

# **TREASURE ISLAND**

by Dexter Petley

## **PART 5**

It was July now; the heat wave was on high tide, mosquitoes with bolt cutters like pirates on blood money. I was scratching, bleeding and sweating through late afternoon but still buzzing from Wednesday's 32, certain now that it would come together, results just trickling in before the deluge. The carp still mustered on the point before grazing down the margins, scraping their way through the tree roots as before. The rubbed up mouths of both fish confirmed my theory; red raw from pulling on crayfish and sucking spawn off the roots.

Not easy come yet by any means, it was already half nine and the lines were still dead in the water. The carp were lingering off. I'd reduced the amount of bait along the top half of the island to try and get them down quicker. I pulled the third rod in, the furthest up, concerned they might be spooking off it. I was having mainline floating and strange leader behaviour (see conclusion below). If I do fish three rods, I usually pull the third in before dark, stripping down to twilight management. It was last knockings when the tip pulled round on the bush again, and a junior common played a blinder on his first trial. Results were less than mediocre now so on the way home I decided to alter tactics, get one over on them first.

So come Friday, I was expecting things to accelerate. I'm not superstitious, but Fridays often produce exceptional catches for me. I'm a Friday's child; I'd be forgiven for thinking it was the one day a week I get to see the lay lines under water, when the scales fall from my eyes. Friday is fish day; it must have rubbed off, carp divining, urgent calls to the water half way through evenings begun elsewhere. This was another urgent call-out. All morning I was

unable to concentrate on work. There was carp song coming down the wires. It was the hottest day of the year and the sky was like a bush-fire. I downed tools and took off, all set up by mid-afternoon, shade as hot as sunlight, water as boiling as the air.

This time I set up on the island, right in the enemy camp. It was a great risk, fishing on their heads in the muster point, under the rod tops. My thinking was a tactical version of impatience; nab one off the point then withdraw to a



safe distance and nab another as they regrouped and drifted down the margins. As soon as the lines were flying up and down I realised the error. The carp were on the point, mobbing on the bait ten minutes after I'd trailed it in. They surfaced in water shallower than their girths. Even slack and pinned down, their pectorals raked the lines up. I was hidden back among the trees, but kept springing out like a spider every time a buzzer whined and the indicator flew up. A big common and two mirrors rolled in a ball over the left hand rod like a cartoon cat fight. They all looked over 40 but one was a lot bigger than the others. The sweat was running into my eyes and I was guzzling water. It was 32°C. Nothing I could do washed out the salt from the sweat. I could hardly see when the hanger stayed up and line pulled jerkily off the spool. I must have lost a stone during the fight. It was the common, 37.2 in its fire shield livery:

On Monday, I was back in the usual swim after leaving well alone the weekend. There was no Sunday litter in my swim; it was all elsewhere, with the 30ft high bouncy castle they'd inflated by the swings, with the kids on bikes, the hoodless hoodies, mean without the means. Schools had broken up. They ignored me and reserved their admiration for the hand brake turns underway in the car park. From now on, the fishing situation was in danger. So far I'd been relatively undisturbed, the island unoccupied except by evening walkers who stuck to the tree line and didn't spook the carp. This was bound to change and I felt like I was on borrowed time.

**On the point, carp mustered mid-afternoon, nudging thick oily rings as they touched air. Passing ducks took a wide berth. Poplars rustled in the first breeze for a week. I leaned back on the chair for a decent wait but sprang forward at a half-take on the middle rod before just before teatime. First bite to come in the bay and the first on the miniature Withy rig. The fish swung up the margin looking for a passage out. Rod creaked in the cork like rigging on an away breeze. Three kids on bikes pulled up behind me like the carp police. They watched in silence, voices buried in their throats like hands in pockets. I grin and bear it- fish come off when people stand and stare! This was touch and go, the fish was running the snags. Full test curve all the way till it rolled into the net. Three mobile phones were sending bulletins home. I tried to slap a D-notice on it. Told them it was only ten kilos. But they were easily bored by carp care and total lack of violence. The fish had belly and a plimsol line with Live System cargo.....  
Another 37!**



**I waited for their dads to come with carp rods but they were watching “foot”. The world cup was still on. The bouncy castle was flat, deflated for its own good. I thought I was getting away with it, fishing unmolested. Evenings so far; someone walks round with a mobile or two, grim faced campers leave their van on the campsite after supper for a dog s..t tour of the island with their poodle. This evening an old duff and his grandson come fish spotting, satisfied by sun perch just on the edge of my bush. They don’t see the carp tail big as two lily pads flick ten yards from the silly perch. It’s 8.30, on the brink of idyll – just me and that carp. I’d forgotten this was Art House pit, public nuisance number one. No peace for the wicked. The beat up colourless Nevada, scuffmobile for a ratbag family, broke through the barrier and drove as far as it could get to me. Within minutes the place was a dump. Two chip bag brats, a Vodka dad only 21, married the teenager next door who kicked all the rubbish under the car. The 3 year old, shaved head and dressed in camo, smashed the fishing poles against the lit barbeque. The wind picks up. The middle rod nodded round but I couldn’t concentrate as the kids were given permission by their**

**mum to throw all their rubbish into the water. The fish was big and just wouldn't come left into the channel where I could net it. Instead it swam towards the idiots. I was on the wrong edge of the swim, the fish going deep. I had to give it line to go left and get the net. It went solid on a snag I didn't know was there. I held tight, feeling it thump. I put the rod down and slackened off. For a minute the line twitched, but a tiny barbless hook is easy to shed. The twitching stopped. It had gone and I was relieved at that. I pulled for a break. The carp had stopped singing as the Nevada barbeque broke the sound barrier. I packed up. Roll on next Friday.**

**When it came it was another 32 degree sweatshop. Water temperatures had swung between 23 and 27. Now they were 28°c. By evening the island was a boot camp of teenage mutants; three tents, two bivvies and skinny girls with 'hack Dad off' toddlers of their own. The dads lined empty beer bottles along the waterside and shot at them with airguns. Shoot and swig, their dogs bark at me across the divide.**



**I hadn't been able to get back here for a week, but all I'd done was think about it. Results were still mediocre considering the number of fish coming through. I knew I was getting done on the bush rig so I changed both rods to tiny Withy type rigs, much refined on half the usual length of 1.5mm shrink tube, fished weightless on the bottom. (About an inch. You want the final shape of a question mark, but even fished ordinary turn-over style, a long length is more difficult –on a combi hook link – for a carp to eject than conventional lengths of shrink.)**

**I'm not a fan of pop-up or chod rigs or even bait systems which scream for attention. If you don't know where the carp go, then don't cast is my motto. I will even fill a pva bag with gravel, mussel shell, crayfish bits and sand (or whatever material might be on the bottom - taken home and dried out of course) in order to hide the hook bait completely when putting it on an identified feeding spot. One of the most natural presentations possible; a carp**

**nosing up the bottom and finding something edible under a pile of habitat it's used to filtering for food. This is why I have such confidence in Live System on gravel pits. Both hook bait and pellets match the bottom already.**

**One thing I would like to mention, a small point but something I'm nevertheless meticulous about, is that I have never, in thirty-five years carp fishing, ever used a shop bought plastic boilie stop. I use leaf stem, dried grass stalk, alder cone twigs, anything lying about round the swim. In dry summer weather it's the work of five minutes to collect a year's worth, cut them up into lengths and keep sealed in a small plastic pouch. Not just for natural effect but because I like to minimise the amount of non-biodegradable rubbish I leave in the water. Who knows, but by now there could be millions of plastic boilie stops on lake beds throughout the carp fishing world. Not good at all when you consider how many of these go through a carp's intestines. Some, certainly, could cause damage. I'm also ambivalent about ejected leads. It's become a bit of a fad, this. Lead in water is still toxic, coated or not. Using stones is a better principle (see photo in Part 4). Anglers have a duty to practice basic ecology. Litter is litter, whether it's a lead deliberately ejected or a boilie stop accidentally lost. Neither substance belongs on a lake bed. Think about it. Anglers think one lead now and then doesn't hurt, but how many, therefore, before it does? They won't go away. Lead makers are urging you to eject, of course, producing ever more expensive "safe" leads for the purpose. If you believe these are trifling objections, visit a drained and well-fished carp lake before the lead-hunters have looted it.**

**Back to boot camp Friday, then. Weather was hazy with a hot evening breeze blowing down the channel. The islanders were making trouble round the margins; Lord of the flies himself was an axe wielding cave-mouth specialist in anti-carp behaviour. Topless with his pants showing, a "watch me" fool coming up with a gag every few minutes till he was reduced to pointing the airgun at his wife's head for a laugh. The dog was already swimming over my spots after half a log pitched in for its pleasure. I considered packing up, only a fish humped under the trees. More dogged than I, they were steering round the trouble.**

**The island girls started collecting firewood in plastic bags behind me. They stank of fags and shower gel. Fire lit, dogs tied to a tree, they settled down to grill their meat. Just enough peace for more carp to nudge their way down the margins under the back of the tents. I was leaving it late, but the Friday factor was at work, even when axe-dad**

**threw a grappling hook into the tree right above my left hand bait. I believed only in the bobbins. He cracked off a branch and dragged it to the fire like a caveman dragging his girl by the hair. Before she burned, two bleeps, bobbin tight and the rod top pulled round.**

**The fish stayed put. Underpants was back with his rope. My line was tight to just below his feet. He saw nothing but I was standing thirty yards in front of him, in the water with the rod doubled up and a boil like a washing machine under his nose. But he was away, in the Neolithic age. The fish moves off and power-kites at will. I net it as the third branch is stolen off my tree. First of the Friday forties:**

**Over three weeks passed before I could get back there. Suddenly it was August 5<sup>th</sup> and my fear was that I'd blown it; water evaporated, levels down a foot a month, the holiday season, the carp spooked off the island by more campers. The fish had grown used to finding Live System, even though I'd diminished the initial 10kgs over the hundred yards down to 3kgs on the spots and some scattered left and right. The longer I left going back, the bigger the fear of what I'd find. Imagine my surprise. Municipal rage at the urban retour had stumped up the cash for a maze of electronic gates, security barriers and impenetrable fencing. The cuplrits responsible were sulking in supermarket car parks elsewhere, admiring the rubbish and the skid-marks. By 6.30 the gates were locked and I was alone, my exit and entrance a bridge of fallen pylons over the river. Water temperature had dropped to 23. The grass was yellow but my rod rest holes were still there. So was the Friday forty-one, picking up where I left off, like a bookmark halfway through a summer read:**





**Two dog walkers kept me informed, locals who pike fished, kept their eye on events. There'd been carp anglers over the weeks, but only a double had come out. Everyone was moaning about the fencing. They were starting a petition. I'm the only person not to sign it. Next day I was netting a 28 when two of the boot-campers broke through with their car and were hauling their tat the rest of the way by foot. They tried mugging the fish for their barbeque and I judged it wise to pack up.**

**Holiday anglers came and went, leaving their ground bait bags and coils of line as a souvenir of their visit. The ducklings grew, surviving the daily blitz of rock grenades. The popcorn buckets and coke bottles still drifted with the wind and the kebab shop clutter was on the rise as a new wave of mobilette cadets passed their driving test and broke through security to tear round the bank. Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, big national holiday weekend, the final push before the functionaries went back to work. I usually shrink away and fish the Seine to re-emerge pit-side at the dead end of August. I hadn't planned to fish Art House. It was 6pm and I was waiting with dread for the annual neighbours' family discos to start up, or the village grilled pig, all night ball and fireworks riots. But all was mute and I was getting that gut Friday wake-up call. The weather had rallied behind my flag; it was why the people were**



quiet, and staying indoors. It was grey, chilly, passing showers all afternoon. Five minutes past six and the gear's in the van. By seven I'm setting up in the swim and spraying Live System over the spots. Everyone was indoors.

The first take comes within the hour, two gentle bleeps and a nod on the rod tip. Not up for the fight, it too was on a quiet night in. As soon as I saw it I knew it was the 22kg lake record. But out of condition, it went 44 instead of 49. Blocked intestine, carp piles and a vent like a wine cork. A tank of a fish anyway, I nursed it for ten minutes till it drifted away.



At last knockings, I hit another fish on the bay spot. I'd moved off the bush due to lower levels than before, putting one at 6ft in the bay, the right hander on a drop off at four. The bay fish rolled along the bottom at will, picking up the other line. I turned the alarm off, pumped the fish back out and played it to the left. The other spool still clicked and whirred. Another fish had picked it up. It was running away from me so I left it and netted the one at hand.

A second forty, the original Girl Friday at 42.

**The third fish was still on. It was dark now but it seemed to have run into open water, making for a buoy 120 yards off. It still took line all the way back and played me to death's door under the rod top, touching the snags every which way. Again, I recognised her immediately under the headlamp. Three Scale for the fifth time, fourth on Live System. She made it a hat trick at 40.8. This pit where I'd once done fifty blanks on the trot and now, in a quick evening session fished on the hoof, I'd landed three forties.**

**Summer went down like a like a power cut. Daylight became a thin yellow in a rapidly approaching autumn. My Friday second sight was coming in forth as a few blanks crept in. Evenings on Art House were winding up and sometimes I was scratching for stragglers around dark fall. They did keep coming, still upper thirties but the unspawned bellies had flattened out and the 40s were 37s again. It felt, at one point, like the party was over, but I hung on, drinking the dregs right up to the eve of the first autumn enduro, down to fishing bags only as the Live System was running out.**

**In conclusion, there were fewer fish than I believed, but results were reasonable. Seventeen sessions produced 30 fish, including seven 40s and twelve 30s. About 80 hours fishing time. 50kgs of Live System. Three good fish lost. Several repeat captures. Three Scale I caught three times over the summer and again recently, on Nov 8<sup>th</sup>, in open water, at her best of 42, that makes six captures on Live System, same rig. She's no mug either. In September, a local carp angler told me she was dead the day after I'd caught her; said she hadn't been seen for two years.....likewise two of the other forties.**



Assessing the campaign critically, I made some fundamental errors. Fishing three rods in the early sessions cost me two big fish; too many gaps of more than a week between days when bait went in; spreading the bait too far up the island. Presentation issues took time to resolve. Fishing slack with Adrena-line is a nightmare as it floats up off the bottom until the coating wears off. I won't fish back leads. Leader issues too: Ultima's flurocarbon coated snag leader was crinkling up dreadfully after pressure, or just a couple of hours immersion. I know other anglers have experienced the same problem. I sent mine back. This undoubtedly cost me fish early on until I switched back to Amnesia, which never fails. I failed in my ultimate target of breaking the lake record, even if I caught the biggest fish in there; which I still like to doubt. I did not catch one of the three fish rolling over my bait that afternoon on the island. I'm sure it's a fifty. There may still be some work for Live System yet this winter. But come summer, I shall be repeating the campaign for a film crew as part of a two pit attack, only this time we'll see what Three Scale thinks of N-Gage XP.









