

My Year on The Mill

By Jake Hughes

Compared to the easy fishing of 2008 last year (2009) was a slow one for many over at the VAC's Moor Mill complex.

Although the stocked fish were quickly gaining weight, some by as much as 5lb in a season, there was much against us anglers fishing the pits. It was apparent to many that the slow weed growth, the signal crayfish and the low water levels had affected our fishing on the Island Pit. The surface fishing was more difficult, the fish certainly seemed a lot warier than they had been in previous years.



I remember turning up one early spring weekend with my friend Bradley Wiffen and deciding to fish round the back as a few low double commons were seen cruising under the surface. We both set up and, with limited supplies of surface baits, I opted to fish the single pop-up approach, casting to holding areas and showing fish while Bradley fancied his chances doing the complete opposite and piling in the bait.

16lb mirror over particle

Bradley soon managed to bank two mid double commons within twenty minutes of each other while I did nothing but assist him in netting fish. It was soon obvious to the both of us that baiting was the way to go and from March until May we had huge success using bright hookbaits over big spreads of boilies. At this point we were both unable to fish nights but day sessions still produced many large carp and we were averaging two each on a day session. On 20th May we landed four high double figure fish including Bradley's 16 lb 'Walthamstow' common and my solid 17 lb 5 oz common, whilst everyone else was fishing the carp match at Smallford.



Bradley with a Walthamstow' common



My 17lb common

The fishing then turned hard about a month after spawning as the water level dramatically decreased and some gravel bars were as shallow as just six inches deep. This triggered a change of tactic and from July onwards particle was our plan of attack. On a usual session I would bait up many marginal areas around the lake with home prepared pigeon conditioner and visit them a few hours later with my stalking gear. I managed to land several fish a session with very small simple hookbaits that other anglers would look and laugh at but they worked and my catches proved this. I could see many fish in a foot of gin clear water no more than two metres away from me feeding on my spot.

The great thing about this was that my fishing massively improved and I could tweak little parts of my rigs in order to receive more bites more often. I remember one hard weekend where I was struggling to receive a take after two nights. I woke up at about six on the second morning, reeled in and baited the shallow stalking spot with particle; I then went back to the swim and recast my rods. As soon as the sun beamed on the water I knew it was time to check the spot and when I arrived I could clearly see six or seven fish between 12 -17 lb. I sneaked off to get my rod and secretly crept the lead in. After about fifteen minutes I had successfully banked a 17 lb mirror to which I believe was the biggest fish in the swim. I then banked another two fish that day from the same spot, one being a 10 lb common and the other being an old dark high double mirror carp.



Unfortunately the spot stopped producing but however, with every negative there is a positive, and as the summer quickly disappeared, the single hookbait approach was an instant success casting very close to the many snaggy islands present in the island lake or in the deeper weed beds with long soft fluorocarbon hooklinks.



In late September Bradley and I were receiving takes after just minutes of casting out and in just two hours we landed three carp and one very small but equally welcome tench! Spodding has also been a very good tactic for many of us fishing the island pit and from June until late October it has been many anglers favourite tactic. Bradley and I have both had great success with the spod on gravel bars with plastic hookbaits to tackle the crayfish. I once landed three carp to mid double figures and one large bream over particle.

The Island Lake can be very hard at times and although I believe the stock is about 300 they can be hard to catch. Tactics such as surface fishing haven't been at their best due to the lack of weed cover and they excessive amounts of Canadian geese, coots, ducks and swans. This has also made it difficult to fish mid-water zigs - you will get the opportunity but you have to be quick if the birds appear. Fishing on the bottom can also be hard what with the crayfish and the tufty ducks but if there are crayfish present just move your rig ten or fifteen yards to the right or left.



7lb tench from the Pike Pit



Another 17lb common



Bradley with a 16 from the School Pit

We have also been lucky enough to have some bonus fish this year from the Moor Mill complex. I have managed tench to seven pounds from the pike pit and both Bradley and I have now both had double figure bream from the leather pit, mine being the biggest at 10 lb 8 oz. I have had a double figure bream from the island pit when targeting carp in the summer months and Bradley landed a beautiful 16 lb dark common from the silty shallow school pit in June. We have now had about fifty-ish fish each from the island lake and it has been a very good for the both of us.

Tight lines.