

# Going the Distance

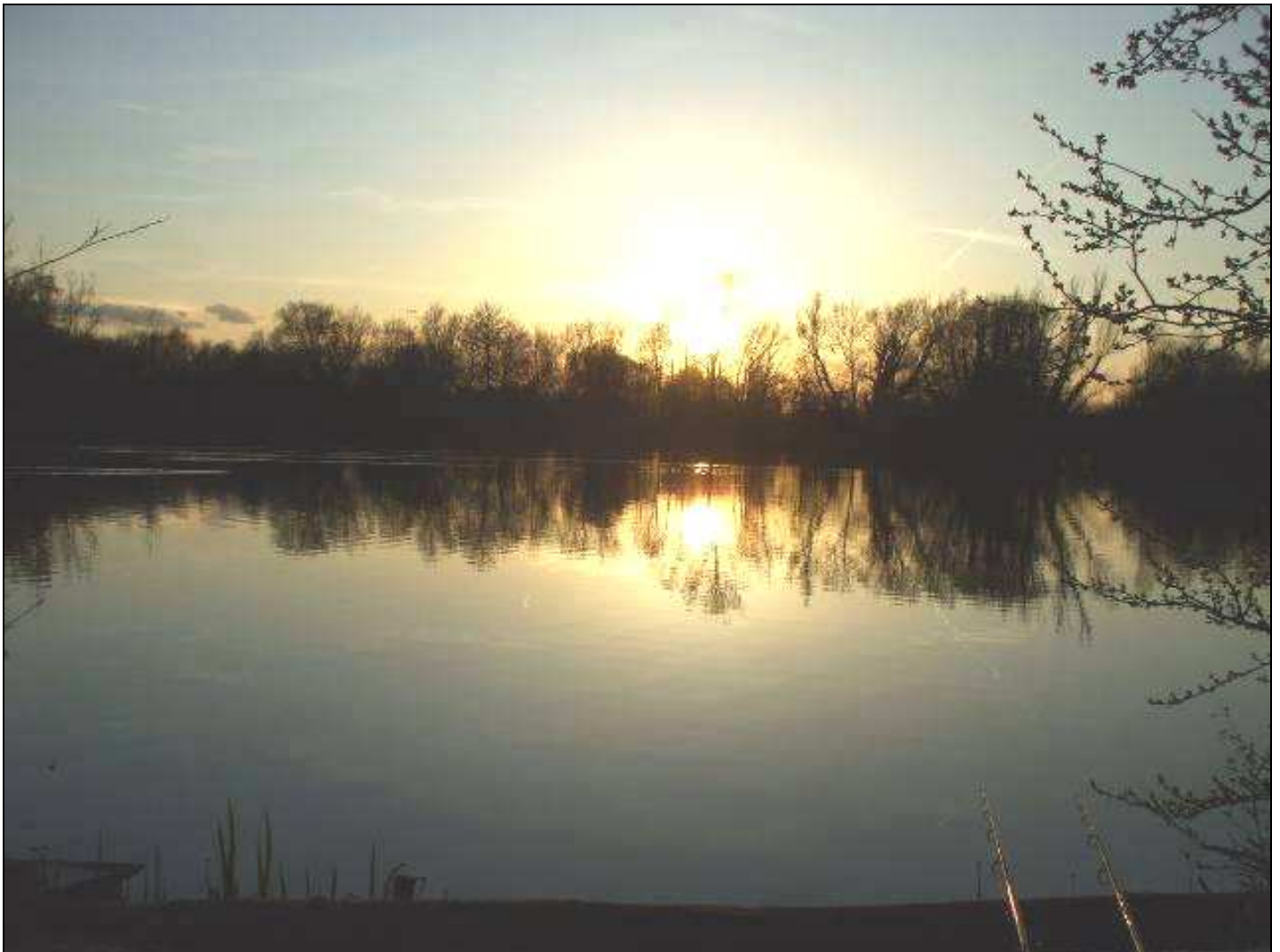
## An article on Crayfish Pool

By Warren Fenn

### **New Start**

Season of 2010 had arrived and I really felt I wanted to test my fishing skills this year and join a water which would test and challenge me in all areas of my ability. Moving to Surrey from up north through early winter meant that I was living in the heart of some of England's best carp fishing waters and had a long list of lakes to choose from. After spending a lengthy time researching venues and weighing up my options I decided to join a small water called Crayfish Pool.

I'd heard a lot about this water and research provided me with both positive and negative feedback. Comments ranged from "the stock is all big fat ugly Simmos" to "the lake stays really quiet with some lovely originals". My reasons for joining Crayfish Pool wasn't from what other anglers were saying about the venue, but what the venue holds. The venue is around 3-4 acres with a stock of 35 fish; the water is crystal clear with thick weed at times, full of snags, overhanging trees and last but not least it's full to the brim with Crayfish. Challenging??? I think so.



## Preparing for Battle



Knowing that Crayfish Pool was going to be a tricky little venue, I really took my time to get to know the water. My first session on there, which was Easter bank holiday, was a challenge in itself with three days of heavy rain and not a single fish showing. I knew they were still holding up somewhere from the real cold winter we'd had. I think it was my third session where I actually saw the first fish show. It was in a peg called Green bank close to a tree snag. After having a good start to this year having capturing 3 30s up to 38lb 4oz from two different waters I knew the exact terminal tackle and bait I was going to start with on Crayfish pool; the mighty N-Gage XP with a custom balanced bait fished on a pop-up rig.



The rig I'm using in my opinion isn't really a pop-up rig or bottom bait rig, I prefer to call it more of a hover rig where the bait hovers just above the bottom with neutral buoyancy. This rig had landed me three chunks already this year and I had high hopes that it would do the same on this venue.



As you can see with this rig I'm using lead putty to balance the buoyancy of the bait and the first section of the rig, which is connected to the hook is a semi-stiff link and the second section is a soft link material.

I found the rig worked best with 14mm cork ball pop-ups, but have used 14mm standard pop-ups and twin 10mm pop-ups. Instead of wrapping the bait floss around the boilie to hold the bait in position, I passed it through the bait like a standard hair rig bait, I believe this gives better bait presentation for the fish and is harder for the crayfish to destroy.

With this rig I managed to reap the reward of nailing 6 fish on continuous sessions which included two of the big simmo 30+ mirrors, and one of the lakes prized gems in The Thorpe Park common at 27lb 8oz, which hadn't been out for nearly three years. I also managed to bag 'Uppy' which in my eyes was one of the best looking fish in the lake at 26lb+ and Sov's at 28lb which put up a fight like a true warrior.



Thorpe Park Common 27lb 8oz



Ventnor (big simmo) at 32lb 4oz



Uppy 26lb 6oz



Sov's 28lb



After having so much success with this rig without dropping a single fish, I was confident that this was the rig to catch the big girl ('Needles') which last came out three years ago at 38lb+ and was expected to be up to well over 40lbs when it next graced an angler's mat. But as the temperatures started to rise so did the crayfish activity - in their thousands! It started off with the crayfish trimming the corkball pop-ups until only the cork was left- which I actually managed to catch on. But then it came to the point where you couldn't possibly keep a rig out for more than 5 minutes! They were eating anything your lead, putty, beads, braid coating, even the cork in the corkball pop-ups! I even put 1kg of baits out in the margin as a test and it took the crayfish 20 minutes to finish the lot!

After a lot of thinking I decided to switch to using choddy rigs with light 2oz leads, with a fake plastic tiger soaked in Feedstim XP. I felt the fake tiger would be impossible for the crayfish to destroy. For freebies I changed the bait slightly by adding Tiger Nuts to my N-Gage boilies to slow the crayfish down sufficiently for the fish to discover the bait, which seemed to work as I tested a couple of kg's in the margin.

## The one that got away

I'm not the greatest fan of the choddy rig but I felt it was a rig that the crayfish would struggle to tamper with or destroy because the rig will always reset itself after being tugged at. It was around mid June and I was down for a short over night session and I managed to spot the big girl (Needles) in the reed corner, which I had been baiting for some time and was where I managed to bag the Thorpe Park common.

As I was setting my rods up Needles produced two bream rolls over the back of a weed bed where I'd been baiting - she had to be feeding! Result. Because it was so warm and it was such a short session I decided not to bring my bivvy and sleep under the stars. I flicked two choddy's to the back of the weed where she had topped and put three handfuls of bait over each one, then I kicked back and slowly fell asleep.

I woke up the next morning at 7am and realised it had been an uneventful night (so far this season all the fish had been caught in the early hours and the cut off time was usually around 8ish). I managed to drift back to sleep and around 9:40am my left rod bounced into life. The take was so aggressive that the indicator was left on the ground in its slack line position. As I was playing the fish I knew straight away from its pure strength and power it was a chunk. After about a 20 minute fight, keeping the fish away from the snag tree and out of the weed, the fish came to the surface and straight away from its sheer size I knew it was 'Needles', and from the looks of her in the water, she was easily 40lb.

She was about two rod lengths out in front of me on the surface and as I slowly brought her in, she shook her head aggressively and the hook suddenly popped out and shot back towards me and "the big girl" slowly swam into the depths. THE PAIN! I don't really know how to describe the feeling I felt when she spat the hook back at me, but it's a feeling I wouldn't wish on any angler. I was sat on my bedchair for a good 45minutes with my head in my hands; I was gutted! As I packed my gear away in anger I walked past another angler en route to my car and told him what had happened and his words were "join the club". As I got home I couldn't think about anything else but the chunk I had just lost, blaming the choddy for the hook pull and babbling on about how I will never use the choddy again, yeah right!

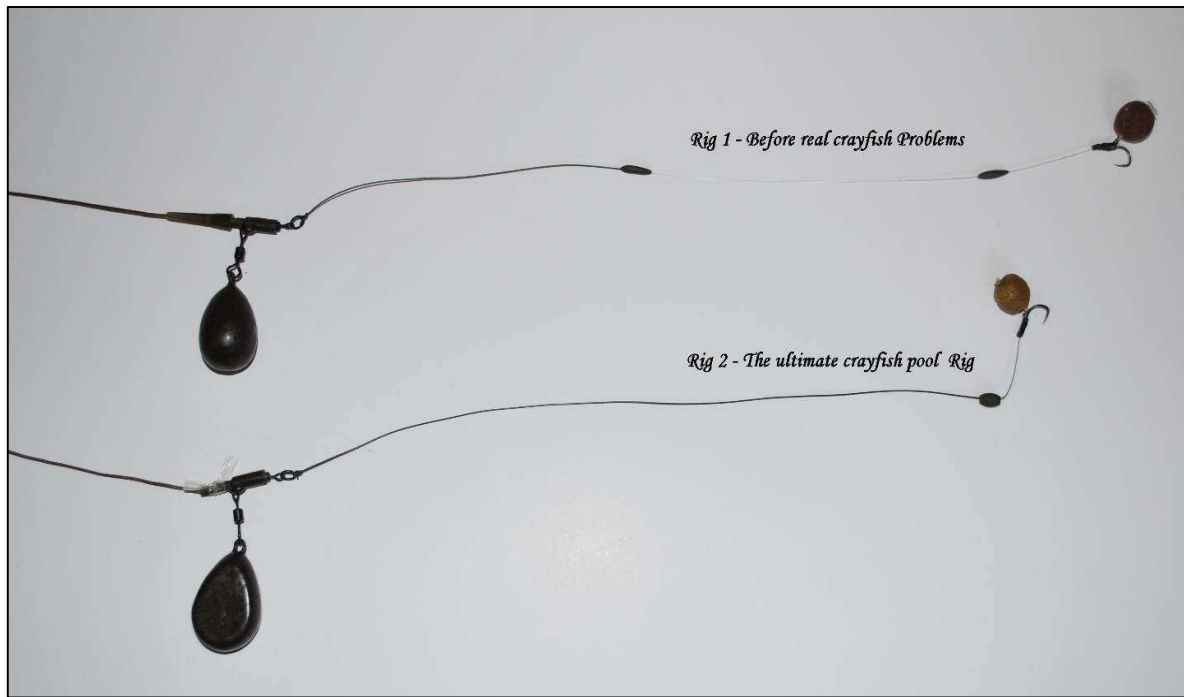


After finally getting over losing "the big girl" and looking at reasons why I may have lost her I finally came to a conclusion which I believed caused the hook pull.

Because I used a light lead (2oz), as the fish took the bait I believe the hook hold in the fish's mouth wasn't set properly and as the fish had hit the surface she used the lead as a pendulum to pull the hook out.

What I should have used was a 3-4oz lead on a break away choddy system so the weight of the lead would secure a strong hook hold and, as the fish bolted, the lead would break free allowing the fish not to use the lead to eject the hook.

So, after a long think and not confident in using the choddy system, I came up with a new rig which I thought may work and would prove to be the perfect rig for fishing Crayfish Pool.



Rig 1 produced a lot of my early fish but as the crayfish activity picked up I had to change my methods

Rig 2 is the rig which I believe is by far the superior Crayfish pool rig. This rig is made from a stiff coated braid hook length with a stripped supple section (1-1.5 inches) near the hook section for freedom of hook movement.



In more detail you can see I was using a korda safety clip system, which releases the lead when tethered in weed or snags allowing you to break free with the fish. After much thought from losing "the big girl" I found success using PVA tape (instead of rubber sleeve) to keep the lead on at cast and as a fish takes the hook bait and bolts the lead will be ejected, like the break off lead choddy system. This would ensure that you have a strong connection with the fish to the rod reducing hook pulls. As I mentioned earlier with the break off choddy system I increased the lead sizes from 2oz to 3oz to ensure deeper hook holds. Also I switched from using a round lead to a flat pear lead to reduce movement of rig if fishing on a slight slope as well as any movement produced created by crayfish. With this new approach I have lost a weight or two, but believe me I would rather loose a few weights than another chunk!

I changed from using my hovering boilie method to using a pop-up plastic tiger nut. I would prefer to use the hovering method but due to the increase in crayfish activity the design of the rig couldn't be presented in the right manner on the lake bed. Also, as you can see I've changed from using putty to using a fox shot to balance the bait on the lake bed (fox shot is 1 inch from hook eye), which the crayfish can't move or pull off.

Both baits are needled on to bait floss (like the standard hair rig with plastic boilie stop) and are attached to a rig ring. The rig ring has freedom to move identical to a D-rig system but has shrink tubing to reduce movement to the lower shank of the hook because I believe this will give better hooking presentation as the hook bait enters the mouth.

## XXX and Tiger delight



Using this new approach I decided to also switch bait to XXX boilies mixed with Tiger nuts for an added boost. Knowing I'd baited up all season with N-Gage it was a long shot, but XXX is a bait that I think needs no introduction to waters as it's always an instant hit. With this approach I also stuck with the plastic popup Tigers soaked in Feedstim XP. I managed to catch a further 6 fish with 1 lost (hook pull from the snags), including 'Nettles', another one of the big commons, which most anglers and the bailiff thought was the biggest common and one which was thought to go 30. Unluckily I managed to catch her after spawning at 25lb 4oz but I was happy to slip my net under her; it was another fish which hadn't been out for over 2 years and wasn't a 'Simmo'.

I also managed to catch 'Uppy' again and another couple of big simmo's over 30 and a stunning low 20lb mirror called 'Stunner' which I would go as far as saying is one of the best looking 20s I've ever caught.



Nettles 25lb 4oz



East Cowes (big simmo) 33lb 9oz



One of the best looking 20s in the land, that scaly pattern is perfect!

Stunner at 23lb 8oz

## No place like home



View from Green bank peg at the snag tree.

View from Green bank

The two markers are where I have caught 80% of my carp from on Crayfish pool; I found success regular success fishing to these spots. When casting I made sure both rigs were as tight as possible to the snag with my reels locked up. All freebies were fired into the snag with always a little scattering around the edge. I even managed on two occasions to brace up due to the fish feeding so confidently under, in and along the snag.



View from Green bank

## Next stop the Royal

Fishing Crayfish pool this summer has definitely produced the challenges I was after and opened my eyes to fishing against crayfish. I've learnt and adapted my approach to catch carp in spite of them with numerous catches which include the two most sought after commons in the lake. To anyone who fishes Crayfish pool or other crayfish infested waters my advice would be to use soaked and flavoured plastic baits, but also experiment, try new things and fish with confidence. For me the challenge at Crayfish Pool has sharpened my tools and I'm ready for a new challenge.

Next stop Richmond Park and the Royal Forty, for my target, a winter forty.

*Tight lines*  
*Warren Fenn*

