

PETE GREGORY'S PIKE SEASON



at the same time offering the possibility of a really big fish. I had two days afloat and blanked, and my boat partner Alan Roberts managed just one run, although it resulted in a new personal best fish of 22lbs 14oz, which of course made his day! A fairly small number of 20's were caught in February, which was slightly disappointing, but soon the trout season was upon us and we could start our efforts with the fly. Early spring saw few pike enthusiasts out and results were mixed. A few large pike were found dead, and rumours from among the anti-fly brigade began to spread, though it seems far more likely that these fish were spawning casualties.

This year's spring and summer fly fishing was often very tough: location in particular proved to be the biggest headache during what turned out to be one of the longest, hottest and driest summers of recent years - far from ideal piking conditions.

I should add for my own part that I am still very much of a novice with a fly. In fact eighteen months ago I'd never cast one in my life, but I was determined to learn how to. Alan Roberts and I booked local expert Martin Cottis for a day's guiding and tuition. I was gobsmacked how much and how quickly we learned from him (he might not agree with that). I personally decided to start to learn to fish for trout first, using the lighter #6-7 weight rods before even thinking of trying

the much heavier #10-11 weights needed for pike. I honestly expected to spend the whole first day just learning to cast, but in just over an hour with Martin we were casting efficiently enough to fish from the boat, and an hour later both of us were catching brown and rainbow trout, then later in the day came our first pike on flies- just into double figures too! A superb day's fishing, and the seed had been sown, thanks to Martin.

Despite my legendary ineptitude in casting pike flies I managed to get a 'P.B.' fly- caught pike of 27lbs in September '02. The method is still very much in its infancy, but once experienced it can become very addictive. Last summer my two best fish were 18 and 22lbs, both taken on an A.R. Bunny Bug.

By late September '03 the water level on Chew was at its lowest for a decade. Islands and underwater features were showing everywhere, and as the trials began in October it was soon obvious which boats had fish finders/depth sounders and which didn't, as the latter were constantly running into barely submerged obstacles. The usual annual stampede towards Stratford Bay resulted in almost complete disappointment - only a handful of fish came from there, and the small number of boats that stayed near the boat jetties in the first few days had great sport with big pike and quality perch. In fact throughout the trials the stretch of water in front of the Lodge produced the bulk of the decent pike, though obviously as the trials progressed the fish spread

out and became harder to find and tempt- by the last session in November they seemed to have literally switched off altogether. For me personally my quest for the Holy Grail culminated on the 28th October when, on this occasion having no boat partner, my one and only run, in the early afternoon gave me my new 'P.B.' an incredible fish of 33lb 8oz! My thanks are due to Pete Austin and Julian Kneeshaw who came over and helped photograph and weigh her.

An up-and-coming young angler worth mentioning is Julian Chidgey, who is fast becoming a local star. This season, besides clocking up several fly- caught pike up to 26lbs, Julian did very well in the October trials, with fish of 24lbs, 27lbs, and an astonishing 29lb 15 oz- (how honest is that?) Well done young man!

I would like to finish with a special note of thanks to the early-rising restaurant staff who provided such excellent and plentiful breakfasts for all us hungry gannets so far from our home comforts. Cheers, ladies!

Tight Lines.
Pete.

Official return figures for Oct-Nov '03 show: from 542 recorded visits, 361 pike caught, av wt.10.04, 152 doubles, of which 41 over 20lbs, 5 over 30lbs, best 36.03 taken by Mr G.Clark of Whitchurch. Bristol Water fisheries would like to point out that quite a few pike anglers do not put in all their returns, particularly their blanks and smaller pike).



"Fish with the England Team Captain"



John Horsey has been the Resident Professional Guide at Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes for the past 11 years. He is the only angler ever to have been appointed Captain of England at all four disciplines: World Team, European Team, Loch Style and Rivers.

A visit to Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes can be a challenging, if not daunting prospect at times. Both are huge expanses of open water that contain plenty of hidden features, such as sunken islands, secluded bays and miles of tree-lined banks.

Knowing where to fish, what flies to use and which tactics to employ, are three of the essential ingredients for success. A day with John can also help you to improve existing skills, learn new techniques and thereby achieve more consistent results!

Why not enlist the services of England's Team Captain and let him show you the best way to fish Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes.

****NEW** ... PIKE ON THE FLY!**

During the past few years, John has fished extensively for pike using modified fly fishing tackle. He has now extended his Guiding Services to include pike fishing and he can supply all the necessary equipment to cope with these wild and sometimes huge "toothy critters"!



One of John's clients, Derbyshire County cricketer Christopher Bassano with a 20lb Chew Valley pike.

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Having taken part in the recent pike trials I think most, if not all of the anglers that fished in them would agree that these latest ones have probably been the best to date, with lots of doubles, twenties and more thirties taken than ever before, with the top weight going 36lb plus.

With the trials in their third year this is a testimonial in my opinion to how well Bristol Water is managing the fishery. With Bob at the helm and enthusiastic

and helpful staff, both in the shop, on the boat jetties and round the lakeside, the atmosphere is friendly and, even on hard days, always positive.

Last year's February trials really tested angler endurance and will to succeed. February is always liable to be the worst month of the pike man's calendar, while