more salmon will begin to filter into our rivers as time passes; numbers of sea species like bass and mullet (hopefully, see pg 58) will start to pick up; almost all coarse fish will soon be on the munch in readiness for spawning. It's a great time of the year to be an angler...Thats the good news. However, there is much bad news at the moment with regards to over-fishing, pollution and, here in Ireland, the highly controversial subject of predator control.

At the beginning of March, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), for those that have somehow missed the fallout, decided to recommence gill netting once again on selected Irish lakes; namely Lough's Conn, Cullin, Carra, Mask, Corrib, Arrow and Sheelin. I do not apologise for what I am about to say but the situation is absolutely abhorrent. As a true all-round angler and fisheries biologist I am utterly appalled with IFI, their actions and, most of all, their attitude towards pike. To use gill nets to cull pike on these large lakes is sickening for many reasons, least of all because IFI have no scientific justification whatsoever for spending almost €0.25m per year on doing so, killing thousands of fish in the process

- and not just pike either!

IFI continue to kill pike because they maintain that "pike feed preferentially on trout" in these lakes. From a scientific basis (on which fisheries management MUST be based), this is complete rubbish, based only on biased personal opinions and very poor, non peer-reviewed science. It beggars belief that anyone, let alone the organisation in charge of Irish inland fisheries, can believe that pike are the cause of the national decline in trout stocks. To anyone with a modicum of common sense and logic, it is abundantly clear that water enrichment (eutrophication) and quality problems are the major issue, along with the spread of roach throughout Irish systems, which can compete heavily with trout. There is scientific proof for all of this and none that says pike cause trout stocks to collapse. That is not how Nature works. Incidentally, the trout stocks and ecosystems of these great lakes were fine until man started to intervene...

Many anglers, myself included, have had enough of the ignorance perpetuated by certain factions and individuals within IFI on this matter. A protest to end gill netting on Irish lakes (pg 8) takes place at IFI's Headquarters on March 24th. All forward thinking anglers, be they game or coarse fans, need to work together to end the barbarity.

This is just the beginning...

*Bill Brazier*

# Off the Scale

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## Acknowledgments

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Thank you to all the people behind the scenes and our advertisers for their continued support.

And lastly, thank you, valued reader, for your interest.

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Let's all cast a new eye on angling together...

**Cover shot:** A Brown trout being lovingly returned

**Photo credit:** Bill Brazier

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# MY TWO CENTS



**By Dan O Kelly**

Photography by Dan O Kelly & friends

Firstly I would like to try and to explain to other anglers, i.e. not pike anglers, what a big pike from the Western Lough's means, or any big lake for that matter. It all started for me back in the 80s when my father used to bring us to Blessington in the winter to fish for these big green pike things. My father would have favoured trout in the summer but we would try our luck at pike in the winter, with no great success I might add but great memories all the same. I remember walking back to the car at dusk on summer evening after a day's trout fishing and seeing big pike dart out from the side of the shore, making what seemed like massive bow waves to a small boy. These mystical creatures would disappear into the night as quick as they appeared. Well, as you can

**Dan O Kelly is one of Ireland's most prominent and respected big fish anglers, especially in carp and pike circles. His dedication, passion, knowledge and results are almost unrivaled. The following article tries to go some way to explaining Dan's views on the pike control and culling in the great Western lough's of Ireland, places where he has spent a great deal of his fishing life.**

guess this did not take long to capture the imagination of a young lad. This is where my fascination with pike started and to this day has not stopped. Those early days in Blessington, hard as they were with little fish to show for our efforts, were, in fact, a good thing as since then I've never been afraid to tackle big waters. It's a thing that some anglers shy away from but for me it's

just normal.

I'll fast forward a few years now, to when I turned 20 and got my first car. Suddenly I was not confined to lifts or the 65 Bus to Blesso' (to give it its Dublin slang name) anymore and a new world opened up. Although I had great faith in Blesso' at the time, myself and a few angling buddies started to try other smaller waters around Cavan, Monaghan, Meath, Longford, etc. But we always returned to Blesso'. We had good success but it was hard going. After about five years of intense fishing on Blesso' all I had for my efforts was three fish over the 20lb mark. Well appreciated, of course, but we started hearing about another big lake that was producing numbers of big doubles and twenties. A boat was dropped on this lake and a few recce sessions were done. It was quickly obvious that we could get greater numbers of bigger fish from this lake. All faith in Blesso' was lost and all attention was now on this new water. I believed that with the number of fish we were getting that a 30-plus was only a matter of time.

I continued in this belief for a number of years. After the first year we decided to try bivving up. I was fishing four days a week at this time, back-to-back, and was getting fed up with getting up at 5am each morning to drive around Tallaght conducting a wake-up service for my angling besties. Then to have to drive to the lake to launch the boat and proceed down the lake, probably not getting your rods

out till half nine or ten, not to mention the dangers of driving that early in the morning in the winter... So, it was decided that we would try staying over and do some night fishing. Being carp anglers we had the equipment to do it so we did. After the first session, which was in about 2002, we have not looked back.

Over the next seven seasons I clocked up a lot of nights, some winters up to 80 nights. The fish kept coming and many high doubles and twenties were caught but we struggled to get fish over 25lbs. I was getting more into carp fishing and more interested in fishery management at the time and was starting to see patterns in some lakes regarding size i.e. ceiling weights. In most carp circles it is pretty much known what is to be expected from each water and I started to think that this could be the same with pike waters. My attentions started to turn to the Western Lough's and one in particular - the Daddy, the Iron Maiden, the Mecca that is Lough Mask. I started to do my research and borrowed a book from a friend Rory. It was Neville Fickling's re-edited and updated version of the late Fred Buller's *Book of Mammoth Pike*. This book inspired me and I read it cover-to-cover time and time again. I even brought it with me when I fished there to give me inspiration if my faith was slipping on a tough session. After a couple a sessions and soakings the book ended up in bits and I could not with a straight face hand it back to Rory

so I had to acquire a new copy! Rory then sniffed out three articles by Mark Ackerley on his Mask antics which in turn were read, examined, scrutinised. Thankfully Mark did not put in the X and Y coordinates for successful areas. I hate getting details of where best to fish - I prefer to travel around and use my own gut feelings. Getting exact locations I feel are an insult to my water craft and severely lessen the achievement.

So it was in '07 that myself and Noel started to fish Lough Mask. The first few sessions were hard and not what we were used to, but we had expected this and were prepared for it. I had come to the conclusion that I needed to think like a carp angler and not like a pike angler. In carp fishing we will set out at the start of a season with targets, particular fish we want to catch. It's nothing to sit for a week for one take, or even a month or a season to achieve your goals and a lot of the time you don't. I decided that I would adopt this frame of mind for Mask as I knew it was not going to throw up the goods easily. But, if I wanted to beat my PB at the time of 26lb 12oz and get the 30lb+ I had tried for over so many nights, months, years, then I needed a different

**“My attentions started to turn to the Western Lough's and one in particular - the Daddy, the Iron Maiden, the Mecca that is Lough Mask”**

approach and I was fully prepared to take it on the chin to achieve my goals.

It took us four nights before we got our first run; a perfectly formed five pounder was the result for me.

Later that same November day I had a 7lbs trout, a welcome surprise which

I returned with great care and respect.

The following February I caught the same fish about 600 yards away at 7lb 14oz.

Again, I returned it with care. A few weeks later I caught the fish twice more in

two sessions in the same

swim. A few days after that a boat trolled passed me and caught a fish that looked like the same one. Unfortunately a Priest was summoned from the tackle bag and the last rites were administered and that was the end of that. I never saw the beautiful, friendly fish again.

By this time I was working a full-time job and weekends were the only time I could get away so it was long drives on a Friday evening to get to the lake. With the winds the way they are over there sometimes we would not even get to fish the first night and would have to sleep in the cars, which is not much fun when it's full of bivvies and bedchairs and you suffer with whiplash. After a few stretching



excises one morning we set off in the boat for a swim we liked the look of on the previous week. Bivvies were set up, the rods were placed and the kettle was brewing when I got a single beep. I looked out to see an oil patch above one of my baits. It was a strange fight where the fish did nothing till it got close in and then the fight began. Still, shortly afterwards I had it on the bank and it was clearly the biggest pike I'd ever caught. There was a scramble for the scales and camera. We weighed her on two scales and it read 29lb 10oz both

1 - 4. I caught this magnificent 7lb+ Mask trout on four separate occasions before it was sadly killed by an angler fishing for trout. A crying shame.

times. Not the thirty I had hoped for but a PB and it only took seven nights on Mask to beat what I'd done in seven years on the previous lake. Optimism levels shot through the roof, as it was clear that our strategy was right and it was only a matter of keeping the faith and the pressure on and the big fish would come... I went around on cloud nine for the next few months.



5. Seven days on the right water is better than seven years on the wrong water... 29lb 10oz from 2007, a PB at the time.

6. Fishing from the "unfishable swim" was difficult but paid off handsomely

poor years, captures wise. I was not going to let another year slip by so I headed once again to Mask. Noel had gone off the scene at this time and I was joined by another friend of mine, Deego. I had gone out a few days earlier than Deego and was on an island taking in the weather when I had a screaming run. The result was a 23lb 12oz fish which was my 50th over twenty. Due to the bad weather the previous winters my last twenty was in 2010 and I had waited since then to get to the 50 mark.

I stayed another night in that swim and in the morning I caught the same fish again this time exactly a pound heavier. It was clear that the fish were on the munch so it was time to get moving and try and get on other fish. Deego arrived later that day and we headed off to another swim, but not before having a look at an area which looked great, except for the large amount of trees close to the

**"so there I was up to my belly in water fighting this fish on a nice winter's morning with the sun shining - it doesn't get any better than that"**

Again, I'll fast forward a few years to 2012. As we were in the depths of recession the one up-shot was that I now had no job and plenty of time for fishing. Longer trips on Mask were possible now. It's an ill wind that blows no good. The winters of '10 and '11 had been write-off's - the coldest in living memory. Most of the lakes were frozen over and if they weren't it was too dangerous to travel to them, so as a result both were very

water's edge. So we headed off and did a night in our second choice of swim. That resulted in a 12lbs for me and the next morning Deego had the very same fish. All night I was thinking of going back to the unfishable swim; something felt right about it. So we went back and cleared a few spots for the rods and managed to get the baits out.

Eight o' clock the next morning I had a screamer and after hitting the fish I could not make out what size it was as they don't seem to fight much till they get in close on Mask. Due to the amount of trees in the swim I knew I would have to be in my chesties to land the fish. I called for Deego to come with the boat just in case it was required to land the fish. Thankfully it wasn't and I landed it by just wading out as far as I could.

As normal she woke up as she got into the margins, so there I was up to my belly in water fighting this fish on a nice winter's morning with the sun shining - it doesn't get any better than that. After some poor speculation of the weight from Deego

(!), I landed it and it was clearly a nice fish. I knew I was in or around the thirty mark I wanted. I lifted the sling but was suffering a case of shaky hands, then the other rod went off. Deego quickly sacked the fish while I hit the other rod. An 18lb'er was the result of that run and was quickly returned so all eyes could focus back on the fish in the sack. I found a suitable tree to hang a piece of cord, that I carry for such occasions, from. Shaky hands would not be an issue then! The needle landed bang on 30lb. I did not want to call it so I turned the scales round to Deego and said "you call it", to which he replied "Dan, ye know what? That's your 30 there!" My reply was an uncontrollable roar, which surprised even me! For years I had put myself under massive pressure to catch



a 30lb-plus pike and now I had done it. All those years of getting out of bed at 5am, all those nights spent holding the bivvy so that the wind didn't blow it away had all come down to this one moment in time and it was my moment.

I had to go sit in the bivvy for a while to gather myself and let it all sink in. Shortly afterwards I thought it would be a smashing idea to go and get some celebratory beer and that I did. Deego had to go that day so I spent the rest of the day and evening contemplating what had just happened. At 11am the next morning I had another run on a different rod and, yep, you've guessed it, it was the same fish

again, this time weighing 30lb 12oz. That's fishing for you - you wait years for a thirty and then you've got two in a matter of hours!

Fast forward another year and I was back in the same swim, the rods out only an hour and I got a run. It got snagged in something so the boat was required, which Deego did the honours with, and we went out after the fish. When we got over the fish there was a piece of gorse bush that was snagging the line which soon fell off and the fish came up to the surface. We instantly

recognised it as the 30 from the year before. She had a unmistakable mark on the top of her back. This time she only pulled the scales around to 27lb 8oz but was very welcome.

Skip another year ahead in time



now to 2014, the year we had massive flooding nationwide and when the lakes were at record levels. The high coloured water made for poor fishing and between myself and Deego we had clocked up 19 nights fishing with only one 7lbs trout for Deego to show for our efforts. This period involved moving the entire set up every 24 hours to find the fish, so it was a lot of work for nothing. We were fishing in another swim not miles away from the swim I'd caught the big one with mark on her back from the previous two years. At 2am one night I



7. After many years of trying my scales finally settled on 30lb exactly

8. 30lb on the nose. A incredible fish from an incredible water. I caught the same fish again the next morning!

**“That’s fishing for you - you wait years for a thirty and then you’ve got two in a matter of hours!”**

got a run; happy days, the first run in 19 nights. As the fish was pumped closer it was clear that something was not right. White marks could be seen on the fish from a full thirty yards away. There was not much of a fight to speak of and she just sailed in. Soon this behaviour became understandable due to the condition the fish was in. I will let the pictures explain.

The fish had clearly been in a gill net for some time. I'll never know if the fish managed to get out of the net or if it was realised. There was no IFI tag in the fish so I assume it managed to get



9 - 11. A once great fish mutilated almost beyond recognition due to gill nets. She weighed just 21lb 14oz when I caught her on this (the last) occasion. Clearly, she was not long for this world due to her severe injuries. It's an absolute disgrace that this should happen at the hands of man, let alone men charged with protecting our inland waters.

12. Devastating to see any fish, pike or otherwise, in such a state. Gill netting simply cannot continue.

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out itself, or someone did not want to sign their own work. The week before there had been a massive storm and it's possible that it was unsafe to check the nets for a number of days, which then begs the next question - why were they put out in the first place? Ironically, it had a small pike of about 2lbs down its throat, so even in its pitiable state it was still doing its natural duty and controlling the numbers of small pike. The fish weighed a poultry 21lb 14oz and if it was not for its recent dinner it might not have even made 20lb. I ended up catching this fish five times over three years, twice at 30lb+ and once at 29lb, 27lb and finally 21lb 14oz. Yes, this was the same big pike with the mark on her back...

I remember there were figures released years ago stating that a rod-caught salmon was worth €1500 to the economy and a drift net caught salmon



was meagre in comparison. I wonder what a rod caught 30lb pike is worth to the economy? I know a gill net-caught one costs the State money, so where's the sense in that? There is none, never was and never will be. The science is



abundant to prove that it doesn't work and is only cruel. Trying to beat nature is a fool's errand and always will be. But these bias people, which our State trusts to manage our inland fisheries, are blatantly running their own agenda

and using tax payers money to do it (nice work if you can get it I suppose). Incredibly, at the same time these same people putting roach caught in gill nets back. ROACH!!! A highly invasive and non-indigenous species are been

returned and indigenous pike, the apex predator that is Nature's control to fish such as roach, is being removed! I watched them [IFI officers] one day as they removed roach and just threw them back over the boat. You could not make this up. I was expecting the arrival of Jeremy Beadle any minute but he, along with common sense, were nowhere to be seen that day, or any other.

There are many other points about gill netting that will be covered in this issue so I'm not going to try and cover them all. This is, just as the title suggest "my two cents" worth. However, one other point I will make about my feelings on the subject, that I've not seen mentioned anywhere else, is that it's downright offensive and insulting to watch these guys drop nets to kill the very thing that you have put all your energy, effort, time and money into catching; an insult to me as a person and an angler. To have your target species be treated like a second class citizen by people who clearly have no understanding - or choose to have no understanding - of natural equilibrium and balance, who are just pushing their own deluded agenda to tailor massive natural lakes to suit one species of fish, is very hard to take. If you need prove of this you

**"The day that Dr. Pedreschi's paper was published... should have seen IFI put their hands up and say "sorry, we've got it wrong for the last 60 odd years""**

only have to look at the findings of the team led by Dr. Debbi Pedreschi at UCD, which proved (through genetic analysis) that pike are native to this country

and have been for the last 8000 years. IFI will bang on about conserving the trout stocks but they seemed to manage just fine long before IFI where around. The day that Dr. Pedreschi's paper was published, which in fairness poured scorn on previous publications on the

subject, should have seen IFI put their hands up and say "sorry, we've got it wrong for the last 60 odd years" Did they? – No! What they did was to add electrofishing techniques to their pike culling and removal arsenal. So since these revelations about pike being native to Irish waters they have actually stepped up their efforts to remove them.

You couldn't make it up...

DO'K



# STOP PIKE CULLING IN IRELAND



**Inland Fisheries Ireland** continue to spend hundreds of thousands of Euro each year to manage and control pike stocks on selected Irish lakes which support stocks of wild Brown trout through the use of gill netting.

Gill nets do not discriminate and kill all manner of bird, mammal and fish species, including both pike and trout.

An abundance of scientific evidence suggests that this practice does not improve trout stocks, in fact, in many ways it facilitates the exact opposite. If you do not believe that pike should be persecuted and culled in the name of trout preservation then please sign and share this petition! A change in management policy is possible!



# What's your opinion on...



We asked a whole host of respected anglers, journalists, fisheries scientists, angling bodies, federations and stakeholders from all corners of our pastime what their thoughts were on the recent recommencement of gill netting (culling and removal) for pike from selected Irish lakes by Inland Fisheries Ireland. Below are the responses we received prior to publication...

## GILL NETTING OF PIKE IN IRISH LAKES BY INLAND FISHERIES IRELAND

### KENNY SLOAN

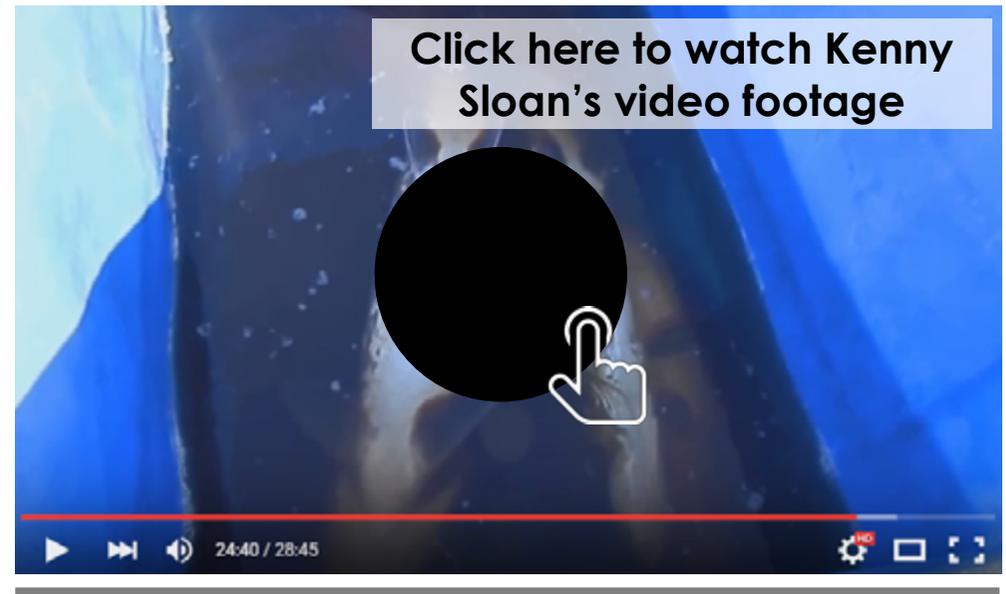
*Salmon, trout and pike angling guide,  
Foxford, Co. Mayo*

I have been guiding for salmon, pike and trout in Co. Mayo for the past 15 years. I host many groups from France, Italy, Germany and the UK. All of the anglers I bring into the region are disgusted at the gill netting/electrofishing for pike [culling/removal] that they see taking place while they are fishing with me on Lough Conn and Cullen. Many come to fish for salmon but also like to try their hand at pike fly fishing. They save up all year to come here and when they see Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) killing and removing the very fish that they are after it does not make sense to them - they do not come back! I pay my taxes every year to fund this scandal and think the very people who do this in my part of the world would be better off patrolling the River Moy and stopping the wholesale slaughter of the

salmon by poachers. I have seen the gill nets set on these Loughs around river mouths where they also capture salmon and trout as by-catch.

From 2008-2014 it cost €262,330 to gill net/electrofish Conn and Cullen in the winter time. It is time to rethink the so called "lake management program" from the Dark Ages and start to bring the tourists back into the West again in numbers. If this practice was stopped, there are many tour operators ready and waiting to send pike anglers to the Western lakes. It would also save thousands of euro's and find those who gill net/electrofish for pike a more responsible job. I am one of four guides in the area who all have the same opinion. It is simply a case of gross mismanagement over a period spanning decades.

The strange thing is that no one will be held accountable for what went on at Lough Conn/Cullen over the many years. Inspector Declan Cooke, who is in charge of these gill netters, actually joined in to help them. Strangely he is listed as an author of the new IFI Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for pike management and control. This does not make any sense to me, or many others.



## NATIONAL COARSE FISHING FEDERATION OF IRELAND (NCFFI)

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The National Coarse Fishing Federation of Ireland do not support the wanton slaughter of wildlife through the use of gill nets, the more so as fish friendly methods of fishery management are available and in use by IFI. We are at a loss to know why this most precious of angling resources is being abused and wasted.

The NCFFI are in favour of fishery management, including the capture and transport of fish. Most of the countries' waters are managed in this way successfully by Inland Fisheries staff and by anglers in cooperation with the IFI.

It has been suggested to our executive that IFI's current plans are limited to seven wild trout fisheries. However, while acknowledging that the practice will no longer be widespread, we view the use of gill nets as barbaric and any use is a cause of major concern. We will continue to review inconsistencies in the implementation of fisheries law and work to challenge them.

We believe in the right to protest for everyone and the NCFFI will complement the public campaign by meeting with the department and politicians if need be.

Meanwhile it is important for our overseas anglers to continue to see the good angling product we have on offer on Ireland's free public waters. We must continue to support the rural communities many of whom rely on the economic benefit of angling tourism. We need to ensure that our challenge to the rules for this particular campaign does not damage the good work and contribution from our clubs across the island and deter the visiting angler from coming back to enjoy our angling.

Quite apart from any ethical question (and there are many) the significant economic value, (€100 million is the estimate for the Irish Pike Fishery alone) should give cause for a rethink.



**GEOFF COOPER**

*Founder of the Irish Angling Alliance (IAA)*

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The Oxford dictionaries' definition of a dictator is: A ruler who has complete power. A person in power who acts cruelly or unfairly. The same dictionary describes a megalomaniac as "craving for or mental delusions of power" If you throw in with that the fact that most of them are, while they are getting away with it, actually pocketing a lot of money out of the folk they are ignoring or selling short, I reckon that pretty well weighs up the bloke that is in charge of Inland Fisheries Ireland.

If we also throw into that mix the destruction of some of Ireland's most valuable assets and the wealth that they used to bring to this country then we've pretty much hit the nail on the head.

The shame and disgrace any normal person would feel would either bring about their resignation or the seeing of sense and make a massive attempt to redeem themselves and put right the wrongs they have condoned during their tenure. This won't happen of course as this does not fit the physiognomy of the deluded.

Consider the world of mega business. The directors of operations for each particular company are judged on their merits and what they have each achieved for that organization. The ones that step up to the mark are amply rewarded. The ones that don't are swiftly thrown into the gutter. I guess you would think that under those circumstances the bloke that oversees the destruction of Ireland's coarse fish, the dismantling of our tourist industry through the sheer bad management of all he surveys plus the turning of a blind eye to certain pollution issues, would have his lords and masters at least asking him what the hell is he playing at. Unfortunately, public office in many cases doesn't work like that - certainly not in this wonderful country of ours. Fiddling whilst Rome burns is an anachronism that instantly springs to mind. The powers that be are either badly informed or on a different planet.

Almost all dictators have the proverbial Achilles heel. It is the fact that they continue to ignore the thousands of ordinary folk that surround them and treat them with utter contempt. Ultimately,

good and honest folk cry 'enough is enough' and begin to work as a body to bring down the perpetrators who miscarry the office in which they stand. I firmly believe that there is now a groundswell of feeling amongst the Irish/UK angling fraternities that is now strong and relentless. We at the Irish Angling Alliance (IAA) are prepared to lead the charge and bring down the folk who blatantly ignore us. The IAA was formed with the object and desire to bring together whatever discipline all anglers partake in with a common objective; to protect and improve what we have here. By having a common goal we can do this.

Let's forget all the petty squabbles between certain factions that have taken place in the past. Forget the clash of personalities. We must now all work together before it really is too late. Go with us at the Irish Angling Alliance. We have the knowledge and expertise to win our case. We are working for you and with you to stop the carnage that is taking place on our great lakes. Help us to turn our angling economy back to being vibrant and flourishing once again. Help us to stop water pollution and bring the miscreants to justice. With the help and backing of the good folk of Ireland and the UK we can now stop the rot.

I ask the question; who pays the wages of the employees of Inland Fisheries Ireland? YOU DO - the tax paying public. Are we happy with how they squander our hard earned cash. You bet we're not. Now is the time do something about it.

So I've written my personal opinions of the current regime – barbaric, and it has no idea of how to manage our precious coarse fish stock. The gill netting controversy is only part of the bigger picture when it comes to the total disregard of our valuable assets. Here is a short resume of my experiences in these matters over the last thirty years...

My first visits to this country were as an angling tourist. I was pointed in the direction of Cartonroy on the outskirts of Athlone by one of the major tourist agencies sending anglers to Ireland. There were four agencies then operating from the UK sending thousands of anglers here. Only one exists now and has had to diversify to stay afloat.

I was told to fish the rubbish tip below the weir in the town.

Rubbish dumped by the local council spread as far as the eye could see. I got there bright and early and set aside the rubbish. Also as far as the eye could see were British anglers on every peg. I managed to find a gap and my first cast produced a bream around 4lbs in weight. The next cast produced a similar fish. Looking down the line of anglers almost everybody else was doing similar. The bream stocks were beyond the wildest dreams of any angler. If you fish there now I defy anybody to catch bream of any description. Where did they go? All now gone, without any investigation by the IFI or any of its regional offices or predecessors.

I fished there for several days on my first visit and to be honest I bored of filling up to three large keep nets every day and decided to visit the canal at Rahan. It was beautiful and almost virgin water. That day I landed over 90lbs of superb rudd, bream, perch and hybrids. It was angling El dorado. From an angling point of view, worth a King's ransom.

Several other lads, on my recommendation decided to give it a go. I'd decided to take a day off and on their return they reported bank to bank dead fish. I visited the scene and I found an area where slurry had been dumped into the canal. I phoned the SHRFB (now IFI Limerick) and told them of the fish kill. The person on the other end of the phone reacted quickly and with interest. I then pinpointed the location. There was a drawn out pause. The person then said, "Coarse fish?" I replied that they were. The person then said, "Oh don't worry if they are only coarse fish" I was staggered, but began to get the picture.

Over the years I have witnessed many awful things. The gill netted fish that were sold to the pet factory at Edgeworsthown by the SHRFB. Dead bream on Lough Forbes in their thousands. Illegal fyke nets, some with dead otters in them plus hundred weights of dead coarse fish with no response from either the old SHRFB or the new IFI. Yes the gill nets HAVE to go but they are just an integral part of the bigger picture. Those that are complicit must now take the consequences.

## LIAM FAULKNER

Save the Brown Trout Facebook group (1400+ members)

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As the founder of Save the Brown trout group on Facebook our aim was to highlight the decline of stocks on both our river and lough systems in Ireland and the UK. We believe this is not solely down to predators such as pike but to many combinations of impacts such as pollution, invasive species like zebra mussels or curly weed (*Lagarosiphon*) and over-fishing by man, to name but a few. The latter, the greatest predator of all needs to be re-educated and shown that the way forward for angling is conservation

By protecting stocks, encouraging catch and release especially during competitions and mayfly-time and reducing bag limits. Mother Nature has given us the balance on everything on the earth, why does mankind want to change it? Gill net is an out-dated and failed method of predator control, catching wildlife such as swans, otters as well as the game fish they strive to protect, Brown trout.

Anglers need to take control and realise that they are the ones who need to change their attitudes. Gill netting is a waste of resources which IFI simply do not have. It is barbaric, bleeds bad publicity and has killed off a lot angling tourism.

Save the Brown trout. Please practice CPR – catch, photo, release.

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## GARY ROBINSON

*Fisheries biologist / journalist*

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Saddened, annoyed, angered, embarrassed, incredulous, mystified but ultimately not surprised. That's is more or less how I felt when reacting to the news that once again, in 2016, gill nets have been rolled out by Inland Fisheries Ireland by way of their latest pike cull. The angler in me knows that this practice is wrong. The Irishman in me is ashamed. The aquatic scientist in me is lost for words....

Ecosystems and the trophic levels within them are controlled from the top down. What this means is the top predators in an ecosystem controls the abundance of lower levels and not the other way round. Apex predators keep the rest of the biomass genetically healthier with their presence, picking off the diseased and dying, the weak and the slow, ensuring genetic lines stay strong by leaving the fit and healthy to spawn. Pike are not the greatest threat to trout and salmon in Irish waters or any other waters for that matter; their presence actually benefits the trout. None of these ideas are radical, fantasy or fiction. They are proven through science and considered sound by the scientific community and accepted far and wide by most modern, forward thinking individuals. A cull of pike is therefore akin to shooting all of Africa's lions in a bid to protect gazelles; it makes no sense!

The ecological damage that tinkering in waterways will produce is matched only by the economic damage the practice is responsible for. Every year **SIX FIGURE SUMS** are spent by those hell bent on removing an indigenous apex predator from it home. Even bigger sums are lost through the loss of visiting angler revenue such is the international disgust for a method of fishery 'management' that should have died off in the 60's. In modern Ireland, these pike culls pander to the minority while flying in the face of the majority.

Finally, what type of message does a practice like this send out to our youths, the future of the sport? In a day and age where an X-Box is nearly always first choice over a tackle box, an antiquated practice of letting part of our heritage be strangled and slowly suffocated does not appear to be appealing to the next generation of angler. Maybe to encourage more children into the sport of angling we should start taking a more modern approach? Stop the decades of lies and rhetoric when it comes to pike in Irish waters. They are something that should be cherished and protected, not persecuted and exterminated. They have their place in the ecosystem just like every other inhabitant and although it has been completely overlooked by some, the ecosystem services that they provide to the nation cannot be underestimated.

Gill netting and predator control – no sense, no logic, no point.

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## NATHAN EDGELL

*B.Sc (Hons) Countryside Management; professional UK angler*

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Ireland is famous for its stunning countryside, history, lovely people and, of course, angling. With no closed season, its angling history and fantastic waters are a Mecca for anglers worldwide. To see gill netting practices (which cannot only affect pike but all other types of species too) is truly a tragic and barbaric shame in this day and age. It's well known that nature finds a balance within any ecosystem and removal of species and interference within that system will only upset the balance to the detriment of the fishery. Consequently, all species will suffer as nature fights to restore the balance. Please stop this practice now!

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## MARTIN SALTER

*Former MEP; UK angling journalist*

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It is nothing short of appalling to see the IFI reneging on promises made last year with the Irish Federation of Pike Angling Clubs (IFPAC) and the trout federations to phase out gill netting on Lough Cullen, and the other Western lakes and Lough Sheelin.

Gill netting is a dreadful and indiscriminate fishery management tool and leads to a huge amount of by-catch of other fish, many of which end up dead or injured. I understand that IFI spent a significant amount of money importing electrofishing boom boats from the States last year so they could specifically electrofish small pike, instead of indiscriminately killing larger pike and coarse fish as well as the very trout they are trying to preserve.

Over here in England one of our best trout reservoirs at Chew is also the country's premier pike water due to the large stocks of roach and perch which make up a large proportion of the pike's diet. And of course big pike love to eat small pike so why doesn't IFI simply stop wasting public money and let the fisheries flourish?

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## ROSS MACKLIN

*Ph.D candidate Freshwater ecology; Environmental/  
fisheries consultant*

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The boom and bust patterns of zebra mussel and roach are the main protagonists in the cascading cycles in many Irish lakes, as has been shown in the literature. These invasive species in Irish lakes help regulate the stasis of lakes from the bottom up (i.e. cycling of nutrients, zooplankton etc.). Large-bodied, low density of top predators would be the desirable stasis in mixed stock cyprinid, percid, salmonid fisheries. Stability would come if nature were left to balance itself out, and with the increase in poaching and other pressures the removal of pike has helped change the stasis of the large wild lakes. Large pike will eat large fecund roach and help reduce roach recruitment and therefore are very beneficial in regulating a pelagic fish stock that is harvesting zooplankton. Interestingly, there has been no link made between roach and the reduction in the mayfly hatch. It would seem plausible that roach, when in an upward cycle of numerical abundance, would crop mayfly in addition to zooplankton, thereby impacting trout stocks negatively.

The decline in salmonid spawning tributaries is considered the primary impactor on salmonid recruitment to the large lakes and efforts should be focused on salmonid river enhancement instead of other methods. The abolishment of schemes such as REPS and the projected increases in agricultural output with Food Harvest 2020 may result in the decline of rivers and streams running into the lakes further, in addition to the continuation of new and existing catchment pressures. Anglers in Ireland, including pike anglers, want to conserve trout stocks and also pike stocks. It would seem that conclusive evidence on the effect of pike stock management would be best achieved by placing a moratorium on the culling and reviewing after a period of time to establish evident changes in the stasis of mixed stock fisheries objectively.

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## NARA (NATIONAL ANGLERS REPRESENTATIVE ASSOCIATION)

*Representing game/trout angling clubs across Ireland*

In 2012 an expert group met to draft Inland Fisheries Ireland's Pike Policy Document and Brown Trout Policy Document. Executive members of the Irish Federation of Pike Angling Clubs (IFPAC) participated on this expert group and fully supported both policy documents. The Pike Policy Document and Brown Trout Policy Document set out the framework for pike management on designated managed brown trout fisheries. The group accepted that scientific evaluation had demonstrated that necessity for controlling pike stocks in designated managed brown trout fisheries. A list of these waters is contained within the Brown Trout Policy Document. In accepting the science the group recognised that IFI have to undertake pike removal exercises in the designated trout lakes. The pike policy expert group also recognised that pike management on the designated trout lakes involved the removal of pike by netting and / or electro fishing.

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**\* Many other anglers, stakeholders, bodies and organisations were asked for comment but the above are only the responses we received prior to publication. Some declined to officially comment on the issue of gill netting/predator control in Irish lakes.**

**Notably, Dr. Greg Forde, Head of Operations at Inland Fisheries Ireland failed to issue a response on the matter.**

**Disclaimer:** all of the views expressed above are those of the authors/bodies/organisations themselves and not necessarily those held by Off the Scale.



**“THE SECRET OF  
CHANGE IS TO  
FOCUS ALL OF  
YOUR ENERGY,  
NOT ON FIGHTING  
THE OLD, BUT ON  
BUILDING THE  
NEW”**

~ SOCRATES

We asked graffiti artist **DUSTO** for his views on the recommencement of pike gill netting... This was his response



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By Jason Nash  
Photography by Jason Nash & friends

## TURNING GREY TO SILVER

Looking down river on a bleak spring day, with dark, low lying clouds and skeleton-like trees lurking above you, the water beneath looks empty and devoid of life. Peer a little closer and quite the opposite is true. The fast flowing river and its salmon are currently in a state of transition; eggs tucked away under inches of gravel are developing into alevins as their spindly, meagre parents, worn from their travels and combat, peregrinate their way back to sea for a much needed and deserved meal. In turn, out in the rough waters of the Atlantic, exuberant, sparkling spring salmon are homing in on their natal river using the earth's magnetic field, the river's unique chemical smell and pheromones released by resident fish, to spawn the next generation of salmon.

For the game angler, it's time to dust down the rods and get the gear ready for the new season ahead. It's been a long winter, with many pondering how trout and salmon redds have fared during the winter floods. Quantifying the damage incurred is difficult to say the

least, but all is not lost. 2015 in general was a very wet year, in comparison to the previous two. Salmon and trout had easy access to the spawning grounds for much of it and my observations on the Bandon showed there was very little spawning on the lower catchment. This is positive as the

hydraulic power of water lower down a river is much greater than that experienced upstream. Studies conducted by the Spey Fisheries Board in Scotland portray the flexible growth strategy of juvenile salmon parr. Smolt production following a large spate(s) is reduced. However, year classes

of surviving fish grow much quicker and exhibit higher survival rates due to less competition, mitigating to a large extent the loss of smolt production by the second year following a spate event.

Fishing in spring is a cold affair. High water dominates, with low water temperatures governing the early months, up until April at least. Summer tactics are a thing of the past and will not yield many positive results at the start of the year. Spring salmon are a sight to behold, creatures of beauty and epitomise what salmon are all about. Having spent at least two winters at sea feeding, they are pristine and much coveted by fishermen. To have the chance of latching onto one of these special creatures, the right techniques must be engaged. For me, fly fishing



and spinning are the only two methods I would consider using on a quest for an early springer. Prawn/shrimp fishing is something I have tried in the past and rarely do now. Worms, whilst useful and a great bait, have no place in spring fishing for me. Too many kelts (previously spawned salmon) are migrating back to sea and trout at this time of year are ravenous. If I chose to fish the worm my chances of hooking one of these would be far greater and it is not what I

intend to do. If the water was low and I spotted a definite spring fish resting in a pool then an allowance would be made (with a quick strike once a take is felt) but otherwise the worms can wait until later on in the year.

Firstly, I will cover fly fishing. As mentioned already, summer techniques are based around moderate flows and average to high water temperatures. To expect spring salmon to react the same way as summer salmon

1. Likely water for a springer - a series of pools on the upper reaches of the River Drowes in Co. Donegal.

2. Don't be afraid to use big, flashy flies to grab the attention of a springer.

to the same methods of presentation is a mistake. Water temperature is a limiting factor to a salmon's movement. In the early spring, you can expect temperatures to be generally between five and eight degrees Celsius. Lethargic spring salmon hold station low in the water column, using their pectoral fins

as hydrofoils to hug the boundary layer where the speed of water isn't as fast as it is on the surface. Remember, these creatures don't feed and won't spawn until the end of the year so conserving their energy is a survival strategy. When temperatures are around four degrees and lower, a salmon's swimming speed is diminished the



“When temperatures are around four degrees and lower, a salmon's swimming speed is diminished, which is why fishing below weirs and rapids is so successful at the start of the year

If this page does not display, then  
click or double click the image...



5. Waiting for the take, with a loop of line ready to be released as soon as a bump is felt.

6. A quartet of Flying C's ready for battle. Colour of body and blade will change to suit water and weather.

the matter is, fishing flies won't cover every conceivable situation. Many pools, on smaller rivers especially, have areas which cannot be reached with a fly. Quite often river height and clarity early on in the year are unsuitable for effective fly fishing so spinning tactics may be employed. As much as one likes to limit one's self to the fly, to do so deprives you of the opportunity to cover fish at a time

when they are scarce enough. For this reason, more often than not, I carry a spinning rod with me at this time of the year. There is much more to this method than mere chuck and chance. The same golden rule for fly fishing applies to spinning; depth. Even though you have a 20 gram spinner attached, if you cast it and simply retrieve than

you will not reach the required depth. To do so, you must let your lure sink, cast upstream or both. Combing a pool when in flood, think of the depth and the structure which you observed during the low summer months in your mind's eye. Let the spinner sink where needed and retrieve slowly. If you're not

bumping the bottom than you probably aren't fishing deep enough and although you may lose some lures, when a salmon strikes the losses are quickly forgotten. Use your rod to impart life in your lure in areas where the water isn't too fast or when the spinner is downstream of you. Pausing or slowing down your

retrieve and jerking the tip of the rod breaks up a monotonous straight retrieve and the fluttering of the spinner can induce a take. As a bonus,

using your rod like this means you are winding up more slack line which as a consequence, takes pressure off you reel and back!

For spinning, a 9 or 10 foot rod, rated for 10-40 gram casting weight, is perfect. A rod of this length gives you the power to play a strong spring salmon and fish heavy

spinners in high water. Anything much longer is too soft and will put unnecessary stress on your reel. With regards to the reel, buy quality and strength. Cheap,



5

bigger the fly. A big fly is classified as anything around 3-4 inches in overall length. Tied on plastic, aluminium, copper or brass tubes, every situation will be covered. Patterns should be limited to proven fish catchers as opportunities to cover early running spring salmon are limited. Due to the weight of the flies and the desire to fish at depth, short leaders are necessary. If you

have too long a leader, the fly will be nearer the water's surface and will negate the purpose of the sinking fly line. A leader of 3-4 feet, comprising 20-30lb breaking strain fluorocarbon, is perfect. If the river level drops and the clarity is gin clear, reduce your sinking line rate, size of fly and lengthen your leader, tapering it with lighter fluorocarbon.

The fact of



6

“If you're not bumping the bottom than you probably aren't fishing deep enough and although you may lose some lures, when a salmon strikes the losses are quickly forgotten

## MAIN DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF A KELT



- Thin shape due to not feeding for an extended period of time
- Flat, hollow belly
- Distended vent post spawning
- Presence of gill maggots on the red gill filaments
- Fins and tail may be damaged or torn

7. A strong, reliable reel is needed to fish a heavy spinner effectively in high, cold water.

8. A pristine spring salmon. Perfect reward for after much patience and perseverance.



small reels will not see the summer if regularly used for spinning in high water. I have a Shimano Spheros, in the 6000 size. Designed for saltwater use, features such as X-SHIELD and X-SHIP offer gear durability and protection against

water intrusion. Its size and gear ratio mean I can retrieve the spinner as slow as I want without putting stress on the reel, thus increasing its longevity. Load the spool with strong monofilament of 15 to 20lb breaking strain and attach a

swivel 3 feet above the spinner to eliminate the risk of knots and tangles.

As for spinners, the ever reliable Flying C has enticed countless salmon over the years. For spring work in high water I only ever use 20 gram (Size 4) lures

as anything lighter doesn't gain the required depth. Casting with these is easy and loads of water can be covered quickly and efficiently. Two colours dominate the early

season; yellow and black. As mentioned already, these colours command the colour scheme for attracting spring salmon. Although there are exceptions, during brighter days the yellow excels, whilst on duller days the black comes into its own. In coloured water, salmon find a copper blade more appealing and in clear water the silver blade takes over. Using a clip to change lures is extremely useful as I often find myself chopping and changing during the course of a day. Time and again this versatility has paid

off when fishing with friends who may stick to their initial choice throughout the day! Being in the right place at the right time goes a long way in salmon fishing and none more so than in the spring time. The first salmon entering a river are programmed to run to the upper part of the system and will travel the furthest of all. The upper and middle sections of river are where most efforts should be concentrated as this is where the majority of fish intend to stop, take a breather and rest. Only a handful of Irish rivers

receive a sustained run of these magnificent early fish and most of them tend to be lake fed, such as the Caragh in Kerry and Drowes in Donegal. On these rivers and elsewhere, determination and patience is needed. Adapt to the salmon, think about where they may be in any given condition of water and an elusive, fresh, silver reward will eventually transpire.

Good luck!

JN





*Nothing* makes a fish bigger than almost being caught...



# *Skipper's Diary*

A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT THE LIFE OF A CHARTER SKIPPER

With John Fleming

**G**iven the unforeseen weather of last season, we look eagerly forward to the 2016 season, which has already gotten off to a great start with big specimen pollock and coalies falling to jigging tactics. This season is shaping up to be a great one with bigger prospects and bigger fish to target.

## **NEW SEASON GOALS**

With the new season under way we have decided to going to put a strong emphasis on getting a lot more species, both big and small, on the boat. Also a big effort will be made to try and get as many specimens (as ratified by the Irish Specimen Fish Committee) as we can.

Looking constantly at charts and researching new ground will bring more prospects and that's what I'm aiming towards.

Skate are going to pay a major part of this seasons angling as we have located the ground they are in, happily hiding well away from areas of the seabed that can be netted easily.

Again on the slightly rarer side we are going to be targeting porbeagle in a big way as well. We will also be trying to get as many days at anchor as we can, drifting for the likes of plaice, turbot, brill and ray to add to our ever growing species list. There are still a lot of superb sea angling opportunities off our shores if you look hard enough in the right places, at the right times.



any harm to the fish.

Another day in particular which always comes to mind when speaking about shark fishing; the day we saw our first specimen being taken since I started the business. It was a huge fish, measuring at 2.03 metres and weighed approximately 109lbs, using the

weight/length formula. It had the largest head I have ever seen on an example of the species. It was a beautiful looking fish too, sporting a silvery grey belly with a fantastic shade of dark blue on its back. It was caught by a good friend of mine David O Malley from Newport Co. Mayo. It took Dave approximately an hour and fifteen minutes of long fast runs and hard pumping to land that fish. It was promptly photographed, tagged and released. That same day we had another nine sharks all of which were a good average size of 70-80 lbs. It was a day I will never forget as a skipper and something I am glad that I could have been a part of. Its days like these that make being a skipper so rewarding.

## SHARK SEASON 2015

Last year's sharking got off to a magnificent start, once the weather eventually settled down. Our first day out in early June saw four decent blues to 86lb, and it kind of carried on like that with the number of sharks increasing every day we managed to get out.

Interestingly, we saw a huge number of small blues ("pups") amongst the big boys. In fact in one stand-out day we had sixteen blues below 30lbs which is a fantastic sign for the future as it shows the stocks are strong and increasing. These small fish have a wicked temper nipping at anything! We ensured they were released as fast as possible to reduce



### ABOVE LEFT

David O Malley taking the strain of a big blue on a calm, misty morning in Galway Bay

### ABOVE RIGHT

Our biggest shark last year which topped 109lb! A seriously impressive fish

### RIGHT

And measured 203cm in length!



“ “ ***There are still a lot of superb sea angling opportunities off our shores if you look hard enough in the right places, at the right times***

Once September came we started to see the size of the fish was greatly increasing with a lot more sharks of around the 90lbs mark coming to the boat. We also had two more specimens (fish weighing over 100lb and or measuring over 190cm) between September and October. Getting one was fantastic but two more - I wasn't expecting that to be honest!

We were also blessed with unusually warm waters in the late part of the season which saw days at sea fishing for shark go on right until late November. Actually on our last day out before the weather finally broke we managed seven lovely blues up to 80lb.

If the water temperature ever stays up like this it means we are blessed with an extremely long season; a whopping six months to fish for them, which would be absolutely fantastic if it happened again this year.

We were very happy the way last season worked out with no less than 74 blue sharks caught and released.



““ *That same day we had another nine sharks...of a good average size of 70-80 lbs... It's days like these that make being a skipper so rewarding*

**TOP LEFT**  
A typical good-sized blue about to be measured

**TOP MIDDLE**  
Sometimes it's not such a hard life!

**TOP RIGHT**  
Who said this was a good idea?!

**LEFT**  
Another happy customer!

## SHARK SEASON 2016

With what we have learned from last year's angling we are really going to be honing in this year, knowing that we can start the season earlier and finish later than many would suggest. Also by learning that different areas at different parts of the season fish better than others means we will be able to put our customers on fish on a more regular basis, which is of course what my job is all about!

One helpful tip I will share with you is that using mono on the top half of the (up) trace did not work for

us at all, as fish rolled up and broke it a few times. So we changed tackle and now use a fully stainless steel trace with Mustad 12/0 circle hooks with the barbs shaved down for easy un-hooking. In angling you are always learning new things...

For the season coming I wish you tight lines and be sure to enjoy it because I know I will!

Until next time,

JF



### RIGHT

Hopefully we will see many more scenes like this in 2016!



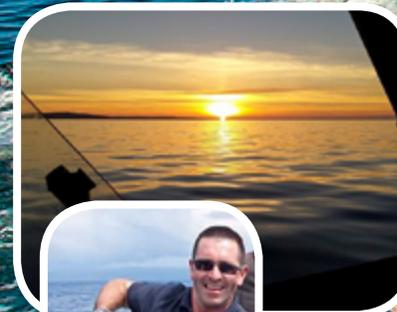
“Skate are going to pay a major part of this seasons angling and...we are going to be targeting porbeagle in a big way as well

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# THE DIARY OF A FISHING FANATIC

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**By Karl Bohan**

Photography by Karl Bohan & friends

DESMOND, GERTRUDE, HENRY, IMOGEN... DO THESE NAMES SOUND FAMILIAR? THESE FRONTS HAVE VENOMOUSLY SCATHED OUR LANDS SINCE THE TURN OF THE YEAR. HIGH WINDS AND WIDESPREAD FLOODING WERE A COMMON THEME, MAKING FOR SOME VERY CHALLENGING ANGLING CONDITIONS. BUT TO ENJOY ANYTHING WORTHWHILE THERE MUST BE SOME DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING IT. SUFFERING THE MISFORTUNE OF A BROKEN FOOT UNFORTUNATELY CUT SHORT MY ANNUAL PIKE EXPLOITS TO A MERE FOUR OUTINGS. BUT ENOUGH NOW OF THE EXCUSES...

I MET WITH LONG-TIME FRIEND AND ANGLING COMRADE JAMES BOURKE AND OVER A FEW PINTS WE THRASHED OUT A PLAN FOR THE COMING WEEKS - PIKE OBVIOUSLY BEING THE TARGET. WE AGREED ON THREE VENUES, ONE OLD AND TWO NEW. AND SO THE DATES WERE SET AND AS ALWAYS OPTIMISM LEVELS WERE REACHING FEVER PITCH. FINALLY WE WERE ON ROUTE TO IRELAND'S PREMIER ANGLING COUNTY, A PLACE CLOSE TO MY HEART, LOVELY LEITRIM.

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**LEFT**

A misty late winter day dawns on a secluded Irish lake and hopes of encountering a pike or two are high

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## VENUE ONE

An hour before dawn we found ourselves trudging head-on into an oncoming blizzard. Loaded with gear and with spirits invigorated on this fresh January morning we set off across the solid meadows en route to the water's edge. Wayward tufts of frozen rushes filled our sights, temporarily paralysed by the icy northerly wind blowing in across from Slieve Anierin. All Flora trapped in an anguished state, all Fauna well and truly hidden away for their winter slumber. For it has been said the Drumshanbo wind when blowing from the north can be felt throughout Connacht and its icy fingers know no boundaries.

With neither of us having fished this lough before, we were here more in hope than expectation, with static ledgered dead baits being the order of the day. After a simple "leading around"



### ABOVE

It was a little bit wintry, with a full blown blizzard for most of the day!

### FAR LEFT

The only run of the day materialising on our first venue

### LEFT

One bite, one fish, one 14lb'er from a new venue. We deemed it a great success whilst questioning our sanity at the same time

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“ And now for the almost impossible task of boiling the kettle, 80km winds and intermittent snow showers were making life very difficult

exercise I was happy with the visual image of contours I had built up in my head. A 14ft plateau extended out 20 yards before dropping to 22ft. As good a place as any to cast some baits to. Typically at this time of year (January) you would expect to find the pike in the deeper water but with the temperatures having been so erratic it would not be uncommon to find them already moving up to the shallow areas in preparation to spawn.

And now for the almost impossible task of boiling the kettle, 80km winds and intermittent snow showers were making life very difficult. But we managed with the aid of the brollies to get the tea made, an essential part of fishing in my book. The day dragged on as often does when huddled under a brolly in bad weather waiting on a run which may or may not come and often times spirits get low. After several recasts each and with about an hour of light left my left hand Delkim lit up with a furious take. I bent into the fish and soon enough a rod buckling 14lber was safely guided into the waiting net. Not the monster I had so vividly landed in my dream the night before but it was a fish and a decent one at that. A few snaps and she went powerfully back into the icy water. Sadly that was all the action we encountered and an hour after dark we decided to throw in the towel and begin the uphill hike back to the car. New venues are always tough and I suppose to catch at all must be deemed a success...



**FAR LEFT**

Our next venue was frozen solid and we had to work hard with oars and the engine to clear enough space to fish. Dedication!

**LEFT**

Dropping our baits out after the thaw

**BELOW**

A hard earned fish taken on smelt mid-morning. It was the start of a good run of fish for both James and I. They don't have to be big to be fun

rest of the gear, prepped the rods and boiled the kettle in anticipation. Almost a full two hours later I had created four pathways from our base to various locations extending as far as 100yds from the bank. Obviously a considerable amount of effort required but strangely therapeutic all the same. Lost in the morning mist with not a sound to be heard. I find it hard to simply sit behind alarmed rods at the best of times so this was a nice distraction.

With the four baits dropped in various depths and locations it was now time for a hard earned mug of tea. And surely enough just as I sat down and

**VENUE TWO**

James and myself set off long before night had relinquished its icy grip on the sparkling overhead canvas. We were heading back to a venue we were familiar with in hope of results. A widespread sharp ground frost had us fretting on route to our chosen venue. Once parked up and the usually visible lough was obscured by a freezing fog that hung in the still morning air. This truly is a place untouched by the outside world. Clumps of frozen snow clung to the boughs and limbs of the naked trees. Our worst fears were confirmed on upon reaching the water's edge. The lough was sealed shut with a firm lid in place. We had driven over two hours and the likelihood being that most if not all the lakes in this area be frozen solid. With the Shannon so badly

flooded, to fish a river just wasn't an option.

After a little discussion I suggested we use the dingy to break a pathway through the ice out far enough to place some baits. We both agreed it wasn't an ideal idea but turning back now didn't come into the equation. So it was agreed. We pumped the boat up beside the van and carried it the 100 or so yards to the water's edge. I mounted the transducer and engine while James broke the ice in the shallows in order to get me afloat. Armed with a robust extendable bank stick I set off clearing a path in front of the dingy and rowing along. All the while James carried down the



opened my sandwich one of my rods took off with some impetus. The smelt at 70 yards having been engulfed by an angry 8lber. It was a start and hopefully a sign of things to come. But as I have found over the years in my experience, if the first fish of the day doesn't break double figures it usually means a day of Jacks and possibly low doubles. Obviously we hoping for at least a mid to high double but to be honest we were kept that busy catching pike we weren't all that bothered!

By midday the light S/W wind had thawed the lake almost entirely and the high piercing winter sun that had burned off the morning mist was now gradually loosening Jack Frosts grip on the lough meadows. A pair of Pied wagtails foraged eagerly alongside us, disappearing momentarily only to return again. The chances of a man placing salt on ones tail filled my mind as I watched them flitter about in the joyous winter light. I believe actually catching the fish is maybe only half of where the angler derives their pleasure from and in fact it is the angler who is unknowingly caught in a web spun by nature itself., willingly held prisoner and entranced by the ever changing ambiance it pervades.

I think the final count was around eleven fish between us all taken on either pollan roach or smelt baits. James managed the fish of the day with a pristine 14lber. An enjoyable session with a couple of low doubles showing. Just as the winter light began to fail we

packed it in. Standing at the roadside gazing back down towards the lough we both ,without saying a word were thinking of the mysteries its darkened water has yet to reveal. There shivered a pure sky as pale as ash as the last remnants of light crept down behind the trees. My suspicion was Jack Frost had just awoken from his slumber and as an icy sky loomed over us I feared the flora were to be once more locked in a state of anguish.



#### FAR RIGHT

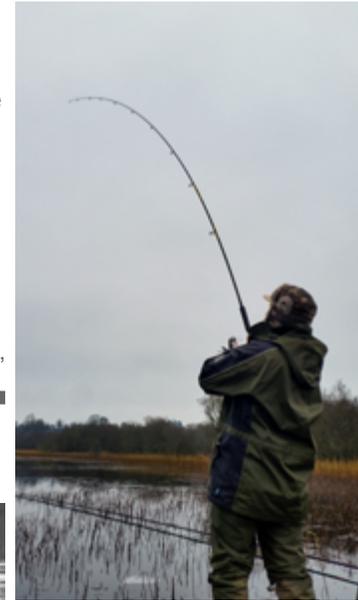
All eleven of our fish from venue two fell to popped up herring, pollan or large smelt

#### RIGHT

James strikes into the largest fish of the day

#### BELOW LEFT

James with his snow pike, all 14lb of it.



## Thoughts?

*OtS: You hook your deadbaits differently to a lot of anglers, Karl. (see above). Usually the top treble is pushed through the tail-wrist of the bait but you thread your trace through the body of the bait so the hook sits further up, towards the head. Why is this?*

*KB: My thinking is that having the bait threaded on prevents losing soft, oily baits on the cast. The fact that the hook is further up the fish may seem reckless given the pike swallow head first but I've honestly never encountered any problems with deep hooking. It also enables you to hit runs almost instantly and hook the pike while the bait is still sideways in their mouth. I know some people count or "feel out" the run/take but I always hit them as quick as possible and nearly always connect*

“ I believe actually catching the fish is maybe only half of where the angler derives their pleasure from...

## VENUE THREE

This was to be my final outing before undergoing surgery on my foot. With this clearly at the forefront of my mind I suggested to James we fish another known venue as the thoughts of being laid up for 6 weeks having ended with a blank was my idea of hell! James as always being very easy going agreed and so the date was set. Thursday, February the 18th. On Arrival to our chosen swim we discovered it was two foot underwater, but obviously not enough to deter us. It was a beautiful misty morning, a thick foggy cloak hung above the water and the dawn chorus was carried eerily through the still morning air. We were feeling ridiculously optimistic as always. Again four ledgered baits were cast to the desired locations and the alarms were rigged. The first cup of tea poured had not even time to draw before James was away battling a fish. It set the tone. The



### ABOVE

It is scenes like this that make going fishing so special

### LEFT

A nice high-single figure fish landed through the early morning ice. One of eight runs in the first hectic hour

first hour was nothing less than manic with eight runs and five pike landed. This is what piking is all about! Forget the sizes and enjoy the sport it brings. Some low doubles mixed in with jacks but the pleasure was in no way diluted. A pre-spawning frenzy we concluded, as up until midday we were kept on our toes re-casting, hitting dropped runs and of course fish being landed. So far that 20lb+er we had both hoped for had eluded us again.

I don't see myself as a prolific pike angler by any means, nor an

expert, but it's always nice to add a 20lb+ fish to tally. I have managed seven 20s from 6 different venues over the past four years and knowing my season was ending prematurely I was now more so than ever praying to connect with one and finish on a real high! A few more fish each including a double hook up had us in great spirits. A drop back bite on my sardine and once I lifted the rod from the rests the line began to peel. One sweeping strike and the rod buckled over with the power of this fish. Several times she tried to free herself in the various weed beds out in front of



**TOP**  
A bitterly cold reward from the flooded venue

**MIDDLE**  
A pristine near-double from a day when it all actually went according to plan for once!

**BOTTOM**  
Feb 18th and a spawned out 19lb 10oz goes back to grow larger



**RIGHT**  
Sometimes, even in cold conditions, pike need extra time for revival. This one needed a rest in the margins for several minutes. Treat every one with respect, take your time and hopefully the fishing God's will reward you!



---

“ And with that the curtain was drawn on another season pursuing “Old Mossyback”...



me, but I kept the rod tip high and soon I guided her over the submerged net James had at the ready.

Celebrations of joy and handshakes came as we both thought she was a 20. Three times we weighed her and each time the result was the same. 19lb 10oz. She had just spawned and was hollowed out. A cracking fish and one to be very happy with. A quick snap and I released her back to torment all those who dwell in the underwater jungle.. Who knows, maybe we will meet again, I certainly hope so.

And with that the curtain was drawn on another season pursuing “Old Mossyback”. We celebrated our day out in true style with a hearty feed and a few pints of the black stuff. As much as I do enjoy my solitary fishing, to share the experiences with a good friend further embellishes such adventures. In pursuit of what? I do not know exactly, and I am not sure I want to know.

For life is not about the big catch, it's about how you live the moments in between.

Until the next installment, thank you for reading and good luck chasing your dreams.

KB 



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# THE FUTURE

## “Light rock fishing”

Written by Michael O Reilly (16)

Photography: Michael O Reilly & friends

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Light rock fishing (LRF) is a modern ultralight lure fishing style using finesse rods to target a wide range of species on small lures. It originated in Japan where its known as light game but has spread right across the world since a dedicated group of anglers from Jersey did a lot of research and promoted this. Light rock fishing kicked off from there and soon spread across the UK before reaching Ireland where it has grown immensely in popularity. I can know walk into my local tackle shop, Southside Angling, and find a vast array of soft plastics, finesse jig heads, braid, LRF rods and

reels. One of the reasons light rock fishing is becoming so popular is because of the sheer simplicity and the contrast of species that can be caught all year long. All you need is your ultralight rod, small reel and a small bag containing your lures. This mobile approach means you can sneak in impromptu sessions and get out fishing more often, therefore catching more fish. It's also a great way to get kids hooked on fishing!

The list of species that can be caught using LRF tactics is endless. Recently, during a 24-hour species hunt organised by my good pal Gary

Simply put, kids are the future of everything – politics, business, sport, the environment and, of course, fishing. It is up to current generations to nurture them, to encourage them and to teach them. However, some young anglers appear to need little coaching and are already way ahead of their years in terms of ability and knowledge.

Michael O Reilly can already be classed as a true all-rounder, chasing game, coarse and sea fish, but it is light rock fishing (LRF) from the seashore that has quickly become his favourite way of fishing. It's fun, easy to do, accessible to all and, importantly, is not at all to do with the size of the fish - it is about fishing for the sheer love of it. Over to Michael to sing it's praises...

Blake, I had 19 species with the majority of them falling to light rock fishing tactics. That was an excellent species hunt and I would thoroughly recommend taking part in it this summer! Using this scaled-down ultralight approach gives you a new perspective on how fish behave and tests your skills to the limit, especially when you hook a decent fish! Even an average sized pollock or mackerel will put a nice bend in the rod and provide



A simple set up is all that is needed

a spirited fight, bringing a smile to the anglers face. A lot of people associate light rock fishing with only catching small fish but believe me when I say it big fish do take small lures! I've had

Even small fish put a decent bend in a LRF rod



cod to 5lb on a two inch section of Gulp sandworm along with 6lb-plus pollock on a small metal jig. There's also the freshwater side to look at, where the same terminal tackle can be used in the canals, rivers and lakes for shad, perch, pike, trout, roach and even carp!

## The setup

Light rock fishing rods are extremely light and have a fast action. They are usually around 7ft in length and are rated from 0.5g to 7g. Be careful not to exceed the maximum casting weight as this can result in rod breakages. There are two types of LRF rods, solid tipped and tubular. Without going into too much detail, solid tipped rods are soft (which allows the fish to inhale the lure without feeling any resistance) and offer fantastic sensitivity when inching a lure across the bottom or fishing on the drop. Tubular rods recover faster when compressed which allows you to cast further, transmit more feel, are better for imparting action into a lure and

therefore are ideal for fishing metal lures or fishing "sink and draw" style. They range in price from the cheap and cheerful Rockfish UL which retails around €35 right up to the specialist rods such as the Major Craft Zaltz or the Tict Ice Cube which are a lot dearer. I'm currently using the Rockfish Dual from HTO. This rod has a casting weight of 1-8g, is 7ft 6' in length and is

supplied with two tips, a solid tip and a tubular. I would highly recommend this rod to anyone looking to take up light rock fishing or looking for a new rod. The rod is light, sensitive, well priced, casts well and has a fair bit of backbone well capable of landing a decent fish, which I've put to the test fishing for pike. These rods are paired with a small sized 1000 or 2000 sized fixed spool reel, loaded with either a light PE braid (6lb to 8lb), depending on the type of ground your fishing, or a light fluorocarbon (4lb to 5lb). This provides a light balanced setup and will ensure

A black goby



you get the maximum enjoyment out of every fish you catch be it big or small.

## Braid vs fluorocarbon

Braid is strong, doesn't stretch and has an incredibly thin diameter which allows you to cast further. The lack of stretch offers terrific bite sensitivity which means you should be able to feel when your lure hits the bottom and when a fish picks up your lure. A fluorocarbon leader of 2 to 3ft is essential when using braid as it isn't very abrasive resistant. It can wear out and break if continuously rubbed against sharp rocks which will lead to lost fish and lures. Your leader should be a lighter breaking strain than your braided main line. For instance I would

A pretty, hard fighting ballan wrasse



use a 4lb fluorocarbon leader with 6lb braid or a 6lb fluorocarbon leader with 8lb braid, depending on the terrain of the mark I'm fishing or on the size of the fish I'm targeting. I use an Albright knot to connect braid to fluorocarbon, which is relatively easy to tie with a bit of practice. When loading a reel with braid be sure to slightly under-fill the spool to minimise the chances of wind knots and tangles. I like the YGK G-soul x3 braid in 6lb as it offers terrific value for money, is super thin and casts like a dream.

Fluorocarbon is almost

invisible, abrasion resistant, sinks well but it has a thicker diameter. The thicker diameter means that to get the best out of the line I wouldn't exceed 4lb BS as heavier diameters can coil off the spool and reduce casting distance. It also doesn't transmit the bites as well as braid does. The fact that it sinks may seem miniscule but when fishing in windy conditions it provides better presentation and doesn't kite off like braid does in the wind. Most reels come with two spools so I load one with braid and one with fluoro' to provide me with the choice on the day



A beautiful little Grey gurnard on typical LRF tactics

Playing the night game...



depending on the conditions.

## Lures

There is a wide multitude of lures used for LRF'ing. They range from a tiny 0.5 inch right up to 4" and vary in shape, size and colour. One of the most popular lures used are rag worm imitations, such as Marukyu Power Isome and Berkley Gulp sandworms. They are both scented which allows fish to home in on them even in murky water. Marukyu's are packed with amino acids which draw fish to them and have a sweet blueberry-like smell. They are also 100% biodegradable

which means they are edible to fish, so even if you miss the first bite chances are the fish will come back for more! Gulp worms have a distinctively stronger fishy scent and are slightly more durable. Berkley also do one of my favourite lures, the deadly 2" Fish Fry. This lure, although named Fish Fry, resembles a small lug worm with a slim profile and a thin little tail that waves enticingly with even the slightest of movements. I thoroughly recommend storing all scented lures in a small waterproof tub as the packets they come in contain scented juices and can leak. If not stored in this juice these artificial baits will shrivel up and become useless. They can be mounted

on a jig head whole for larger species such as wrasse and pollock, or be cut up into smaller sections to be used for smaller species on split shot and dropshot rigs.

Although scented lures may reign supreme on certain days it is useful to use unscented lures too! I've noted that my catch rate increases when using lures that glow in the dark, especially in the winter months or in low light levels, especially for herring and pollock. In this case I would use lures such as the Ami from Aquawave which resembles a small shrimp or the Ecogear Grass Minnow which imitates a tiny baitfish. The idea is to match the hatch of what the fish are feeding on.

## Metal jigs

One of my favourite methods is fishing with metal jigs. You simply cannot beat the crash diving take of a pollock, the drag singing and your rod doubled over! Metal jigs are absolutely deadly when it comes to matching the baitfish that many fish are feeding on and come in all weights and sizes; jigs, spoons and blades. Although they will catch fish on a standard straight retrieve, introducing pauses, jerks and fishing "sink and draw" will produce more fish. Fishing O.T.D (on the drop) where you allow the lure to sink under a controlled fall can be excellent,



especially for pollock. "Deadsticking" is another method which can produce bonus fish. Basically all you do is let the current do the work while you leave the lure static. If you are fishing rough ground I wouldn't really suggest this technique as tackle losses can be quite high. Bites can be quick so a flick of the wrist will ensure you set the hook. A tubular rod is ideal for metal work as it transmits and responds well. Fluorocarbon can also be used if you'd like to shy away from braid as bites tend to be quite aggressive. Metals can provide some hectic action

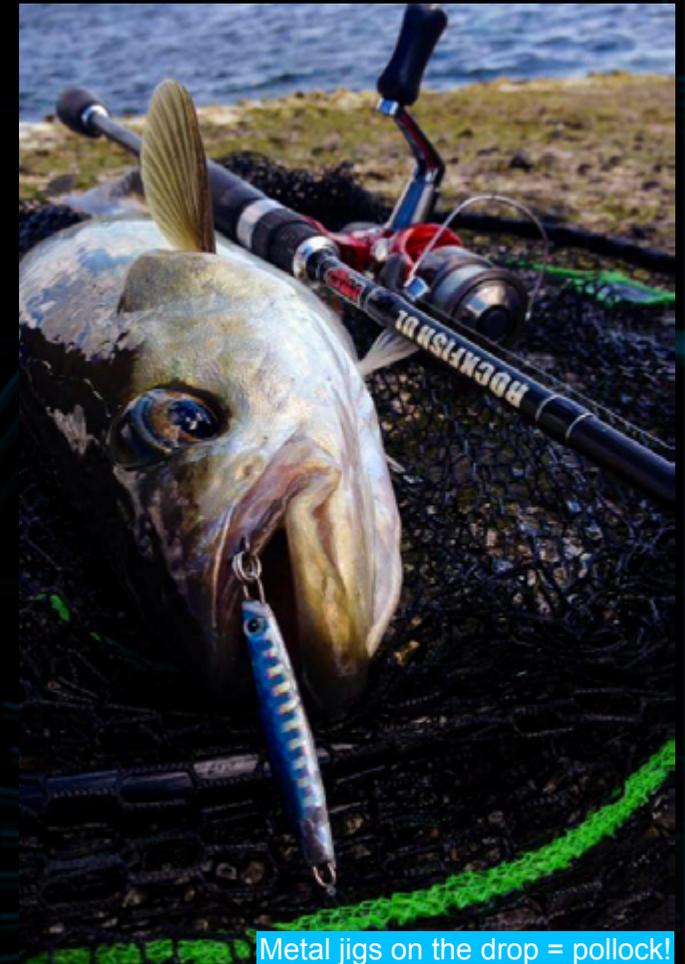
especially in summer months as the mackerel and pollock arrive inshore to feast on the baitfish. I change all treble hooks to a single size 4s as I practice catch and release and find they hook up better anyway. It's not uncommon to catch over 50 pollock per session along with mackerel and the odd codling. The majority of my fishing with metal jigs is done from rock marks which are riddled with kelp and enormous rocks where tackle losses can be high. Fish are attracted to these features as they provide cover and are home to crustaceans and prey fish. So get in amongst those snags, don't cry if you lose a few lures along the way and you'll reap the awards!

## Rigs

### Split shot rig:

This rig is simple and excellent for mini species. It consists of 2ft of fluorocarbon, a split shot and a hook (size 16 to 8 depending on the size of the lure and the

target species). You can alternate the distance between the weight and the hook to achieve a different fall rate on your lure. By fishing the split shot close to the hook you will be in direct contact with your lure and be more inclined to fish it faster. By fishing the split shot 2-3 inches away from the hook your lure will sink slower which is ideal for mini species such as blennys,



Metal jigs on the drop = pollock!

Corkwing wrasse



as they tend to prefer a slower moving bait. A standard hook (e.g. Kamasan B983) will be sufficient but I find longer shank hooks like a Gamakatsu F31 provides a better hook-up rate. This rig is also ideal for fishing in rock pools.

#### Dropshot rig:

The dropshot rig is ideal for presenting your lure off bottom accurately around structure. It consists of a 4ft length of fluorocarbon, a hook and a dropshot lead. These leads have a swivel that is designed to grip the line without tying a knot and in the event of a snag will allow you to get your rig back whilst leaving the lead behind. The great thing about using these leads is that you can adjust the distance between the weight and the

lure to fish different parts of the water column. It's important to leave a tag end of around 2ft to allow you to do this. I tie the hook on via a palomar knot and this ensures that the hook stands proudly at a 90 degree angle off the line. Simply drop your rig down alongside, for example, a harbour wall and let it hit the bottom. Tighten up the slack line until you feel the resistance of the weight. Your lure will then rise up and be suspended off the bottom.

Shaking the rod tip will cause your lure to writhe and twitch just like a real ragworm/baitfish. You can also achieve a weightless effect on your lure if you allow a bit of slack line by dropping the rod tip. The lure falls enticingly and this is when most of the bites come. The main idea of this rig is to move the lure and not the weight. If you don't get any bites simply raise the rig and drop it down again to the left or right and repeat the same process. You can also cast the rig to cover more water and search out potential hidden features which has been very successful for species such as flounder and whiting. Simply cast the rig out and let the lead

hit the bottom. Tighten up to the lead and impart action into the lure by twitching the rod tip and using a slow retrieve to keep in contact. I prefer column weights for fishing vertically as they tend to snag less and round ones for casting as they kick up more sand from the seabed, which is irresistible to flounder in particular. This is my preferred setup when fishing a deep water mark or in rough conditions.



#### Jigheads:

A jighead is a hook with a weighted head which you simply mount your lure onto. It's versatile and can be fished vertically or cast out and fished in different depths of the water column. Whether it be bumping along the bottom for flatties or hopping it amongst the rocks for wrasse. The

most important factor of fishing the jighead is to use the lightest one you can get away with depending on conditions and the depth of water. A lure that falls slowly through the water will look far more natural than one that rockets straight to the bottom.

### Where to fish?

Harbours are excellent LRF marks as they are easily accessible, provide shelter and are home to many species. The mini species love to hide in the cracks and crevices along the harbour walls. Light rock fishing can be done from beaches, estuaries, rock marks and even rock pools! The main element to look for in any LRF mark is structure. By structure I mean features such as kelp/weed beds, rocks, sandbars and gullies. Fish love structure and are drawn to it. Rockpools are one of the best places to practice your light rock fishing skills as quite often you can actually see the fish dart out and engulf your lure. Remember, there are no hard and fast rules to fishing so get out there and give light rock fishing a go!

For frequent catch reports check out my Facebook page [Ultra Light Ireland](#)





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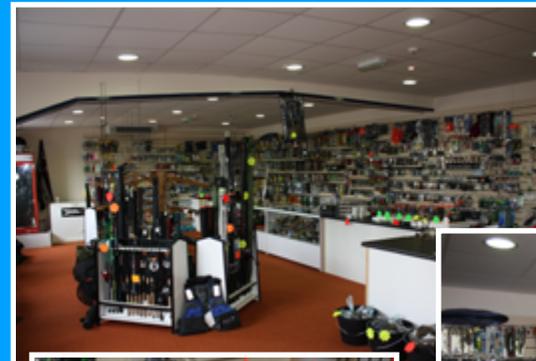
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# The life of a small boat angler

Words by **Barry Murphy** Photography by **Barry Murphy & friends**

**H**aving been an angler from as soon as I was old enough to tag along with my father, I have tried my arm at most types but my heart is firmly set on sea angling these days. With time restrictions most of my time is spent fishing matches, both from shore and boat but I always make as much time as I can for pleasure fishing in my own boat. I purchased my first boat about fifteen years ago. Back then I was fairly clueless but was not long in learning the basics and realising how good small boat angling in Ireland can be with a bit of time spent finding marks and gleaning some info' from friends.



Always changing and swapping baits to see the response...

Living in Waterford as I do, the options for small boat angling are plentiful with great fishing out of Dunmore East and Tramore. You are also within towing distance to the west of Dungarvan, Youghal and Cork Harbour and to the east Kilmore, Rosslare and Cahore. Waterford, like Cork, has of a huge estuary as a fall-back for times of bad weather and winter fishing, which was the case on this trip. Unlike Cork Harbour, which is very busy with both charter and small boat angling, Waterford estuary is virtually unfished in terms of angling.

This winter just gone was one of the worst weather-wise, which even affected shore angling and this meant the chances of getting a rare winter run in the boat was a no-go. With a week off college coming up in February and hoping for a break in the weather the plan was set to get out at least once. With the boat all sorted and ready and waiting to go it was now just down to the weather and eagerly watching the weather sites. The Wednesday of my week long break looked the best but with a big blow on the Tuesday it made the chance of getting out very uncertain. It was clear from the weather that even if we did get out it was going to be a day sheltering in the estuary, as a spin to the wrecks was definitely out of the question as the drop in the wind and the direction swinging to the north would not be enough to calm the



We needed to find shelter...

sea sufficiently.

We arrived at the new slip in Dunmore East at 10:30am, which is much improved on the old slip and wide enough to launch at least two boats at the one time. Unlike the summer months when the slip can be busy we had the place to ourselves and it was not long before we had the boat in the water. Even though the winds had died off there was still a big swell pushing up the outer part of the estuary, so a call was made to head up to get some shelter in the inner estuary. With all the rain of the last few months (!), the estuary had not fished well all winter as you have three big rivers (the Nore, Barrow and Suir) meeting which means a lot of fresh water coming down – never good for the fishing.

However, despite the weather, tide and conditions all being against us we decided to give it a go. We were well supplied with bait (peelers, rag, razorfish, lug wraps and mackerel) and were all set for a day up the estuary, glad to be out on the water. With the tides completely wrong we decided to stick to the deeper water and hope it might hold a few bigger fish. The first mark was a short spin up the estuary, usually a good summer area, so we decided to

give it an hour. It was not long before we had the anchor set and baits in the water. Conor fished one rod with a 3-up rig and as it was the top of the tide we could both fish fairly light. I decided to fish two rods, one lighter with a normal 1-up 1-down rig on lug tipped with mackerel and on the other rod I fished a flowing trace with a 6/0 hook with a full lug wrap and a whole razor.

It was not long before one of the ever-growing numbers of seals came up to say hello, which I don't think helped the fishing much. In truth, the fishing was as slow as we expected with the state of the tide but it wasn't long before the whiting and dabs started knocking at the baits. A lot of bits were missed as we kept the baits on the big side to try and tempt a bigger fish or two. I was into whiting to about 35cm



Both Conor and I quickly found small dab



Good fun on lighter gear but still the fishing was slower than expected

another friendly seal popped up next to the boat to see what was going on. The same tactics as described earlier were used in our new spot to start with, and happily a few bigger whiting started to show on the bigger baits – still though, nothing all that special. The wind had died away completely by now and it was like a summers day, when out of the wind that is. As the tide was just over two hours into the drop, the greater strength meant a change in tactics was required; up-tiding. The first few drops kept us busy with a good few medium size whiting and a few small

dabs but again, frustratingly, it soon started to slow up and the expected bigger dabs did not show.

After another slow half hour a call was made to move again – one of the joys of boat angling is that you can easily move between marks if the fishing is slow. With it being mid-tide and at one of the narrowest parts of the estuary it was decided to move to a mark out of the main flow. With the wind still dropping and the conditions improving in the outer estuary we decided to chance a mark in the outer estuary that can



**It always surprises me when most of the time... big baits and huge hooks result in tiny fish!**

and Conor was tipping away at the dabs and flounder; nothing major, averaging 25cm in size. The rod with the bigger bait on was very quiet but after replacing the razor with mackerel the bites were instant. It always surprises me when most of the time, especially when match fishing where you try to match the bait and hook size to the size of the fish on the venue, big baits and huge hooks result in tiny fish! Once I had changed to mackerel I had a very small whiting and a baby dab in quick succession. Conor was tipping away on small dabs the whole time and I was having good fun with

whiting on the lighter rod. Even though we were catching fairly regularly it was still slower than expected and with no sign of a much-desired cod it was decided to up-anchor and head up the estuary to a deeper hole which if it didn't hold cod at least gave a chance of a specimen dab.

A quick five min trip saw us dropping anchor again and before we had baits in the water



Changing marks and tactics resulted in more small dabs!

through up a few bullhuss. This area is right on the edge of rough ground and gravel beds and it can be hard to get through the dogfish in the summer months but this was the first time trying this mark so early in the year and was, as so much fishing is, trial and error. I stuck the same tactics and fished one rod on big baits and stayed light on the other to see what else might be around. Within minutes of anchoring up we had another (!) friendly seal for company. We were not there long when the winds picked up suddenly and it became a bit uncomfortable. We gave it 45 minutes before calling it a day. Incidentally, the mark didn't pay off as I blanked and Conor had only a couple of whiting.



In the main flow, out of the main flow - the fishing was just slow!



As small boat angling goes in Ireland you have to take the opportunities to get out when they arrive



Still, better to be catching small whiting than nothing at all!

By the time we were half way back to the slip the winds had dropped again and it calmed down – one of those very changeable, Irish days. We were glad the winds had dropped off for our return to shore as a warning to anyone new to launching from Dunmore East is that any wind from the North West or North creates an awkward and potentially dangerous wash on the slip, even though not half as bad as the old slip. Sure, this was not the most productive day as far as fishing goes but from a small boat angler's point of view to get the first run of the year in and have no hitches is great and a bit of fishing was a bonus.

The year ahead is looking busy for boat angling with our club setting its boat angling dates. Then there is also the winter boat fishing

competitions in Cork, the Munster boat competitions (open and closed) as well as this year's Master Angler, which is held in Cork this year. In between these dates hopefully there will be plenty of time to get out in my own boat including a few tow aways.

As small boat angling goes in Ireland you have to take the opportunities to get out when they arrive and as a student I might get more opportunities than most. A real plus point to the small boat angler is the huge drop in the price of petrol which has been crippling over the last few years. Hopefully it will stay low! Even though it is only February as I write, there is the potential of decent fishing if we get a break in the worst spell of weather we had in a few years. Good fishing can be had on the reefs and wrecks for



An enjoyable day but hopefully the fishing will improve soon!

cod, pollock and wrasse as well as clean ground smooth hounds, rays, plaice, tope, bass and, later in the year good, action with the blue shark.

I can't wait!

Catch you next time,

BM



# THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM...

By Gary Robinson

Photography by Gary Robinson & friends

In Ireland we have a knack of heaping praise onto anything that suits us. Even pedestrian events can raise a raucous cheer if the intention is to place them upon a pedestal. The sentiment of a previous Irish soccer team captain that we are a nation that celebrates mediocrity is completely true but we also lavish praise onto both good and exceptional events and circumstances with glee and generosity. As good as we are at heaping praise on things, undeservedly on many occasions; we are also adept at ignoring problems and hoping they will disappear. If this disappearance is not forthcoming then we bury our heads a little deeper in the sand in the hopes that this trick will work. As a nation we are superb at dodging issues that are uncomfortable and those that we do not wish to address. The lack of desire to talk publicly about issues such as suicide and cancer make excellent examples.

“ If you were to ask me what the most important factor for preserving Irish angling is then both the angler and scientist in me will answer that question with **‘water quality’** ”

We have fantastic angling resources in this country and we should all feel both proud and blessed to have what we have on our own doorstep. There are many positives to take from our resources but there are also negatives. If you were to ask me what the most important factor for preserving Irish angling is then both the angler and scientist in me will answer that question with ‘water quality’. No matter what work gets done, be it efforts in preventing illegal fishing, instream works to restore river habitats, signage and facilities for visiting anglers or restockings, all of these efforts are a waste of time and resources if we cannot get a handle on the water quality issue. I am of the opinion that with regard to spawning salmonids, salmon and trout, any work that is done in rivers will be of absolutely no use if water quality continues to deteriorate. And this is where we meet the elephant in the room.

In Ireland we have a long tradition of being an agricultural country with the majority of land usage in every county being dedicated towards agriculture. Many policies in this country are tapered towards



This image encapsulates the problem

the agricultural sector and there are many instances where agriculture can be attributed towards creating and compounding environmental damage. Let's take a look at some of the more common pollution events that arise from agricultural practices and how they affect water quality.

The amount of land set aside for agriculture in Ireland is approximately 4.2 million hectares which is 64% of the country. The vast majority of farming in Ireland relates to cattle with approximately 80% of agricultural land devoted to grass for cattle grazing (Teagasc). With so much land set aside

for cattle it should come as no surprise that the Irish herd is just over 6.95 million cows (CSO, 2015). Just fewer than seven million cattle create a lot of by-products and most will be familiar with the CO2 and methane emissions from their rear end. Not so obvious, however, are the threats to our water. On farmland where livestock can reach and enter waterways we should be able to see deterioration in water quality, particularly after large rainfall events. These will come from a number of sources with the most notable being heavy rain that follows a spreading exercise. Common practice is to spread

animal waste products on the land to act as a fertiliser. More often than not, when rain occurs after spreading we see a situation where all the faecal waste spread on the fields gets washed into the river, flushing huge amounts of nitrates, phosphates and ammonia into the waterways. Ammonia in very small quantities can cause death to macroinvertebrates, the building blocks of the dietary needs for fish, fowl and mammals that all rely on aquatic food webs for survival. Do damage to the lower reaches of the food web and you will have less food for other aquatic inhabitants. It doesn't take a genius to figure out what that leads to. Larger amounts of ammonia will cause far more instant damage – fish and fowl kills are the order of the day. There are rules regarding how close to a river this practice can be carried out but they are widely ignored.

Nitrates and phosphates are just as bad in terms of altering the aquatic environment should excess amounts

find their way into our waters. Along with other nutrients, nitrates and phosphates are the primary ingredients for plant growth. An excess of these nutrients sees an explosion of plant growth which has many different impacts on rivers. The physical nature of the river will change by excessive plant growth and this can pose problems towards the free passage of spawning fish. Assuming fish can migrate through the dense vegetation they then run the risk of having their spawning grounds over run by plants, the root systems preventing them from cutting redds to deposit eggs in. If egg laying is hampered then the outlook for subsequent generations of fish do not look good. There are many waters that are suffering from explosions in plant growth, impeding both the natural flow of the river and the fish that live within them.

Access to rivers for livestock is also creating more problems. As cattle walk to the river to drink the hooves create erosion of river banks and the removal of plants along riparian zones which in turn leads to loose soil and banks. Rainfall ensures that a lot of this loose soil will be washed back into the river increasing turbidity and any soil that gets washed into the river will be deposited somewhere further downstream, creating problems for individuals and communities along the length of the river. Such is the extent

“ There are many instances where agriculture can be attributed towards creating and compounding environmental damage



A Corrib feeder stream, apparently. Good luck to any fish trying to spawn in here!

Ireland has also seen many of its river courses altered and canalised by the drainage schemes that have operated in this country for generations. Anecdotal evidence in many parts of the country suggest of rivers and streams that teemed with fish until they were deepened and dredged in the hopes of making them drain the fields faster. Indeed the fields did drain faster, so much faster in fact that coupled with the mass clearance of forestry and bogland in Ireland to make way for livestock grazing this country has experienced flooding that is growing increasingly bad as each year rolls by. The cleared land that has been sliced apart with drainage ditches drains very fast, so fast that it causes misery to thousands downstream as towns and villages suffer flooding. Dredging to appease

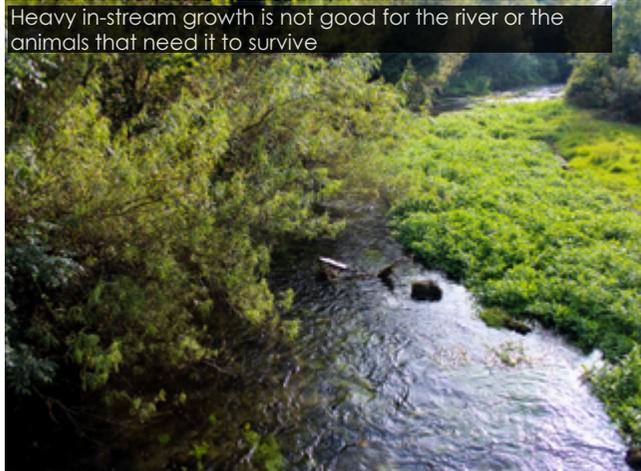
of upland erosion due to livestock that any misguided dredging efforts undertaken in any of our main rivers will result in the removed sediment being replaced by Nature working on cattle trampled river banks within a few short years. Erosion of river banks also leads to situations where upland rivers widen and become too shallow to support fish life and accommodate larger spawning fish.



Another alleged feeder stream that feeds one of our large trout lakes



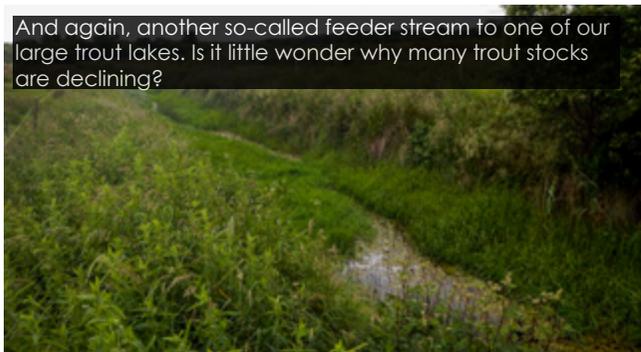
No regard for this stretch of riparian zone on the River Suck



Heavy in-stream growth is not good for the river or the animals that need it to survive



The exit of a heavily overgrown and silted Lough Ennel feeder stream

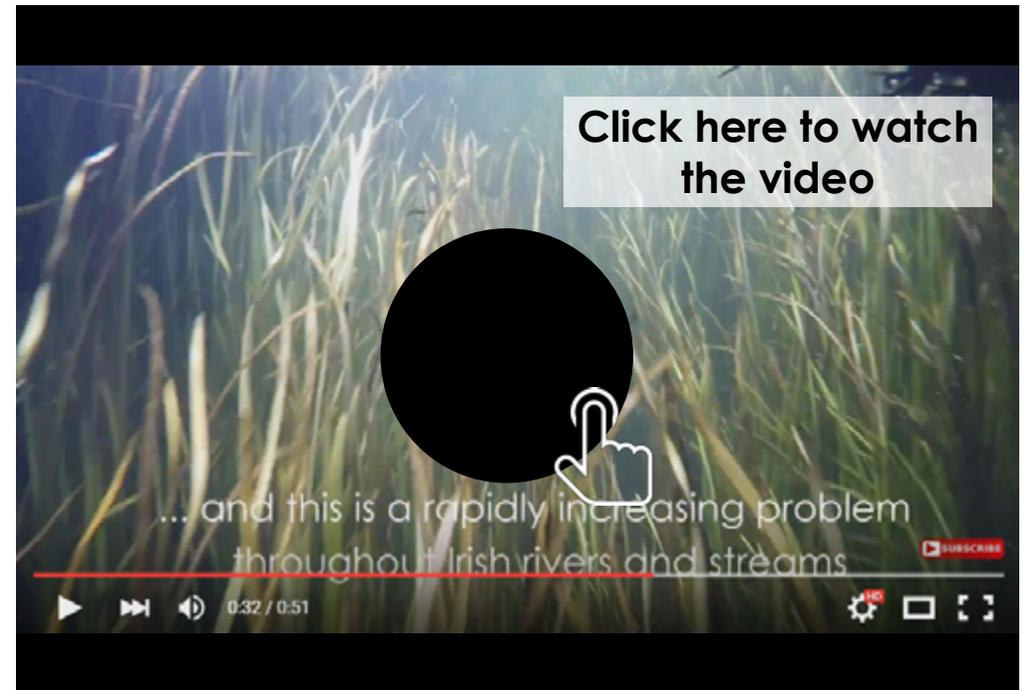


And again, another so-called feeder stream to one of our large trout lakes. Is it little wonder why many trout stocks are declining?

“ An excess of these nutrients sees an explosion of plant growth which has many different impacts on rivers...physical nature of the river will change... problems towards the free passage of spawning fish... risk of having their spawning grounds over run by plants

the agricultural sector will not prevent this problem happening again. When the rivers eventually silt up again we will be back to square one and all the areas that get dredged will accomplish will be to push the problem further downstream. Crop farming produces similar effects with the spreading of fertilisers that invariably get washed into the waterways.

The problem is widespread and signs of danger can be seen readily if one is prepared to look closely. It is well known that intensive agricultural practices are environmentally damaging so why is there such a reluctance to raise the issue? Why will none of the canvassing politicians engage in criticism of the practices? They turned tail and ran when the issue of agriculturally caused water quality issues were raised. Why did a State employee



for a body charged with monitoring and protecting wildlife in Ireland tell me that 'intensive agriculture is compatible with the Irish environment' and he kept a straight face while he did it! The phrase 'It is very difficult to make a man understand something if his salary depends on him not understanding it', springs to mind.

The farmer's lobby group is a powerful one indeed and perhaps it is

this that instils a fear into our politicians when it comes to speaking out about the damage that current farming practices are causing in Ireland. With 272,000 people working on farms this equates to a sizeable portion of the vote in a small country (CSO, 2012). Perhaps speaking the truth and exposing the problem is regarded as political suicide in this country? Party comes first, to hell with the rest and morals or ethics will



After repeated drainage schemes this river is in danger of canalisation which will destroy the natural hydrology and ecology

Ministers, declare 'Economics are far more important than the environment'. With attitudes like that what hope do we have? We had a leader of the country that attended a global climate change where all nations would endeavour to reduce pollution and our lad asked for an exemption. That made me shudder because surely all economics are dependent on there being a healthy environment there in the first place. Without a healthy environment the rest will come tumbling down. A deterioration of water quality is something that will not be widely noticed until it is too late.

Now, I am not for one second suggesting that we disband farms and abandon agriculture; that would be ridiculous in the extreme. We all need to eat and Ireland has a huge agricultural export market. What we need is balance. We can all use the land in a way that everybody gains from it, not just one sector that destroys it for all other stakeholders. Granted, farming brings a lot of money into this country but so do water based activities. Angling alone generates over €0.75 billion every

have nothing to do with it! The manner in which EU farm inspections are carried out is farcical. Imagine having a 'surprise' inspection of your farm to see that everything is in order but the only twist is that you know the inspection date six months in advance. That seems a system that is purely there to facilitate the farmer. It is incredibly easy for everything to be above board when you get six months' notice of a 'surprise' inspection. Pollution is diffuse so difficult to pinpoint and even when there are spills that can be traced there is usually very little done to the perpetrator by way of reprimanding.

As recently as in the last month I have heard three politicians, two of them

.....  
 “The phrase 'it is very difficult to make a man understand something if his salary depends on him not understanding it', springs to mind  
 .....

year (IFI, 2012), money which benefits a range of industries and small economies and a resource that is dependent on good water quality. The many families and businesses that depend on this visitor revenue would sorely miss it should water quality drop below levels that are conducive to healthy fisheries.



Open banks (bad) and heavy algal cover of the stream bed (very bad) as a result of poor agricultural practices on a tributary of the Boyne

I realise that in a predominantly agricultural country writing a piece like this will not make me many friends. Indeed I foresee a busy inbox after

a choice between one or the other. If we took an example from some of the Welsh farmers in Pontbren or some of the farmers involved in the Mulkear Life project then things could change and potentially we would be able to choose both agriculture and good water quality.

It's up to us...



this one, but it is written for the right reasons. We all need clean water and we all need to share in it. We really need to look at new and novel approaches to land management and farming practices in Ireland if both agriculture and water quality are to continue to thrive. The way things are, we have been offered

# Tackling your first saltwater ADVENTURE

*: the do's and don'ts*

by Marina Gibson  
Photography: WhereWiseMenFish

Last year my mind, body and soul were seeking further exploration with a fly rod. A saltwater adventure had long teased my attention, but my thirst was yet to be sated. After suffering the sight of numerous images and videos of bonefish on social media and in various glossy magazines, I developed an overwhelming urge to land a ghost of the flats. The itch had to be scratched.

Twice I started this article about my trip on the emerald Cuban waters, but on both occasions, having completed the first two paragraphs, I felt the need to start over. The incredible experience was hard to put into simple words. Instead, I decided to change my approach and detail the do's and don'ts, to advise a saltwater virgin – as I was. This article acts as a simple guide, to help others from making the same mistakes I did.



## Fishing Essentials:

I was fortunate from the outset. Our outfitter, the world renowned WhereWise-MenFish, kindly supplied all the required fishing tackle – of which there was enough to fill a small truck – relieving me of the task. But this is not always the case. Most outfitters will not be so thoughtful, and therefore this is an area you need to research before heading for the golden sands. The saltwater species are insanely powerful, and will rip you and your gear to bits if you are unprepared. The rods, reels and extras will vary depending on where you are travelling to and what species of fish you are targeting.

### BONEFISH:

- 7-8wt + reel
- Floating and intermediate line
- Leader and tippet: 12lb – 20lb
- Flies – Crazy Charlie, Mantis Shrimp, Christmas Island Special, Bonefish Gotcha, Bonecrusher, Bonefish Scampi, Bonefish Junk, Clauser Minnows

### TARPON:

- 11-12wt + reel (must be sealed and have a metal drag system – plastic will break on first fish you hook!)
- Floating, intermediate and sinking lines (for all occasions)
- Leader: 60lb – 80lb
- Flies – Black & Red/ Black & Purple Tarpon Bunny, Tarpon Cockroach – all tied on Gamakatsu or Tiemco hooks

### PERMIT:

- 10wt + reel
- Floating line
- Leader and tippet: 16lb – 20lb
- Flies – Avalon Shrimp

### EXTRAS:

- Spinning rod (casting weight larger than 60g) + reel
- Swivels
- Braid (40lb+), Leaders (50lb+) and wire traces (for sharks and barracudas)
- Lures – GT Ice Cream, Large surface poppers 50g – 190g, diving lures 25g – 110g
- Forceps/ pliers (saltwater) & line clippers



My first Cuban bonefish - happy or what!

## Be prepared!



My heavy fly rod casting lessons before the Cuba trip from Tom Festing were invaluable!

Before the trip, I took the time to have a couple of valuable lessons with Tom Festing of Sportfish. After practicing my casting with a 12wt, he substituted the fluff at the end of my line for himself, feigning to be a powerful tarpon. He almost wrenched the rod from my grasp, and promptly informed me that when hooking a tarpon, one shouldn't strike upwards into the fish. Do so, and you'll lose it. When setting the hook, it is vital that you keep the rod tip down and strip-strike as fast as possible – once the hook is set properly, you lift into the fish. From here on your fate is in the lap of the fishing gods.

This technique is applicable to the majority of fish species in Cuba. If you don't already know how to double haul, watch a bundle of YouTube videos and practice out in your garden prior to departure. The hours put in beforehand will pay off when under the wide Latin American skies. On the flats you will be under a great deal of pressure from your guide to get it right, and when you can double haul against the wind and pop the fly onto the nose of a fish, your chances of success are greatly increased... and the chance of infuriating your guide significantly lessened!

## Clothing - the essentials

### A QUALITY PAIR OF POLAROID'S :

I took a pair of Costa Del Mar 580g – they practically give x-ray vision out on the water. Tip: secure your sunglasses around your neck with a strap, or be prepared to lose them in a frantic fight with a King.

### WADING BOOTS:

While the water is gin-clear and the sand silky, it is essential to bring some form of protection for your feet. When fishing the flats you never know when your guide might ask you to step off the boat and walk across the seabed, which can be sharp and tough in places. Investing in a decent pair of proper saltwater wading boots may save you losing that fish of a lifetime.

### CAP & BUFF:

They come as a pair and will well and truly save your skin! Caps are crucial - more often than not you're in the blistering heat all day, surrounded by reflecting water. They also shut out sunlight from creeping in through the top of your sunglasses, increasing your chances of spotting those lurking fish!

### T-SHIRTS & LONG SLEEVE TOPS/ SHIRTS FOR MEN; BIKINI TOPS & STRAP TOPS FOR LADIES:

The sun is ruthless on the flats, so be sensible and cover up. In Cuba I did the opposite and got burnt everyday – by the end of the holiday, although very brown, my skin was screaming for help. I advise buying one proper saltwater shirt, and beat your will for a tan – there is nothing funny about sunstroke. Plus, it ruins the trip – you're there for the incredible sport, not a tan!



Wear the right clothing when exposed to tropical heat or else you'll seriously regret it!

### LIGHTWEIGHT WATERPROOF JACKET:

You will be fishing in a tropical environment, so you never know when the heavens may open. And when they open, you won't have seen rain like it – it falls like gravel. To paraphrase Sir Ranulph Fiennes: *“There is no such thing as bad weather just inadequate clothing”*.

### LIGHTWEIGHT TROUSERS (HAREM PANTS OR LINEN TROUSERS):

Dress for comfort. When you want a break from the sun or on that long journey back to base, all you'll wish for is comfort.

### WATERPROOF BAG:

Leave the handbags at home ladies, even if you aren't fishing! You may think your bag is safe from water down in the storage cabin on the skiff, but it isn't. Don't be the borrower and don't be the person who asks if they can put stuff in someone else's bag to keep dry. Take your own. Be organized and ensure that at the end of the day your phones and cameras are in the same condition as you left them.

### FINGER TAPE/GLOVES/FINGER GUARDS:

A lot of people who have been saltwater fishing their whole lives will say that they don't bother with gloves or tape, but if you have a whole week ahead of you and this is your first time with heavy single handed rods, I can't recommend them enough. When you hook into a big fish and the line shoots through your fingers, almost burning them to the bone, you'll be grateful you did.

## Suggested extras!

### MOSQUITO REPELLENT & AFTER STING:

Those mozzies will get you on AND off the skiff, so be warned!

### BACK UP CARDS & EXTRA CASH:

Always take enough cash to tip your hard-working guides and those who have helped you along the way. Remember to take some extra cash or a spare bankcard and put it somewhere safe. I learned this the hard way. As I had to get back in a hurry for a hen-do, I left the fishing party a day early. En route to the airport I realised that I'd left all my cash and cards behind. I had to hustle my way to the terminal – a journey that should have only been half an hour took a good four hours.

### CUBAN SIM CARD:

If you cannot live without your mobile phone then buy a Cuban SIM when



Chasing small tarpon around the Cuban flats is an experience I will never forget - amazing!

you arrive. If you think your mobile will work anywhere other than on your hotel wifi, forget it. Saying that, far better to turn it off if you can and enjoy the holiday!



Truly the stuff of dreams!

### WATERPROOF SUN CREAM, LIP PROTECTION AND VERA:

As I did not listen to my mother, I received severe burns everyday from the sun. It wasn't a highlight of the trip. You can't go wrong with factor 50 or 30 SPF sun cream

### VISA :

Want to save time and sit back sipping on your first alcoholic beverage ASAP? You can buy your visa pre-airport check-in or you can do it in the airport. Check that your passport is valid for at least 6 months, too.

### CHECK THE CURRENCY :

Always double-check with your outfitter which currency to take. I asked a colleague which currency Cuba use and he answered with US dollars, which was correct, but not everywhere accepts it. Hotels, taxis and pretty much all necessity shops only take Cuban peso.

### PLUG ADAPTER:

Better to have your own. If you forget then buy one at your departure airport.

### CAMERA:

You will be amongst nature's finest landscapes and incredible wildlife. You

can't capture it all, but with a camera by your side you can take snapshots to show your family and friends on your return. The day you forget your camera will also inevitably be the day you catch a fish of a lifetime – without a photo, no one will believe your fisherman's tale!

**Tip:** the brighter the colours, the more vibrant the outcome, so don't hold back on those rainbow caps/buffs/tops and shorts.

## Final thoughts...

If you have a choice, don't go alone – a trip like this is worth sharing. Unfortunately I couldn't manage to persuade any of my fishy friends to join, so I booked a solo spot – regardless, it was one of my most exciting adventures to date.

Cuba offers more than just fishing – there is plenty to do and see. Havana is an energetic and welcoming city, the people are great and the streets are bursting with culture. There is exquisite architecture; it is the home of world-famous cigars, and don't forget Havana Rum.

After my experience in Cuba I will now be fully prepared for my next saltwater adventure to Belize in August later this year. I hope that this guide will be of use for those planning their first saltwater trip, wherever that may be in the world. Please note that the above includes no compulsory rules, only tips and advice.

I wish you all good luck, tight lines and screaming reels!

MG



What a beautiful species, what a beautiful place, what a trip!





IT MAY HAVE BEEN ROUGH AND HORRIBLE BUT THE PIKE FED WELL!

## LET'S FACE IT

**Craig Murphy**  
 Craig Murphy & friends

THERE WILL BE DAYS WHEN THE FISHING IS BETTER THAN ONE'S MOST OPTIMISTIC FORECAST, OTHERS WHEN IT IS FAR WORSE.; EITHER IS A GAIN OVER JUST STAYING HOME ~ RODERICK HAIG-BROWN, FISHERMAN'S SPRING, 1951.

The above quote is as relevant today as it was back then. Roderick's logic often comes to mind when faced with yet another weather system moving in over Ireland to top up our already swollen rivers and lakes. Lately I

haven't had the time to be fussy. Fishing opportunities have become limited so I'll go when I can, regardless of weather or water levels. You'll always find somewhere to fish. Marinas, back waters and lakes with

easy access are all ideal locations for bad weather fishing; after all nobody wants to be lugging gear down a field in 80km wind-driven rain do they? These types of locations are often overlooked due to their ease of

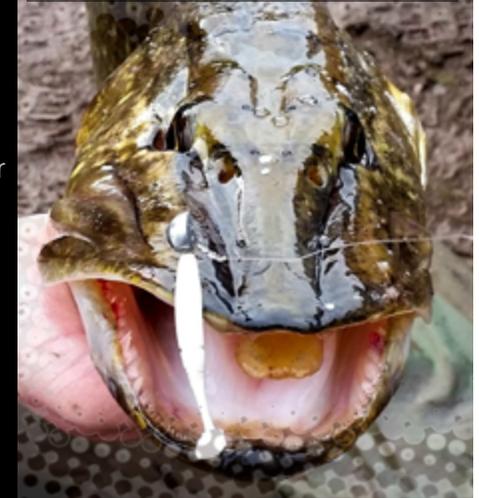
access. Marinas are usually stuffed with coarse fish in the winter months. Tucked in out of the fast currents they offer an ideal refuge in such times and where the coarse fish are holding up the pike won't be too far away. Since the last issue I've been hitting a few such venues in the hunt for ole *Esox*. With storm after storm rolling in there was little choice, with most of my regular haunts flooded. Results have been good so far with plenty of doubles coming to my deadbait rods and even a couple on the small lures intended for perch, which gave me the run around on such light gear. A 1 to 7 gram LRF rod doesn't give you much stopping power, but over the last two months I've noticed results have been surprisingly better on days when most anglers would stay at home.

Stormy days are not the most comfortable to venture out in but if you can stick it out you will reap the rewards. Why is this?

I remember seeing a picture of 'The Duke' Mick Brown in an article he wrote. He was standing in the margins, churning up the mud with his feet and the cloud of dark brown silt could clearly be seen seeping out into the lake. He was talking about undercurrents and how they affect scent distribution on still-waters. Undercurrents can be formed by temperature differences that occur in deep water, underground springs that empty into lakes and, of course, the weather; the latter being the most easy to read in an angling situation. Undercurrents formed by the wind-driven waves hitting the bank then travel in a different direction under the turbulent surface water. Stronger winds equal bigger undercurrents, which disperse the scent of our dead baits and allow the pike to

home in. It's also worth mentioning that coarse fish usually move close to the shoreline that is being churned up by the wave action and in turn attract the pike in. That's why wind direction should always be considered when choosing what bank to fish on. Most of the time I'll fish with the wind in my face, given the water in front of me has enough depth to feel confident about. It makes for uncomfortable fishing and can be difficult to get the baits out any distance but there isn't much need when the undercurrents are sending scent trails

GREAT FUN IN THE BACKWATERS ON A LRF ROD



out into the lake and drawing the fish in. Shorelines facing into the prevailing wind have been very productive for me over the last few years. Usually devoid of reeds, they can be very rocky areas where the wave action has eroded the bank over time and the lake has taken in the exposed rocks and boulders, which in turn offer great structure for pike to hide amongst.

On a recent trip to a lake which isn't affected much by high water levels, I had the hard decision to fish into 'white horses' or get in out of the wind and fish a more sheltered area. I went with my gut and fished into the waves. It was a constant 70km westerly which had 2ft waves rolling into the bank. The swim had a graduated slope to 12ft at 30 yards,

then a steeper slope to 25ft at 50 yards. It's worth mentioning that fishing in such conditions requires strong tackle, and mono leaders of 40 or 50lb are essential. As good as braid is for strength it can be cut easily if it comes in contact with rocks or zebra mussels. Casting leads of 3oz+ are also needed; the last thing you want to use is a light lead as you'll be left with a bow of braid on the cast which you must correct to avoid it settling around any rocks and leading to a breakage on a take or retrieve. A heavy lead can be tightened

into quickly and provide a straight line to your rig. Heavy drop backs are essential too as the wind can take up any slack given by a taking pike and never register on the alarm, unless you have a heavy drop off pulling the slack line back through the rod eyes.

So, back to the session... With the waves rolling in it was difficult to get



A LONG, LEAN 17LB'ER THAT MADE STARING AT A DITCH ALL DAY SO WORTH IT!



CALM BEFORE YET ANOTHER STORM!

out to the shelf so our baits had to be small and streamlined to get the distance. Half a section of lamprey on one rod and a trout tail section on the other were cast out that morning, before storm Henry reared his ugly head. I couldn't manage the 50 yards as the wind was so strong but I guess the baits were at around 40 yards, at the top of the shelf. Leaving our baits to soak and not wanting

to get soaked ourselves we hid in the day shelter awaiting a run. The only thing I hate about fishing into the wind is having to set up the shelter facing away from the water! The monotony of staring at a ditch all day was broken by the odd beep when a wave would hit the rod tip. Just as another squally shower came over, my left rod gave a few beeps and the drop back slowly moved downward before it shot up and

unclipped just as I got to it. I struck into the fish which in turn pulled back, taking a bit of line in the process, and caused a nice bend in my old Fox Warrior 3.25lb TC rod. After a brief tussle it showed itself on the surface. I've never had to use a wave to land a fish in freshwater before but that's exactly how it transpired. The fish was guided towards the net riding on a wave which worked out nicely. A quick

weigh, snap and back she went - a long lean seventeen. Not long after my second rod gave a beep followed by a one toner. Lifting into her I could feel the head shakes of an angry pike. She took a couple of strong runs but she tired soon after, telling me she wasn't the beast I had hoped for but a short plump seventeen this time. That was all the action we had for that day, but just goes to show they'll still feed on the most unlikely of days.

On my next session I hit a backwater off a river. The recent storm had the water levels running high for a number of days which had peaked the day

before we were due to fish. The flooded river would see the pike move out of the flow and into the calm backwater. Well, that was the plan

anyway. Again the wind was strong as the tail end of storm Imogen continued to batter the country with heavy showers, so being beside the van was a bonus. This is not my favourite style of fishing, I'd much rather be out away from the van in the wilderness under a brolly but sometimes the weather can be too much to deal with and these handy spots can be the difference between getting out fishing or staying at home. The water was heavily coloured so I went with oily mackerel and bloody

lamprey baits enhanced with some BioEdge potions to give them a bit of a kick. These throw off a good scent trail in the slowly swirling currents of the back water and help the pike locate the baits. I pop up almost all of my baits these days so they just stand upright on their tails. Between weedy bottoms and deep silt I have found this to be a much better presentation over regular bottom baits. Marinas can be fairly

shallow at normal water levels rising a couple of feet in flood. I've never really felt confident fishing into 4 or 5 foot of water on most venues but I feel differently about marinas. They are mainly uniform seeing as they are predominantly man made. So, looking

for other features to fish around is the way forward; in and around moored boats and underneath floating jetties are good places to start. Clear patches in weed beds are also areas worth searching out.

On the day in question we had little or no features to fish to and had to search out clear patches in the weed. Fishing the far margin with one rod and the other a couple of rod lengths out to a clear path in the weed was my plan. It didn't take long before interest was shown when a solid take was registered on my margin rod. Lifting into it I could feel it was a good fish. Staying deep I couldn't get a look at it for a few minutes as it slowly ploughed its way around the marina while my angling buddy Michael O'Reilly was readying the net. Meanwhile the fish was showing signs of tiring and turned on the surface. "BIG FISH"

I called as the net was fetched just in time. She was reluctant to come to the net. These river fish really do fight harder than their lake counterparts, just when you think they're ready they give another run! Eventually she was subdued and guided into the mesh. When she was placed on the mat I had a sneaky feeling she would go over the magic 20lb mark but then the doubt set in. I've had too many river '19s' and I called '19' before she was weighed. The scales were zeroed as she was transferred to the sling. She went 20lb 11oz, which after the sling was deducted left 20lb 5oz and measured 106.5cm on the measuring mat.



MY FIRST SPECIMEN OF 2016 AT JUST OVER 20LB

RICHIE WITH HIS 21LB 12OZ SHANNON SPECIMEN



the gear out and set up camp as the sun was just creeping up on the horizon. The baits were cast out in earnest. It wasn't long before I had the first run - a micro jack! A sign that the bigger females might be on the feed maybe? This was followed by another run to the same rod

this time. With one of the only anglers I trust with a net ready to pounce, she was guided towards the bank and slipped into the net in text book style. Another twenty? I'm afraid not this time. She looked a 20-plus from the side but she didn't have the substance. Narrow across the back, she went 18lb 15oz, a beautiful fish nevertheless.

My first specimen of 2016 was in the bag. Better than sitting at home for sure!

On my latest pike trip I fished the still flooded River Shannon system. This trip only materialised after a few late night phone calls were made to my good friends Richie Dunne and Stephen Gibbons. The conditions were perfect. Fresh westerly winds with a few showers forecast would make for a very changeable day; plenty of triggers to hopefully get a few takes. On the long drive across looking at the full moon

in the clear sky I had 'the feeling,' something I haven't had in a long while, the gut feeling of anticipation for a good days fishing where a monster could be a real possibility. Happily it didn't fail me, as predicted my piking senses were on point. Here's how it went down...

Having a boat with us we loaded it up with the gear and headed off to our chosen swim - a high bank which enabled us to fish into a reasonable depth of water. With optimism running high we impatiently got all

minutes after I recast the chewed-up but still fresh trout bait. Another jack, a little bigger than the last. Then my other rod, baited with a pollan, screamed off. This time a nice low double was the result. Richie's rod then gave a few beeps and he hooked into another jack. Just as I had caught my breath from running up the bank with the net the alarm on my very productive mangled trout rod sounded before the line pinged off the clip and started peeling off the reel at rate of knots. On the strike I instantly realised it was a much bigger fish

As I returned the fish Stephen said "at this rate there could be a 25 plus or a 30 on the bank today!" and he wasn't too far wrong... Richie's rod went next but this time he called for the net, which is always a good sign. As the thoughts of what might be



SHE WAS A PEACH...

STEPHEN GOT IN ON THE ACT THAT DAY TOO WITH A NOTHER TWENTY AT 22LB 14OZ



IT WAS NARROWER ACROSS THE BACK THAN THE OTHER FISH THAT DAY BUT A BEAUTIFUL FISH NEVERTHELESS. 18LB 15OZ



on the end of the line ran through our heads, I readied the net to return the favour. When she surfaced we could see she was a bigger fish yet again. Safely in the net we wasted no time in weighing her. Tipping the scales at 21lb 12oz, she was Richie's first 20-plus fish of 2016 and a peach at that. The sport had dried up for an hour or so before that fish and the fear of a blank made Stephen change up his approach. He was fishing both his rods that bit further out. After noticing all the fish so far had come from very close in he

pulled his baits in from the deeper water and into the marginal shelf. The bites had dropped off our end with only a couple of dropped runs which we thought were trout having a go at the baits, or possibly the tail end of the morning feeding spell. It turns out they weren't entirely finished...

Stephen's rod screamed off just as the lunch was put on - always the way! He did battle with the fish for a few moments before we caught sight of her and incredibly she was bigger again! True to the

form of the day they just kept getting bigger... I slipped the net under what turned out to be the last fish of the day and also the biggest. This was a special fish for Stephen. Not only was this his first proper pike session after a serious heart operation which had seen him out of action for 9 weeks but it was his first twenty pounder of 2016. She tipped the scales at 22lb 14oz. We all had to stop and admire her for a few moments for she was a stunner, as the picture shows. It was certainly smiles all round as we finally got the

lunch going after a busy morning.

We fished out the rest of the day, right up until the final half hour of light but nothing else materialised. The way things had shaped up that day we were reluctant to leave, all of us transfixed on the rods for the last half hour, willing the drop off to fall. We were all thinking the same thing - if we were to hook another fish it could be a big twenty or even a thirty! It's hard to pack up when there was a real possibility of a seriously big fish turning up. Sadly

it didn't happen on this occasion. Needless to say it was pitch black by the time we got back to the slip!

I will try squeeze in one or two more sessions before the pike begin to spawn everywhere. I know they have gone in a few places already at this stage (mid-March). I'm not a fan of fishing for them after they have spawned, too risky in my opinion. They can be very weak from the process. I'd say hundreds of them die every year from being overplayed in the

warmer months or being caught post-spawning. The last thing I want is a dead pike on my hands. I'm always sad to be hanging up the dead bait rods but there are plenty more species to target until winter returns again. I'm looking forward to it already.

Catch you next time,

CM





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NEEDS!

# Mullet:

The days are getting longer, the gloom less gloomier. Memories of last season's expeditions and catches give way to thoughts and plans for the coming months. Maybe even some time will be found for tackle cleaning and renewing. Soon I'll be looking at the algae covered estuary mud for the first clues; 'tram-tracks' in the mud (as though drawn with two fingers) that will say "They are back!" Then the disturbance at the top of the water - wind? Or could it be...? Perhaps a brief glimpse of ghostly grey below the surface or maybe just a trick of light...Then the sure sign of multiple bow-waves and splashes amongst the bladder wrack on the edge of the incoming tide signaling that they really are here again. That's the way it has always been, but for how much longer?

Mullet are slow-growing. They grow more slowly than even the slow-growing bass, and mature even later. In our

northern climes it will take them some 10 full years to reach maturity, at a modest 3lbs in weight (count the rings on the scales). And they don't spawn every year. Individual mullet will return to their same feeding grounds every year. That all adds up to a recipe for vulnerability to exploitation, especially on a local level. They also have the unfortunate habit of aggregating to spawn, when the pre-spawning aggregations give an impression of boundless plentitude and make easy pickings for a seine-net.

This has always been the case, and mullet anglers with their strange tackle, strange bait and secretive ways have always put up with their anger at the sight of netsmen in the local creek or stories of big hauls for the beach-seiners, and yet still looked forward to the coming season with much optimism. But even the most stoic have begun

“ Mullet are slow-growing... it will take them some 10 years to reach maturity, at a modest 3lb in weight



## Species in

# peril

By Leon Roskilly  
Photography: Off the Scale

to recognise that something isn't right. The big fish are becoming much harder to catch, the always frustrating mullet even less reliable in their appearance.

So, what's going on, what is changing? Partly it's down to falling quotas for other species. With less catching opportunities for more valuable species

available, fishermen must turn to other species

“ **Even the most stoic have begun to realise that something isn't right**

to maintain their living. Not just fishermen, but fish buyers willing to pay more (the price of 'grey mullet' has been steadily rising), chefs becoming more inventive (not just here but over on the continent where much of 'our' fish goes), and an influx of folk from other European countries, more adventurous in their choice of seafood to be eaten, are all helping to create more demand.

Then there is what is happening with bass. Mullet and bass not only swim together, but they share much. Put out a bait for mullet and there's a fair chance a nuisance bass will get there first, the angler knowing right away by the way the fish reacts on the strike. Whereas

a mullet is slow to realise it has been hooked, but gains strength and determination throughout the extended fight, a bass is off from start, but that fight is soon over.

Just as a net set for mullet will inevitably catch bass, so many 'mullet' nets are set with bass in mind. But bass is a

favourite fish for many more anglers

than the frustrating mullet, and with chefs and diners too. No wonder it has been fished so heavily and for far too long so that the EU has now felt it necessary to introduce emergency measures. But restrictions on fishing for bass are likely to have an ominous consequence for mullet, as mullet start to replace bass as a targeted commercial species, and the marketing begins... It is true that some measures meant to curtail bass exploitation will also benefit mullet, such as no

fishing zones in nursery areas (provided that mullet fishing is not allowed), restrictions on

“ **Mullet are now very much in the firing line as a replacement catch and few are campaigning for their survival**



estuary netting etc., but mullet are now very much in the firing line as a replacement catch and few are campaigning for their survival.

So, things are not looking too

good for the future of our mullet fishing. What to do about that is the big question. Getting people interested in mullet and mullet fishing is probably one of the more fun things to do. In England, The National Mullet Club organise fish-ins where those who would like to know more about fishing for mullet are made very welcome and even if you can't get along it's worth joining simply

for the magazine and forum (although the name of the club might imply its only for UK anglers, there are members from Ireland and overseas).

Why not try to organise something locally? When I started a local group I was surprised at just how many local mullet anglers came out of the woodwork, even if some of them were more interested in the monthly pub meets than mullet fishing, and we all learned a lot from one another, and not just about fishing for mullet either.

Try to get angling organisations interested in the problems that mullet face and onto their own agendas. Not just angling organisations either, any organisation that looks towards the future health of our estuaries and coastal waters are probably not that aware of the plight of our mullet stocks or what can be done to protect them.

There is no quick and easy answer, no waving of a magic wand to make all well again in the land of the mullet, no magic bullet of legislation, no easy way to change the mindsets of people who see mullet as just

another fish to bring in the green stuff. But, as someone once said, the only way to eat an elephant is one spoonful at a time.

Although more difficult than herding cats, a small number of anglers working together to a common purpose can surprise themselves at what they can achieve. One letter to a politician won't change anything, but a few letters can and does make a difference. An angler sitting quietly at a meeting listening attentively is not heard, but one then another standing up to speak they are much harder to ignore. Mullet anglers getting together, working for a common cause, using letters, emails, social media and press releases can start to bring about the changes needed, whether working locally, regionally or nationally.

Many of the arguments that can be used have already been set out at in a paper [HERE](#)

Maybe this year will be the year when mullet start to become really scarce, the year when the netsmen find more weed than fish in their nets, the year when anglers scan the surface for rare signs of

“ There is no quick and easy answer, no waving of a magic wand to make all well again in the land of the mullet, no magic bullet of legislation, no easy way to change the mindsets of people who see mullet as just another fish to bring in the green stuff...”



vanished mullet, or maybe it's the year when YOU decide that something has to be done, not by someone else but by YOU. That is when things will begin to change.

Fight the fight,

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# A LESSON ON DEEP RIVER TROTTING WITH GARY DOYLE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: BILL BRAZIER



There is something special, magical about flowing water. Perhaps it is the fact that rivers and streams are unpredictable, their character ever-changing due to the weather, season or location, but always and forever hypnotically flowing onwards and outwards towards the sea. From an angler's (and fish's) viewpoint, they also present certain challenges and struggles not readily encountered in any other aquatic environment. Flooding events and changeable flow rates, even tides sometimes, mean that river tactics often require far more contemplation and planning that, say,



Spring is finally here!

in a stillwater or canal. Whether the target be coarse species or even game, invariably the bait must drift downstream or at least move in a natural manner in order to achieve consistent success. Of course, there are plenty of occasions when static baits hard on the bottom will be eagerly sought and accepted but often the best results come to those anglers who understand the river's current and use it to their advantage.

The ancient art of trotting a float (and it is certainly an art) is, sadly, practiced by only a relatively small number of enthusiasts, particularly in Ireland where rivers typically contain less coarse species than elsewhere in Europe. Gary Doyle is one such angler. The renowned match angler and Carlow-man grew up on the banks of the River Barrow, undeniably one of our finest and most productive rivers, and we thought it would be interesting to join him for a session to see how a river expert goes about things.

If truth be told, we had actually



Graignamanagh is beautiful spot



arranged to meet several times before today throughout this winter past but, as you will all empathise, the weather and river conditions always united against us. Still, on the bright side, with the days now much longer and temperatures rising we could a) get more fishing in and b) hopefully have a better chance at catching a decent number of fish for the cameras. Roach and dace are, unlike some of our other coarse species, definitely introduced to Irish waters. Dace are a relatively recent coloniser of the Barrow and, along with their red-finned cousins, form huge shoals throughout the river. For those seeking them they can provide superb sport all year round, with the right tactics employed.

Gary and I had agreed to fish at the condensed little town of Gaignamanagh, on the Kilkenney/Carlow border, in the lower reaches of

the Barrow. In fact, the river becomes tidal just a few miles downstream at the famous village of St. Mullins (think: Twaite shad). The stretch Gary had chosen is largely canalised in appearance (for boat traffic) and quite deep for the Barrow, being a good 10-12ft deep for the most part. As such it can and frequently does hold a lot of fish, particularly in the cooler months - namely dace, roach and perch, with the odd pike lurking around too. Given the depth of the swim, many of you might ask why Gary didn't choose to feeder fish. "Well, trotting gives a far more natural presentation and it also allows you to search out the swim more, instead of taking the more static approach" explained our river fan. "This might be better for bigger fish like bream or hybrids but when looking for numbers of smaller silver fish trotting is pretty hard to beat".

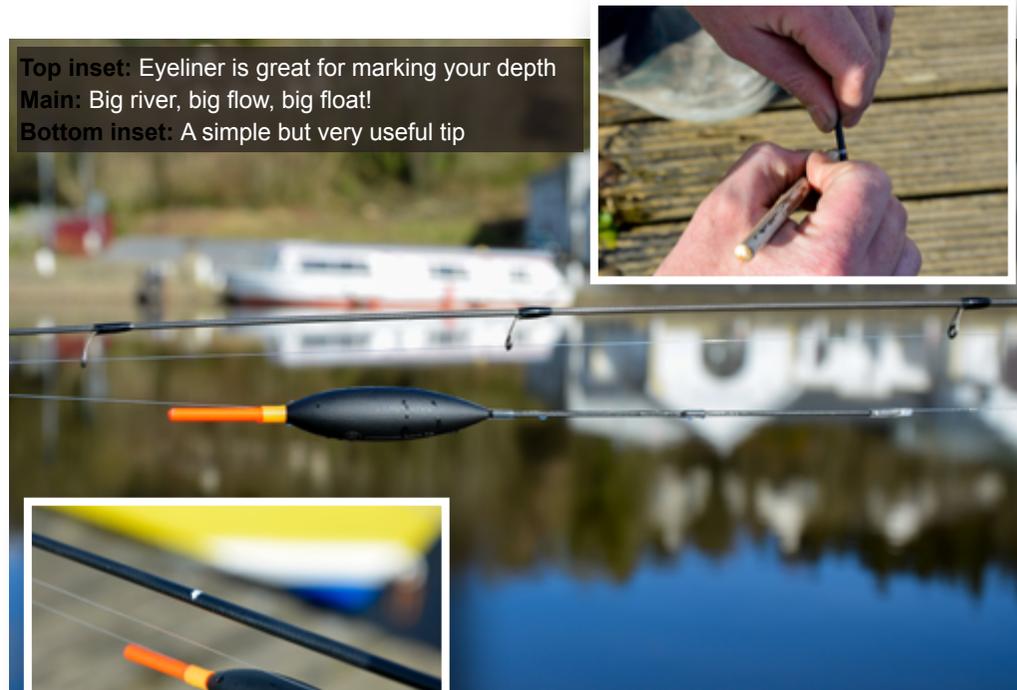
River conditions looked, to both of us, very good. Finally the heavy rains of late winter and early spring had relented (for now!) and the river was actually dropping, or 'fining down' as it is commonly phrased. This usually leads to good fishing and coupled with some glorious warm March sunshine and both the dace and roach feeding up ready for spawning we hoped for a fruitful day's fishing. Trotting a float fished at over 10ft deep might seem alien to many but the principles are exactly the same as if you were fishing



**"trotting gives a far more natural presentation and it also allows you to search out the swim more"**



Organised: hooklinks all ready to go

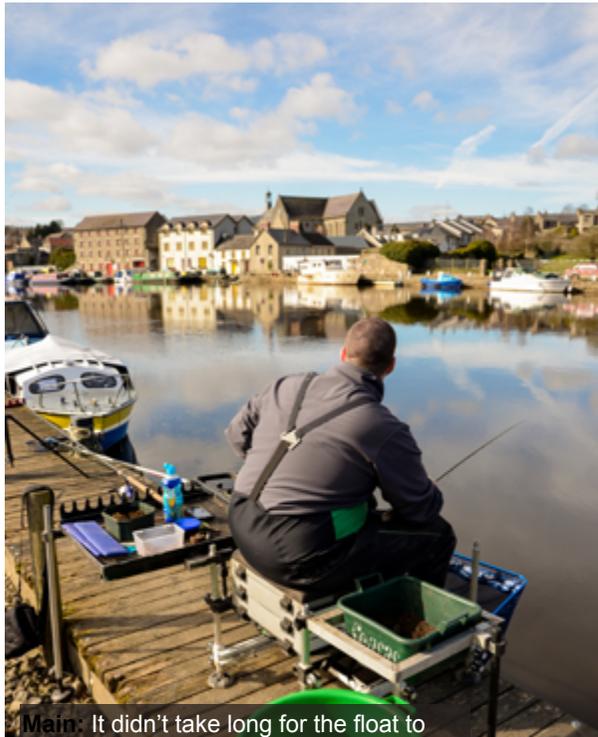


Top inset: Eyeliner is great for marking your depth

Main: Big river, big flow, big float!

Bottom inset: A simple but very useful tip

a more typically shallow stretch. The only real difference is that everything, in order to combat the huge volume and power of flowing water, is stepped up. Gary's rods (why he uses two will become apparent later) today were simple 14ft float rods, a bit longer than some of you might use but the extra length offers greater float and line control on rivers, and obviously means you can fish that little bit deeper. Even in the warmer parts of the year, the larger fish are invariably closer to the bottom than their smaller brothers and sisters. Gaz's set up was refreshingly simple - a (very) large stick float known as a 'bolo' (short for Bolognese) attached top and bottom end; a large



**Main:** It didn't take long for the float to disappear!

**Top inset:** A typical Barrow dace swings to hand

**Bottom inset:** Gary caught quite a few of these during the day!

'inside line', along the marginal slope and moored boats to see if any perch were at home. "The flow in the margins (still 8ft deep) is fractionally slower than the main river so I can drop down to a 3g float, which will drift downstream at about the right rate given the pace of water" he clarified. Once the swim was quickly plumbed to judge the depth Gary broke out his mascara – a flattering shade of beige! After the initial mockery and laughter it became clear why he had been in his wife's make up bag – it turns out eyeliner is an excellent method of marking the exact depth of the float on

your rod. Easy to do in a split second, is waterproof and rubs off at the end of the session. Genius! *"Even if I break off, have to re-tie the rig, need to change depths temporarily during the session I always know where my original depth is on the rod, which saves messing around plumbing –up again"*.

Like his set up, Gaz's bait choice was all thoroughly thought out too; proven, tried and tested and perfect for the job at hand. Maggots and casters were the obvious hookbait choices for dace and roach but he also had an enviable collection of lobworms (an unbeatable perch bait) and a nicely-riddled, heavy, dark groundbait (Sensas River, Gros Gardons, black crumb and Terre de Rivière soil) which would sink straight to the riverbed and stay in close proximity. *"The last thing you want"* added Gary, *"is an active mix that breaks up on the way down to the bottom or drifts away downriver*

**"In deep water the last thing you want is an active mix that breaks up on the way down to the bottom"**

*quickly. That's a sure way to break up any shoals of fish you attract, which is the opposite of what you are trying to do!"*

Boosh, boosh, boosh! In went three balls of groundbait as the float was swung out for the first time of the day. Gary's plumbing and knowledge of the river topography meant the float ran through perfectly, matching the pace of the river, with the bait sitting just off or just touching bottom. *"It's so important to know the exact depth you're trotting at"* he remarked to me, *"If your bait is dragging along the bottom, slightly over-depth, then you actually miss a lot of bites. The float doesn't bury under, it just dips and you don't often strike even though the fish has actually taken the bait. Fishing just off or just tipping bottom results in far*

*more positive bites"*. Likewise, 'holding back' the float every now and then for a second or two as it trundles down river makes the hookbait rise up and waft in the flow, often encouraging a fish to strike at it.

Second run through and the float did indeed disappear towards the end of the swim, about 20 yards downstream. This is to be expected early in the



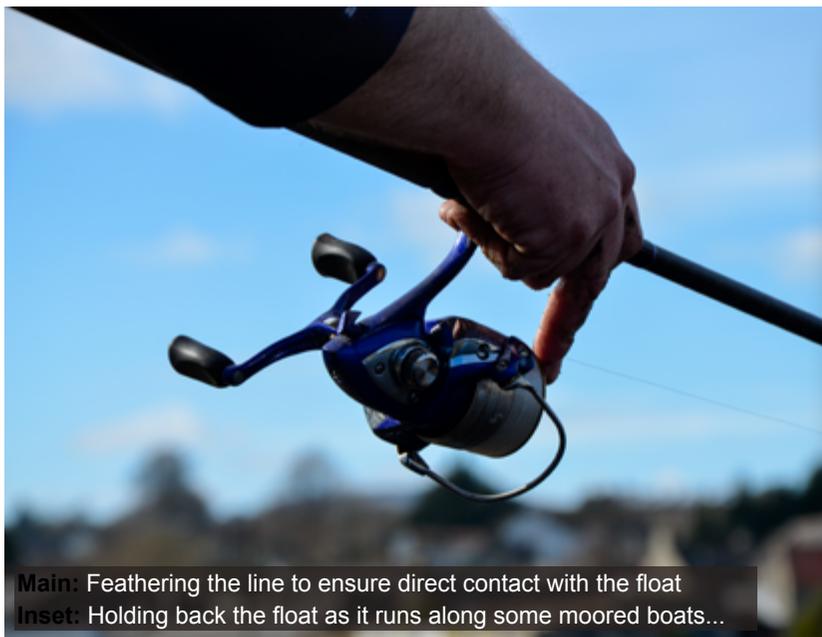
7g olivette to act as the bulk shot to get the hookbait quickly down to near the bottom where the loose feed will all end up; a few size 8 dropper shots on a 3lb hooklink and a size 16 Tubertini hook. As I said, the only thing different really to 'normal' stick float fishing is that the set up was a bit beefier.

In true matchman style (i.e. highly efficient and prepared) Gary also had a near identical set up on his other float rod. This slightly lighter float would be fished occasionally on the

session, as the bait will steadily draw fish closer and closer to you as the day goes on (i.e. they move upstream to intercept it). A small dace was the first fish to hand and we both smiled at the prospect of another five or six hours fishing in a lovely spot, or filming in my case! With every few trot's through Gary added another ball of groundbait but, despite catching quite a few more small dace and a couple of roach it soon became clear that the groundbait, for whatever reason, wasn't holding the fish in the swim as well as he would have liked. Most bites were coming (almost every cast) at the downstream end of the swim.

Puzzled, Gaz set about making his first tactical change of the day after about an hour. The number 8 droppers (of which there were two pairs and a single shot) on his hooklink were swapped for number 9's. This, to me, was an almost insignificant

A plump bonus, caster-caught roach comes to the net



Main: Feathering the line to ensure direct contact with the float  
Inset: Holding back the float as it runs along some moored boats...



difference and I enquired as to why he did this. *"Let's just see what happens"* he smirked. He swung out the rig, holding back the float on the surface to allow the flow to take the weights downstream first and prevent any tangles. First run down with the fractionally lighter dropper's and the float sank out of sight. It may have been just another small dace but this was impressive for the previous half a dozen casts had failed to produce any bites at all. And yet the next half a dozen casts resulted in half a dozen fish in the keepnet! *"The bait is now falling ever so slightly slower from the olivette down to the bottom and the fish now seem confident to take it"* - sometimes it is the

smallest changes in fishing that make all the difference.

It's rare, however, to change one aspect of the set up (in any fishing) and keep catching for the rest of the session. A successful trip in catching terms is usually a culmination of lots of little tactical ploys and modifications made in response to light levels, weather conditions, fluctuating water temperature, fish moving in or out of the area, angling pressure itself... The next occasion bites dried up on the main line saw Gary wind in, switch rods and send

a juicy lob tail down the margins and alongside the moored boats. Almost instantly a perch shot out and grabbed the worm section – well played, Mr. Doyle! Several more small perch obliged over the next few trots before that action too slowed up – shoal spooked perhaps?

It was fascinating to watch Gaz and how he approached the swim. His readiness to change the merest of

things was eye-opening, too. Each time the regularity of bites decreased he had an answer. Many anglers, myself included it has to be said, would have no doubt accepted that the fish has simply moved off for a while, or maybe that a marauding pike or cunning cormorant had moved in and unsettled the other fish. But here in front of my

Moored boats + lobworm = perch!







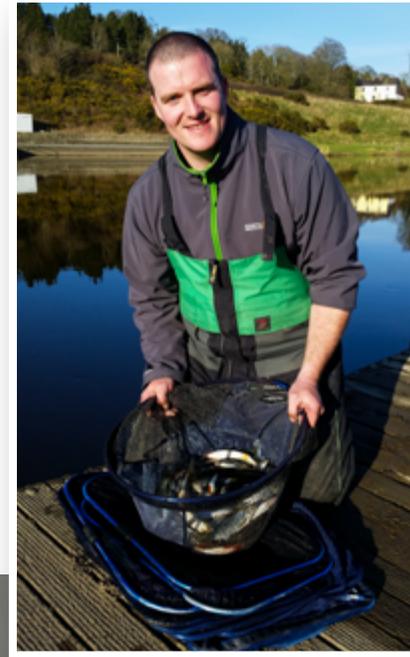
**“trading a size 16 for an 18 and then later dropping the hooklink from 3lb to 2lb brought about bites from the same run that had stopped producing”**

eyes was clear proof that fish of some description (normally small dace) were ever-present in the swim, for as each tiny alteration was made bites were once again, immediately, forthcoming. Fascinatingly, trading a size 16 for an 18 and then later dropping the hooklink from 3lb to 2lb brought about bites from the same run that had stopped producing until that point. The earlier change from groundbait as the main feed to catapulting loose maggots and sometimes casters also definitely switched more fish on. *“You always have to be thinking about your next change”* said Gary, *“never be afraid to change something. If the bites have stopped then you don’t have much to lose, do you?”* Gary was keen to cite the highly respected, incredibly successful Cathal Hughes as his eternal reminder to upkeep this philosophy. I think this assertiveness is a valuable lesson to a great many fishermen and women out there, regardless of your favourite angling discipline.

Pleasantly, the sun shone all afternoon and into early evening. Luckily, the wind never really picked up, as it can be very awkward when trotting, where it is required to have your mainline floating on the surface for greater control and contact with the

float. Dace after dace came to hand, along with some bonus plump roach and every now and then a perch from under their under-hull hide outs. Not that today was about the size of fish at all, but the class of larger dace in the stretch were conspicuous by their absence and the landing net wasn’t needed more than a couple of times all day. Clearly, we both recognised, many had moved off to spawn in shallower water elsewhere. In fact, the skin of many small males had begun to feel more like fine sandpaper than a cheese grater, indicating the spawning tubercles were no longer necessary for their annual courtship.

It’s quite hard work straining to see the tiny protruding tip of a stick float at distance all day, especially when it



insists on dipping and dragging under almost every cast! By four o’ clock our feature angler was hungry and tired and I decided to let him clock-off early. A final weight of just under 5kg was a very respectable one, especially considering that the aforementioned larger stamp of dace known to frequent Gaignamanagh failed to show. Gary had shown today why many match anglers are so good at catching numbers of fish – always thinking, always changing, always adapting to the situation.



**Main:** Many of the dace had clearly spawned  
**Left inset:** Loose feeding casters brought a better stamp of fish  
**Top inset:** Almost a 5kg bag caught by never being afraid to change things

Thanks for reading...



Casting a new eye on angling

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