

Pike Anglers Club of Great Britain



When it all goes wrong by Graham Slater



I think it fair to say that most of what is written in the angling press is quite positive in as much as it tends to focus on the authors success, either with a technique or a particular days fishing. Given the foregoing it would be easy to assume that you are the only one that has things go wrong, not so I can assure you. No matter who you are there will come a day when it goes wrong and that's what I intend to look at here, not because I crave your sympathy but because hopefully by reading this you can avoid the situations I found myself in or at least get out of them safely. Think I exaggerate about the safety aspect? Read on.....

I've never done a lot of summer pike fishing and what I have done has been largely confined to lure fishing on my local river. I soon came to realise that the pike

on the river were holding up in quite small areas, with up to a mile of water seemingly devoid of any predators, and in an attempt to locate these spots I soon gave up struggling along overgrown banks and bought a half share in a small aluminium boat. With the boat kitted out and ready to go it was a relatively easy, and very pleasant, task to troll lures to get an idea of pike distribution. Using this method it soon became apparent that there were three areas that stood out head and shoulders above anywhere else in the 3 mile stretch that I concentrated on (no Neville, I'm not telling you where they are!) and it soon became the norm to target these areas at the start of a mornings fishing and then go off exploring. You now have a flavour of the sort of day I was anticipating as I readied my gear the night before.

Up at 3.30am I had a cup of tea whilst the kettle boiled again to fill the flask, that done it was simply a case of adding flask and sandwiches to the already loaded car and collecting the boat from the lockup. Even at that time of day it was mild enough to wear nothing but a tee shirt, stark contrast to my normal winter attire. Boat safely attached I was soon away; arriving at the slipway just as the faintest glow off daylight appeared in the East, perfect timing. It didn't take long to attach the outboard and load my lure fishing kit and soon the boat was tied up and waiting whilst I parked the car and trailer and made them secure. I will add at this juncture that I had remembered to bring my waders as an aid to launching and retrieving, something I'd forgotten the previous winter and had to remove socks and trousers to get the boat back on the trailer, not a good idea at all but I digress.



Deciding to go to the furthest mark first I poured a cup of tea and savoured it as I made my way downstream to the first spot, I don't think there could have been a happier man that morning. Tea finished I motored downstream of the hot area and swung back round and across the river to slip the anchor in without disturbing anything. First cast with a sub-surface jerkbait was met by a huge swirl as something struck and missed, changing over to an orange manta I threw it back into the same place and sure enough another massive disturbance just below the surface was met with solid resistance as I set the hooks in a good fish. A combination of current and a fit river pike gave an enjoyable fight and as I drew the beaten fish to the side of the boat I could see it was bigger than I'd first thought, a very long fish indeed.

Now, under normal circumstances I'm quite happy to unhook pike in the water and estimate their weight, only bringing them into the boat for weighing if I think they'll exceed twenty pounds. This is for no other reason than I've caught quite a few double figure fish so am quite happy to estimate them, the potential for damaging a lively fish being removed by leaving them in the water. I've put that lest anyone think I was boasting in some fashion. Once again I seem to have wandered off the matter in hand so back to the pike.

I was so pre-occupied with wondering whether this fish would indeed exceed the magical twenty pound mark that I completely forgot to put the unhooking glove on my left hand. Feeling along the jaw line gently I slipped my hand in to chin the fish which is exactly the point it decided to shake it's head vigorously. Before I had time to react one point of the freshly sharpened 4/0 treble buried itself in my thumb, just behind the nail. Oh dear, I think that's what I said anyway as I looked at the Manta which had now made myself and the pike inseparable companions. I'm sure you must appreciate that this could have been a very difficult situation indeed had it not been for the fact that I always carry cutters up to the task of sheering the metal of any hook that I carry, in my case Knipex. Snipping the hook I could at last release my hand and unhook the pike which I then released before trying to remove the point, plus barb, which were no buried deep in my flesh. It soon became apparent that all I was achieving by wriggling and pulling at the hook was to hurt myself, it was going no where. By 6.30 I had the boat back at the slip and on the trailer, my mornings fishing consisting of just two casts.



Boat back in the lock-up, car parked in the hospital car park I presented myself at the reception desk in A&E and explained my injury. I was hugely impressed to be seen by two doctors and three nurses within minutes, impressed that was until I realised that they thought it was funny and just wanted a look before they went home off their night shift! Eventually a very nice lady doctor came to fetch me and explain what they were going to do, this consisted of giving me the gas they give pregnant ladies and then pulling the offending hook point out with pliers; she assured me it wouldn't hurt, I wonder what other lies she tells patients?



So there you have it, hardly life threatening but a days fishing ruined for one careless moment. Lessons learned that day? ALWAYS use an unhooking glove and make sure that you have suitable cutters with you when lure fishing, my situation would have been a whole lot worse had I not been able to cut the hook. OK, so that was a fairly light hearted look at a situation that could have been avoided but only gave me mild discomfort for a couple of hours with no lasting ill effects. What I am going to describe next falls into another category altogether and could so easily have seen a very different outcome.

The week running up to the PAC conference was a fairly hectic time for me but I set aside Tuesday and Wednesday to fish before making the long trek down to see friends and family before making my way to Stoneleigh on the Friday afternoon. Given the distance involved I elected to take a sleeping bag and stay overnight on the Tuesday rather than get up early and travel again, something I frequently do.

Tuesday was fairly quiet on the pike fishing front so I decided that I would be away for 1pm Wednesday at the very latest as I had plenty to do prior to my departure.

Baits were out for first light but by 10.30 I'd only had 2 small fish, on the left hand rod, to show for my efforts and as I sat down to make a brew the aluminium side bar of my lightweight chair finally had enough of me and snapped in the middle, that was enough, I'd have the tea and get off. That's precisely what would have happened had I not had a screaming run to the same rod just as I was about to mash the tea. Quickly on the rod I wound down and pulled into the pike, expecting another small fish I was very pleasantly surprised when the rod bent round and just stayed there as it's usually the sign of a big pike. After the most amazing fight I was pleased to net a fish which was clearly over the 20lb mark and so it proved when I weighed it, twenty one pounds and eight ounces. Collapsing the landing net, I use a Redport Fastnet for that very reason, I anchored it in the margin whilst I quickly set up the tripod for the self take photographs.

With the photographs completed and a fresh bait recast I sat down to finish off the; by now, lukewarm tea, all thoughts of leaving early banished to the back of my mind. Funny how catching a good fish changes your perspective, isn't it? Sitting as best I could on the broken chair I started to ponder over the events of the day so far and realised that the only runs had all come to the left hand rod, had to be worth moving the right hand one round didn't it, even for a couple of hours. How I wish I hadn't.....

I honestly don't know what happened next. One minute I was walking along the waters edge with a rod in one hand and two bank sticks in the other, the next I was laying on the floor in agony. I don't know whether I slipped, my ankle went over or a rock that I'd stepped on moved but whatever the reason it left me laying full length on the ground fighting to stay conscious and desperately trying not to vomit as even through the intense pain I knew enough to realise that a combination of the two could lead to very serious consequences. After some time, I haven't a clue how long, I managed to pick myself up and hobble back to the chair and sit down. As the pain started to recede slightly I

tried standing and putting my weight on my left foot and moving it to see if anything was broken, my leg moved but the foot stayed in the same place and I could feel the broken bones grating against each other, that was all the confirmation I needed. I knew I was in trouble now, half a mile from the car and over an hour from home and I couldn't walk, let alone drive.

It's quite easy to let panic set in faced with a situation like this but it never solves anything, far better to sit and consider the options and then try and do something positive which is what I did. There were only two people that knew where I was, such was the remoteness I'd never have been able to direct anyone to find me, so I 'phoned the first one who thought I was ringing about a boat he was selling! I soon put him right as to my predicament and he agreed to try and get someone to drive him up and he'd help me get everything back to the car and bring me home in it. Incredibly, whilst I was waiting for him to ring me back I had a run on one of the remaining rods, I'd forgotten all about them! Using a bank stick as a walking stick I made it to the rod and unceremoniously skull dragged a pike of about eight pounds to the edge where it was unhooked and allowed to swim off, the remaining rod being reeled in at the same time. Back in the relative comfort of my chair I eventually received the call I was hoping for, I could expect to be picked up in a couple of hours which left me nothing to do but make myself as comfortable as possible and sit and wait. I don't think time has ever passed so slowly.

Eventually Brian came walking down the path, his father in law very generously getting out of bed after a night shift to drive him up, and with much Mickey taking set about packing my gear away. With him taking everything bar one small bag we started out along the path back to the car, him striding away and me using a couple of branches as make shift crutches. Every single step of that half mile walk was agony and I had to stop frequently to rest, it was sheer determination that got me back to that car. With the worst part over with I made myself as comfortable as possible in the passenger seat and took a couple of Paracetamol to deaden the pain for the journey back.

Dropped off at home with my kit and both dogs safely in the house I rang a taxi to take me to A&E where they X rayed my ankle and pronounced it broken in three places, that probably explained the pain then! Temporarily plastered up and dosed with pain killers I was sent home for the night to return to the fracture clinic the next morning. As luck would have it they decided that surgery wasn't needed and that a plaster and rest for five weeks should see me on the mend, I hope they are telling the truth as I still have two more weeks of boredom to endure as I type this.



Alls well that ends well, as that bloke from Stratford on Avon once said, but there are lessons to be learned from both of these experiences and that's why I've written them up. I was fortunate that it was only my ankle I broken but what if it had been my skull and I'd remained unconscious? No-one was expecting me home and no-one would have found me, without being melodramatic I could have died there. If reading this prevents one single person from making the mistakes I did then it has been worthwhile.

When lure fishing:

- Always use an unhooking glove, the ones by Lindy do the job for me and remember to get the left hand glove if you are right handed.
- Always carry cutters that are up to the job of cutting through the thickest gauge hooks you use, Knipex are the best I've found.

If fishing alone:

- Tell someone where you're going.
- Tell them when you expect to be back.
- Carry a fully charged mobile 'phone, they're cheap enough nowadays.
- Have a basic first aid kit amongst your gear.
- If the worst does happen, try not to panic but stay calm and think the situation through.
- In the event of a suspected foot/ankle injury do not remove your boot as the foot will swell and you won't get it back on.

As a footnote to this I received an email from someone who had been walking back across boulders in darkness wearing chest waders and with no means of communication, reading about my incident on the net had made him think long and hard about how he was doing things. Just remember, it isn't always other people it happens to.