

How to Catch Pike

The following document has been put together with care and an “Easy to Read” attitude towards Pike Fishing. All that’s been done is to take various information, add bits and taken bits, put into practice and then developed. I have only lightly touched on the subjects of Equipment, and Water Craft as these are all well known parts to your fisherman’s tool box.

1. Equipment

You can never underestimate the importance of sound and sturdy equipment. All aspects of your fishing tactics will come to no avail if you fall short on equipment. At the end of the day you are pursuing a very powerful predator. Make sure that the basic tackle is sound and up to the job. Rods need to be powerful 2–3 lb test, and well maintained. I personally recommend a test curve towards the 3lb mark. Its no use fishing too light, only expecting a small to mid-double to show itself when all of a sudden you’re into a thirty plus, it will be too late. You need to be the one in control. Most Personal Bests could have come earlier. I've heard it a 100 times before, “That was a monster, couldn’t stop it, just broke away!!!” (Tackle not maintained) Reels also need to be up to the job. Bait runners are probably the most common type these days, and again you don’t have to spend hundreds of pounds on them. Mitchell produce a very reasonable reel for less than £30, I used them 3 seasons ago, and they coped really well with high doubles.

The line, I have left for its own chapter, as I feel that there’s a lot of info to pass on. It’s no use having the top of the range rods & reels, expensive line, only to fall short on old rusty swivels, blunt hooks and bad knot tying.

So to conclude, if your equipment is well maintained you’re on the first step to success.

2. Water Craft

It doesn’t matter whether it’s a lake, pond, river, stream or reservoir that you have chosen to fish, you will still need to learn its features, such as depths, inlets, snags, and probably where the prey fish are located. Pike love to hide up, they are famous for their ambush tactics. Shoals of roach are a good sign that they may soon be visited by a predator. A very common occurrence is that roach are taken whilst they are being caught, they’re taken just as they are being brought to the net. Also a well stocked keep net will encourage pike to attack, I have witnessed this many times. But, as the chapters roll on, you will discover that our Aim is to attract the pike to us, and not to chase him. All will become clear!!

3. Pre Baiting

This is the first big step that you will make towards finding and attracting the pike. A couple of days before the planned fishing trip, a visit to the venue will take place, to survey the likely swims that offer good potential for fish. The following information should be noted:-

i) Likely weather conditions, such as wind direction, one such tactic would be to “drift” my baits in which case I will need to have the wind coming from behind. Another tactic would be to free line dead baits, again calm water would be the option. It depends on how you wish to present your baits.

ii) Look for signs of other anglers, and what species were they after. Carp anglers would have probably launched buckets of ground bait out, which now would have attracted large shoals of “prey” fish. Match anglers again would have done much the same. So this may not be such a bad place to fish.

iii) Is this a popular swim, will I be first here. There are always favourite swims, and unpopular swims. Try to pick the later, they have had less disturbance. Practical Pre-Baiting; I always keep my old dead baits, these are used as an attractant prior to fishing. Once a swim has been chosen, the process of

pre baiting either side of it will begin. Not in the next swim but between them, in the bushes. Cotton or very low breaking strain line 1-2lb is used, tie one end to the old dead bait, then throw it out, not too far, probably no more than 20m out. Secure the other end to a branch of a tree or bush. Do this about 2-3 times either side of your intended swim. Sometimes on popular waters it is advisable to do this to a number of swims. When you return to the swim ready to start fishing, check to see if the baits have been taken. This will indicate whether the area has been visited. And to the pike, they will know that this has now become easy pickings. Use Sea baits, there is less chance of other predators picking up the baits, such as Eels, Zander or perch, or even Chub.

4. The BLEND

The traditional Piker is never seen throwing out ground bait. Not even on TV by the experts. (Or was it performed prior to filming?) Not like the buckets of hemp, boillies, sweet corn, dog biscuit etc etc that the carp angler distributes, (they normally raise the level of the lake a couple of inches). Or the match angler with his gallons of maggots, pinkies, whites, bronzes, squats, worms and mashed bread. No, the pike angler, once his baits are in the water, he sits back and hopes that the pure aroma of his bait will be enough. Well here's the secret; if used correctly pike ground bait or "The BLEND" as I like to call it, will without doubt improve the quantity of your catches. The Blend should be prepared the night before, saves time messing around on the day

i) Put 2lb of small trout pellets into a bucket and pour boiling water on top so that the pellets are covered by about half an inch.

ii) Cover and leave for 10 mins

iii) Take the lid off, give the pellets a good mix up, and then let them cool down.

iv) Add 4lbs of brown crumb.

v) Add fish oil. I put approx a pint of mackerel oil. (this works out really cheap if purchased in bulk) Mine is purchased from the local market fish monger at about £10 for 5 gallons.

vi) Mix the contents together and add water to achieve your desired texture.

As soon as the venue is reached, the Blend is fired out, in an area where my baits will be. Don't put out the ground bait in too tight an area, as you'll quite often find that once you start firing it out it will land in what looks like the exact same spot. What you must also remember is that putting two or three pounds of ground bait into a canal isn't going to have the same effect as putting it into a large lake, so try to get a sense of proportion of the water you are fishing. If your not fishing far out the bait can be thrown, but if you want it at distance you'll need a good quality ground bait catapult. Most good tackle shops have a decent range. Mine was about £15 and quite easily fires out golf ball sized ground bait 50-60 metres.

There has been a lot written about oils, for example, whether they simply rise to the surface and disperse after being injected into baits. Well this ground bait method is quite different. The trout pellets slowly release the oils (in fact an oil slick can be seen on the surface over the bait throughout the day), whereas an injected bait only lasts half an hour or so unless you use the capsules on the attracter leads. Using ground bait for pike is very much a multi-purpose method. Firstly it attracts prey fish into your swim, which also gives you the opportunity to snatch a few baits. Hopefully this will, in turn, bring the pike to you. Secondly, the trout pellets contained in the Blend will not only bind the whole thing together, which makes it great for firing out long distances, but they also slowly release smelly oils which the pike could sniff out even if the prey fish aren't attracted. Lastly, when the ground bait is thrown or fired in, the splashing noise it makes must get the pikes attention – similar to what happens when a lure hits the surface.

In conclusion with The Blend, when used on its own, it can be very successful, but when used in conjunction with the rest of the information contained in this book. It is Deadly Effective.

5. Triggers

The wonderful thing about "triggers" is that they are not always based on natural phenomena – some of them you can create yourself. The pike has been around for a very long time indeed, not changed at all in thousands of years, a sign that nature conceived the design of this predator fish correctly from a very early stage in evolution. Over this long period of evolution, the pike being still of a primitive nature, it responds well to nature's natural triggers for their feeding. These responses to external stimuli have hardly changed or evolved at all, especially in comparison to ourselves which have evolved at a tremendous rate and as a result have lost our "supper senses" to the environment which we once had.

The sun rises and sets every day, and gives heat to our planet. That much is obvious, but it is equally obvious that it changes the light conditions under the water, these light conditions differ depending on cloud cover and time of year. Furthermore, like the moon, the sun could also have some magnetic pull which can have a significant effect on pike and prey behaviour – especially when a cold front is approaching.

When natural triggers are present, i.e. moon/sunrise, set and high point and more importantly cold fronts approaching, I sometimes use man-made triggers to get the pike moving. It's like giving the pike a wake-up nudge, so to speak. A story that springs to mind is told in Fred Buller's Book, Doomsday Book of Mammoth Pike about Tommy Morgan, and his fishing companion Bokas. Tommy and Bokas would set up several live bait rigs in a weedy bay, then would row the boat around the back of the potamogeton weed beds to drive out the pike towards their rigged baits. Once the pike had been disturbed and driven out, runs would occur on the live bait rigs. Tommy and Bokas had unknowingly created a man-made trigger.

Other man-made triggers are:-

When boat fishing, say a reservoir, find an area that you wish to fish, then zoom around for a couple of minutes, this will create a vast disturbance, and also churn up the colour. Drop anchor (only after coming to a stand still) and drop your baits. You will find this will trigger takes.

When I fish reservoirs, I am always on the look out for other anglers that have been fishing an area for some time, only to move on, having had no success. Their pack up is noisy, the anchor is hauled into the boat, engine revved up, sometimes they do the odd "doughnut" churning up the mud and silt. When my baits are then offered, together with a balls of "The Blend" Success has never been missing.

Another trick is to throw the anchor out, (making sure that there is enough rope). On doing this you wake up the pike and they seem to come to inspect it. Any lures or baits which are working the swim area are usually taken.

Another example, is just ask carp anglers how many times that their "spod" has been attacked, when being retrieved.

It has been well known for some time that early mornings and evenings are good times for big pike to feed. Well this could well be because of the effect of sun and light conditions changing, and the fact that prey fish are feeding; these prey fish being in a greater than usual state of preoccupation, making it easier for the pike to slowly approach and attack.

The fact that the moon has the ability to create our waves, high tide, and spring tide co-inside with the Full and New Moons, it is this phenomenon that will arouse all predators.

Check out this sites [Home Page](#) for moon phases.

Even before I had concrete proof that we could predict when a pike would come on the feed, I always had faith in this idea, for the simple reason that few things in nature happen at random. There is always a good reason for any animal being in a certain place at a certain time, and behaving in a

certain way. The only fundamental difference with fish is that, for obvious reasons, we cannot see what goes on in their lives from day to day, so we have to try to work things out using other clues.

Pike have a feeding cycle throughout the course of a 12-month period that changes in intensity with the changing of the seasons; it seems to me that they also have an outside stimulus influencing when they should start and stop feeding during a 24-hour period. In other words, a daily cycle. These periods when pike are stimulated or triggered to feed seem to vary in their duration in accordance with the state of the weather, water conditions, air temperature, barometric pressure, etc, from virtually not happening at all. For instance in freezing conditions or extremely hot days which have a negative effect on feeding and therefore override the influence of the changing position of the moon, to a couple of hours of non-stop intense feeding during optimum weather conditions within key moon phase periods.

As was stated at the beginning of this section, "You can create you own feeding triggers". Dedicated lure anglers have been saying for some time that they can trigger a pike to attack their lures by fishing them in a certain way. This could well be true some of the time, especially with smaller pike. Fishing within these parameters with Pre-Baiting and using The Blend will defiantly induce feeding triggers.

Appendix 1

A typical weather chart. This is what you should be looking for; a cold front approaching the country, easily identified by the triangles. If a cold front like this starts approaching then the pike will start to feed up as early as three days before it hits, depending on the intensity and time of the year.

6. Bait and Presentation

I have found that every angler has his or her favourite baits, and will never try experimenting with new ones or trying something different. I've seen anglers frantically reeling in their perfectly good baits, to change them, because a pike has been caught 50m away on say a mackerel tail, when they was using a mackerels head. Remember, you have already put into place, Pre-Baiting, The Blend, and Triggers, so long as your bait is well presented, you will have no trouble in initiating a take.

It has been said "That successful pike fishing requires three main aspects" Location; Ability; and Baits.

Location: Fishing the correct waters in the right areas i.e. waters that hold the pike in quantity and quality you desire.

Ability: Having the ability to get to the water and the amount of time you can spend at them.

Baits: Using the best baits for the water you are fishing.

Location and Ability is in the hands of the angler. It's no use living in the North, and expecting to get a days fishing in Norfolk. What has surprised me is that many anglers will drive past perfectly good venues and travel for another 2hrs to get to a lake, or river. To me, they have lost 4hrs fishing time. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying stick to one venue all the time, just use your time to its most productive. If you are travelling good distances, stay for a couple of days. (Not forgetting to bring a nice present back to the wife, girlfriend, or husband upon your return). Anyway back to your baits. Basically 90% of my piking is various forms of Dead Baiting. So my baits have to be fresh and look right. In my opinion the bait has to look appealing to me if I'm going to have confidence in it. If it's not perfect, then the confidence just isn't there and that gut feeling starts to creep in.

My bait comes in bulk from various sources. This means that fairly often I have a very important job to do in the kitchen, and bag all these baits. The way I do this is to individually wrap every fish after glazing them with water. The small amount of water glazed over the fish seals in the qualities, those all important scents and oils, and also keeping the fish frozen with out dehydration. I have experimented with glazing the fish with "winterized oil". This has the advantage of when only fishing short sessions. You cast the bait out while still in its frozen state. It will be held on the bottom by a large lead and due to the fact that the whole bait is still frozen, it will be popped up. As it thaws, it will

slowly release the oil that surrounds it, creating a trail of scent. This will attract pike from as far away as 50m, and the closer they get, the stronger the scent will become. This method has produced many takes, but is time consuming in its preparation.

Anyway back to the wrapping. The advantage of wrapping the fish singularly, is you can instantly see the size of your bait, and secondly, when trying to unroll one fish out of a bag of two or more baits quiet often the bag would be moulded into the ice around the fish, inevitably the bag would rip and air would get into the other fish and of course the heat of your hand would start melting the ice around the other baits. Also, on returning home only the baits that had been touched would be put aside for Pre-Baiting, and the rest were still fully glazed, and could be refrozen. The main disadvantage about individually wrapping dead baits is that it is very time consuming to do properly, my kitchen worktop always gets soaked, the cat thinks Christmas has come early, and the smell of fish does tend to linger. Again, a box of chocolates for the misses works wonders.

At this point I would like to mention that the best freezer bags that I've come across are Tesco's own in the large and medium sizes. They don't come much tougher, and they don't discolour with age. I would steer clear of using cling film to wrap baits, I found that it turned yellow, and on using the baits there was an unusual slimy feeling to them. Apart from that, it is too fiddly to tear and wrap with wet hands, and more time consuming.

Now that we have stored our baits, we need to know what baits to use. I would go as far to say that this has never really been that high on the list for me. If the bait is presented as natural as possible, then once all the other factors are in place, the type of bait will not need to be an issue. It's just down to the angler. Most of my baits are sea baits, although I do have a selection of fresh water baits, but only use these on certain situations. For example; if the pike are striking into shoals of roach, you will stand more chance of a take by wobbling a dead roach past it as opposed to a sardine, or smelt. Early October, for some reason is very productive when eel sections are offered, maybe it's the time when eels start their migration back to the Sargasso Sea, and become more active. Offering a dead trout on a reservoir will not look too out of place to the pike, its something that is a common sight to them. But to come across dead strangely smelling sea baits, will cause the pike to notice something out of the norm, and again having introduced your "triggers" will to my experience induce an attack. So at this point I will admit I may be over-fussy about the general condition of my bait, but at the end of the day, if I'm sitting on the bank or in a boat and I'm 100% confident in my baits, then I'm happy.

7. Pecking Orders

Why is it so often the case "First Cast, biggest pike"? For quite some time now I have noticed that on those days when I've encountered a multiple catch of pike, it is often the biggest fish of the catch that seem to feed first. At first I simply put this down to coincidence, but just lately I'm not so sure and I now think that this occurrence could possibly be down to some kind of pecking order. I am sure that many of you will have come across this very situation at some time or other and those that have will be able to identify with what I am saying. So is this occurrence simply a coincidence or do smaller pike often give way to their larger counterparts and form some sort of queuing system when it comes to a feeding binge? I can recall many such situations when a big pike has been caught and the next fish caught has been a pound or so less and the weights have actually continued to decline as more fish were caught throughout the session. Strangely enough, this pecking order often only seems to apply to the significantly larger sized pike from mid-doubles upwards.

Now obviously I am not suggesting that the pike are literally queuing up in line in order of size, but on the whole it does seem as though the biggest pike often get the first pick of what's on offer. This can be related to all predators, every species has its pecking orders.

Now with this in mind, you could say that as soon as you've caught your first pike of the session, it's going to be the biggest of the day, so let's move to another swim. By looking at the "pecking order" this would seem so. But "NO" stay where you are, release the pike back to the water about 25m away, (but not near say a match angler who is having a great day catching roach etc). They will glide off and recover into the depths for the rest of the day. (That's the pike, not the match angler).

Also with the pre-baiting, and groundbaiting that's been going on, you will be sure of another large pike cruising into your vicinity.

8. Braid

It's taken the lure world by storm. Catfish anglers have long seen the benefits of braid. Now it's the turn of bait pike anglers. Braided main lines have really taken off over the last few years, especially amongst lure angling enthusiasts. My own introduction to braid was four seasons ago. The first time I used it was incredible. I was fishing a large gravel pit, searching small gravel bars, which were only a couple of feet wide and easily missed. In fact, if I had been using traditional mono line most of these small features would have been missed. However, by switching over to braid the small plucks on the rod tip suddenly became rod wrenching thuds as the three-ounce lead tumbled across gravel, flints and stones on the lakebed.

Braided mainline had revolutionised feature-finding overnight. The two types that I have found are both manufactured by Fox Tackle, these being Driftmaster and Trollmaster, both specifically aimed at the pike angler. Driftmaster, a braid that floats, no more greasing of mono, no more line sinking between float and rod tip, but the most impressive of all was the way the braid picked up easily and quickly off the surface of the water during striking. Braid was also to prove far superior to mono in setting the hooks into the pike, especially at range.

Also the following benefits you can expect are:

- 1) You get better casting distances.*
- 2) No need to overfill your spool.*
- 3) Smaller diameter allowing for greater breaking strain.*
- 4) Doesn't stretch.*
- 5) Doesn't have a memory.*
- 6) Less resistant to wind after casting.*

The first time you play a pike on braided line the experience can be a little nerve wrecking. Every lunge, roll and head shake of the pike is greatly exaggerated when compared to mono lines and can be felt right through the length of the rod. However, after catching a few pike on braid you can often sense just when a pike is about to shake its head, flare its gills, and make a last dash for freedom. It's a unique sensitivity that can tell you just when to apply more pressure with the rod, and equally when to ease off a bit to avoid pulling the hooks out of an angry predator.

I personally use Driftmaster on all my rigs, (floating braid) as I ledger with my lines clipped as tight as a bow string, then it doesn't matter whether the braid floats or sinks. The theory is that a floating braid may well be better for this form of fishing because when a run occurs; a floating line would rise up, thus avoiding any weeds or snags between rod tip and lead. Although I doubt that this would happen on a fast run. It also has the versatility of a quick change in tactics, going from ledgering to drifting on the same rod in a matter of seconds as opposed to minutes.

Another great advantage of using braid is it has a very long life. I changed my mono every season, but with braid, well I've just completed my 4th season, and it looks like a 5th may well be on the cards. Again looking after every aspect of your tackle is vitally important it and cannot be stressed enough.

Well in conclusion, this information will if followed correctly produce a greater increase in the number of your catches, and hopefully that personal best. As stated at the beginning, these pages are aimed at new pike anglers, just entering the sport, and experienced ones alike.

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