

Pike Anglers Club of Great Britain



Drain Fishing by Graham Slater



Pike fishing on drains seems to divide people into two camps, those that hate it and those that love it. I'm firmly in the latter category and would go as far as to say that drains are probably my favourite venue. Judging by the amount of times I hear "I wouldn't know where to start" I think this must be the biggest stumbling block for the novice drain angler and there is no easy answer. What doesn't work, in my experience, is relying on backside features such as trees, telegraph poles, fences etc. I have caught pike from near these but I've also caught an awful lot from completely featureless areas and would go as far as to say that pike captures close to external features can be a self fulfilling prophecy in as much as always fishing near a certain tree produces a few pike, well it will if that's the only place you fish!

My advice is to pick a stretch of water and work along it methodically using the oft maligned 'leapfrogging method' whereby the last rod is constantly moved in front of the first rod to cover new water until pike are located. How far you space your rods, and the interval between moving, is open to debate as everyone seems to have their own ideas but 20 minutes and about 20 yards seems to work for me. What you are searching for is an area that holds some pike; this may be as small as twenty yards in a mile of water or as big as 100 yards but, whatever the size, can provide fantastic sport once identified.

As odd as it may sound you sometimes need to work your way along a productive stretch until you are no longer catching anything before you realise what the boundaries are, with this done it is worth going back and sitting it out in an area with pike present. Keep your eyes open for any signs of pike activity and analyse what's happening. A couple of winters back I'd been moving along a narrow side drain and had the sum total of one jack to show for my hard work when I noticed a huge swirl and subsequent puffs of silt as something big struck at a shoal of bream in the shallow water, sitting it out in that one spot I had a 22lb fish two hours later, a just reward for observation and hard work.

I tend to use just 2 rods when moving along a drain as not only is it easier but I fail to see any advantage to more than that, you'll be covering the water anyway. Whether to use rod rests/buzzers comes down to the method in use at the time. If I'm legering baits I'll always use them but my favourite method by far is to lay the rods on the ground and watch a float, efficient and less to carry.

Having said the above the one thing I never go without is a lure rod. I may only take 3 or 4 lures in a small box in my pocket but they are invaluable, and have produced some real bonus fish, on the days that the pike don't want lives or dead. Whilst on the subject of lures it might be worth mentioning that they are a very good method of evaluating an unfamiliar stretch of drain as they are a very fast and efficient method of locating fish. Look for follows, swirls etc. as well as hits. I did just that on a new drain last year and had follows from fish in one small stretch of water although I didn't actually catch anything. Having identified an area with pike in I went back at the next available opportunity with my bait rods, over 5 short morning sessions I had 30 doubles to around 17lb and a load of single figure fish, brilliant fishing by any standards. One last point before I move onto the tackle and methods I use. Due to my location I fish the Lincolnshire drains which tend to be shallower than the corresponding Cambridgeshire. Drains, for this reason I don't use paternostered baits as the method is useless in 2 feet of water! Everything else is applicable to the deeper, wider waterways.



If you've read this far then it must be obvious that I consider mobility to be the key to success. You are far more likely to move if you have the bare minimum of gear with you, the very thought of having to pack away an umbrella, bedchair, cooking gear etc. is enough to put anyone off before they've even started.

With that in mind I'll detail what, for want of a better description, is my standard gear.

- Dave Lumb P5's fitted with Shimano 4500 Baitrunners loaded with 65lb PowerPro braid.
- Traces made from Masons Multistrand wire in 30lb bs fitted with Owner trebles.
- Homemade floats, leads etc.
- Redport 42" Fastnet
- Alloy bank sticks fitted with Delkims and drop offs.
- Spare traces, floats, leads etc. in an ex army rucksack along with camera, food, towel and any assorted bits I may feel I need.
- Unhooking mat attached to rucksack.

The only luxury I allow myself on these forays is a lightweight chair but that's purely down to the fact that if I sit on the bank for any length of time my back is murder for days afterward so I try and be sensible (no comments please). How you choose to transport your frozen baits is entirely up to you but for mobility I find the Cotswold Aquarius cool bag hard to beat and it fits easily into the rucksack, the whole idea being that I can move easily in one go without struggling along the bag or having to make a second trip.

Having given you a basic outline of the tackle and modus operandi I'm now going to take a closer look at the actual set ups that I commonly use when tackling these waterways, starting with dead-baits.



Probably my favourite, and most productive, method on the waters I fish. Given their shallow nature I fish them hard on the bottom for most of the time unless there is an excessive amount of weed present in which case I'll add some buoyancy to the bait to keep it clear and within site of any pike. My actual set up couldn't be simpler and is probably best illustrated in the accompanying photograph, a bottom end only float with enough weight to cock it against and a suitable wire trace. Using this method I can lay the rod on the floor and tighten up to the float until it lays at half cock, the braid then being tucked into an elastic band above the reel seat, thus giving a very sensitive bite indication which just happens to be one of my favourite sights as the float keels over before moving off across the drain. In truth any rod will do as long as it has the backbone to set the hooks and land a fish as quickly as possible but I use the aforementioned DLST P5's as I find them a pleasure to use and they are more than capable of subduing any pike I'm ever likely to meet. I've lost count of how many fish I've caught on this simple set up and, truth be told, if you were never to use anything else then you'd catch plenty of pike. By all means use bank sticks and alarms if you wish but I try and avoid them as it's just something else to carry.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this piece due to the shallow nature of the Lincolnshire drains I rarely paternoster live-baits, much preferring to leger them as it is a far more effective presentation in 2 feet of water. As above my rod/reel/braid remain the same but the float is dispensed with. I like to think that I've

refined my methods over the years until they are as efficient as possible both from a presentation and bite indication point, with that in mind I'll go into some detail around the actual terminal tackle.

I used to use standard 18 inch to 2 foot long traces when legering lives but I suffered a couple of bite offs as a result of the bait swimming back up the mainline and the pike engulfing the lot. With this in mind I set about altering things to prevent this, here's the set up I use today. The hook trace is 10 inches long and is attached, via a link, to a 2 foot long up-trace of 100lb Titanium wire which has a cork ball permanently fixed above the link swivel. Running freely on the up-trace is a lead link of 8 inches which has a suitable sized lead attached, via a paperclip. Why a paperclip? They are perfect for opening up to lose a snagged lead but strong enough cast without opening up. Any of the dimensions above can be altered to suit your own set of circumstances, you may wish to lengthen the lead link due to weed for example but the one thing to bear in mind is that the hook trace must always be shorter than the up-trace or we are back to inviting bite offs. With everything in place it is then simply a case of placing the rod in the rests and attaching a suitable form of bite indication, my preference being for homemade drop off indicators used in conjunction with Delkim front alarms. I'll let you into a secret here, I used to use electronic drop-offs but moved over to the Delkims because I can place the receiver in my coat pocket and I don't have to let the world know when I've got a take.

That's my two most common set ups but there is just one more that can really come into it's own some days and that's the free roving livebait fished simple under a float. I tend to use polystyrene floats bought from a sea angling supplier that take 2 ounces of lead to cock them, they will support a decent sized bait whilst still being of a size that even modest pike can pull them under. Used in conjunction with floating braid a bait fished in this manner can cover a

considerable amount of water and it really is a sight to behold when the float disappears in a huge vortex as a pike hits the bait.

At the very start of this piece I mentioned the Redport Fastnet. For those of you not familiar with this item of equipment it is a full sized 42" landing net but, rather than pushing the arms into a tensioning block, they slide along the pole and open out in one simple movement. I began using one of these as I found one of two things was happening with my standard net, either it got caught in every bramble and thistle as I walked along or I rolled it up and then promptly forgot it when I had a take! Probably not an item you'd purchase unless you were going to do a lot of this type of fishing but certainly something to bear in mind. On a similar vein I don't carry a tripod for my self take shots but prefer to use a bank stick and camera adaptor, just one less thing to carry.



That about brings me to the end of this piece, I hope it's given you some insight into the way I tackle these unique waters. Keep mobile, keep trying and you will catch pike from the drains. Good luck!

