

TREASURE ISLAND

by Dexter Petley

Part 3

November came with a bitter East wind. I moved off the island and fished around the second sighting. One Friday after dark I heard fish crashing on the wind. This was exceptional, provoked by tumbling barometric pressure. With orange floodlights off the aquatic centre shining straight into my eyes, I couldn't take bearings on the fish. The wind was in my face but the fish sounded way out of reach, nowhere near the baits. I sat it out till 9pm, surprised by two consecutive one-toners. Both lean, out of condition males pink on crayfish, a 26 and a 29.



The smaller wriggled like an eel all the way in. A frustrating session, being so close to vital knowledge. They were big fish out there too, heavy, scattered crashing like someone chucking rocks in. Going at them blindly didn't interest me; catching a fish without knowing why, just whacking a chod rig in their direction when they were moving in; not my style. The males could have been outsiders pushed forward by plump females feeding in the silt. Or they were simply on their respective spots, triggered into simultaneous hearing on one of them; but it was late, there were

cruisers in the car park, hi-beams sweeping over the water and lighting me up, rap booming out of speakers. I would have stayed on, but I was pushing it. On the way back to the van I heard a fish and this time managed to at least fix the sector; not upwind of where I'd been, but cross wind towards the car park bank.

I'm not good at early rising, but next morning I made an huge effort. By eight o'clock I was sat sour-eyed in the previous evening's swim with just a flask of coffee, binoculars and a marker rod. There to observe. Even on three hour sessions, an hour of this is spent on dry lines observation and rig prep. I think of it like, say, bomb disposal. No point rushing in and blowing up the swim. It needs assessing before anything touches the water. The reverse is also true. After a blank, when I've packed the rods down, I'll sit there another half an hour. It's astonishing how many times, eventually, a fish or two will crash over the baits. They knew you were there; they know when you're not. Takes your lines out and see. This is vital knowledge.

This morning the wind had dropped. It wasn't an inspiring sight, roach and bream popping everywhere on a doldrum. After an hour a strip of breeze showed along the car park bank. I had work waiting and had to leave. As I stood folding the chair I saw a good fish head and shoulder just off the strip of ruffled water. I took bearings, walked round keeping my eye on the spot till I had it lined up from a fishable gap under the trees.

A new weather pattern set in for November. Mist, drizzle, filthy but not exactly cold, no heavy frosts, water temperature 9°C, poised to fall a degree at the next frost but holding for the moment as the water cleared.

Afternoons were dry but rain set in half an hour before dark and continued for an hour, easing off around pack-up time.

The morning fish had come up in six feet of water over a bar at forty yards, smoother, sandier than the plateaus, probably the old gravel track used by diggers when Art House was four separate pits. It was wide enough for two baits before plunging twelve feet into silt to the left and a 9ft sandy drop off further out. Before the big freeze arrived in December, two fish came to the spot after dark. Another flabby male at 26 and a smooth, fit condition female at 32.



Two months of snow and ice put paid to any meaningful winter campaign. Then came an abrupt turnaround at the end of February. A southern hurricane all Sunday and half the night. My barometer touched bottom and trees came down. Before it was over I'd rigged up and packed the gear for a Monday session. The water was high up the bank, strewn with a tide line of debris.

High water cut off my trajectory to the far right spot but I still managed two baits on the old track, the left hand rod going fifty yards to the drop off. Single 14mm Live System, matching pellets in the bag, leads upped to three and a half ounces, rig sleeves added this time, 15lb Amnesia hook links. Twenty baits tight round each. Just before sunset, one bleep and the left hand hanger pulled tight. Three Scale again, for the third time, twice on Live System. In top condition now, she went 40.8.





In the next article, I finally come to my heat wave campaign proper; the surprises having only just begun.