The sight of a big pike laying beaten on the surface as it is drawn towards the outstretched net is one of the most impressive in fishing. The combination of that huge toothy maw, sleek mottled camouflaged body and steely eye combine to give us the UK’s ultimate freshwater predator. Pike are also one of our most widely distributed freshwater fish, being found from the North of Scotland to the South coast. Only the far tip of Cornwall remaining pike-free.

I guess I am like most anglers and nothing more than a casual pike angler. By that I mean that the pursuit of really big pike is something that I do not have the drive to attempt. To me, a double is a good fish, and a twenty something to be celebrated with the story recounted in the pub! Fish of this size are available to all and are a realistic challenge from both stillwaters and rivers. The other reason that I would classify myself as no more than a casual pike angler is that it has been more years than I can remember that I have used livebait. This is not through any conscious decision, simply that I am more than happy with my results on shop-bought deadbaits to not feel the need to go to all the extra trouble of trying to catch livebait from the venues I pike fish. I am sure that livebait would catch me more fish, but on most venues, most of the time, deadbaits are effective enough to keep me happy.

My approach to pike fishing, and some would say all my fishing, is not revolutionary or full of gimmicks. Location is the key, with a simple presentation of quality baits all that is then required.
“Location, both in terms of fishing venues that produce good pike, and then finding the right areas, is key.”

Sorting Fact From Fiction
As a rule of thumb, in any fishery you get one pound of predator to every ten pounds of prey fish, so you don’t have to be Einstein to realise that pike, and particularly good ones, are not going to be numerous. Location, both in terms of fishing venues that produce good pike, and then finding the right areas, is key. I must hold my hands up and admit that most venues I have been found the result of eitherseeing catch reports in the weeklies, being told of captures by friends, or researching venues on the internet.

Carp anglers are a great source of information, as they will often spot big pike in the warmer months and are in good areas they generally stay. If there is marginal cover present then this rod will be fished tight to it, even if it is only a couple of feet deep. Prey fish will often seek out overhead cover during the day and as the light pike will move to it in the edge or run. The second rod is more tricky, as this is going out, but how far out and why? Whilst you can catch pike by just chucking a bait blindly into the venue, feature finding really will pay dividends. At the very least, have a few casts with just a lead to ascertain the depth (count the lead down), the presence of any weed and the type of lakebed. Changes in depth, which often also signal the edges of weedbeds, are prime spots from which pike can launch an ambush attack. Begin by casting from the bed, even just six inches difference, are also likely to mark patrol routes and are well worth looking at. Always try to learn the maximum you can from each venue as the pike are not going to be moving about. Most swims have only a couple of features so with more rods I find that I am normally only covering one small carryall, small freezer box, chair and rod sling. If it doesn’t fit in here then it doesn’t come with me, but my tactics bag always holds everything I need quite easily. You do have to be realistic though about what you carry and chuck out anything that might be there ‘just in case’.

The one area that I don’t skimp on though is keeping dry and warm. If you get chilled you will be going home, so a decent umbrella, proper waterproofs and warm boots are an absolute must. Being comfortable will catch you a lot more fish than the latest shiny piece of tackle!

Keeping Mobile – Gear Choice
The one area that I don’t skimp on though is keeping dry and warm. If you get chilled you will be going home, so a decent umbrella, proper waterproofs and warm boots are an absolute must. Being comfortable will catch you a lot more fish than the latest shiny piece of tackle!

I normally only fish with two rods, as I find this also keeps me more mobile. It is surprising how awkward and heavy three or four rods get when you have to carry them any distance, so they are better left at home if you are going to be moving about. Most swims have only a couple of features so with more rods I find that I am normally only covering one small carryall, small freezer box, chair, mat and rod sling. One small carryall, small freezer box, chair, mat and rod sling. One small carryall, small freezer box, chair, mat and rod sling. One small carryall, small freezer box, chair, mat and rod sling.

Time For A Recast?
Because I will be moving swims regularly, I am happy that my baits are in good areas they generally stay put. The margin rod will not be recast if I can help it, I will fish this rod until I get recast every 30-45 minutes or so if there are a few different areas to explore. Recasting moves baits, feature sealing will all keep you warm, and when the temperature is struggling to get above freezing will definitely keep you fishing longer.

Two Rod Approach
One rod will always go on the margin either to my left or right. Pike will very often hug the margins, particularly between dusk and dawn and about a third of all my pike come from within a rod length of the bank. I fish this rod at the margin, but with a slightly longer line than the front. Pike will often be looking for good pike fishing. Take my word for it, don’t fish blindly I try to apply some logic to my search and fish to features. This keeps me motivated and a bit warmer, even on the worst of days. Whether it catches me any more fish than staying static on a known hot spot is debatable, but if you are new in a venue then at the very least you will learn a lot more and may well drop on a fish or two.

On a lot of stillwaters you can take a mountain of gear and barrow it around if you want. This doesn’t suit me though as a lot of my time is spent on rivers where muddy fields, gates and ditches make a barrow impractical. Over the years I have pared my gear down to just one small carryall, small freezer box, chair, mat and rod sling. If it doesn’t fit in here then it doesn’t come with me, but my tactics bag always holds everything I need quite easily. You do have to be realistic though about what you carry and chuck out anything that might be there ‘just in case’.

The one area that I don’t skimp on though is keeping dry and warm. If you get chilled you will be going home, so a decent umbrella, proper waterproofs and warm boots are an absolute must. Being comfortable will catch you a lot more fish than the latest shiny piece of tackle!

I normally only fish with two rods, as I find this also keeps me more mobile. It is surprising how awkward and heavy three or four rods get when you have to carry them any distance, so they are better left at home if you are going to be moving about. Most swims have only a couple of features so with more rods I find that I am normally only covering one small carryall, small freezer box, chair, mat and rod sling.
**STILLWATER LEDGER RIG**

There is no place for complicated rigs in pike fishing, and I like to keep mine as simple as possible. Main line is 10lb minimum to combat any snags or weed that might be present and to handle the general wear and tear of mobile fishing. A ledger boom with a large ring at one end keeps the line out of any debris on the lakebed and keeps everything moving smoothly. A bit more free-running, and that is about as complicated as it gets.

**RIVER FLOAT LEGER**

I use a searching strategy on rivers too, with one rod fished close to the near margin and the other to any feature that may be present. Normally on rivers I will be fishing pools where the water is deeper and slower flowing. These can vary from tiny slacks behind weedbeds to huge spate-scoured pools. Often one rod is sufficient, with just enough lead to load a buoyant inline float and the bait allowed to move with the current. When two rods can be used then the second rod is often fished as a float leger with the bait anchored to the deck. In any kind of flow you will need a very buoyant float to stop it being pulled under. Probably the best that are readily available are the stubby-looking white inline polystyrene floats commonly sold for sea fishing. These will need a good 2-3 ounce gripper lead to sink them, which might seem excessive but, once again, as long as the lead is free-running the weight doesn’t make much difference. What you need to ensure is that once the lead hits bottom it does not move an inch, otherwise the chances are it will snag.

Another reason for using a big lead is that I like to keep the line off the water surface and tight to the float. With the rod top high and the float runner set fairly stiff this might make much difference. What you need to ensure is that once the lead hits bottom it does not move an inch, otherwise the chances are it will snag.

The bite indication drop-offs and alarms

Nine times out of ten I want my deadbait within a couple of feet of the lakebed, and that means ledgering, either with or without a float. If you are moving about a lot and fishing swims of different depths on a stillwater a float set-up can be a pain, as it needs to be constantly readjusted. Another reason that I have tended recently not to use a float on lakes is because I like to pop my deadbaits up off the lead to keep them clear of any weed and make them more visible and avoid weed. With a float bringing the main line semi-vertical as well there is the chance of the pike picking up both the bait and the line resulting in a bite-off. If you want to use a float leger with pop-ups then a long uptrace is a prudent idea.

**”Pop-ups increase the number of takes quite considerably”**

It’s worth trying pop-up baits. I like to pop my baits up off the lead to keep them clear of any weed and make them instantly obvious to any passing pike. Whilst this might seem unnatural the pike don’t normally seem to mind and it does increase the number of takes quite considerably. There are several ways of popping your baits up, but I prefer to simply use a polystyrene clip to create buoyancy and an extra visual attraction. Most freshwater baits will be naturally buoyant so a roach or poutian makes the ideal bait for fishing over weed.

If you are using bite alarms ensure that they work with completely slack lines as once the line pulls from the clip it will be under no tension.

**BUYER’S GUIDE TO SHOPPING FOR RIGS**

- Use a 2-3oz lead attached to the rolling swivel.
- Use a large inline float with plenty of buoyancy.
- Add a rolling swivel with quick release attachment.
- Slide two large float stops on to the main line.
- Tie on the trace using a four-turn grinner knot.
- Finish off with a large buffer bead.
DEADBait Choice
>>> You need to seek out quality deadbaits that are still firm and tough and small fresh. Some, like sardines I can buy from my local supermarket, but a lot of the time to get baits of the right size and freshness it is much easier to buy baits sold specifically for bait. Several companies now sell pre-packed pike baits and having used them all I can say they are all of a good quality.
Each of us has our favourite baits and I am no different (I always have one rod on a sardine), on some venues the pike do seem to show a preference for certain baits, so it is worth trying a few different variations. There are loads of exotic deadbaits on the market today, and most are readily available in your local tackle shop. I must admit though that I tend to stick to a few tried and tested favourites as I know exactly how each will perform and have confidence in when and where to use them.

Mackerel
Baits up to around 20cm (8 inches) I use whole, above this the baits are halved and I have a slight preference for the head end as this contains more blood. A very tough bait, small ones cast well and they will work just about anywhere, my do-it-all bait.

Sardines
Very self-baited meaning they need to be cast out frozen if you need to go any distance. Very oily and without doubts my favourite bait for short to medium range fishing.

Smelt
A very equal bait and one that is quite tough, making them useful when you want to recast regularly and maybe switch baits back. Their small size makes them easy to pop up.

Pollan
This freshwater clupeid (herring family) fish is naturally buoyant making it useful on weedy waters, effective on venues where the pike are wary of sea baits.

Roach
Very tough and natural in most waters. Naturally buoyant and also ideal for wobbling if you puncture the swimbladder.

Using Deadbaits
>>> Keep my baits in a small Coleman cool box that will keep them frozen solid all day. This is not only to keep the baits fresh, but also to make soft-bodied baits easier to cast. Sardines are notoriously difficult to cast, being very soft-bodied, but even these baits are easy to use from frozen. Hook placement is key, muscle and bone are tough, so this is where the hooks go. Avoid the soft belly and sides of the baits.

Correctly hooked even sardines can be cast well and will stand up to continual recasting well.

Even soft baits you will find that the tail root is quite tough.

The lower treble goes into the root of the dorsal fin where there is tough muscle tissue.

Don’t worry if the trace is loose between the two hooks, this is fine as the casting stress is taken on the upper hook.

The lower treble goes into the root of the dorsal fin.

My pike fishing is not exactly revolutionary, but designed to be as simple and mobile as possible.

Using Legered Baits
>>> My pike fishing is not exactly revolutionary, but designed to be as simple and mobile as possible. With pike becoming increasingly rare creatures getting a bait in front of the fish is invaluably the key. Go on, get your walking boots on and go search out some predators!

Legered Deadbait
The bait should sit like this below the float in quite a natural position.

The lower treble goes into the root of the dorsal fin.

Don’t worry if the trace is loose between the two hooks, this is fine as the casting stress is taken on the upper hook.

The lower treble goes into the root of the dorsal fin where there is tough muscle tissue.

The finished bait is very streamlined, casting well and will stand up to continual recasting well.

Correctly hooked even sardines can be cast a decent distance.

Don’t worry if the trace is loose between the two hooks, this is fine as the casting stress is taken on the upper hook.

The lower treble goes into the root of the dorsal fin where there is tough muscle tissue.

The finished bait is very streamlined, casting well and will stand up to continual recasting well.

Correctly hooked even sardines can be cast a decent distance.

Correctly hooked even sardines can be cast a decent distance.