

The National Anguilla Club

EEL ANGLING SPECIALISTS

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EDITOR'S PAGE

It was very heartening for me, as a result of sending out the Bulletin in January to see a positive response from members albeit that, in the main, they were new members.

At the time of writing I do not have sufficient articles to issue the Bulletin, without the inclusion of material of Bulletins of the past. This will continue until the day comes when the membership commits to supply me with articles. In the mean time I would welcome suggestions of any " old classics " which members consider would be suitable for re-issue.

In order to encourage you, I will, at the next A.G.M., be awarding a tackle voucher to the value of £50.00 to the person I consider has made the greatest contribution to the Bulletin. Could I urge members to look through their back issues of Bulletins to see the quality of articles written by past and present members. I won't mention any current members by name but Terry Coulson, Alan Hawkins and Dave Holman wrote articles that would do justice to any current angling paper or magazine.

I read with interest, Kevin Richmond's recent article on winter eel fishing in the Angling Times. You will note that John Sidley makes mention of Kevin Richmond in his article in this Bulletin. As I am writing snows lies thick on the hills surrounding my home. I think that perhaps I am a little too old for winter eel fishing (and Ernie Orme) certainly is !).

I have recently been in correspondence with ex-member Arthur Sutton, who sends all his friends in the club his kindest regards. He seems to have settled down after the trauma of redundancy and tells me he is still manufacturing the A.J.S. Alarms, which for all of you who haven't come across them, take some beating. I bought three of A.J.S.'s Alarms from Dave Walker when he had his tackle shop and they are still giving me good service. Arthur and I correspond regularly so I will keep you informed of his doings.

As Terry says in his Chairman's Page by the time you see this Bulletin myself, Ernie, Terry and Bob will have terrified the inhabitants of rural Wales with our presence. I will tell you how we got on in the next Bulletin. I can guarantee we will have eaten a lot and perhaps consumed a little alcohol in the comfort of our riverside cottage. I won't have a lot of sleep as Terry and Ernie snore and I will return home more tired than I went. God help the innocent Bob !

I am completing this on the 8.50 train from London Euston to Macclesfield on my way home from a meeting. My monthly trips to London give me the opportunity to catch up on my reading and put pen to paper, in the hope, vain though it maybe, that you will do so also.

Yours " the eternal optimist " Mark Davies

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

It looks like 1988 will be the start of a new era for the National Anguilla Club. I know it's been said in the past and I guess it will be said sometime in the future, but for those living in the present and who are members of the National Anguilla Club, it is what is happening now that is important.

After all that rambling introduction, you will all be thinking 'what on Earth is our President waffelling on about?'

The fact is that I am very pleased with the way things are developing. We have had a great influx of new blood into the Club, many members of excellent potential and mixed experience and success with freshwater eels. Several of our new members have yet to catch eels over 3lb while several have successfully caught eels to over 4lb. My main message to all new members, and several old ones of course, is that catching big eels is not the be all and end all of what the Club is about. You have all read our Constitution (it obviously requires revision to bring it up to date in some areas). Our aim is not just to catch as many big eels as possible, but to promote our side of angling and attempt to promote the conservation of eel fishing wherever possible. We must also not lose sight in our quest for success in eel fishing, that satisfaction as an eel angler or member of the National Anguilla Club, is achieved in many different ways by different members. I cannot speak specifically for other past or present members, who I hope will respond by sending in their own thoughts (present members anyway), but for myself, I have several stages or areas of pleasure that I obtain from my eel fishing or active involvement with the National Anguilla Club. No one area or stage alone could sustain my interest or continued efforts.

Obviously, I do need to go eel fishing - this I have done now for over 23 years as a serious eel angling specialist. I have learnt much along the years and am prepared to adapt and change as new ideas appear reasonable to me. Indeed, I feel I would have stopped specialising for eels many years ago if I fished in a stereotyped way. I have changed my attitude towards tackle, baits, choosing waters or swims within waters but never my attitude towards eels. I add variety to my interest by fishing for other specialist species such as pike and barbel. I have never been interested in carp angling but tolerate those anglers who are.

I am not interested in 'numbers' or size of the eels I am fortunate to catch, provided I do not have too many blanks and that in the occasional season I am 'lucky' enough to catch an eel over 4lb. I am more interested in 'quality' rather than quantity and would rather 'blank' than be pestered with numerous eels under 1lb or so, although having said that, in the days when to be 'Top Gun' in the Anguilla Club, you had to have large numbers of eels to your credit each season - regardless of size - I was guilty of thrashing waters where you could catch large numbers of eels without too much trouble provided you didn't mind them being 'laces' and costing a fortune in traces. I gave up when I realised I couldn't or didn't want to compete with certain members (now ex-members) who were achieving over 160 eels with over two-thirds under 1lb. It may have been what being a specialist eel angler is all about to them, but not to me.

I know at one time I said that all eels are statistically important, regardless of size, but I felt this was beyond the point. These days I feel I have had my share of laces and try to concentrate on waters where when my bite sensor sounds and line is being pulled away, I can anticipate action with a decent eel and not a trace tangling lace.

The waters I fish at present for eels are also waters with the potential to produce big eels. Unfortunately, because of various commitments such as work, family, administrative work for NASA and the NAC, plus attending many angling meetings, AGM's, Conferences, decorating, gardening, you name it, my fishing is often restricted to one main session per week. I am usually able to fit in two or three week end sessions also. Overall, I feel I can put in at least 20 overnight sessions minimum per season, for eels. If I am successful in catching just one eel over 4lb. I am very, very pleased, as those who fish with me regularly will confirm. However, I have had several seasons over the years that despite a major effort, I have not landed an eel over 3lb. That to me is eel fishing. If it were as easy as carp fishing I would have packed up long ago.

The main point is that because my eeling time is limited, I try to maximise it by trying to fish waters with the best potential and am prepared to travel to distant waters as finances permit. Sometimes after a few blanks I will fish a water where I know I will certainly catch eels, but of lower average size, just to 'feel' an eel.

Actually fishing for eels is only one side to what 'I' get out of being a specialist angler. I am a prime example of the saying 'that you only get out in proportion to what you put in'. This is certainly true for the NASA and the National Anguilla Club - or any other Club. Those who sit back and do nothing but say 'what will/can it do for me?' without doing anything in return will certainly get nothing out of membership. Just like you will never catch fish if you don't go fishing. Membership is a waste of time for those members who never attend meetings, who never attend Club trips or who never make any contribution to the Bulletin.

Membership of the National Anguilla Club will go over the 30 mark for the first time since the middle 1970's when it stood at a maximum of 36. I can only repeat that for the National Anguilla Club to be successful - as a Club - is for all members to do their best to be an active part of it - to fish for eels - to attend meetings and trips and to contribute to the Bulletin. It has been said many times before - all members should try to make at least one contribution per year. When are YOU going to make YOURS.

Tight Lines.

Brian Crawford

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CHAIRMAN'S PAGE

Its the hardest thing in the world to get back into, the routine of writing something on a regular basis, when you have got out of the habit.

However duty calls and its high time that I got something done, particularly while I have the opportunity. Of course its always easier when you've got something to write about, which happily is the case now.

Firstly and most importantly, we have seven new members join the Club in recent weeks. You will find their names and addresses in the new Directory of Members.

I will take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to each of them. I hope that all of them will enjoy a long and happy association with the National Anguilla Club.

It would be interesting to hear from the new boys, as to what prompted their applications for membership and even more pleasing to see their names appear in the Contents page in the near future with an article or two to their credit. (Your wish has come true Terry read on -Editor)

Bob and I have finally succeeded in collecting all the Club paperwork and equipment from Dave Walker. We shall endeavour to get it sorted out and passed onto Brian and Mark as soon as possible so that they might have the chance to get everything up to date.

The latest edition of Specialist Angler was as good as ever, and remember, if you want to receive individual copies in the future you will have to renew NASA membership individually. Do it now!

There appears to be a distinct threat once again, of an assault on those Welsh chub by Ernie, Mark, Bob and yours truly providing the weather is reasonable. Watch this space for further news!

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STEVE MARKWELL

I've written a short piece on baits and presentation, although I am sure all members will be familiar with my baits and rigs. These are the baits that I find the most effective and productive.

Worms and Deadbaits

None of these offerings are fished hard on the bottom. Worms for instance are either air injected or suspended a few inches above the lake bed by means of a small poly-ball on a length of light mono about eight inches long tied to the trace/hook eye. Deadbaits (nearly always sections) are suspended in the same manner. The water I am fishing at the present is alive with small rudd, but I have found that the eels of 3lb plus will only accept bream deadbaits! Perhaps members could enlighten me on this strange behaviour. Anyway back to the basic baits. These are usually dipped or injected with additives. Pilchard, crayfish, mussel and squid flavours being the most popular. Sometimes sweeteners are added and on one or two waters these have proved very effective. With my baits presented a few inches of the bottom I feel this gives me an increased chance of a take, for natural body juices and additives must be dispersed in the water to a higher degree than with a bait lying in silt or weed. Also eels can home in on a food item visually (highly unlikely in my experience of feeding eels in an aquarium - the eel has to practically bump into a worm or maggot to find and devour it - Editor) I think that their eyesight is a lot better than anglers give them credit for, as using live-baits can testify.

Paste Baits

Unfortunately in my neck of the woods (Mid-Bedfordshire) pastes, particles and specials are savaged by tench, carp and bream within a very short time causing much frustration and lost rod hours for the intended quarry. Natural food items such as bloodworms, water louse, snails, leeches etc used in paste form would in my opinion become the number one Tench/Carp bait (sardine based paste was a firm favourite with the waters population of carp).

Hair Rigs

Like paste using hair rigs gave me a great deal of problems in early trials, either I was missing runs or in some cases the hair was being severed by the eels teeth (this was a water with narrow headed eels, using very short hair rigs) May be a delayed strike would have resulted in more fish and also I think more deep hooked fish which I find unacceptable. Apart from eel section which is very tough I no longer use this method.

Pre-Baiting

I do this on waters that do not have a high density of carp and tench. Pre-baiting with offal is no go on my waters because of the risk of unwanted diseases (Steve please speak to member Ernie Orme who is the Club's long standing expert on unwanted diseases! - Editor) Putting freebies in a big eel swim does boost my confidence and thus I feel gives me the edge.

Basic Rigs

Static baits are fished with a J.S. Rig (whats the hells a JS Rig? - Editor) with a poly ball on the lead link so that the swivel is clear of any debris. I never free line, mainly because I do weekend and sometimes (work allowing) week sessions and I know that a one inch drop-back could go unnoticed, resulting in the possibility of deep hooking. Even fishing under the rod tip I use lead or on short sessions an isotope float. Both methods giving excellent bite indication. In my experience the use of fixed leads is not very effective. Bootlaces and even an eel of 3.2 hung themselves without even a bleep. At the end of 1985 I started using sub surface rigs and I must say this has had a dramatic effect on my catch returns. I found it worked on all waters that I have fished and sometimes (usually on a night with a bright moon or no cloud cover) the only method that caught eels.

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The rig i use was developed by Vic Bellars and modified bi Colin Dyson being originally designed for pike. For eels I find it superb. It never tangles and offers practically no resistance to a taking fish. Using small hooks and baits the result is nearly always a screaming run and a lip hooked eel. A very effective rig that I cannot praise too highly. Next season I want to try 'sliding hook lengths' that the carp lads have been using for the last year or two. I think this could be a step in the right direction for sorting out the bigger fish. It offers little resistance but there is perhaps some risk of deep hooking. This could perhaps be overcome with only an inch or so of free movement and perhaps a bait bar arrangement at the hook eye. With a running lead and an instant strike the deep hooking problem could be overcome. I again welcome any comments from members (no matter how harsh) who think that the method should or should not be used. Winter eel fishing is an avenue I should explore more. During the last two days in December I caught two eels (2.14 & 2.15) but feel I was cheating as the weather was mild! Unfortunately this winters campaign has had to be postponed because the boys in blue have taken my driving licence (a legacy of drinking three pints of 'lager & being stopped at a stop check) As an experiment I have been thinking of using a beta light on one of my end rigs. Why? You of course that eels are phototropic. Well, Mick Bowles once pointed out that the 'Nessy Hunting Team' who investigated Loch Ness with echo sounders were using cameras and when they were filming the bottom of the loch eels were attracted to the cameras lights. Food for thought? I know that beta lights used in this way have had limited success when used for tench and carp. again any members comments would be most welcome.

If its one thing I have learnt in pursuit of eels and that is to keep an open mind. Odd ideas can sometimes be made to work to your advantage.

all the best to all members and I hope you all catch the eel of your dreams this season.

Editors Note

This article contrasts markedly with John Sidleys entitled "I'm Just An Eel Angler" and I hope both Steves and Johns articles will provoke some comment.

I'M JUST AN EEL ANGLER-JOHN SIDLEY

For the last few months I've been fishing for my second angling favourite, the old pike. As promised one rod has been put out for my first love, Anguilla. As I sat on the bank awaiting action from these two species my thoughts turned to the three eel fishing clubs of which I am a member; ie the British Eel Anglers Club, the Eel Study Group and the National Anguilla Club. I've been thinking, is what these three groups are trying to achieve worth the effort? I for one think not. Apart from making some good friends in all three clubs I feel that my approach to the sport of eeling ends there. Reading through the magazines and newsletters of all three clubs I find that what is written about has all been written in previous years. It seems that we are going over the same ground. What is more we are not making any great advances in our ability to improve our catches.

I find it very funny when I read articles about full moons, half moons, the effect of tides, surface eel rigs, off the bottom eel rigs, scent trails, water temperatures, colour of water, depth being fished, wind, no wind, cloud, no cloud, range fished, on or off the bottom. I find these details very difficult to ascertain when I am fishing 100 yards out in 20 feet of water, Do any of the above factors effect your eel fishing? I feel not! Speaking for myself I am a devoted eel angler and live and breathe eels. Nothing fires my mind like eels and that is why I go eel fishing. It makes no odds whether any of the above factors exist. I just gather my eel gear and go out and do my thing. I simply eel fish none stop. Now you may say "what a prat you are to go out when the conditions are not perfect!" In all the years I have been eel fishing I have yet to establish when the conditions are perfect. I have ^{fished for} eels at night when there has been a hard frost on the ground and caught big eels. I have fished on perfect days and caught big eels, but just the opposite has happened as well. I have caught big eels in conditions which if I had followed the advice given in the three eel club magazines I should have stayed at home.

No lads, I think you are making your eel fishing harder for yourselves. I even think that the old eel may be becoming confused with all the new rigs. Half the time the poor old eel doesn't know which end to grab. Put in the time on the right waters with the right bait and you will catch the big old snakes!

Usually at this time of the year the chances of catching eels are very remote unless the weather turns very mild. It is not until the end of April or May that my chances of catching eels increase. I still go out, simply to eel fish, but having said that I do my homework on the best swims and baits. As I've said before I pick waters that have got a history of producing big eels. My ambition is to catch an eel weighing ten pounds or more. The rest is down to being in the right swim on the right day together with a hell of a lot of luck. I couldn't give a damn what the weather is like as long as the water is not frozen over. I admit to not liking a full moon. It makes it too light and on very clear nights it can become very cold. Nevertheless I have taken some very big eels in moonlit conditions. I am a big eel angler not one of those blokes who goes out to catch eels of any size. If you are fishing a water that you know holds big eels and your worm or deadbait is fished hard on the bottom you'll catch the big eels. But added to this you must have the confidence to believe that you are going to catch a big eel. I can remember Phil Smith at a NAC meeting saying that he wasn't interested in what the water temperature was because if it was too cold this would reduce his confidence in the belief that he was going to catch a big eel. Even where the weather conditions have been against me I feel it is my confidence that has led me to catch big eels. No matter what the weather conditions are like, the successful trips are the ones where you have got the big eel in the sack in the morning.

I do not claim to know everthing about eel fishing and I learn something new every time I go out. However I feel that the lads in the three eel clubs are going knowhere. Its nice to haer from different lad and to read different things about eel fishing and arrange trips with differnt lads but for me it ends there. I cannot think of anothe angler in the country who has devoted his life to eel fishing like I have. No one else has ever put the time that I do into my eel fishing. Perhaps this is why I have caught so many eels over 5lbs? Or maybe the elastic in my Avon scales nedds changing! I for on e wish that the three eels clubs could get together Forget the past and the differences of opinion. I was saddened last week to receive a ltter from Kevin Richmond of the Eel Study Group asking if I was still amember of the Natinal Anguilla Club. I understand that because of rule two of the Eel Study Groups rules I am not allowed to be! I wonder now if I will be asked to leave the British Eel Anglers Club as 99% of the membership of the BEAC are also in the ESG. I wrote back to Kevin and told him that to make it easy for him I would resign from the BEAC and the ESG. I am still a member of the National Anguilla Club. I will not stay whre I am not wanted. But does any of the abov help you catch more eels? It doesn't and its about time that a lot of the so called big eel anglers woke up to this fact. Well lads I must sign of now as its getting rather late and heres one angler who'll hav eto get his gear ready for a trip tomorrow. Its January, 22nd and the weather is not up to much and much of Birmingham is covered in snow. However Chris Roadknight and myself will be out at the crack of dawn trying a lake or the river Severn if the lakeis frozen over. We'll cast a bait tomorrow even if it means cracking the ice. Confidence? I'm full of it for Gerry and I have caught some cracking pike in such conditions.

Remember you only get out of fishing what you are prepared to put in

Tight lines and may the fish of your dreams slip over your landing net this year.

John Sidley.

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HELLO LADS DON'T READ THIS
BY NEW MEMBER KEITH BRADBURY

Before I start I would just like to say how much it means to me to be a member of the NAC. For someone who lives and fishes in Blackpool just like Brian Crawford did when he lived here.

To think back to my younger days when my mate and I used to go to the local lake in Blackpool to fish and to see this bloke eel fishing and to find out from the older blokes that this was John Watson. I remember now if it was yesterday and saying "John who" That was soon to change. That night saw me and my mate nipping into the park to have a go for the eels. As newcomers to the big fish world it was a miracle that we caught anything. That night as lady luck was on our side we both got a couple of eels. In the morning tired out and covered in slime I went back home to tell my folks that I was going to be an eel angler. Many years later I am still an eel fanatic. I put as many sessions in each season as possible. Big eels have so far stayed away from my hooks although I have caught eels to 4 lbs and a great number of 3lb plus eels. Also like most eel anglers I like to record the eels that I catch so that when I'm not fishing I can look over them. To me any eel is a bonus and there's always the next session to catch that big one.

I look on my eel fishing as the best thing to happen to me next to the wife and kids and she never gets in my way when I want to go eeling. In fact if I don't go for one reason or another she nags me to go.

One thing I've noticed over the years is that eel fishing hasn't changed much. By that I don't mean in terms of tackle, although I've gone back to using fibre glass as opposed to carbon rods. I mean in terms of methods and bait. So for instance the most successful method of catching eels is ledgering worms or dead baits hard on the bottom. When eeling now and when the rules allow I use a third rod. Fishing either on the bottom or sub-surface with small food items such as slugs or snails which have this season given me eels to 3lb from one water that I fish. Don't get me wrong I still use deadbaits and lobworms and always will. But sometimes it pays to try something new.

I know that you might have found this a bit boring, as articles go. It's not really supposed to be an article as such, just a new member who is very nervous, sending in something to put in the Bulletin. I've done it so that the existing members will know a bit about me. I am a very keen and dedicated eel angler and hope that I will be able to make a contribution to the Club's affairs. I did a talk for Martin James programme on Radio Lancashire entitled "Hook Line & Sinker" ie how not to speak whilst playing an eel whilst a microphone is being thrust at you. I will tell you about this in more detail in another article. Well I'll shut up now or else will not be able to stop.

Tight Lines and good eels to your rods,

Keith Bradbury

Well my 1987 eel season is more or less at a close, yet whilst pike fishing my venue in Brum I have kept one rod out with an eel bait on just in case one of those winter snakes feel like a snack and who knows I may just be one of those lucky winter pikers we often read about who knocks out a big old eel whilst pike fishing. With luck the venue I am fishing produces some very big pike on small deadbait sections. For example, last season I took two 20lbs pike on roach heads intended for eels, so my next run on the lake can come from a big pike or eel. I have the best of both worlds, yet if I was fishing a water like Earlswood or a couple of pits in Northampton or Wales where I know the eels are few and far between I do not think I would even bother to put an eel bait out in winter, especially when the frosts have returned. Big eel fishing is hard in summer even on the best waters, in Winter it is a killer.

Quite a few lads I know in the BEAC and the ESG, both of which I am a member, carry on eeling in winter, one being Kevin Richmond who has just been doing a few articles on the monthly magazines and weekly angling papers. I feel Kev sometimes fails to make clear to his readers that most, if not all, of his winter eeling is done on waters that are jam packed with eels. Given a mild spell in winter on those venues it's the law of averages that one of your baits will be cast on or near the nose of an eel. On other waters where the eel population is low, I think you are wasting your time. Most of the anglers who have taken big eels in the Winter will confirm, that after casting out their baits, usually for other species, that the run developed before the rod has had time to settle in the rests. A typically drop on the nose job don't you think? I for one will settle just to summer eel fish, but my praise goes out to the lads who are trying their hand at winter eeling. I only hope it does not crack them up, for too many blanks can get to the best of us. In a few months time Coarse angler will be printing a couple of articles I have written on the subject of winter eeling, those articles being written this winter about my Brum venue. On certain venues I would pursue the eel in Winter, this I have done on my Brum venue. It was interesting to find one or two things out whilst doing the above. Where years ago anglers would say do not fish your summer swims which nine times out of ten were in the shallows. They would advise you to head for the deep holes. Me being one of those anglers I found it was best to fish the shallow water. My first thoughts were that on any warm sunny days that we were lucky to have in the winter months or during a mild spell it would be the shallows that warmed up first. I also thought that a pre-baiting programme on those swims would be a good idea. If there were any eels willing to feed I wanted them to be searching for food in the swim where I was fishing. I say pre-baiting programme and not to feed on the food that I had laid down. I just wanted to attract them in the hope that they would find my bait and bingo. So I set about making myself an oversize swimfeeder out of wire mesh. I filled it with everything I could find dead and deposited it into my swim. A rope was tied to the basket and a bottle tied to the rope at the set depth, the bottle then acting as a marker. My swim feeder would then act as a scent trail for any eels that were feeding in the area. The mesh of the basket was of a size that eels could not get inside to feed on my offerings. This I thought solved the problem of the eels feeding on anything but my hook bait. Within a few days my efforts paid off as I started to take eels from the swim. Fish to 4lbs fell to my rod together with a great many pike to 17lbs. I sat rod, for I was fishing with four rods covering the whole of the swim at different ranges, but it was only the one rod cast out as near as possible to the basket produced the runs. For eels and pike the other rods may well have been thrown up the bank. Another very interesting find was that, a good mouth full, like a roach cut in half of about 4 ozs or a bunch of lobworms was unproductive. It was only when I started using hook size 8's and small sections of roach heads, or a single lobworm that bites were forthcoming. Those winter snakes did not want or would not tolerate a big meal. It was only a snack they wanted. I also found that the runs, if one could call them that, were more or less nil. A couple of bleeps on the Optonic

.All I would see was my main line entering the water lift.I thought the culprits were pike,but on striking I soon found out that it was eels as my rod buckled over as a snake tried ita best to back off.

I have been told by a fellow angler on my Brum Lake that he has a few funny runs on his smelt bait whilst piking.On striking he felt nothing and found no marks on his bait, but better still he has had his baits come back with tails missing,heads smashed and the guts sucked out.I think I'd better get over their with a couple of lobs on the hook don't you?

At this time I would like to say sorry for not getting to the last AGM.My good friens Gerry Rogers could not make it that day so I was without transport.I did think of coming over on my Truimph Bonneville,but the weather was somewhat wet on that day.I look forward to seeing you all at the Spring Meeting.My fishing exploits so far this season are,eel wise,130 stints and took 53 over 1 lbs, 65 over 2 lbs,21 over 3lbs,13 over 4lbs with two over 5lbs the best at 5lbs 7ozs. So far on the pike scene I have taken 53 fish into double figures with one over 20lbs.I wish you all good fishing in 1988 and hope the NAC can go from strength and back to its former glory.A little late I know,but Jean and myself hope you all had a happy Christmas and we wish you a happy new year.I hope the eel of your dreams slips over your landing net in 1988.

Till the Spring Meeting all the very best.

John Sidley

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your letter and the Bulletin. The Bulletin is very good and the articles are great. I like the articles that date back to the 1960's. I thought they were very interesting.

About myself, I first got into eel fishing in 1983. I used to cycle a round trip of 20 miles to fish my local river (the river Wyre). Although I only caught bootlaces I found it very exciting.

In 1984 I fished stillwaters for the first time in search of a big eel. At that time I found that catching big eels was not as easy as catching bootlaces from my local river. It took me six weeks to catch my first stillwater eel which weighed 11lb 2ozs and came from a farm pond in June 1984. From that point on I was hooked on eel fishing and have been ever since. In June 1985 I joined the British Eel Anglers Club and in January, 1987 I joined the eel study group. I am still a member of both groups. In September 1987 I achieved my ambition and caught my first four pound eel weighing 4lb 14ozs (not 4.4 as stated in the latest Bulletin) from Stanley park Lake near Blackpool.

Since I began eel fishing in 1983 I have caught :-

16 eels over 2lbs to 2.14

4 eels over 3lb to 3.11

1 eel over 4lb to 4.14

95% of my eel fishing is done on stillwaters mostly on small farm ponds and a few lakes. I have fished canals and rivers but haven't had much success on larger stillwaters.

I am already looking forward to 1988 and the eel fishing. I can't wait for the season to start so that I can get my eel tackle out again.

Anyway Mark that's all for now. I hope to hear from you soon and the best in your fishing.

Kev

P.S. Enclosed are some photos of my eels. I hope you like them. I am writing an article for the Bulletin about my eel fishing in the Blackpool area etc and will post it off as soon as I have finished it.

It was 8.00pm on a beautiful July evening as the car ground to a halt outside the farm. As we got out of the car the two friendly farm collie dogs came to meet us, barking and wagging their tails, showing a keen interest in the tackle we were unloading from the car. I always take a biscuit for each of them, so that was what they were searching for. After they received their biscuit they disappeared back into the farmyard.

My friend Paul Davies, who I have been fishing with for seven years, was accompanying me, on this his third eeling trip. We made our way down past the side of the quaint eighteenth century farmhouse, through the heavy grey gate and out into the field which adjoins the river. We now had to walk about 300 yards to our chosen swim. On arriving at our swim everything looked perfect, the willow trees on the far bank, that hid the mouth of a small feeder stream, danced in the gentle breeze. The river itself was in perfect summer condition. The minnows near the bank dimpled the surface as they played, occasionally appearing out of the water like a fountain as a hungry perch or jack pike chased them.

The river here is fast on the far bank, where the main current pushes through about ten feet deep, with a gravel bank in the middle rising to within four feet of the surface. It then deepens slightly as an eddy on the near side, as the river widens into a small bay. A well placed bait either side of the gravel bank will not have to wait long before an eel finds it.

As there are no major snags in this swim I use fairly light tackle, a ten foot Daiwa leger rod with a test curve of 1½lbs, a Mitchell 300 reel loaded with six pound line. Terminal tackle could not be simpler, an Arlesy bomb of whatever weight the current dictates, a Berkley ball bearing type swivel and a trace about 14 inches long connected to a size 4 forged hook. Bait, two lobworms hooked through the middle, with their tails cut off to release their juices into the current. Paul was using identical tackle.

The eels tend to feed heavily between 10.30pm and 1.30am in this swim. I have found tough legering to be the most effective in this swim in terms of converting bites into eels on the bank.

About 10.00pm, as the light had almost faded, the wind dropped and some useful cloud cover appeared in the sky. I was very thankful of this, as previous experience had shown the darker and warmer the night the better.

It was 10.45pm before the action started when Paul hooked an eel of about two pounds, I say about as we don't weigh every eel we catch, only the larger ones. It Paul again who hooked the next one, which came adrift. I then had one of about 1½lbs then all went quiet.

Two hours passed without further action, and we were talking about packing up when the line was pulled from my fingers and started trickling off the spool. I closed the bail arm and lifted the rod and let the weight of the fish set the hook. As soon as the rod took the strain of the eel I knew it was larger than anything I had hooked before. Before I had time to blink, twenty yards of line had been taken off my reel. I could see the eel was heading for a fallen tree and was within ten yards of safety. With only five yards to go I decided to try to hold the eel hard and try to turn it, praying my tackle would hold. After what seemed an eternity, which lasted for probably no more than ten or twenty seconds, and in which time I thought that either the line or the rod was going to break, the eel turned and I started to pump it towards me. One short run followed then I brought it within netting distance. Paul slipped the net under the still struggling eel and brought it ashore. I quickly removed the hook from the side of the eel's mouth and then looked for my scales, only to find that I had left them at home. I could see that the eel was larger than any I had caught before. I remembered I do have a tape measure in my top pocket, so while Paul held the eel steady I measured. It was 35 inches long from nose to tail.

After slipping the eel back we fished the rest of the night but with no success and I'm still kicking myself for not checking my tackle thoroughly enough before laeving home, to make sure that I had everything with me.

Do you need help with a problem ? ?

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EEL FISHING IN SOUTH WALES

KEVIN HUIISH

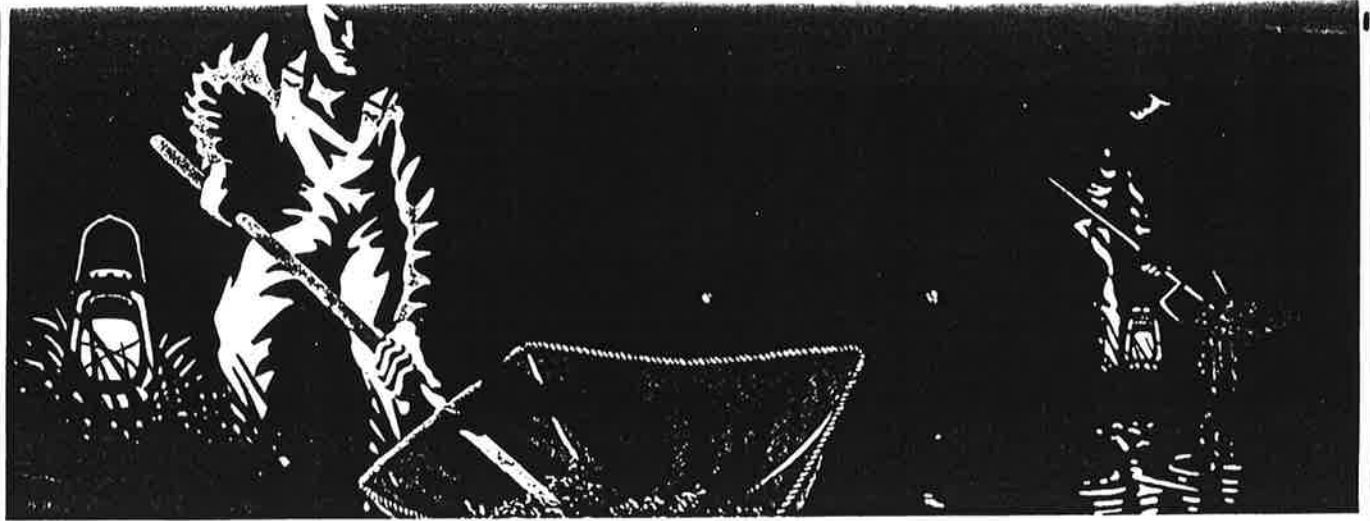
My interest in eels grew after finding a huge fish dead on the bank following an eel session on Barry Reservoir from where I had taken fish to 21lbs 7ozs. The headless corpse of the eel weighed 61lbs 2 ozs. Further sessions produced blanks adding a certain amount of intrigue as far as the large eel was concerned. This happened in 1985. Since then I've only managed a handful of sessions due to my interest in other species (I eventually married my wife in 1986 and my son was born the following year.)

After doing the rounds with carp, tench pike etc I now only fish seriously for two species; eels from April to September/October and Chub September/October to March. A few small sessions after other species are mixed in depending on the weather conditions.

I am a member of the Chub Study Group and I am the Regional Organiser for NASA in South Wales.

I class any fish over 11b as worthy of recording in my records but I like to use these as a means to compare waters rather than play the numbers game. I have been suffering a lot of blanks fishing big trout reservoirs but I feel that a big fish will come from this type of water. Any comments?

I look forward to meeting the members at the May get together on the Grand Union Canal. I will try my best to health the NAC in any way possible.



THE MONTH OF THE ELVER

SEDGEMOOR, SOMERSET

Down in the West Country, spring is coming. You can almost smell it. The damp still lingers, but there is now a softness in the air whenever the wind is in the west.

In the last of the old cider orchards, great spotted woodpeckers hammer at the hollow trees, beating retreat for winter. At last the year is on the move.

Beyond Martock, where the road to Langport sinks down into the waterlogged flatness of the Somerset Levels, the sense of change is everywhere. The golden plovers which spend the winter on these wet pastures are drifting back to Scandinavia. Soon the chiffchaffs will be here; summer visitors from beyond the Sahel, slipping through the pollard willows ahead of the main onrush of warblers, swallows and fly-catchers.

But every year, long before the return of the first cuckoo, an utterly silent and altogether stealthier migrant is arriving by the million in this Somerset waterland.

The coming of the elvers – the eel's multitudinous offspring – is yet another sign of spring, a yearly phenomenon signalling the end of an epic 3000-mile journey from their spawning grounds in the Sargasso sea.

The common eel is the oddest of fish. It can travel overland yet it has no lungs. A night hunter, it sniffs out its prey with nature's keenest nostrils. Its blood is poison. If you have a cut finger, nothing will turn it septic faster; yet cooked eel – jellied, smoked or deep-fried in oil – is delicious.

Even today much of its life is a mystery.

No one knows how adult eels find their way back from Britain across the Atlantic, and nobody knew where they spawned until 1922, when a Danish biologist, Johannes Schmidt, discovered their deep Sargasso secret.

The eel begins life as a curious, leaf-shaped creature called a leptocephalus. For the next two-and-a-half years they drift towards Europe in the Gulf Stream currents; by the time they arrive they have already assumed the wriggling shapes of elvers: miniature eels, matchstick thin, with transparent spun glass bodies.

At the beginning of the year the glass eels gather in Bridgwater Bay in numbers beyond imagining. Then, one dark night when the water is warm enough, they swarm into the mouth of the River Parrett and head upstream, seeking the ponds, streams and ditches where they will grow into adult eels.

In Somerset their final push is helped by the huge Bristol Channel tides which send a waist-high surge of water up the Parrett towards Sedgemoor. When the tide falls back and the river runs out, the elvers are forced towards the banks; but they continue to swim upstream, clotting together in thick, viscous shoals – "crawling" in the local vernacular – and it is then that they fall prey to a shadowy underworld of tax-dodging netmen.

In the old days elvers were strictly for local consumption. Fried in bacon fat with a duck egg stirred in to bind them together they provided a tasty seasonal treat for the Somerset fenmen. But over the past 15 years elvers have become the staple of a

lucrative small country living. During the season, continental juggernauts reverse precariously down the back lanes of Sedgemoor to suck up tons of elvers from holding tanks and whisk them off to Europe. Most go to Germany, where the eel is regarded as a sporting fish scarcely less noble than the salmon, to restock ponds and rivers.

There is no mistaking a night on the Parrett when the elvers are crawling. No moon; only a furtive glimmer of lamps across the fields where high-booted men wait on the banks to scoop up their catch in long-handled cheesecloth nets.

The fact that everything takes place in the dark adds to the sense of stumbling on a clandestine operation, and it does not do for strangers to ask questions. A few years ago the inland Revenue men from Taunton expressed a keen interest in these local activities; but the fishermen proved as slippery as their quarry. Miraculously, individual catches declined overnight to a point way below the tax threshold; although, curiously, the netmen are as numerous as ever.

Sedgemoor and its marshland harvests – elvers from the rivers, withies for the basket trade – are relics of an older, earlier England which has long since gone under in less stubborn shires.

From Burrow Mump you can see it all: a sprawling flatness of withy-beds and cattle pasture mapped with the grey gleam of dykes – known here as *rhyndes*.

The Mump is one of those enigmatic Arthurian hills which dominate the Levels. A landmark for miles around, it rises

above the village of Burrow Bridge: a grassy pyramid terraced by the tread of sheep and crowned by a ruined chapel.

The view from the top is incomparable. To the west, the Quantock hills. To the north-east, the Poldens, with Glastonbury Tor and the Mendips beyond. And on all sides, the arable fields, the brimming dykes, the distant glint of muddy rivers.

Sometimes great floods come, as they did in 1929 when bread was handed up on hayforks to families marooned on upstairs floors. But nowadays, increasingly, the land is being squeezed dry by modern drainage schemes: a gain for farming, a tragedy for conservation. Yet, despite the changes, it is still the kingdom of the elvers.

Those elvers which avoid the nets will disperse into the moor's watery veins. There, during the summer, hidden beneath the floating crust of frogbit and duckweed, they will acquire the dull, olive brown backs and yellow bellies of adult eels. And there they will remain, perhaps for as many as 15 years, fattening for their last great journey.

Not all will survive. Many will be speared by herons; others eaten by the handful of otters for whom these Somerset wetlands are a precious refuge. Then, one night towards the end of the year, when the rain is pouring off the surrounding hills, the swollen rivers will be alive with migrating eels, no longer dull but shimmering silver on their way down to the sea.

TEXT BY BRIAN JACKMAN
ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW DAVIDSON

Fishing the Margins.

By; Dave Holman.

I was glancing through some copies of the Bulletin which I borrowed from benevolent Ernie Orme about four years ago, when I came across a series of articles entitled, "Hot-spots and Holding places."

Many of these articles made for extremely interesting reading and brought me around to thinking of my own "hotspots."

Recently, I have had a number of successful eel sessions, (including a 4lb'er), by concentrating on fishing the margins. I tell you this not to brag, but simply to rouse some interest in this very productive and enjoyable branch of eel fishing.

Having the bait so near to the bank, it is so much easier to size up the exact spot you intend to fish. Take into consideration the contours of the lake bed, trees, rubbish, weedbeds, rushes or any other feature, and from these it is possible to trace a possible route of a patrolling eel. Drop in your bait along this path and your chances of success are very high indeed.

Compare this with the hit and miss affair of spraying out legers towards an area where you hope eels will be, and perhaps I can convince you that fishing the margins is well worthwhile.

Two features, not so much required from a water, but considered essential, are trees, and mud!

Some lakes have a dense area of trees where few if any anglers ever venture. The more impenetrable these are the better and where the branches overhang or roots and old logs are laying in the water then you have one feature correct. If the bottom is mud or peat and shelves from 2'-5' at the end of these trees then you have a sure fire winner, always providing the eels are present in the first place.

What you don't want is a sand or gravel bottom. I like the waters of 20 acres plus, with a variety of depths and bottom, (eels seem to prefer water with some access to the deeps.)

One word of caution; every spot I know with such ideal conditions is always the furthest from the car park and a long walk through rough terrain is called for.

Having found your Mecca, before actually fishing, the next step is to sort out your spots. I use this word in the plural because it would be silly to use all your rods in one clearing. Instead, sort out several over a distance of 70yds or so.

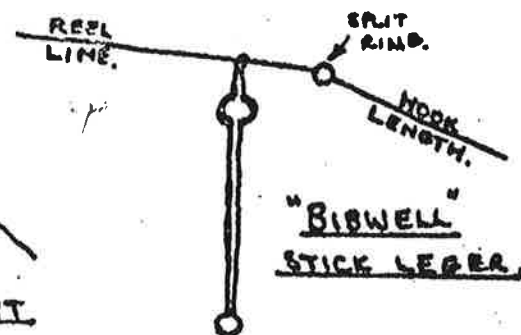
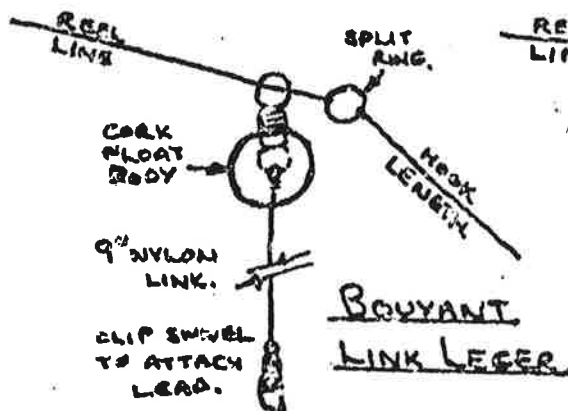
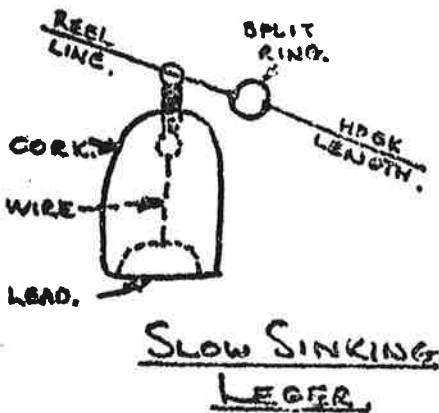
What we are looking for is just enough space in the trees to flick out a bait, so a branch or two may have to be tied back or clipped, but don't open up the spot too much. Then move down the wood another 20yds or so until you find another space and so on until you can scatter your gear along the whole of your chosen pitch.

Next, weigh up your spots, plumb the depths carefully with float and leger finding out exactly where the water starts to deepen, however slightly, past the end of the trees. Have a good look and use your judgement to decide where an eel will be most likely to take.

You will need several bite alarms and a camp site around the middle of your pitch, and all this can be sorted out before you actually move in with your tackle.

Don't use light gear in such circumstances, a big lively eel hooked at such short range is indeed a sturdy opponent. An S/U carp rod or similar with eleven pound line fits the bill admirably and gives you some sort of bargaining power. I am a great believer in light tackle, but never when fishing the margins.

Freelining is the best method but should some form of weight be required to make the distance, either slow sinking legers, or bouyant link legers, or Bibwell stick legers described in Bulletin, Vol: 12, No: 4, by Chris Davy make ideal terminal rigs.



An ordinary leger rig will sink into the mud and possibly offer resistance to a taking fish.

Worms are my favourite bait. Dead fish if used, should be either very small, or in section because on arrival from your camp to a rod signalling a run you must strike immediately. It's no use if the eel has found a few tree trunks to run round.

On some waters, I have found that the eels prefer bunches of two or three worms while on other waters, a single worm is the only bait which produces worthwhile results.

When it comes to actually fishing, it is necessary to choose a dark time of the moon and if possible, plenty of cloud cover. Eels venturing into these shallows need to feel pretty secure and it goes without saying that absolute silence is essential, so while waiting for a distant alarm to sound, a bedchair is the best place to be.

On the right night, arrive early as setting up will disturb an otherwise quiet place. Set up your camp with large landing net outside, put up your rods in the chosen spots, and lastly, site the alarms.

Now you can have a brew and take in the pleasure of being in such a secluded spot as darkness descends, which to me is worth a visit on it's own.

Just before dark, bait up your rods and cast them exactly to intercept the eel. Then leave a trail of 15-20 lobs along the anticipated routes and then make a retreat to the bedchair.

I have listened to people trying to sneak up on me through a wood and it sounds like a charging rhino coming at you. Imagine what it is like for the eel in the dead of night when you leap off your bedchair and stumble towards a pulsating alarm. No wonder some of these fish belt out line at an amazing rate, they must be frightened to death.

Expect a run at any time, though for some reason, just before dawn seems to be a particularly good time. If you get a run before it is properly dark, suspect a pike, and don't forget to re-groundbait if it is.

The eels invariably take off parallel to the bank rather than straight out and hopefully you can strike before the eel crosses too many overhanging branches. This is where your topography of the spot comes in, knowing exactly where the snags are, and when to pile on the pressure.

A small torch taped low on the landing net handle is a great help, otherwise netting an eel in the added darkness of the trees is extremely difficult. Another must is a pair waders so that if necessary you can get in there to sort him out. Once again, knowledge of your swim will be essential before blundering on.

Once an eel has been taken on a rod, it is very rare to get a second on the same rod although very often, a second fish is caught on another rod within minutes of the first.

Indeed, I have had two runs at the same time, and when the two rods are some 70yds apart-well, a problem arises.

Often, margin caught eels are larger than the average size for the water but after a successful session, don't fish the same spot again for at least a couple of months. I can guarantee that you will blank. Far better to search out another area and try there.

In some respects, eels in this situation seem to have the same territorial habits as trout in small streams. Find the best pool and here will be the best trout, remove him and some time later a second though lesser trout will move in and take over.

If I can quote one classic example with eels;

"In September 1975, margin fishing an Ellesmere lake for the first time, I caught an eel of 5:04. The following June, the first visit of 1976 produced a 4:11 and despite trying it several times later that year nothing else was forthcoming. Yet another first session in July 1977 produced a fish of 3:13.

All these eels were taken from the same area of just a few square inches and no other eels were caught within 50yds.

This is certainly not the only occasion when I have noticed this lowering of sizes. If only the fish got bigger instead. Now I tend to accept the fact, and try to discover new swims to try hoping that one day I will drop my bait on a real monster.

Certainly margin fishing is not easy but I assure you that it does work, at least it does in my waters and it may do in yours. Give it a try along the lines I have suggested and maybe the margins will become your "Hotspots" too.