

Running into Winter

by Myles Gibson

The fishing certainly slowed down in Oxford towards the back end of the season; to my knowledge there had been only six or so fish caught in total since the start of September despite the lake receiving regular pressure both mid week and at weekends! There had been on average six to eight midweek anglers on most weeks throughout the season and come September a few lads achieved their personal targets and moved on in the pursuit of new fish, leaving the lake a lot quieter than usual during the autumn months.

I took full advantage of the fact there were fewer anglers around mid week and planned to step it up and do four nights a week and do what work I had over the weekends. With the lake being quieter I started to bait an area that I knew had produced both of the big mirrors in the past. It was the same area where I caught my first fish from the lake - a 40lb 4oz mirror - the previous October so I already knew the area pretty well. I was convinced that if baited regularly it would give me my best bet at hooking into one of the better ones. At the end of one session around late August I pulled into the swim, which fished out to the bit of water I planned to concentrate my efforts on, and just spent an hour or so with the marker rod getting a clip sorted for the spot I had in mind. It was a large area of clear ground in slightly deeper water, broken up into individual spots by weed beds. Due to the fact the water clarity wasn't at its best I was unable to see the lake bed, so I used a marker rod most of the time. I had fished and caught from the front of the spot which was at 155 yards range but I wanted to fish the back of the spot with long fluorocarbon leaders to try and achieve the best line lay possible, in the end the marker was clipped up at 165 yards some ten yards into the clear ground and a rod length or so short of a wall of thick weed at the back of the spot.



More than happy with way the five ounce lead was thudding down on hitting the clip and sliding along the clear lake bed, all was paced out clipped up etc, even the odd tap of gravel could clearly be felt through the braid indicating how clean the bottom was. I have been using the popular method of two bank sticks a rod length apart and counting how many times around the sticks it is until the braid on the marker reel was hitting the clip, personally I believe it is by far the best way to achieve ultimate accuracy.

I baited the spot with what I had left over from my session which was around three kilos of mixed sized N Gage, giving them a good glugging in the Feedstim XP liquid as the baits were already a few days old, and also a jar of hemp. I only introduced the hemp as I wanted any little clumps of weed that may be amongst the spot to be cleared as more often than not I would just be casting my rigs out to the clip and feeling for a drop. I planned to try and bait the spot at least once a week with at least two kilos of boilies each time and then just fish it when fish were visually present. The following week saw me fishing elsewhere around the lake but to no avail. There were fish regularly showing but it was a case of always being one step behind them as they really do move around on that place and soon settle in pressure free areas. It was on my next session in the middle of September when I was to meet Choco face to face for the first time, however it was Ed's turn to capture the great fish and after three years of grafting too! What a way to end a campaign, well done mate and what a buzz. With yet another occasional mid week angler pulling off I couldn't help but feel a high off the fact that if one of the big mirrors was going to make a mistake the chances of it being me as the captor were increased. I was enjoying my fishing and when I wasn't at the lake all I could do is think about the place and the fish it was home to, and trying to imagine the feeling of lifting the net around one of the ones I dearly wanted to catch.

The week after Choco had made an appearance was pretty quiet with there only being three other lads having a go, I set up in a swim known as the humps which is at the far north end of the pit as I had seen fish in that area throughout my last session. There was someone straight opposite at the other end of the lake and one other chap half way up along the east bank. It was a full moon over that session and on the first morning there were three fish out in a matter of three hours, we all caught one. It was madness as apart from Choco there had been nothing out for some two weeks then three out in a morning and all from different areas of the lake.



I have never known a lake like it; it's as if something just triggers them, I can clearly remember watching fish lump out as I was playing the twenty six linear I managed to tempt that prolific morning. That fish came from a shallow hump covered in light weed in an area I had seen the fish passing on their way in and out of the cafe bay the previous week, a single bright pop up fished over twenty or so freebees did the damage.

The birds had started to become a real pain with a gang of coots and tufties regularly sat over the spot I was baiting, I started to bait up with baits that had been washed out in lake water for a few days, so they were nice and soft, hoping by the time the birds were on it, the baits would be so soft that they just split in their beak ensuring they couldn't completely clear me out, I didn't want to introduce any more hemp as I was wanting to use a stiff link pop up presentation and didn't like the thought that I was fishing a pop up over some uneaten hemp, so it was to be boilies all the way.



All was quiet on the lake until the second week in October when I managed a thirty one pound twelve ounce mirror from the baited spot and lost one in the early hours the next morning on the same rod; there was also a low twenty caught in between my two takes from the other end of the lake. Same again, nothing for weeks then three takes in a matter of twelve hours! I had set up down the south end of the lake for the first two nights of my planned four nighter as I had heard a good few shows when I arrived in the early hours of the morning out at range, and with the wind being a very strong Northerly, I opted to fish on the back of it and fish at mega range. Two rods were fished on a large silty area out at range over a good kilo of N-gage in the area where I'd heard the fish lumping out.

One of my mates Ian had set up in the peg next to the swim I had been baiting as he had seen a few show at range in open water; after a brew and a chat I asked him to give me the heads up if he should see any shows over the spot I had been baiting. I was sitting up watching the water waiting for dark to turn in to light in the hope of spotting a fish or something to go off. I received a text from Ian an hour or so after first light reading along the lines 'seen 2 show in the area u said m8' After a quick chat I slowly started to load the van and pack the gear away for the move. Ten minutes later the phone went again 'seen another 3 right on the money m8' the slow pack down soon became an open the back doors on the van and chuck the lot in.

I was soon round in the swim unloading the van when a good fish boshed right over the spot, I soon had two singles on the spot and set up the bivvy, a few more showed but they were more to my left, in front of Ian next-door, so I took the opportunity to lash the marker out to the prepped spot and introduced a few hundred baits in the area.

The whole process went to plan and within the hour two rods were rockin on the spot, an N-Gage cork ball pop up on the left and a white fruity number on the right.

We were both sat in my swim drinking tea and watching the water when Ian just froze and said 'I have 100% just seen Choco come up to its wrist' I could see the disturbance the fish left and was happy to see it was no more than thirty yards from the baited spot. As you can imagine the thought of 'this could be it' was constantly in my mind as I knew my target fish was in the area, and how much he loves his bait. I was sat in Ian's swim about half an hour after the big mirror showed drinking tea when I heard my buzzer go in to meltdown, it was the left hander the- one fished on a fishmeal pop up that had been picked up. The fish soon found a weed bed in its bid for freedom and not wanting to put the light mono I was using under any necessary tension I took to the boat and slowly wound myself to my prize. I must have repeated the phrase 'come on Choco' a hundred times in my head before I was above the fish. The long X-Line leader was well and truly on the spool at this point so I cranked down and started to pump the weeded fish up. With my Polaroid's on I could make out a long dark mirror twisting and turning a few feet under the boat.



My heart was racing as I couldn't make out how wide the fish was, just its length. Soon the fish weeded itself again, but once above it, all went smoothly and the fish was in the net on the first attempt. On the way back to the bank I heard Ian Ask 'Well is it?' 'No mate, it's a stunner though mate; around low thirty' was my reply.

With a few shots done the long lean mirror was returned to its watery home. Both rods were redone that evening, both on fishmeal pop ups as it was clear they liked eating the bait.

The same rod tore off in the early hours of the morning but the fish just flat rodded me and on its run the hook slipped, I was devastated as that fish really did have some power, God that loss hurt. I continued to plug away at it until early November but with nothing else to show for my efforts. I will be returning in the spring when the hunt will start over, until then I will be having the odd go on the other lakes on the complex.

Hopefully next time I put finger to keyboard I will have some lovely Oxford carp to talk about, fingers crossed.

Myles Gibson!